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Politics of Disclosure:
Organizational Transparency as Multiactor Negotiation

Abstract: *Transparency is in vogue, yet it is often used as an umbrella concept for a wide array of phenomena. More focused concepts are needed to understand the form and function of different phenomena of visibility. In this article, the authors define organizational transparency as systematic disclosure programs that meet the information needs of other actors. Organizational transparency, they argue, is best studied as an interorganizational negotiation process on the field level. To evaluate its merit, the authors apply this framework to a case study on the introduction of open data in the Berlin city administration. Analyzing the politics of disclosure, they consider the similarities and differences between phenomena of visibility (e.g., open data, freedom of information), explore the transformative power of negotiating transparency, and deduce recommendations for managing transparency.*

Evidence for Practice

- The creation of organizational transparency, the systematic and rule-bound disclosure of relevant information, can be understood as a negotiation process between a focal organization and its stakeholders.
- In this process, information providers (e.g., city agencies) can contribute to the realization of mutual benefit through tactful timing, structural coupling, and the creation of new role expectations.
- Information seekers (e.g., advocacy organizations) can shape the process toward mutually beneficial outcomes through means of formalization and by using hybrid strategies (e.g., by simultaneously campaigning with very broad and very specific demands).

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Far-reaching disclosure scandals and a growing distrust in institutions have fueled the theoretical debate on the form and function of transparency. While some authors argue provocatively that theories of transparency have failed (Fenster 2015), others ask for theoretical and empirical efforts that allow for greater complexity when studying transparency (Meijer 2013). So far, transparency has often been used as an "umbrella construct" (Hirsch and Levin 1999) that accounts for a wide variety of phenomena. While this approach is helpful in establishing a new research field, in this article, we show how more specific concepts of transparency allow for a deeper understanding and help make practical recommendations regarding how to manage transparency.

At the beginning of this article, we develop a definition of what we consider one of the most interesting phenomena of visibility: *organizational* transparency (Albu and Flyverbom 2016; Cucciniello, Porumbescu, and Grimmelikhuijsen 2017; Garsten and Montoya 2008). In contrast to individual acts of transparency and other forms of information disclosure, organizational transparency, we argue, is characterized by systematic programs for information

disclosure that meet information needs external to the organization (cf. Bernstein 2017). In recent years, a large proportion of studies on the creation of organizational transparency in the public sector have explored the adoption of open data. While early studies explored mainly barriers to open data adoption (Janssen, Charalabidis, and Zuiderwijk 2012), recent accounts have looked at antecedent and enabling conditions of open data as a form of organizational transparency (Grimmelikhuijsen and Feeney 2017). Overall, many of these studies call for more processual and contextual research into the creation of organizational transparency between public organizations and their stakeholders (Cucciniello, Porumbescu, and Grimmelikhuijsen 2017; Meijer 2013). Responding to these calls, we complement our definition of organizational transparency with a process framework that allows us to study the interorganizational negotiation of disclosure programs between "challengers" (information seekers) and "incumbents" (information providers), who "vie for advantage" (Fligstein 2013, 41) on the field level (Fligstein and McAdam 2012; Zietsma and Lawrence 2010). We call this new framework the *politics of disclosure* (cf. Hansen and Flyverbom 2015).

To evaluate its merit, we apply our framework to a case study of the successful introduction of open data in the Berlin city administration. Based on rich qualitative data, we reconstruct the way that city agencies in Berlin engaged in the politics of disclosure with a heterogeneous group of stakeholders (activists, academics, and politicians) over a period of six years. At the end of this process, access to information had been renegotiated and the city agencies were generally perceived as being more transparent.

With our study, we contribute to a more rigorous understanding of transparency in multiple ways. First, we show that narrower concepts of transparency such as organizational transparency deepen our understanding of the phenomena of visibility. Second, we show that understanding the creation of transparency through a process lens makes visible the transformative effect of respective negotiations—that is, indicates that the struggle around visibility shapes the very organizations that are intending to make themselves visible. Finally, our analysis allows us to make empirically grounded recommendations for practitioners, directed at incumbents as well as challengers, on how to manage transparency.

Theoretical Context

Transparency is "the order of the day" (Han 2015) and has been used as an "umbrella concept" (Hirsch and Levin 1999) to capture a wide variety of phenomena such as episodes of whistle-blowing, freedom of information (FOI) policies, and open data initiatives. The use of transparency as a one-size-fits-all concept for different "phenomena of visibility" (Strathern 2000) irons out differences between these phenomena (cf. Fenster 2015). Therefore, we develop a theoretical framework for the more specific concept of *organizational* transparency. First, we differentiate organizational transparency from individual transparency (e.g., whistle-blowing) and other forms of information disclosure (e.g., public relations communications). Second, we argue that the form and function of organizational transparency as a relational property can be best understood when studied through a process lens.

Organizational Transparency

Meijer (2013, 430) defines transparency most generally "as the availability of information about an actor that allows other actors to monitor the workings or performance of the first actor." Transparency, hence, is a relational concept that presupposes an observer as well as an observed (Bernstein 2017). There is, however, a difference as to whether the actor that makes information available is an individual (who may or may not be part of a certain organization) or an organization. Whistle-blowing is a prime example of the former: Weiskopf and Tobias-Miersch (2016) provide an empirical account of a European Union official who engaged in whistle-blowing against what he considered malpractice within the institution. The authors describe whistle-blowing through the Foucauldian concept of "parrhesia" (frank speech), according to which disclosure can be interpreted as "truth-telling in the workplace" (Mansbach 2009, 367) by individuals who intend to create change. By disclosing information, these individuals put themselves at high risk. Although information about an organization is made visible to outside observers, the transparency that comes from whistle-blowing is one that is solely linked to an individual's motivation and affect—at least in cases in which organizations lack specific whistle-blowing regulations intended

to organizationally shield or even incentivize individual whistle-blowers (see, e.g., Lewis 2002).

The latter poses the question of how we can understand transparency not as individual action triggered by motivation and affect but as an organized phenomenon? Following the canonical, decision-based theory of the firm, organization takes place when decisions are detached from the arbitrariness and contingency of individuals and transformed into "performance programs" (March and Simon 1958), which define how certain decisions are made on the basis of certain given conditions: "if this is the case, then do that" (Seidl and Becker 2006, 42). Exploring the variety of these programs, Cyert and March (1963, 107) find that communication within organizations is governed by sets of "information handling rules." One of the sets they consider most fundamental for organizations, and one that relates closely to our interest in organizational transparency, comprises the "characteristics of the information leaving the firm" (107).

We come closer to a framework of organizational transparency but still need to address another clarifying question: how can we differentiate organized information disclosure (e.g., public relations communications) from organizational transparency? Albu and Flyverbom (2016, 5) review the transparency literature relating to the study of organizations and conclude that "in most accounts, transparency is associated with the sharing of information" about an organization's processes, procedures, functioning, and performance. Zooming in, we find studies that measure "transparency as [the] *frequency* of information disclosure" (Berglund 2014, 360; emphasis added), relate the existence of transparency to the *accuracy* of disclosed information (Wehmeier and Raaz 2012), or agree that disclosed information has to be *relevant* for interested parties in order to create transparency (Rawlins 2008).

What unites these definitions is that the (organized) disclosure of information only leads to the attribution of transparency when it meets information needs in the organization's environment. A simple thought experiment shows that the attribution of transparency depends on the specific observer: if a city agency regularly disclosed information about its ongoing IT projects, it would probably not be considered overly transparent by a nongovernmental organization (NGO) interested in gender equality at the workplace. If the same agency regularly disclosed information on its job application processes, the NGO would most likely praise it for being a transparent organization, yet software engineering graduates might apply to firms that make challenges at their technical core more transparent to prospective employees. From this thought experiment, we can infer that whether disclosure decisions are considered accurate, timely, and relevant (the transparency criteria derived earlier) depends on whether the information helps other actors make decisions themselves. Organizational transparency is hence not a property that lies in an organization itself but a property inherent in the relations between an organization and actors in its environment (Bernstein 2017; cf. Emirbayer 1997). Within each of these relations, transparency is achieved when an organization's reduction of case-by-case decision situations regarding information disclosure ("performance programs," "information handling rules") leads to an increase in information-based decision situations in the organization's environment.

Our definition of organizational transparency allows us to differentiate it from individual acts of transparency as well as from other forms of information disclosure. At the heart of our definition is the relation between organizations and various, maybe even contradictory, information needs in their environment. In the following section, we complement our current framework (the *what*) with a process lens that allows us to unpack and understand the negotiation of these relations (the *how*). This allows us to understand the process by which organizations become transparent, or, as we call it, the *politics of disclosure*.

The Multiactor Negotiation of Transparency: A Process Lens

In this section, we build on our definition of organizational transparency developed earlier and propose a process framework to study the negotiation of transparency over time. The question of how transparency comes about has already been studied in the course of the introduction of FOI legislation (Pasquier and Villeneuve 2007) and, more recently, by looking at cases of open data policy adoption. Janssen, Charalabidis, and Zuiderwijk (2012) engaged with employees of public agencies and derived a comprehensive list of barriers to open data adoption, which they sort into categories such as institutional and legislative constraints, complexity of the task, or a lack of technical skill. A more recent review of barriers to open data adoption points out that "too little emphasis has been placed on feedback and interdependencies among suppliers, users, and intended beneficiaries" (Dawes, Vidiasova, and Parkhimovich 2016, 16), thereby moving the locus of the barriers from the individual agency to the relations between agency and environment. Only recently have scholars shifted their attention from typologies of barriers toward antecedents for successful transparency enactment.

When looking at antecedents, the need to study interorganizational processes of transparency becomes clear as well. Grimmelikhuijsen and Feeney (2017) test how structural, cultural, and environmental variables explain the adoption of different open government characteristics. On the one hand, they find that technological capacity, the absence of strong routines, and an organizational climate conducive to innovation relate positively to higher levels of transparency. On the other hand, their findings suggest not only that transparency is shaped by intraorganizational factors but that "external pressure matters" as well (10). Along these lines, ben-Aaron et al. (2017) show the positive effect of peer conformity on the enactment of transparency, demonstrating that a local government's fulfillment of a public records request is influenced by the knowledge that its peers have already complied. To get a better understanding of how transparency is created in the interplay of multiple actors, many of the aforementioned studies ask for more future research that takes a longitudinal look at the political environment of transparency.

The need for an interorganizational as well as processual approach to transparency, which has become salient in this review of the literature on open data adoption, is expressed in more general terms by Marilyn Strathern, a pioneer in the field of transparency studies, who famously argued that "there is nothing innocent about making the invisible visible" (2000, 309). Transparency projects serve as arenas of power in which actors vie for advantage (Fligstein and McAdam 2012). The rearrangement of access to information

means that power is partly redistributed within these arenas (Meijer 2013, 431). For example, data sets previously being used as informal "bargaining chips" between employees within and across public agencies may suddenly become available to everyone (cf. Heimstädt 2017). Recently, Flyverbom (2015) suggested studying transparency not as a stable order, but as a "form of *ordering*" (emphasis added), thereby referring to a processual understanding of these arenas and their politics of disclosure. Against the backdrop of our definition developed above, we modify this suggestion and propose studying organizational transparency as a process of negotiation. To capture the piecemeal processes through which actors negotiate and attribute transparency over time, a framework is needed that structures the ongoing flow of events into analytical parts allowing comparison and theorization (Langley 1999; Langley et al. 2013).

Zietsma and Lawrence (2010) develop a process model of successful practice change, which they use to describe social contestation and changes in the field of forestry, but we find this model particularly useful to study the negotiation and change of disclosure programs as well. In their framework, they deconstruct the process of change into distinct temporal episodes, in which they study the recursive interplay of groups each pushing for their own ideas of legitimate practices. Grounded in the fruitful convergence of research on social movements and organizational change (Strang and Jung 2005; Zald, Morrill, and Rao 2005), they describe four stages in which challengers (in our case, information seekers) and incumbents (information providers) negotiate practice change. (1) At first, existing practices are uncontested, supported by a regulatory framework and backed by solidarity and educational structures. (2) In the following phase, challengers try to disrupt existing practices by reframing them and the organizations that use them as illegitimate. Incumbent organizations, in turn, try to delegitimize challengers and their framing. (3) In a subsequent phase, challengers create new practices and powerful narratives surrounding them. Potential practices are tested for their social acceptability. (4) Practices that turn out to be viable are promoted by removing barriers to adoption, by promoting their legitimacy, and through "theorization" (Mena and Suddaby 2016)—their embedding in scientifically backed means-end relations.

Earlier, we developed a framework to study *organizational* transparency. By refining our conceptual understanding of transparency, we add to a recent interpretative turn in transparency studies that tries to uncover "the complex work of human actors and technologies that goes into what appears to be 'transparent'" (Hansen and Flyverbom, 2015, 872). Our framework, the politics of disclosure, consists of two parts. First, we describe *organizational* transparency as characterized by rules and programs that detach disclosure decisions from single individuals and their personal motivations. Organizational transparency is achieved when organized disclosure decisions resonate with the information demands of external observers. As organizations most likely face different information demands, they need to engage in interorganizational negotiations if they wish to be perceived as transparent by one or multiple external actors. Second, we introduce a process lens to study this negotiation of transparency over time. In the following sections, we test the value of our framework by applying it to a recent phenomenon of organizational transparency (open data) following the research question: *how is organizational*

transparency negotiated in the interplay of organizations that disclose information and actors that express an interest in information to be disclosed?

Methods

Research Context and Case Selection

To address our research question, we conducted an inductive case study (Eisenhardt 1989) on the introduction of *open data* as a form of organizational transparency in a city administration. We thereby respond directly to calls for more contextual, longitudinal, and qualitative research on public sector transparency (Cucciniello, Porumbescu, and Grimmelikhuijsen 2017; cf. de Fine Licht 2014; Flyvbjerg 2001; Meijer 2013). Open data is a contemporary transparency concept around which a heterogeneous group of organizations gather to negotiate the modalities of information disclosure. Most generally, open data describes the idea that organizations make the digital data sets that they produce and use in their daily operations available to the public. When published under liberal copyright licenses, such as the ones developed by Creative Commons, the data sets can be used and modified by everyone for noncommercial as well as commercial purposes (cf. Dobusch and Quack 2013).

Over the last decades, a "well-established and powerful, though disparate, 'transparency movement'" (Birchall 2011, 11) has campaigned for greater information disclosure in various domains of social life. Groups that focus in particular on the reconfiguration of intellectual property and copyright regimes are sometimes subsumed as the Access to Knowledge movement (Kapczynski 2007). Actors from this movement also participate in the various arenas in which open data is debated. One particularly interesting aspect of what Heimstädt, Saunderson, and Heath (2014) describe as "open data ecosystems" is that social movement organizations are not the only ones pushing for greater information disclosure in these arenas—they are joined by academics, journalists, managers, and entrepreneurs who engage in the politics of disclosure.

We studied the adoption of open data by city agencies in Berlin. According to the 2014 Open Data Census, Berlin is the German city with the most comprehensive adoption of open data policies and ranks among the most open cities worldwide.[1] Berlin therefore serves as what Yin (2013) calls an "extreme case," one in which a certain phenomenon is particularly distinct. In this study, the phenomenon of interest is an institutionalized coproduction of transparency. Berlin, however, is not only home to many activist groups, start-ups, and media companies, all potentially interested in access to public sector data sets, but it is furthermore imprinted by a history of protests and vivid debates around public data collection, storage, and use (Loader et al. 2004). When trying to transfer insights from Berlin to other cities, one must bear in mind that historical context matters for theory building on public administration issues and is necessary for a genuinely open inquiry (Adams 1992).

Data Collection

Against the backdrop of our research question and process framework (Zietsma and Lawrence 2010), we opted for a longitudinal case study and multiple means of data collection in order to capture the politics of disclosure most richly (Yin 2003).

We focused our study on a period of six years (2008–14), at the end of which access to information had been reorganized and the city agencies were generally perceived as being substantially more transparent. Data collection took place between July and September 2014. The data collection was geared toward two major aims. First, we wanted to learn as much about the disclosure decisions of city agencies and the information needs of stakeholders as possible. Second, we tried to develop a deep understanding of the contextual conditions in which the renegotiation of information access in Berlin took place.

Interviews. In total, we conducted and audiotaped 21 interviews with challengers (e.g., activists, academics, journalists) as well as incumbents (e.g., officials from city government, city administration, and city-owned companies). In our interviews with challengers, we asked them about their involvement in the open data process in general, their interest in specific forms of information, their tactics to influence incumbent organizations, and how their activities and interests had changed over time. In our interviews with incumbent organizations, we asked them about the processes and practices through which they disclose information and how these had changed over time.

Documentary evidence. In order to identify relevant actors and events in the open data process, we collected documentary evidence with a deliberately wide scope. These documents include news reports, policy documents, handbooks, guides, and slide decks, as well as pictures, videos, and website screenshots. In total, we analyzed and evaluated more than 2,600 pages of relevant documents. All documents were written in either English or German, and we translated passages from German into English when necessary. In many cases, we used information from these documents to inform our interviews and, in turn, searched for focal documents that were mentioned in interviews (studies, public hearing protocols).

Observation. We found that media reports tend to report more on urban incumbents (e.g., local government, city agencies) and devote less coverage to challengers (e.g., activists). Therefore, we decided to complement interview and documentary evidence with data from participant observation at a focal challenger organization in the field, not seeking to overemphasize its contribution to the politics of disclosure but to create a balanced account. The first author spent 12 weeks part time at a nonprofit open data advocacy organization with an office in and an operational focus on Berlin. Affiliation with this organization greatly facilitated our access to focal actors in the field, a crucial requirement, as our research focus required contact to very specific interview partners (the ones directly involved in the open data process). Shadowing different team members during their daily work routines and participating in formal meetings and informal exchanges allowed us to learn at firsthand about the cultural frames (e.g., *information as power*) and practices (*data scraping*[2]) associated with information disclosure (Neyland 2007b).

Data Analysis

We performed data analysis both during and after the data collection, moving back and forth between data, literature, and emerging theory in an open-ended, grounded-theory-style analysis (Glaser and Strauss 1967; Locke 2001). During the data gathering

Table 1 Chronology of Events (Excerpt)

Year	Event
Since 1980s	Berlin is home to an emerging community of people interested in the societal impacts of digital technology. At the heart of this is the community organization Chaos Computer Club.
2008	For the first time, open data is discussed at the Chaos Computer Club's annual meeting.
2009	Proponents of open data found two different advocacy organizations.
2009–10	The advocacy organizations engage in intense lobbying activities, targeted at different organizations in the city administration.
2010	Berlin's Department of Economic Development initiates a multistakeholder dialogue on the practical implementation of open data.
2011	Berlin's Department of Economic Development launches an open data web portal to collect and publish data sets from other public sector organizations.
2014	The web portal holds more than 800 data sets from more than 25 public sector organizations.

Table 2 Actions of Challengers and Incumbents in the First Temporal Bracket

Bracket Title: Sharing Data, One Disclosure at a Time (B1)

Challengers

Action	Data
C1. Making case-by-case disclosure requests	"The Freedom of Information right in Berlin is the most liberal one in Germany, as the exceptions to the general principle of transparency are phrased particularly restrictively" (preface to the Berlin Freedom of Information Act)

Incumbents

Action	Data
I1. Making inconsistent disclosure decisions	"In theory every citizen in Germany already has a right to information. The Freedom of Information legislation grants the right to access public records. Reality, however, oftentimes looks different. When sending in a disclosure request, administrative fees and cost of reproduction are charged. Many requests are rejected, oftentimes with reference to security concerns or 'confidentiality'" (newspaper article)

and analysis, the first and second authors triangulated between the first author's impressions from the field and the second author's perspective, which was from the outside but grounded in previous research on transparency movements. After entering our interview transcripts, documentary evidence, and field notes from the observation into the qualitative data analysis software MAXQDA, we analyzed our data in three iterative steps, following Langley's (1999) recommendations for working with process data.

In the first step, we coded our data using a mixture of deductive categorical (e.g., challenger, incumbent) and inductive exploratory ("in vivo") codes related to decisions, rules, or practices of information disclosure and transparency. In total, we had obtained 405 coded passages by the end of this process and were able to develop a time line of critical events (an excerpt can be found in table 1). In the second step, we delineated four temporal brackets within a six-year process from 2008 to 2014 (Pozzebon and Pinsonneault 2005). Bracketing is a method popularized by the process school of organization studies (cf. Langley et al. 2013), which—building on Giddens's (1984) theory of structuration—seeks to highlight how the outcomes of one phase serve as starting conditions for (and thereby shape) following phases. The four brackets we developed resonate with the process model by Zietsma and Lawrence (2010) but ultimately emerged from our inductive codes. Within each of the brackets, we subsequently sorted the codes using the categorization of challengers and incumbents. In the third step, we reconstructed the politics of disclosure for each of the four brackets.

Findings

In this section, we provide a theoretically structured account of how several city agencies in Berlin adopted open data. During this process, organizational transparency was created through multiactor negotiations between these agencies and a heterogeneous group of activists, academics, and politicians. We identify four temporal brackets along which the politics of disclosure can be unpacked: (1) At first, incumbents share data, one disclosure decision at a time. (2) In the following bracket, various disclosure demands emerge among challengers. (3) After a period of contestation, challengers and incumbents craft a mutually aligned disclosure program. (4) Eventually, the program is implemented and reinforced in collaboration between challengers and incumbents. The narration in

each of the brackets is guided by codes that are referenced in the text and can be found together with exemplary data in tables 2–5.

First Bracket: Sharing Data, One Disclosure at a Time

The Berlin city administration consists of more than 40 formal organizations. In addition, there are dozens of affiliated city-owned utility and service providers. In early 2008, the first year of our observation period, these organizations disclosed information as a result of case-by-case and sometimes arbitrary decisions (see table 2). These decisions were made against the backdrop of two related legislative frameworks. In response to a European Union directive from 1990, the German government passed the Environmental Information Act in 1994, which made it mandatory for all national and state agencies to release information related to the natural environment on individual request. In October 1999, against the backdrop of this highly specialized disclosure law, the Berlin parliament passed the much broader Berlin Freedom of Information Act. At this time, only one other state in Germany had a similar law (the adjacent state of Brandenburg). The national freedom of information law was passed in 2005.

The Berlin Freedom of Information Act grants everyone the right to "access or to receive information about the contents of the files held by [a] public body" (section 3, paragraph 1). In practice, however, only a small number of people (mainly journalists or members of other city agencies) were aware of and utilized this regulation (B1-C1; referring to the codes and data displayed at the end of this section). At this time, requests for information disclosure were sent to the respective city agency and forwarded to the employee who was handling the requested files or data sets. This employee would then decide whether the information was to be disclosed directly, whether it would be disclosed for a high administrative fee (up to €500), or whether the agency would deny the request based on some of the many exemptions included in the act (B1-I1). Overall, our interviewees reported that disclosure decisions at this time were rather arbitrary, depending on the individual employee, and that in many cases the administration found a way to block the publication of documents through bureaucratic processes (field notes, informal interview with activists). In this bracket, we find that information is disclosed as a result of individual decisions. The lack of any decision

program makes the disclosures appear arbitrary and selective. On the other hand, none of the challengers requested standardized disclosure procedures that would enable them to use the disclosed information as a stable basis on which to make decisions.

Second Bracket: Various Incongruent Disclosure Demands Emerge

In the period from mid-2008 to mid-2010, the concept of open data emerged in Berlin through sources such as international organizations and blogs. It was interpreted by different actors, who picked up the concept and articulated ideas about how the city administration should change its data-handling practices (see table 3). All actors agreed that information disclosure should change from a regime of individual and inconsistent disclosure decisions to a reliable disclosure program. The ideas of what this program should be like overlapped but were presented in an uncoordinated way and perceived by city agencies as a confusing polyphony. Among the challengers, we identified three groups that expressed their disclosure demands most explicitly: activists, academics, and politicians.

Activists. Since the 1960s, Berlin has been home to various groups of political activists, strongly intertwined with the local countercultures. Since decades before the term "open data" was coined, this community has engaged in issues such as political openness, freedom of information, and digital civil rights. By mid-2008, actors from these spheres had picked up the concept of open data from U.S. blogs and introduced it to the wider activist community through presentations at activist conferences, the use of blogs and social media, and personal conversations in the bars and hackerspaces of Berlin. Many of these activists saw open data as a tool that could help them increase the government's accountability. Therefore, their vision of open data was one in which the public administration should release all its data to the public at once without bothering about legal constraints (B2-C1). In their opinion, every day of hesitation left room for corruption and hidden power play. To focus and promote their vision of open data, two groups of activists established formal nonprofit organizations dedicated to the issue.

Academics. In many large cities around the world, multiple partnerships exist between academic institutions and individual city agencies. In Berlin, one of these long-term partnerships is that of the city administration responsible for technical and economic affairs and an independent research institute specializing in the technical infrastructure of public sector organizations in Germany. When we spoke about the early days of open data in Berlin, one employee from this research institute gave an account of the interpretation of open data:

> One of our research programs was about smart cities. The entire institute was working on an agenda for Berlin in the year 2030, so we approached the issue of smart cities and, within this issue, identified urban data platforms as a centerpiece. From this point, it's easy to establish the bridge to open data, so we brought the two together. (employee of a Berlin-based research institute)

What became clear in this and other interviews with members of the research institute is that their disclosure demands followed a rather technical logic. Instead of seeing the idea as a radical social innovation, they handled the issue as a gradual improvement of information systems that were already in place. Specifically, they demanded that the city administration should create a prototype of an open data repository without legal underpinning. Once this repository began to fill up, more funds and supporting legislation would follow (B2-C2).

Politicians. In Berlin, the growth of the Pirate Party has had a significant influence on the field of open data. Founded in 2006 with a topical focus on internet governance, it won 9 percent of the votes for the Berlin Senate in 2011. During its election campaign, its promoted the concept of "Open Access to the Public Sector," (Pirate Party manifesto, 2009), basically a different term for the concept of open data. From interviews and relevant documents, we learned that the local Pirate Party as well as the Green Party (founded around environmental and social justice issues in 1980) have carried out the most significant efforts to promote open data in Berlin by repeatedly bringing up the issue in public hearings, inquiries, and legislative proposals (B2-C3).

> [The Pirate Party] definitely applied quite some pressure on the other parties, pressure to engage with the issue [of transparency]. Politicians recognized that people think transparency is important and would actually vote for it. (employee of city agency)

In this initial phase, there was little to no coordination between activists and politicians, as the former favored a pragmatic and immediate disclosure and the latter advocated legislative change first.

Table 3 Actions of Challengers and Incumbents in the Second Temporal Bracket

Bracket Title: Various Disclosure Demands Emerge (B1)	
Challengers	
Action	Data
C1. Expressing disclosure demands (activists)	"From 1999 onward, I always went to the annual meeting of Chaos Computer Club. I found it fascinating how you could use technology to make the world a better place…. Then, back in 2008 and 2009, … for us open data had already been 'smoldering' for a while because we were reading the US blogs. For us, this was superhot shit." (member of open data NGO)
C2. Expressing disclosure demands (academics)	"One of our research programs was about smart cities. The entire institute was working on an agenda for Berlin in the year 2030, so we approached the issue of smart cities and, within this issue, identified urban data platforms as a centrepiece. From this point, it's easy to establish the bridge to open data, so we brought the two together." (employee of a research institute)
C3. Expressing disclosure demands (politicians)	"We demand the inclusion of software and any other digital products that are produced with public funding in the open access concept." (2009 election manifesto of the German Pirate Party, excerpt from section "Open Access for the Public Sector")
Incumbents	
Action	Data
I1. Refusing to cater to different disclosure demands	"At this point we had to say: we're sorry but no, we cannot upload all the data sets. There is no legal basis for that. On what legal basis should we do that?" (employee of city agency recalled his reaction after being faced with various open data demands)

In this bracket, city agencies in Berlin felt increasing pressure on their legitimacy:

> There was concurrence between interested political experts, interested professionals from the business world, and interested parts of civil society. They reinforced each other … they confirmed to each other that the issue [open data] is hugely important, they pushed it so much that in the end, no one dared to say anything against it. (employee of city agency)

Besides dealing with the day-to-day work of disclosure requests, the agencies now also had to find an appropriate response to the different demands to select relevant data and disclose it on a regular basis and under a licensing scheme they had never used before (liberal licenses such as Creative Commons were largely unknown within the agencies at that time). In this temporal bracket, city agencies either ignored or refused to cater to these various disclosure demands (B2-I1). They recognized the academic proposals as interesting but in need of further theoretical clarifications, regarded the Pirate Party as misfits within the established political system, which would vanish as quickly as they had appeared, and evaluated the activists' demands for radical and immediate transparency as "practically impossible" and driven by "youthful foolishness." Most interestingly, many city agencies did not reject the notion of information disclosure as such (they had been dealing with FOI requests since the law was passed in 1999) but rather felt unable to cope with the various demands for disclosure programs all at once:

> We had already begun to develop an understanding of open data, but apparently that was "way too little" and "way too slow" and we should just hand over all the data. At this point we had so say no. There was no legal basis for that. (employee of city agency)

Third Bracket: A Mutually Aligned Disclosure Program Is Crafted

By mid-2010, all challengers had increased the pressure of their demands (B3-C1). In the political realm, more and more politicians from the Green Party and the Pirate Party introduced open data bills to different borough councils. In the academic realm, the research institute hired more open data staff and engaged in open data consultancy projects for the federal government and other cities. The increase of public attention (several national newspapers covered the foundation of the two open data NGOs) motivated challengers to engage in more intense social movement tactics in order to delegitimize the practice of professional confidentiality (*Amtsgeheimnis*) and arbitrary information disclosure (see table 4). During a web community conference in Berlin in the summer of 2010, one of the activist groups scraped a database for geospatial data maintained by a large public sector organization in Berlin. "We called this 'Hack the Government,'" one of the participants stated.

> We retrieved the data from [a city website], which is a platform where [one of Berlin's public sector organizations] uploads its geodata and maps. This database is a monstrous thing—it's completely unusable and you cannot access the data. (open data activist)

Table 4 Actions of Challengers and Incumbents in the Third Temporal Bracket

Bracket Title: A Mutually Aligned Disclosure Program Is Crafted (B3)

Challengers

Action	Data
C1. Aggressively challenging existing disclosure regime	"We called this 'Hack the Government.' We retrieved the data from [a city website], that is, a platform where [one of Berlin's public sector organizations] uploads its geodata and maps. This database is a monstrous thing—it's completely unusable and you cannot access the data. And then [a member of an open data NGO] scraped the whole thing and created a visualization of inhabitants, foreign nationals, housing, free kindergarten places, and all these things." (member of an open data NGO)
	"There was this student, the app developer. He just scraped all our timetable data and created this very popular app. This is how the open data idea came to us, and, for quite some time, we weren't really convinced, to be honest, we were afraid of quality issues and also a loss of control." (employee of a public sector transport organization)
C2. Coordinating and consolidating disclosure demands	"And then we decided we finally needed to talk to each other and we founded this regulars' table. From then on we met once a month." (member of an open data NGO)
	"We created and published this open data agenda, where we brought together the open data regulars' table with the wider community, the economy and the academic world" (employee of a research institute)

Incumbents

Action	Data
I1. Defending the old disclosure regime	"And then we received a letter from [public sector organization in Berlin], and it said that the data we had used was under copyright protection. They asked us to take the data off the web." (member of an open data NGO)
I2. Arranging negotiations on disclosure program	"First we had to get to know each other better. We needed to build some mutual trust before we could engage in substantial collaboration." (employee of city agency)
	"At this barcamp [a rather informal conference format] we discussed how—despite different interpretations of open data, different paces and different expectations—we could potentially work together on this issue." (employee of city agency)

The scraping attracted some attention, not only within the community; it also stimulated the Berlin city administration to defend their old disclosure regime (B3-I1). A member of the NGO remembered what happened a few days after the conference:

> And then we received a letter from [the city government], and it said that the data we used was under copyright protection. They asked us to take the data off the web, and they offered us a meeting to negotiate a price at which we could *buy* [the speaker emphasized the last word to make it sound absurd] the data.

In the fall of 2010, challengers as well as incumbents faced difficult situations. The challengers had realized that their individual efforts to push for open data programs had been and seemed to be remaining unsuccessful. At the same time, they had recognized that other challengers were being equally unsuccessful in pushing their own vision. The city administration, on the other hand, faced a

variety of different and uncoordinated attacks on its legitimacy and was unable to prioritize and respond to them appropriately.

> These people [the challengers] had no idea about the pace at which these administrative processes progress. They did not understand that this was an entirely new topic for the city administration and that there were no structures in place at all. (employee of city agency)

At a small conference in the fall of 2010, these problems led to a harsh dispute between some challengers and incumbents, and the parties involved eventually decided to inaugurate a regular meeting to "find a good solution" (this formulation appeared in several interviews from both sides). From the fall of 2010 to the fall of 2011, the Open Data Regulars Table met several times. The participants included activists, academics, and politicians but also several employees of the city administration, who had arranged internally to be responsible for the open data issue. Sitting—quite literally—at one table, the different challengers gradually aligned their ideas of what makes a good implementation of open data (B3-C2; B3-I2).

> We had this meeting with 12 to 15 people from all kinds of organizations. And then [a group member] said that she could not leave home because she couldn't find a babysitter. And then we said, "Then we will just come over." We simply moved the meeting from a bar into her living room and turned it into a bottle party. Everyone brought something along … and then we sat … that was just crazy. There you had the city ministry of the interior, the city ministry for economic affairs, representatives of the federal ministry of the interior, the industry and civil society … sitting in [the group member's] living room and planning. (employee of large IT company)

In these coordination efforts, a lot of discussion revolved around the types of data sets that should be released first, the copyright framework of these data sets, and the feedback loops that would allow citizens to interact with the city administration. In the fall of 2011, the actors involved released the Berlin Open Data Declaration, a document signed by all participating parties, in which they agreed upon a number of statements about how open data should be implemented in Berlin in order to create a "transparent government."

Fourth Bracket: Support and Reinforcement of the Disclosure Program

In the Berlin Open Data Declaration, challengers and incumbents agreed on a disclosure program that was supposed to create transparency between the two groups. In the fourth temporal bracket, challengers and incumbents worked together in order to support the widespread implementation of the open data program (see table 5).

In the fall of 2011, the city administration of Berlin launched the Berlin Open Data Portal, a website on which individual city organizations could voluntarily upload data sets to make them available to the public. Initially starting with a few dozen data sets, this number had increased to more than 800 data sets from

Table 5 Actions of Challengers and Incumbents in the Fourth Temporal Bracket

Bracket Title: Support and Reinforcement of the Disclosure Program (B4)

Challengers

Action	Data
C1. Supporting program implementation	Between 2011 and the end of the data collection, the open data NGO organized various workshops and events, during which it introduced public sector employees to the open data idea and educated them in using and publishing data on web platforms. (field notes)
C2. Reporting on information-based decisions	Members of public sector organizations in the process of adopting open data have been in constant personal contact with members of open data NGOs to get evaluations of the demands from the wider community. (field notes based on informal interviews) "We had to convince the line managers within the cultural institutions. However, luckily, some of them had already looked into the topic of open data quite a bit. Some of them had already picked some data they wanted to use." (member of an open data NGO about an event they organized to help cultural institutions adopt open data)

Incumbents

Action	Data
I1. Expanding scope of disclosure programs	"We developed this guideline for all web editors in our borough. In total there are around 60 web editors. Of course, they not only edit our websites but also do many other things as well. But with the guideline and the upcoming update in our CMS [content management system] they will be able to upload open data on their own." (borough councilor)
I2. Reporting on complexity reduction	"And then we had the idea to organize an event together [with an open data NGO], which worked, and the conference was also repeated in the following years." (employee of a public sector organization)

more than 25 public sector organizations by late 2014. During the development process, open data activists and academics joined several meetings of the project team and provided feedback on several prototype versions of the portal.

> Immediately before the launch of the Berlin Open Data portal [we] gave important input to make some necessary changes. We consulted on the layout, so that data would be represented more clearly. I can also remember a workshop just two weeks before the launch in which we collaborated on the imprint of the portal and rewrote and clarified the passages that explained what users were allowed to do with the data and what not. (employee of research institute)

Employees of one of the open data NGOs also gave several workshops at public organizations. In these workshops, they not only covered the ideological underpinnings of open data (e.g., the "Four Freedoms" defined by Richard Stallman, founder of the Free Software Movement, in 1986) but also taught city employees how to add metadata to a data set or how to pick the right license for a data set in order to make it compliant with the Berlin Open Data Declaration (B4-C1). In order to educate as many city agency employees as possible about the new transparency program, some

of the incumbents who had been part of the open data roundtable discussions managed to introduce a lecture on open data into the professional education program for city employees (B4-I2).

Finally, both groups reinforced the new disclosure program by reporting its positive effects to each other. In 2014, one of the open data activist groups established a weekly meeting for citizens that use open data in order to develop applications (for commercial as well as noncommercial purposes). On a regular basis, this group invited employees of city agencies to present and discuss with them the apps that had been made possible through the new disclosure program (B4-C1).

> Once a week they [activists] organize a meeting for people that develop all sorts of apps. They just offer a space for exchange and to learn about things. I also went there once with a colleague…. There are so many abstract and academic talks on the benefits of open data, but as a city agency you want to see what open data does for your citizens. That's what's great about these meetings. (head of city agency)

At these meetings, at conferences, and in newspaper articles, city employees and politicians alike praised the new disclosure routines as an instrument freeing up capacities within the administration, hence making it more cost-efficient (B4-I1).

Discussion

We developed our theoretical framework, the politics of disclosure, to provide a deeper understanding of what organizational transparency is and how it comes about. In the following, we discuss how our framework fits the empirical case of open data in Berlin and in which aspects case and framework deviate. First, we discuss aspects related to our definition of organizational transparency. Second, we discuss what we learned through our framework of transparency as a multiactor negotiation process. Finally, we develop practical recommendations on how to manage transparency projects.

Organizational Transparency

In the foregoing, we have argued that organizational transparency is the property of a relation between an organization and another actor. It is achieved when the systematic, rule-bound disclosure of information by the organization fits with the information needs of the external actor. We have argued that this definition helps us demarcate organizational from individual transparency. Our case study has shown that in the open data process, the challengers (activists, academics, politicians) only considered the city agencies (incumbents) transparent when they had formalized their information disclosure rules (Berlin Open Data Declaration) in a way that fit their information needs (as debated at the Open Data Regulars Table). Our framework also resonates well with previous studies on open data: Meijer (2013) provides insights into the process by which the Council of the European Union is becoming transparent by making many of its internal documents accessible to the public. In a case study, he describes at length how information disclosure programs were negotiated between a pro-transparency coalition, an opposing coalition, and nongovernmental actors such as Statewatch or Access Info Europe. Using our definition of organizational transparency, it would be possible to reanalyze this process with even greater nuance.

Our definition, however, also creates some tensions that need to be addressed. One of the barriers to open data initiatives introduced earlier is that they are supply rather than demand driven (cf. Dawes, Vidiasova, and Parkhimovich 2016; Janssen, Charalabidis, and Zuiderwijk 2012). Would the release of open data that no one uses or even recognizes, therefore, not count as an act of transparency? Following our definition, a necessary condition for organizational transparency is that certain rules lead to the systematic disclosure of information. A sufficient condition is that an external observer (e.g., NGOs, journalists) attribute transparency to the disclosing organization, as the information fits its needs. Transparency is a relational property (Bernstein 2017). When an organization discloses information, such as open data, that no one recognizes or that fits no information needs, it probably will not be considered transparent.

Another tension that is closely related and salient to our case study on open data in Berlin is the question whether information disclosures through FOI requests qualify as a form of organizational transparency. In much of the current transparency literature, FOI is considered a prime example of government transparency (cf. Meijer 2013; Meijer, 't Hart, and Worthy 2015). In our case study, however, we find that some of the challengers consider FOI a somewhat outdated and imperfect form of transparency (especially in the first temporal bracket). Our definition of organizational transparency helps us understand the relation between FOI and open data. Open data is a strong form of organizational transparency, as there is relatively little room for the individual employee of an organization to deviate from disclosure programs that are made public (e.g., the code behind the open data portals is oftentimes openly accessible) and sometimes even automated (for an analysis of the residual individual leeway, see Heimstädt 2017).

Freedom of information, we argue, is a form of transparency that was designed to be organizational in nature, yet in practice, it often shows features of individual transparency. Although there are processes in place regulating how citizens are supposed to request information, the requests are often declined or agencies simply do not respond to them. There might be different reasons for this, ranging from rules that are too ambiguous and leave room for personal interests to the scarcity of resources allocated to FOI requests within the agencies (Janssen, Charalabidis, and Zuiderwijk 2012).

Transparency as a Negotiation Process

We have argued that organizational transparency should be studied as a process of interorganizational negotiation in order to better understand its form and function. By enlarging the focus of analysis from dyadic relationships to the field level (Fligstein and McAdam 2012; Zietsma and Lawrence 2010), it becomes possible to capture the dynamics that unfold when multiple incumbents and challengers with different preconceptions about transparency come together. In our case study on open data in Berlin, this lens enabled us to show, for example, how actors within the heterogeneous group of challengers advocated forms of transparency that strongly reflected the dominant logics and values of their professional field (e.g., a research institute pushing for transparency as an instrument to optimize bureaucratic processes) and how these different logics eventually influenced the professional identities (including norms of transparency) held by employees of city agencies (Noordegraaf 2016).

Furthermore, the process perspective helped us show that transparency is more than an act of making something visible; often, it recursively shapes the organization that discloses information. In his study on university transparency reviews, Neyland (2007a, 499) shows that the reviews "do not straightforwardly open up opportunities for observing the internal dynamics of an organization in order to render the organization accountable" but rather "encourage the adoption of new or reformatted informational production processes that produce information intended to fit the auspices of the review." As Fenster (2015, 161) puts it, unlimited transparency is "improbable." In the third and fourth bracket of our case study, these transformative effects of transparency negotiations become particularly salient. The major outcome of the discussions between challengers and incumbents is the creation of the Berlin Open Data Portal. Through the creation of this centralized portal, the challengers and incumbents standardized to some degree the form (data format, frequency, metadata) that transparency can take in Berlin local government. During the fourth bracket of our analysis, this form (and the underlying technical infrastructure design) was then diffused through the field of city agencies using means such as professional training, guidelines, or the volunteer groups of civic hackers that would regularly meet with city employees.

This example of the Berlin Open Data Portal shows how our framework builds on the literature on barriers to open data and transparency adoption (Dawes, Vidiasova, and Parkhimovich 2016; Janssen, Charalabidis, and Zuiderwijk 2012) yet takes the debate further: based on our theoretical framework, our case study shows that we should not look at the lack of norms (legislation, guidelines) and technology skills (creating an open data portal) as static barriers that need to be overcome; rather, these issues are what Hansen and Flyverbom (2015) describe as "disclosure devices," sociotechnical arenas in which the very nature of transparency in a bounded context (e.g., a city) is negotiated and defined. Recent research has already shifted attention toward interorganizational relations as a factor in transparency adoption (Grimmelikhuijsen and Feeney 2017). Our study elaborates this trajectory and ventures a first glimpse into the black box of these relations.

Managing Transparency
Any shift in access to information resources not only empowers one party but takes power away from another at the same time (Pfeffer and Salancik 1978). Based on our analysis, we offer tentative recommendations on how transparency projects can be managed for the creation of mutual benefit.

Our analysis suggests that information providers (e.g., city agencies) can manage transparency through timing, structural coupling, and the creation of new role expectations. When city agencies recognize growing demands for information disclosure in their environment, our analysis suggests that it is helpful to engage with these demands early on. Early engagement in transparency-related issues can be used to strategically increase the overall legitimacy of the agency (Suchman 1995). Especially in fields in which means-end relations of organizing are difficult to pin down (as in organizational fields of city agencies), engagement with the "rationalized myth" (Meyer and Rowan 1977) of transparency might help increase the agencies' legitimacy. Another recommendation derived from our analysis

is that information providers should couple their programs for disclosing information to their existing structures of information processing. As disclosure programs need to be developed together with information seekers to enact transparency, information seekers need to be informed about the information systems that form the preconditions for open data (e.g., data formats in use, structure of metadata). In our analysis, the Berlin government used the informal Open Data Regulars Table as a communicative arena to address these issues openly and eventually to debate disclosure programs that were coupled structurally to their existing information systems.

Finally, our findings suggest that to manage transparency, information providers need to create new role expectations dedicated to this task. Without transparency managers, the issue is likely to get lost in disputes over responsibility between departments. Role expectations (e.g., the open data working group in Berlin, so-called open data champions in other cities; cf. Schrock 2016) not only create legitimacy for the issue within organizations but also serve as a point of reference for external information seekers who are willing to engage in the politics of disclosure.

Our analysis further suggests that information seekers (e.g., activists, entrepreneurs) can manage transparency through formalization and hybrid strategies. We found that especially in the early days of open data, dialogue between information seekers and local government failed, as the latter was unable to find a focal dialogue partner. When the information seekers began to formalize (e.g., as NGOs with a board of directors), local government officials changed from ignorance to conversation. Our in-depth observation of the focal open data NGO in Berlin brought to the fore particularly that information seekers successfully managed transparency through a hybrid strategy: on the one hand, they used very broad claims (e.g., "open up all public data") that were helpful in mobilizing resources (e.g., donations) from the broader Access to Knowledge movement (cf. "research context and case selection"). As these claims are too unspecific to engage in negotiation with local government, on the other hand, information seekers also used very specific claims (e.g., "open up spending data"). When information providers have addressed the specific claims, information seekers can revert to their broader claim.

Conclusion
In this study, we explored how organizational transparency was negotiated between city agencies (information providers) and a heterogeneous group of activists, academics, and politicians (information seekers). With our study, we illustrate a conceptualization of transparency that draws on decision-based theories of organizations and describes transparency as achieved when a reduction of case-by-case decision situations regarding information disclosure within an organization leads to an increase in information-based decision situations in the organization's environment. In four empirically derived stages, we have shown the piecemeal work, the struggles, and the cooperation necessary for the negotiation and eventual construction of transparency in a large city administration. Against the backdrop of our empirical study, we were able to differentiate strong organizational transparency from other forms of information disclosure (including transparency practices that vary between being individual and organizational, such as FOI), also showing that transparency can be understood as

an interorganizational negotiation process rather than a unilateral act of "making the invisible visible" (Strathern 2000), and eventually making some suggestions on how transparency can be managed by information providers.

With our qualitative and processual approach, we have contributed to a growing "contextual school," which seeks to explain the unique forms that government transparency takes in specific situations (Meijer 2013; Meijer, 't Hart, and Worthy 2015). This study focused on a situation in which the enactment of transparency between city agencies and their stakeholders was successful. Future studies should deepen our understanding of transparency as a contextualized process along different lines: to expand our understanding of where transparency management is not only possible but necessary, future work should contrast our findings with less successful accounts. This could include cases in which the construction of transparency failed at least partly, for example, in the case of Vienna, where the government launched a local open data initiative, yet without the regulative underpinning of FOI legislation (Kornberger et al. 2017). Cases in which disclosure programs break down, for example, when U.S. president Donald Trump discontinued all data disclosure routines of the White House (Tarantola 2017), may reveal knowledge about the maintenance of transparency.

Furthermore, building on accounts of outbound whistle-blowing (Weiskopf and Tobias-Miersch 2016) and intraorganizational whistle-blowing (e.g., Zhang, Chiu, and Wei 2009), we see great potential in exploring the recursive dynamics between the uncoordinated "ejection" of information and the successful enactment of transparency. Do organizations learn from whistle-blowing and subsequently try to organize and manage the process of information disclosure? When is whistle-blowing an antecedent to more enduring organizational transparency, and when does it trigger greater closedness and informational control?

Finally, we think that single-case studies on transparency and specifically open data have paved the way for comparative analysis that describes cities as configurations of actors (Rihoux and Ragin 2008). Based on our analysis of Berlin, we assume that the politics of disclosure will vary substantially in different types of cities. Berlin can be characterized as what David Harvey (2012) calls a "rebel city," one that comprises heterogeneous actors, many of which fight privatization collectively and work toward remunicipalization and the communization of urban infrastructure (cf. Becker, Beveridge, and Naumann 2015). The politics of disclosure in rebel cities most likely differs from those in what Saskia Sassen (2001) describes as "global cities," centers of international decision making, hubs for financial institutions and multinational corporations, and nodes in global networks of communication and transport. Only by carving out the differences between transparency processes in these types of cities can we deepen our understanding of the ambiguous nature of transparency and its entanglement with wider socioeconomic dynamics.

Notes
1. See http://census.okfn.org.
2. In the open data context, scraping refers to the practice of extracting the entire content of a website or database by using a computer script.

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