

# Strategic Alignment of Open Government Initiatives for achieving SDGs in Andalusia

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## Abstract

The 2030 agenda for sustainable development has incorporated the principles of Open Government approach (OG). This technology has provoked a cultural change on both the citizenry, and on the public administrations with the aim at involving citizens in making public decisions. This paper analyzes both the strategies followed by local governments in implementing OG initiatives and the level of alignment of the objectives included into the municipal OG strategies with those settled by the Regional Government to which they belong to, with the aim at analyzing the different efforts made, the SDGs pursued and the need for focusing these efforts on shared objectives to be more effective and efficient in the achievement of the SDGs targets. Empirical research on the OG objectives included into the strategic planning of large-size Andalusian municipalities has been performed. Findings reveal that most of sample municipalities are implementing a push strategy. In addition, differences on the level of pursuing SDGs have been identified in the OG initiatives performed by sample municipalities, mainly due to the particular way of adopting digital and OG strategies consistent with their municipal priorities and circumstances.

## Keywords

Open Government, Strategic Planning, Alignment, large- Introduction

## 1. Introduction

Recent financial crisis and disaster management, as that produced by Covid-19 pandemic, have reinforced the citizenry idea of trust erosion in public administrations, forcing governments actions to be grounded on the principles of democratic governance [1]. In this regard, transparency itself is not enough to both build trust in government and fight against corruption, but it is necessary to encourage stakeholders' engagement at all stages of the political process and policy cycle to promote accountability and the public interest [2]. It has made cities to turn into smart ecosystems [3], undertaking a great bulk of initiatives with the aim at making city governments more transparent and accountable.

The implementation of Open Government initiatives (OG) has allowed city governments to incorporate principles, policies or actions of transparency, accountability, citizen participation and public services co-creation, aimed at achieving higher levels of public value creation. While the idea of OG may not be new [4], it has gained new momentum due to numerous political

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*EGOV-CeDEM-ePart 2022, September 06–08, 2022, Linköping University, Sweden (Hybrid)*

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 CEUR Workshop Proceedings (CEUR-WS.org)

and institutional arrangements including the emergence of smart cities and the need for new governance models under this environment, which require new collaborative workflow and the commitment of stakeholders to strategic planning processes and their identification with the entity goals [5]. It introduces a cultural change on both the citizenry and on the public administrations in the search of higher democracy, moving from a model of representative democracy -based on the right to vote- to a model of conversational and open democracy.

Countries are therefore increasingly acknowledging the role of OG reforms as catalysts for new governance models and inclusive growth (Open Government Partnership -see <https://www.opengovpartnership.org/>-), as well as its role as both an effective tool to pursue the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and to meet countries' SDG objectives [4]. This is especially true at the local government level due to its proximity to citizenry and the impact that their policies could have on the citizens' needs [6]. Also, local governments are early adopters of new technologies to creating an interactive, participatory and information-based urban environment with the aim at increasing the quality of life of its citizens [6]. Nonetheless, OG initiatives have been usually implemented differently across countries due to their institutional context [7], and their national priorities and aspirations of their citizens (<https://www.opengovpartnership.org/process/joining-ogp/open-government-declaration/>-). It has led to the achievement of different SDGs.

At the local government level, ICTs have been demonstrated their potential to provide information transparency, to capture opinions from citizens in an innovative way, and to enhance citizen engagement in the co-creation of solutions to face social problems. However, the way in which OG initiatives have been approached have been very diverse, not guided by an integrative perspective, and they have ranged from those with only open data platforms, to others with separate websites for information transparency, on one hand, and collaboration and/or participation, on the other, or finally those with an integrative OG initiative joining all elements of the OG approach. It could indicate the presence of different development levels and positions concerning OG initiatives. In fact, three different patterns of OG strategies could be characterized according to the way local governments are defining their relationship with citizens (push, pull and networking strategies).

In Spain, the OG initiatives have been implemented initially at the central government level and then it has been replicated to regional and local governments in a hierarchical way through the implementation of different action plans to other more open, participative, and collaborative ones. Nonetheless, it has also entailed technical difficulties and have not always been guided by a holistic perspective [8] either within the municipality or in its relationship with the Regional Government to which they depend on. Cities have faced the reform of their governance models with the use of different OG initiatives according to their societal challenges and the SDGs to be achieved with the aim at creating value for the municipality and the citizens who live in.

Therefore, although comprehensive and uniform OG initiatives could produce higher citizen engagement [9] which support some SDGs objectives (target 11.3 for example), it remains a rather abstract idea and strategic alignment (SA) in public administration research is scarce [10] and a neglected area of research [11]. Evidence on OG initiatives and SA in the public sector can therefore make an important contribution to the literature on strategic management in smart cities.

In this paper, we consider the vertical SA between OG initiatives and higher-level strategies,

defined as the consistency of local OG strategies with Regional socioeconomic objectives. In particular, this paper seeks to analyze both the strategies implemented by local governments in designing OG initiatives and the level of vertical alignment of the objectives included into the municipal OG strategies with those settled by the Regional Government to which they belong to, with the aim at analyzing the different efforts made, the SDGs pursued and the need for focusing these efforts in shared objectives to be more effective and efficient in the achievement of the SDGs targets.

To achieve this aim, the study reported in this work examines OG strategies in several Spanish local governments (n=29) under the microscope and its link with both their strategic alignment with Regional socio-economic objectives and the SDGs targets involved. Concretely, this study focuses on the OG objectives included into the strategic planning of Andalusian municipalities with large population (population over 50,000 inhabitants) and its comparison regarding those included into the Regional Government of Andalusia -socio-economic objectives settled in the Law 2/2007, Reform of the Statute of Autonomy for Andalusia- as a first approach to the object of study.

## 2. Data and Method

Spanish Governments have been making numerous innovations and efforts to immersed in introducing ICTs to achieve a more open and participative administration for years [12], these new challenges have led them to push fast-track smart initiatives and initiatives to face them. One of the main smart initiatives implemented in Spain is the adherence of the Spanish government to the Open Government Partnership movement since 2011[13]. In fact, Spain is one of the European countries with the greatest number of smart initiatives developed [14]. So, it is interesting to pay attention to the development of OG initiatives in Spain.

Despite the importance of OG policies in all levels of public administration, this study focuses on the local government policies due to their highest impact on citizens in their day-today life, given that they are the main providers of public services (Law 7/1985, Regulation of Bases of Local Regimes). In special, as a first approach to this analysis, our study focuses on the Andalusian local governments with a population over 50,000 inhabitants since it is most populated (8,464,411 inhabitants) Autonomous Region in Spain according to the Spanish National Institute of Statistics in 2020. In addition, the Regional Government has funded these local governments with over 189 millions of euros coming from the participation of local governments in the taxes of the Regional Government for the 2021 fiscal year -see <https://www.juntadeandalucia.es/export/drupaljda/20210209%20PATRICA%202021%20CHYFE%20.pdf>-.

As noted previously, this research analyzes the alignment of local OG strategies with the achievement of the basic objectives of the Andalusian Autonomous Region, established in the Organic Law 2/2007, reforming the Statute of Autonomy for Andalusia. To achieve this aim, the data collection was carried out into two stages. In the first one, the authors identified the Andalusian local governments with more than 50,000 inhabitants using the official database of the Spanish National Institute of Statistics. In total, 29 Andalusian local governments were identified, which represent 50.82% of the Andalusian population.

Once sample Andalusian local governments were identified, a search on their official web

pages was carried out to find out the level of OG strategies in each one of them. In the second stage of this research, the authors conducted an analysis of the different strategic plans and initiatives developed by each one of sample municipalities separately. Each strategic plan was analyzed in detail to get insights whether the Andalusian municipalities formulate specific strategic plans or, on the contrary, their OG initiatives were included into a holistic and integrated strategic planning. Afterwards, the authors conducted a comprehensive analysis to identify specific objectives and strategic action lines based on the development of OG and, in turn, to link them to socio-economic objectives set out in article 10 of Organic Law 2/2007, reforming the Statute of Autonomy for Andalusia.

Also, authors linked all socio-economic objectives to the different SDGs, seeking to know whether a higher level of alignment was promoted. When differences among authors' analyses were found, they were debated and put into common basis to reach a consensus. With these analyses, the authors got insights regarding the initiatives undertaken by sample municipalities and their alignment with the achievement of the socio-economic objectives settled by the Regional Government of Andalusia, and more specifically, which are the most driven by such initiatives.

### **3. Results**

To begin with, the objectives included in the Organic Law 2/2007, reforming the Statute of Autonomy for Andalusia -see Table 1-, have been classified into the different UN SDGs observing that the objectives settled in this Law are those mainly included in the goals 10 – reduced inequalities and 11 – sustainable cities and communities (six objectives within each), following from afar by the goals 1 – no poverty and 8 – decent work and economic growth (three objectives within each). The objectives of the zero hunger, clean water, and partnerships for the goals, although they are considered (one objective within each), do not have a very relevant presence among the objectives considered within the normative of Andalusian Regional Government.

Regarding the level of alignment of objectives pursued by OG strategies in sample municipalities and those settled by the Regional Government analyzed by each one of the UN SDGs -see Table 1-, it can be observed that the objectives included in the goals: 3 – Good health and well-being, 4 – Quality education, 9 – Industry, innovation and infrastructures and 12 – Responsible consumption and production are the most considered by the municipal governments in their strategic OG initiatives (50% each other). Nonetheless, data show high dispersion in the last one, which means the non-existence of consensus on the responsible consumption and production objectives to be considered in OG initiatives by the Andalusian municipalities, missing the opportunity of the potential for innovation, development, and collaboration brought by both the ICTs and the OG initiatives. On the other hand, results indicate a higher consensus (low dispersion) about the adopt OG initiatives and projects which favor the good health and well-being, industry, innovation and infrastructures and quality education. Also, results indicate a higher consensus (low dispersion) about the lesser consideration of the objectives about 2 – Zero hunger and 11 – Sustainable cities and communities. These results could be because municipalities consider that they are in a developed country, so they do not have to deal with reducing poverty.

Moreover, the policy makers, politicians and public managers think that the advantages offered by new technologies and the implementation of the OG structures do not allow them to achieve the sustainable cities, hence they tend not to include these objectives in their OG strategies and initiatives. In other words, they act individually, regardless of the source of funding [15]. Hence, there are only two Smart Cities in Andalusia (Malaga and Seville).

Table 1: Sustainable Development Goals and the alignment between objectives promoted by OG strategies in municipalities and objectives settled by the Regional Government (Source: Own elaboration)

SDG	Objectives included in Regional Government of Andalusia	% of alignmt	Median	Stand. Dev.
No poverty	<p>8) The achievement of territorial cohesion, solidarity, and convergence between the various territories of Andalusia, as a way to overcome economic, social and cultural imbalances and to equalize wealth and well-being among all citizens, especially those who they live in rural areas</p> <p>14) Social cohesion, through an effective public welfare system, with special attention to the most socially and economically disadvantaged groups and areas, to facilitate their full integration into Andalusian society, thus promoting overcoming social exclusion.</p> <p>20) Dialogue and social agreement, recognizing the relevant role that the most representative trade union and business organizations in Andalusia fulfill for this purpose.</p>	33.33	5.00	3.21

Zero Hunger	13) Modernization, planning and comprehensive development of the rural environment within the framework of an agrarian reform policy, favoring growth, full employment, the development of agrarian structures and the correction of territorial imbalances, within the framework of Community agricultural policy and that promotes the competitiveness of our agriculture at the European and international level.	6.90	0.00	0.35
Good health and well-being	15) Special attention to people in a situation of dependency. 16) The social, economic and labor integration of people with disabilities.	50.00	2.50	2.12
Quality education	2) Access to all Andalusian people to a permanent and quality education that allows them to achieve personal and social fulfillment 22) The promotion of a culture and peace and dialogue between people	50.00	2.00	1.14
Clean water and sanitation	7) Improving the quality of life of Andalusian people, through the protection of nature and the environment, proper water management and inter-territorial solidarity in its use and distribution, together with the development of social facilities, educational, cultural and health, as well as the provision of modern infrastructures	17.24	1.00	0.52

Decent work and economic growth	<p>1) The achievement of full, stable and quality employment in all sectors of production, with a singular impact on the safeguarding of occupational health and safety, the reconciliation of family and work life and the special guarantee of jobs for women and the young generations of Andalusian people.</p> <p>6) The creation of the essential conditions to make possible the return of Andalusian people abroad who so desire and to contribute with their work to the collective well-being of the Andalusian people</p> <p>20) Dialogue and social agreement, recognizing the relevant role that the most representative trade union and business organizations in Andalusia fulfill for this purpose.</p>	33.33	2.00	3.06
Industry, innovation, and infrastructure	<p>11) Industrial and technological development based on innovation, scientific research, public and private entrepreneurial initiatives, energy sufficiency and quality assessment, as the basis for the harmonious growth of Andalusia.</p> <p>12) The incorporation of the Andalusian people to the knowledge society</p>	50.00	11.50	7.78

Reduced inequalities	<p>9) Convergence with the rest of the State and the European Union, promoting and maintaining the necessary collaborative relations with the State and the other Autonomous Communities and Cities, and promoting the defense of Andalusian interests before the European Union.</p> <p>15) Special attention to people in a situation of dependency.</p> <p>16) The social, economic and labor integration of people with disabilities.</p> <p>17) The social, economic, labor and cultural integration of immigrants in Andalusia.</p> <p>18) The expression of the political, social and cultural pluralism of Andalusia through all the media.</p> <p>21) The promotion of the necessary conditions for the full integration of minorities and, especially, of the gypsy community for their full social incorporation.</p>	16.67	3.50	1.94
Sustainable cities and communities	<p>3) The strengthening of the awareness of identity and Andalusian culture through knowledge, research and dissemination of the historical, anthropological and linguistic heritage</p> <p>4) The defense, promotion, study and prestige of the Andalusian linguistic modality in all its varieties</p>	16.67	7.00	7.60



24) The public authorities shall ensure the safeguarding, knowledge and dissemination of the history of the struggle of the Andalusian people for their rights and freedoms.

19) Citizen participation in the preparation, provision and evaluation of public policies, as well as individual and associated participation in the civic, social, cultural, economic and political spheres, for the sake of an advanced and participatory social democracy.

7) Improving the quality of life of Andalusian people, through the protection of nature and the environment, proper water management and inter-territorial solidarity in its use and distribution, together with the development of social facilities, educational, cultural and health, as well as the provision of modern infrastructures

10) The realization of an efficient communication system that enhances human, cultural and economic exchanges, especially through a system of high-capacity tracks and through a high-speed rail network.

Responsible consumption and production	23) International cooperation with the objective of contributing to the solidarity development of the peoples.	50.00	8.50	12.02
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	5) The use and enhancement of the natural and economic resources of Andalusia under the principle of sustainability, the promotion of knowledge and human capital, the promotion of public and private investment, as well as the fair redistribution of wealth and income			
Partnerships for the goals	23) International cooperation with the objective of contributing to the solidarity development of the peoples.	0.00	0.00	0.00

On the other hand, results allow us to classify local governments into three groups based on the type of OG strategies developed -table 2-. The first one is characterized by only promoting government transparency (push strategy) using a specific website (transparency portal or open data portal). It represents over 75% of Andalusian municipalities. The second one includes those municipalities that own specific websites aimed at both information transparency and citizen participation but in a separately way (engagement strategy). It represents 10.34% of Andalusian municipalities under study. Finally, the last one consists of those municipalities that own specific OG platforms (networking strategy), which represents 13.79% of Andalusian municipalities.

Moreover, sample municipalities running a push strategy show a high level of alignment with the Andalusian Regional Government in the objectives included into the goals: 12 – Responsible consumption and production; 9 – Industry, innovation, and infrastructures; 11 – Sustainable cities and communicates; 6 – Clean water and economic growth and 1 – No poverty. Municipalities seem to have a consensus when it comes to achieving most of these goals through open government strategies, except for the last two ones.

This trend is like the municipalities running an engagement strategy -9 – Industry, innovation, and infrastructures; 12 – Responsible consumption and production and 11 – Sustainable cities and communicates. Although, these municipalities show a clear focus on ICTs favoring the construction of resilient infrastructure, promoting sustainable industrialization, and fostering innovation. This approach is not so evident in the other two goals, because they are less considerate and there is a high dispersion in ensuring sustainable consumption and production patterns.

Finally, sample municipalities running an integrated strategy -networking or mingling strategy- offer an OG platform that allows citizens to be involved in public decision-making processes, and their strategic visions are wider considering a broader range of objectives that can be achieved through the organizational structures implemented with the OG initiatives. Moreover, we can see that these municipalities seem to be more aware that the OG strategies favor the achievement of a greater number of SDGs, and there is a great consensus on most of them, except for two goals: 6 – Clean water and economic growth and 10- Reduced inequalities (high dispersion).

Table 2: OG strategies and the alignment between objectives promoted by municipalities and objectives settled by the Regional Government

OG Strategies	SDG	% of alignment	Median	Stand. Dev.
Push 75.86%	No poverty	12.12	0.00	0.73
	Zero hunger	9.09	0.00	0.29
	Good health and well-being	6.82	0.00	0.35
	Quality education	6.82	0.00	0.35
	Clean water and sanitation	18.18	0.00	0.39
	Decent work and economic growth	9.09	0.00	0.46
	Industry, innovation, and infrastructure	31.82	1.00	0.58
	Reduced inequalities	3.79	0.00	0.43
	Sustainable cities and communities	18.18	1.00	0.97
	Responsible consumption and production	34.09	1.00	0.48
	Partnership for the goals	0.00	0.00	0.00
	No poverty	11.11	0.00	0.58
	Zero hunger	0.00	0.00	0.00
Engagement 10.34%	Good health and well-being	0.00	0.00	0.00
	Quality education	0.00	0.00	0.00
	Clean water and sanitation	0.00	0.00	0.00
	Decent work and economic growth	11.11	0.00	0.58
	Industry, innovation and infrastructure	50.00	1.00	0.00
	Reduced inequalities	11.11	1.00	0.58
	Sustainable cities and communities	16.67	1.00	0.00
	Responsible consumption and production	16.67	0.00	0.58
	Partnership for the goals	0.00	0.00	0.00
	No poverty	16.67	0.50	0.58
Networking 13.79%				

Zero hunger	0.00	0.00	0.00
Good health and well-being	25.00	0.50	0.58
Quality education	0.00	0.00	0.00
Clean water and sanitation	25.00	0.00	0.50
Decent work and economic growth	8.33	0.00	0.50
Industry, innovation and infrastructure	75.00	1.50	0.58
Reduced inequalities	12.50	0.50	0.96
Sustainable cities and communities	33.33	2.00	0.82
Responsible consumption and production	37.50	1.00	0.50
Partnership for the goals	0.00	0.00	0.00

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#### 4. Conclusions

Findings show that most of sample municipalities only show a transparency portal as a response to the normative requirements, which does not offer citizens the opportunity to be engaged in public decision-making. Other sample municipalities have chosen to go one step further and they have created a participation platform as a first step for citizen involvement in decision-making. Nonetheless, this second group of municipalities does not fully engage citizens in the decision-making process, because the power in decisions is kept by the local government. Finally, a small number of municipalities have either come to clearly establish spaces where public participation and collaboration are effective, creating OG platforms.

On another hand, the socio-economic objectives defined by the Andalusian Regional Government in its regulation are usually related to the good health, quality education, industry and infrastructures, and responsible consumption, whereas others, like those related to the zero hunger, sustainable cities, and reduced inequalities, are almost non-existent. This result could be linked to the political goal of strengthening the economic growth and improvement quality of citizens' lives, ignoring other objectives usually existent in more economic-developed areas. Future research should therefore analyze other different Regions or countries, in a comparative basis, with the aim at identifying patterns in the main objectives pursued in accordance with the socio-economic development level, the administrative culture or the smartness of the Region or area analyzed.

Furthermore, findings reveal that sample Andalusian municipalities do not take advantage of the potential of ICTs and OG initiatives to improve zero hunger, sustainable cities, and reduced inequalities issues. They are not concerned with promoting the innovation and the formulation of public policies with the collaboration of citizens in the co-creation of the solutions to face social problems. Similarly, although the economic, health and education objectives are the most considered and developed in the digital strategies of the sample Andalusian municipalities,

there is not a standardized vision among the sample municipalities, which could be due to the different level of OG development that each municipality has reached.

In fact, we have checked that there are similarities when the municipalities are grouped according to the strategy adopted and the level of OG development achieved. In the case of municipalities with the lowest levels of development -push and engagement strategies-, there is a tendency to focus their efforts on achieving the industries, production, and economic growth together with sustainable cities, although there is not a normalized behavior. By contrast, municipalities running a networking strategy consider a broader range of objectives. In brief, they are more aware of the potential of OG adoption, hence, their strategies are focused on innovate industries, responsible consumption, sustainable cities, reduces inequalities, and conservation of natural spaces

Nonetheless, the success of the OG initiative relies on citizens' willingness to interact with the institution and provide input on the given task (Bekkers et al., 2013). In doing so, citizens will acquire greater confidence in the government (Moreno-Carmona et al., 2020). Therefore, future research could advance in the knowledge about capacities and citizens' willingness to collaborate with the public administration in the co-creation of solutions for facing societal challenges. This research could also be focused on drivers and stakeholders' profile to identify trends in citizen collaboration with public entities.

In conclusion, findings indicate that Andalusian municipalities have a long path to move in the development and implementation of OG strategies and initiatives, because a great bulk of them is in a very early stage (push and engagement strategies).

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In conclusion, findings indicate that Andalusian municipalities have a long path to move in the development and implementation of OG strategies and initiatives, because a great bulk of them is in a very early stage (push and engagement strategies).

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