

# Introduction

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The notion of transparency seems to have become commonplace in contemporary communication networks, institutional set-ups and globalized media cultures. It promises to serve a large range of purposes from indicating and improving institutional efficiency and democratic accountability, simplifying communication and strengthening social discipline, to name but a few. The different arenas or “habitats” in which transparency is employed turn the term into a multifaceted and at times ambiguous concept as remarked by David Heald (2006, p.37). Due to ever denser global interdependence the idea of transparency has transgressed boundaries and appears to occupy a central position at the heart of Western network structures. This has led to the assumption that transparency constitutes a fundamental right to gain insight into the well- or not-so-well-functioning of any democratic institutions, which all citizens are entitled to (Stiglitz, 1999). Conversely, the question of how much transparency is needed may also lead to a fear of a global panopticon, which sacrifices individual freedom for the sake of surveillance and control. This joint volume of essays collected for the MARBLE (Maastricht Research Based Learning) project at the Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences of Maastricht University aims at providing an idea of the functional complexity and normative diversity in the contemporary employment of the term transparency.

In its most common usage, transparency is identified with openness and access to information. This meaning of the term implies that transparency takes no static form, but can indicate different directions between observers and observed. Who is open towards whom? Who demands openness from whom? Heald identifies four directions of transparency one can distinguish for analytical purposes. Transparency upwards makes it possible for a principal in a hierarchy to receive information about the conduct of his or her subjects. Transparency downwards, in contrast, enables the hierarchically subordinates to scrutinize the behavior of their superiors. In everyday usage the notion of transparency denotes either form of vertical transparency, associated with state surveillance, on the one hand, and accountability towards citizens, on the other. The transparency of horizontal relations is just as impactful, however. Transparency outwards, as Heald explains, refers to actors being able to look beyond the confines of the organization they find themselves in. Transparency inwards, in turn, describes the condition of the outside being able to observe the inner workings of an organization. Distinguishing various directions of mechanisms at play can be enlightening when one discusses the costs and rewards of transparency as it gives insight into which directions are appropriate and functioning and which not.

Different directions of transparency play out differently in various contexts. Just like some plants need specific conditions to grow, different forms of transparency can only flourish within certain outer conditions of societal and institutional arrangements. Downwards transparency in totalitarian states will take a different form from downwards transparency in so-called participatory democracies, and again different forms if one attempts a cross-comparison among states with the same political system. Habitats themselves are not to be considered static entities, unilaterally constraining the efficiency of directions transparency can take. Rather, institutional frameworks might very well be affected if variations of transparency not typical for the habitat develop and turn out to be successful.

The differentiations made here raise questions about the nature of transparency. If transparency occurs in different forms, to different degrees and takes different directions, how can we evaluate it? Does transparency have an instrumental or an intrinsic value? Some theorists go as far as to consider transparency a human right (Birkinshaw, 2006). Here it is equated with the freedom of information, or access to government-held information which should be a given in so-called “advanced democracies” with a strong civil society. Others (Heald, 2006b) highlight the instrumental function of transparency and call for putting normative claims on a trial rather than allowing them pass unchallenged. The various facets of transparency suggest that a judgment on its costs and benefits can only occur in a contextual manner: “The beneficial nature of transparency is contingent upon the directions and varieties of transparency that occur and on the habitat with which they interact” (p.71).

Some habitats enable transparency to function as a double-edged sword. Especially in a political context in which the role of trust is essential for the participating actors, transparency can both strengthen and severely damage relations among actors. Given that ‘trust is the currency of democracy’, both the supporting and destructive force of transparency can influence become visible in political structures that are centered on representation and the delegation of competences. Media incidents about disclosure of intimate information shedding light on questionable political practices are too numerous to name. Some articles in this volume however touch upon one of the most prominent examples of such releases. The case of Wikileaks relates to the question whether there are limits to transparency and who defines these limits. Since trust and confidence are of utter importance not only in the political field with regards to the accountability of democratically elected representatives, but also – or even more so – vis-à-vis non-elected decision-makers, transparency is deemed vital to defend the legitimacy of such structures. Yet if transparency is confused with the provision of sheer unlimited and unordered information, its consequences are paradoxical. Rather than increasing trust and insight,

transparency then causes data fuzziness and information overkill. In these cases more information leads to less understanding of the structures releasing them.

The above-mentioned examples present different perspectives on transparency. It is worthwhile to question the notion of transparency and thereby gain an enhanced understanding of the kind of transparency that is referred to by different actors addressing different audiences. This endeavour is precisely what the essays collected in this volume shall contribute to. Importantly, the dichotomies of transparency will not be treated as paradoxes. On the contrary, investigating the multiple facets of transparency that demonstrably exist shall help us to move ahead the black-and-white thinking that informs most debates on the concept. That transparency has many sides, that the concept is put into practice differently in different places at different times in order to achieve different objectives, that a deeper understanding of the various usages of transparency gives one the power to comprehend its various meanings in varying societal spheres and hence to find adequate answers – this is what the authors of this volume set out to show.

The volume consists of seven contributions, which shed light on the concept of transparency from different angles and departing from different theories and perspectives. The first chapter focuses on the use of transparency as a means to shape public opinion. It centers on the use of political public relations as a tool to steer media outlets to communicate specific political views, solutions and interpretations of issues in the hope of gaining political or popular support. The research adopts a case study format investigating the communications of the European Council during the European sovereign debt crisis on each of the four rescue-packages. The content of this material is compared to that of articles on the Euro crisis out of six newspapers from three different European countries. In order to facilitate this comparison, usage is made of the concept of ‘framing’ while distinguishing between thematic and position frames for an all-round analysis. The research shows that the first few days after the launch of the rescue package the newspaper reports are largely dominated by the European Council ‘frames’. It is only after this short initial phase that articles become more critical and gain a greater diversity of interpretations and views.

In the second chapter of the volume, the influence of transparency in its normative conception on the International Aid Transparency Initiative (IATI) is analyzed. This initiative is published by *Publish What You Fund* and strives for easy and understandable access to aid spending, thereby providing information about donors, partner countries as well as civil society organizations. This initiative contributes to the achievement of the transparency commitments made at the Accra Agenda for Action following the March 2005 Paris Declaration on Aid Effectiveness. To be able to analyze the actors’ performance to this initiative, the theory of social constructivism is applied as analytical framework.

Based on this theory, the actors' performance with regard to their participation in the IATI is assessed. In particular, the focus is set on the European Union and the World Bank, as supranational institutions, the United Kingdom and Finland, as two European member states, as well as two non-governmental organizations active in the field of international development. A comparative approach is meant to find possible solutions about the different usages of transparency and seeking for methods how transparency can be assessed and compared across different entities.

The third chapter of this volume deals with transparency of EU arms exports. Six of the ten largest arms producing countries in the world are members of the European Union. Progressing integration efforts and a fostered Common Foreign and Security Policy led to the adoption of an EU Common Position on arms exports in 2008. In the context of major economic and national security challenges in a globalised world, the EU aims at harmonising its handling of arms exports. As countries use different strategies to carry through their priorities, the chapter focuses on the question in how far the harmonisation of EU arms exports mirrors national priorities and to what extent harmonisation impacted on transparency of European arms exports. To answer this question, case studies of Austria, Germany and Sweden is employed against the backdrop of Europeanization theory.

The fourth chapter focuses on the implications that democratic and transparent changes have had on governance and how this affects the relationship between a government and its people. Specifically, Mozambique is used as a case study. Governance in Mozambique, much like the rest of Africa, has undergone multiple changes through different waves. The first wave came in the 1960s when many African states, nearly all European colonies, gained their independence. In many cases, internal conflict ensued which ended with the second wave in the 1990s where peace was made and constitutions written. These constitutions promised a democratic state and the respect for human rights. The third wave, arguably still happening at the moment, deals with making governance transparent in so far that the population is able to view the actions of its government but also vice versa. These measures are often introduced in response to allegations of corruption as well as due to international pressure. Therefore, this chapter focuses on upwards and downwards transparency and questions how governments and societies behave and conduct themselves in a transparent atmosphere. In all, this chapter aims to, with the use of the case study, allow the reader a practical insight into how transparency can create certain desired conducts which are required for the creation of a strong state.

The German Pirate Party was founded as a defender of citizen rights in the online sphere. Close to no academic research has been conducted on the group although its importance in the German political landscape can no longer be ignored. The debate on transparency held within the Pirate Party is investigated as being emblematic for

the party's structure, debating culture and its diverse membership. A combination of participant observation and in-depth interviews is employed to assess how the notion of transparency is conceptualized among party members, how it is realized through communication technology and how its conceptualization and creation impact each other. The research shows that the debate on content (i.e. how to define transparency and how to realize it by means of (which?) technology) serves the primary party goal: a change in processes and structures of participation.

The sixth chapter examines the framing of transparency as a governmental reform policy in the Obama administration from January 2006 to April 2012. It applies a policy frame analysis to the administration's discourse in a dataset composed of thirty-one official documents. Transparency and open government have been buzzwords in Obama's 2008 presidential candidacy and his first term in office. The chapter addresses the purpose of Obama's government transparency policy: how has the administration framed transparency and what is transparency meant to do? It systematically deconstructs four frames into problems identified, causes and remedies suggested, as well as their underlying normative dimension, while also being attentive to the administration's strategic usages of transparency. Thereby the chapter aims to contribute to a better understanding of transparency's role and value as a governmental reform strategy.

The last chapter focuses on the framing of transparency in the public discourse on the publication of U.S. diplomatic cables by the website WikiLeaks in 2010. The authors investigate the notion of transparency as presented by different actors and observers in the debate, such as U.S. newspapers, U.S. polit blogs and the U.S. government. Variations in the interpretation of the concept have led them to the identification of three frames surrounding transparency: national security, accountability and mediated transparency. In the coverage of the diplomatic cables release, national security was most prominently stressed. The authors then discuss their findings in terms of implications for the changing notion of transparency in the U.S. context, and point to the reinvention of secrecy under the national security frame.

Ultimately, the volume is an attempt to grasp the multiplicity of shapes and forms the concept of transparency can take and to account for a variety of analytical approaches and theories which all shed light on its different facets. In this way, we may better reflect on the implications transparency exhibits in various societal contexts.

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