

*Artículos científicos*

## **Gobierno abierto: acciones hacia la gobernanza local en México**

***Open government: actions towards local governance in Mexico***

***Governo aberto: ações para a governança local no México***

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### **Resumen**

El tiempo de alta complejidad que vive la sociedad exige de la administración pública esquemas y acciones innovadoras e incluyentes de los diversos actores para que el gobierno se convierta en el coordinador de esfuerzos hacia la procuración del desarrollo de las comunidades. En este contexto, el gobierno abierto, con sus principios de transparencia, participación y colaboración, promueve la generación de políticas basadas en consensos. Por ende, el objetivo de este artículo consistió en disertar sobre la importancia del gobierno abierto como alternativa estratégica de gobernanza en los gobiernos locales para, a su vez, proponer grandes líneas de acción que se puedan desplegar con el propósito de iniciarlos o consolidarlos. La exposición contempló antecedentes de gobernanza, gobierno abierto, diagnóstico a los municipios, recomendaciones y consideraciones. Los hallazgos resaltaron que los municipios mexicanos carecen de institucionalización de los esfuerzos de gobierno abierto. Además, se apreciaron los estilos personales de gobierno y acciones dispersas, y que el desarrollo humano está altamente correlacionado con las acciones de gobierno abierto, lo que evidencia la importancia del contexto en la política. Al final, se incluyeron propuestas de gobierno abierto para ser implementadas por los municipios.

**Palabras clave:** gobierno abierto, gobernanza, municipio.

## Abstract

The highly complex times that society is going through demand from the public administration innovative and inclusive schemes and actions from the various stakeholders so that the government becomes the coordinator of efforts towards the pursuit of community development, that is where open government, with its principles of transparency, participation, and collaboration, promotes the generation of policies based on consensus. The objective of the article was to discuss the importance of open government as a strategic alternative for governance in local governments, and in turn, propose broad lines of action that these spheres of government can deploy in order to initiate or consolidate their line of open government. The presentation included background information on governance, open government, diagnosis of municipalities, recommendations and considerations. The findings highlighted that Mexican municipalities lack institutionalization of open government efforts, personal styles of government and dispersed actions were appreciated, human development is highly correlated with open government actions, evidencing the importance of context in politics. Open government proposals were included to be implemented by municipalities.

**Keywords:** open government, governance, local government

## Resumo

O momento de alta complexidade que a sociedade vive exige da administração pública esquemas e ações inovadoras e inclusivas dos diversos atores para que o governo se torne o coordenador dos esforços em prol da aquisição do desenvolvimento comunitário, é aí que o governo abre, com seus princípios de transparência, participação e colaboração promove a geração de políticas consensuais. O objetivo do artigo foi discutir a importância do governo aberto como alternativa estratégica de governança nos governos locais para, por sua vez, propor grandes linhas de ação que essas áreas de governo podem implantar com o objetivo de iniciar ou consolidar sua linha de governo. abrir. A apresentação contemplou antecedentes de governança, governo aberto, diagnóstico aos municípios, recomendações e considerações. Os resultados destacaram que os municípios mexicanos sofrem com a institucionalização dos esforços de governo aberto, estilos pessoais de governo e ações dispersas foram apreciados, o desenvolvimento humano está altamente correlacionado com ações de governo aberto,

evidenciando a importância do contexto na política. Foram incluídas propostas de governo aberto para serem implementadas pelos municípios.

**Palavras-chave:** governo aberto, governança, município.

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## Introduction

The current complexity in which society is immersed is the result of population growth, the increase in interconnected relationships, scientific and technological advances, and the multiple transformations that have impacted daily life. In this context, various scientific disciplines strive to understand and address this growing situation that society is experiencing, among which we can mention public administration and political science, both belonging to the social sciences. These face the challenge of understanding and modeling new forms of social, administrative and political interaction, in response to the evolution of society. Public administration, for its part, focuses on the distribution of power, while political science focuses on the mechanisms for accessing and maintaining power.

In this dynamic, it is the public administration that assumes the task of studying, understanding and proposing changes in the processes through which the government operates, relates to society and meets collective needs (Bonnin, 2004; Guerrero, 1981). Public administration, in its role of direction and management of government affairs, has as its main objective to satisfy the needs of the community and establish an effective connection with society, representing the State in society.

Public administration, in its role of mediating between the State and society, is essential to promote citizen well-being and collective interest. This mediation is essential to guarantee that the needs of citizens are met and that legal and operational procedures are complied with the aim of offering a quality and warmth service in the exercise of their work.

Within the framework of democratization, public administration undergoes a transformation with the purpose of fully guaranteeing human rights. In this sense, its objective is to recognize and give space to the various actors that influence social life based on their interaction, thus defining its magnitude. The public administration, in this framework, understands that its actions, although derived from government policies, cannot be authoritarian, univocal and vertical. On the contrary, it recognizes that they are the product of intense coordination between different sectors, which ensures integration, collaboration,

participation and the creation of more democratic policies that respond to society's expectations.

Public administration recognizes the potential of *governance* (original expression of governance) as a way of managing politics in its field. It emphasizes the idea that managing taking into account the rights and knowledge of other actors guarantees obtaining more accepted results. Furthermore, actions become more efficient, leading to the achievement of products that drive genuine development, rather than simply fulfilling the vision of the government or political authority.

Currently, we are looking for a government and administration that act as coordinators of efforts instead of executors of unidirectional tasks. The current social complexity requires that diverse actors be recognized and integrated into policy formulation, which implies greater dialogue and debate. Therefore, the dialogic conversation between the authority, the administration and the different actors, sectors and citizens is essential to build cohesive societies with greater accountability. Due to this, the interaction and collaboration between citizens and the government has become closer in these times, greatly facilitated by information and communication technologies (ICT), tools that can promote platforms for conversation, collaboration and participation, as well as promoting transparency and integrity of government institutions. In short, communication is presented as a fundamental activity in the political sphere (Cotarelo, 2013).

In the midst of these demands, open government emerges from a logic in which transparency, collaboration and participation are the fundamental principles. This approach promotes innovation in government management, recognizes the rights of citizens and facilitates the inclusion of diverse actors in the formulation of policies more oriented to the public interest.

Therefore, open government is presented as an alternative strategy that complements and supports governance (Sánchez-Ramos, 2018), hence important questions arise related to the institutional capacity of local governments, specifically municipalities, to implement strategies of open government. For example, what is the capacity that municipalities have as local governments to promote open government? How can municipalities address governance in their respective spheres, considering the increasing demands of today's complexity? These questions are crucial to understanding the issue and developing a methodology that promotes open government at the local level.

For all of the above, the purpose of this article is to discuss the relevance of open government as a governance strategy in local governments and to propose action guidelines that municipal governments can implement to promote open government. To achieve this objective, the article is structured in seven sections. The first establishes the general premises of the need to govern with a governance perspective, where diverse actors are accommodated in policy formulation. The second focuses on defining the concept of open government, highlighting its advantages and limitations, with special emphasis on its viability as an alternative to achieve local governance and promote transparency, collaboration and participation.

The third section presents a general diagnosis of the advances of open government in some Mexican municipalities. The fourth section offers a methodological proposal for municipal governments, in the form of general recommendations to promote and strengthen the implementation of open government and its relationship with the community. The fifth section is dedicated to the discussion of the results, highlighting the coherence with previous research, and at the end the conclusions are presented followed by future lines of research.

### **Governance, a technology of the principle of governing**

Current political-social processes unfold in an environment marked by the influence of globalization and the speed with which virtual connections can be established with the rest of the world. This has given rise to more complex and versatile human relationships, particularly in the political and administrative spheres, which poses a paradox in public life, since, on the one hand, there is an urgent need for recognition and presence in the global context, while that, on the other hand, it is essential to maintain a solid identity and reinforce local dynamics to face global challenges and prosper at the local level. This paradox requires public and political leaders to possess expanded skills and capabilities, as well as more effective governments with greater management capacity.

Faced with this scenario, the government plays a crucial role in preventing society from being overwhelmed by the various complexities it faces. These challenges include growing poverty, marginalization and food restrictions affecting a growing number of people. Indeed, education, although considered a right for everyone, is often not fully materialized in reality. Likewise, research on local problems and their solutions is usually limited, with insufficient investment and a weak relationship between the public sector,

especially at the local level, and research centers and universities. Furthermore, the availability of financial resources to address growing collective needs is often scarce.

In addition to this, recurrent economic crises, inherent to the capitalist system, generate significant economic challenges, while low productivity and unproductivity in society, especially at the local level, lead to low competitiveness and the rise of the informal economy, which creates a non-virtuous cycle. All of this causes conflict and crime to increase, with few realistic prospects of decreasing, hence violence has become an everyday presence. Furthermore, the lack of human capital and social capital in communities highlights the inability of governments, especially at the local level, to address all these problems (Sánchez Ramos, 2018).

In view of this set of real problems, governments face the impossibility of solving them on their own and providing well-being for society. However, they remain an essential component to prevent societies from spiraling into adversity. Its main function in the current era does not lie in assuming direct control of these problems, but in organizing and coordinating society to take advantage of its own capabilities in a complementary way.

To carry out this momentous task, the government needs to develop capabilities, especially the capacity to govern (Dror, 1996) to demonstrate both governability and *governance*. Although both terms refer to the same situation, they are different in their focus. Governance refers to the ability to present and apply decisions within the legal framework, with a focus on legitimacy, which involves working closely with strategic political and social actors. On the other hand, *governance* is related to the capacity that a democratic government develops to facilitate exchange, coordination, control, interaction and decision-making between political and social actors with the aim of promoting the development of society. Governance implies the recognition of social systems, regimes, networks of organizations and territorial spaces, all of which are fundamental for adequate development. In this way, the government becomes the main coordinator, going from assuming exclusive responsibility for decision-making to the responsibility of coordinating all these actors.

Governance implies the recognition of actors that go beyond the government, including the market, civil society and other government levels at the national, state and international levels. In the government are the organizations of political power and the law, while in the market are the institutions, values and culture related to exchange, money and profit. For its part, civil society encompasses a wide variety of actors, such as the family, the school and various social and religious organizations. All of these actors participate in



decision-making and, in the context of governance, are considered and taken into account together to define the objectives and directions of the community.

Governing, from a governance perspective, involves considering aspects such as “what”, “why”, “why” and “how”. The “what” refers to the idea that government alone is not enough to achieve effective governance; It is necessary to integrate independent actors. The “why” is associated with the definition of social direction and the establishment of shared objectives that provide clarity and consensus on the direction to follow. The “why” is based on the recognition that diverse actors have power, competencies and resources to solve problems, reflecting interdependence and codependency that lead to more effective outcomes. The “how” involves the ways in which the government can lead the interaction with different sectors and actors through innovation, which is technically described by procedures, distribution of authority, responsibilities, budget, resources and their implementation.

The new way of governing, based on governance, focuses on the creation of interdependencies and sectoral alliances, along with the recognition of various agents, including economic, informational, intellectual, moral, technological and social resources that must be convened. Governance is based on a different philosophy, as it moves from the belief that the government is the center to the idea of a government system. This, in other words, constitutes a transformation from a hierarchical government to an associative and coordinating system.

For *governance* to be effective, a perspective based on social constructivism is required (Berger and Luckman, 2008), where communication, legitimations and language play a fundamental role. This requires an extensive process of deliberation, participation and collaboration between the various actors, who contribute meaning with their arguments. In this perspective, four elements must be taken into account: a) effectiveness, which is a technical concept related to the ability of governments to carry out what they claim they can do; b) legitimacy, a moral concept that implies that what the government does must be right (Putnam, 1994); c) democracy, a cultural value that allows citizens to express their views and effect changes without resorting to revolution; and d) participation, a value of a social and political nature that, although not essential to govern, facilitates the veto or citizen disagreement. These four values —technical, moral, cultural, and sociopolitical—constitute the basis of the broad constructivist deliberation that shapes governance *in* each locality and society.

In this way, *governance* becomes a way of governing that seeks sustainable economic, social and institutional development, maintaining a balance between the State, civil society and the market. Governance, therefore, includes governability, legitimacy and consensus, which in turn entails effectiveness, efficiency, equity, responsibility, honesty, access to information, transparency, planning and respect for the rule of law. Many of these values are also sought in open government, suggesting that the latter can be a strategy for governing with governance.

Governance can be systemic and competitive (Haldenwang, 2005) when focused on four levels: micro, meso, macro and meta. At the micro level, it focuses on management that seeks efficiency and innovation in networks; At the meso level, the intersectoral aspect is addressed; At the macro level, general regulations are considered, such as the major institutions of the market, the regime and investments; and at the meta level, it is about the aforementioned values, the search for consensus and development.

In summary, in the current context, characterized by a wide diversity of social expressions and subsystems, it is essential to promote interrelation and integration in policy formulation. Therefore, the government needs to develop better capacities for dialogue and coordination, that is, promote *governance*.

Governance is a capacity or aptitude to achieve public objectives that is developed in the social environment, involving multiple interconnected subsystems (Baena del Alcázar, 2005). This capacity must be strong enough to influence policy formulation and implementation through the coordination of these subsystems, growing cultural and political plurality stand out. In these circumstances, government can no longer be the exclusive responsibility of a single individual or political entity, since current legitimacy requires that new forms of government recognize diversity, opposition and the inclusion of different sectors. The new concept of governing, therefore, translates into coordination of horizontal relationships, reduction of subordination and hierarchy, cooperation in direction and control, as well as interdependent associations and construction of networks (Maríñez Navarro, 2016).

From this perspective, the new government dynamic requires leadership that understands the importance of open government and open data. As Ortiz (2010) points out, it is no longer possible to govern in isolation. Now it is crucial to release information from government funds to allow citizens to participate and contribute with proposals and solutions (Linares, 2010). Interaction, therefore, becomes the driving force of the new governmental



reality, where citizens play a leading role in decision-making (Sánchez -Ramos and Martínez Martínez, 2016).

This new reality has been enhanced by the era of globalization, which has been accompanied by democratizing processes, such as widespread access to ICT and social networks, which represents an advance in democracy. This phenomenon has given rise to the formation of communities of individuals who unite around their particular interests, hence they deserve to be heard in policy formulation. In this context, social media plays a critical role in facilitating broad dialogue on pressing issues. Therefore, open government becomes a strategic tool to govern more effectively, where citizens and other interested parties have the right to be consulted, informed, give their opinion and even dissent (Zambrano, 2012).

The use of technology becomes a pillar for governance, through e-governance, where government services are offered in a convincing, efficient and transparent manner (Cruz Rubio, 2015). Electronic governance requires the application of ICT in the provision of public services, the exchange of information and communication, as well as the integration of independent systems and services.

Now, it is important to highlight that there are fundamental differences between electronic government and electronic governance:

1. Electronic governance operates in four spheres: from the government to the client - citizen, from the government to employees, from the government to the government itself and from the government to companies.
2. In electronic government or *e-government*, the application of ICT to improve public services predominates, while in electronic governance the focus of attention is based on the use of ICT and its interaction with different social and economic actors.
3. Electronic government is a one-way communication protocol and *e- governance* is a two-way communication protocol.

On the other hand, the use of open data is of vital importance, along with citizen empowerment and government transparency, to promote governance and combat corruption. Open data, or *open data*, refers to information that is available and accessible and can be used, reused and shared by anyone. They constitute a fundamental component to achieve an open government, in which citizens have the right to know the actions of their government.

Open data allows citizens to be more informed and participate directly in decision-making, which contributes to the creation of a society in which not only what happens in the governance process is known, but in which can actively contribute to this process. For this

reason, open data is considered a fundamental way to promote open government, since the implementation of open data enhances collaborative transparency and the circulation of information.

This information transparency constitutes the foundation of an open government, since without information available to citizens, deliberation and effective citizen participation are not possible (Christmas, 2011; Lindstedt and Naurin, 2010). Information about government activities and decisions must be accessible, complete and available to the public, which ensures that citizens are well informed about government actions, administration and management. Any form of inequality or discretionary censorship in the available information reduces the formal right of participation. When the government shares its information, it allows citizens to perceive it as more transparent, thus strengthening democracy and improving its quality by increasing control over institutions and bringing citizens closer to them. In short, a quality government is one that effectively combines control mechanisms, including the reduction of discretion in both the institutional structure and routine bureaucratic practices.

### **Open government: general bases**

Although the concept of open government has gained strength following the executive decision of the president of the United States, Barack Obama (2009), when he issued a memorandum establishing it as a policy of action, it is important to highlight that this term had already been mentioned previously. Various scholars, such as Wallace Parks (1957), mentioned it to refer to the need to promote freedom of government information. Likewise, researchers such as Sandoval -Almazán (2013), Orlak (2015) and Martínez Puón (2016) identify several authors and situations prior to 2009 as drivers of open government.

However, it was with the measure of the American president that this concept spread globally and was formalized in a great agreement called the Open Government Alliance (OGA) in 2011, where several countries, including Mexico, joined this initiative. and made commitments to increase transparency in their decisions, share data and encourage participation and collaboration.

The Open Government *Partnership* (OGP) emerged within the United Nations as a multilateral initiative that seeks to promote transparency, promote citizen participation in debate and public decision-making, combat corruption and take advantage of ICT to improve governance and quality of public services. The strategic axes of the AGA include improving

public services, increasing public integrity, effectively managing public resources, creating safe communities, promoting corporate responsibility and accountability (Maríñez Navarro and Valenzuela Mendoza, 2013; Ramírez-Alujas, 2012).

Likewise, there are different emphases (Sandoval -Almazán, 2013) and approaches (Maríñez Navarro and Valenzuela Mendoza, 2013; Merlo, 2016) in the field of open government, which are not necessarily conflicting, but complement each other. One of these approaches focuses on the citizen's right to access government information, known as the freedom of information emphasis. The second approach highlights the usefulness of government information in decision-making, adapting it to the needs of citizens. Another is based on the logic of open data as drivers of collaboration and citizen participation in the development of public policies.

Maríñez Navarro and Valenzuela Mendoza (2013) try to place the concept of open government in the context of the evolution of the approaches that have characterized public administration. They identify three: traditional public administration, new public management and new public service. They argue that traditional public administration, with its characteristics of high specialization, departmentalization and hierarchy, has little room for open government. Therefore, this concept fits better in the new public management and even more in the new public service, which is characterized by considering the organization as collaborative, with informal, shared structures and external leadership.

Merlo (2016) also addresses the evolution of approaches in public administration. The first approach relates it to the bureaucracy described by Weber. The second, which he calls *new public management*, is linked to rationalist and economic institutionalism. The third, which he calls *new public management*, differs from the second by proposing the need for a state presence, although not sufficient, to manage complex postmodern societies. In this way, Merlo implicitly suggests that it is governance that gives rise to open government, which she calls *open administration* in her text.

Merlo (2016), based on the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD), explains that an administration is open when it presents transparency, accessibility and receptivity. These characteristics focus on the ability to subject political decisions to public scrutiny, allow citizens to easily access services and information, and respond to new social demands and needs, respectively.

For his part, Valenzuela Mendoza (2016) also recognizes that it is the new public management that promotes the emergence of open government. Its postulate is based on the

fact that the public organization must adapt so that the government is receptive to a proactive citizenry, which favors a dialogic, deliberative and communicative process. Valenzuela's proposal is to implement an open government that encompasses the following: a) nanoimplementation, which involves the creation of spaces for dialogue and deliberation between the government and citizens, b) microimplementation, which promotes transparency, access to information and accountability, c) mesoimplementation, which is related to the creation of collective actions with both citizens and bureaucracy, management and politicians, and d) macroimplementation, which constitutes an institutionalized process with centered axiological rules and principles in transparency and participation.

Likewise, Ramírez Alujas and Cruz Rubio (2016) explain open government from the perspective of public policies. They define it as a set of policies that are new, integrative and representative, the product of participation and collaboration between those who govern and the governed. In addition, they highlight the government's commitment to the principles of transparency, citizen participation, use of rules and accountability mechanisms, as well as citizen access to new ICTs. These authors emphasize that open government is the result of the convergence of three processes: a) technological advances, which, with web 2.0, offer new possibilities for collaboration, known as open source, b) social pressure for *transparency* and *accountability*, summarized in the right to know, c) consolidation of relational governments and collaborative and network governance, known as open innovation or user-driven innovation.

In this way, the governance model becomes the engine of integration and promotion of open government, since it recognizes the need to dialogue and debate public decisions between various actors. Technology facilitates these spaces and dialogue is favored, which also means that *accountability* can be an immediate reality and at a lower cost.

Open government is creating a new public, economic, political and civic value through the interactions that the actors establish in the system (Ramírez Alujas and Cruz Rubio, 2016). This is a new organizational model in which openness becomes the central point of reference for collaboration and participation.

Criado and Rojas (2013, 2016a, 2016b) see open government as an opportunity for administration and government to take advantage of the Internet and the development of virtual communities, where the collaborative principle plays a fundamental role. The web 2.0 platform allows the public sector to materialize the concept of a network, where individuals

can communicate, exchange, create, combine and give meaning to content (Sandoval-Almazán et al., 2011) .

It is important to highlight that while electronic government or electronic administration is characterized by the use of the web 1.0, open government is based on the web 2.0. In the first, the government acts primarily as an informant and uses the web to disseminate information. On the other hand, open government is not limited to disseminating data, but rather encourages communication, conversation, carrying out transactions and generating collective decisions. In this way, open government represents a higher phase of electronic government (Sánchez -Ramos, M. and Martínez Martínez, 2016).

The application of ICT to government processes, known as *e-government*, can be divided into five stages: 1) simple information dissemination, 2) two-way communication, 3) service and financing transactions, 4) integration of citizens and actors, 5 ) political participation (Moon, 2002; Sánchez -Ramos , 2014). When ICT is used with a citizen-centered approach, open government emerges, where deliberative democracy is the basis of collaboration and participation. This, together with transparency, gives rise to a new government model (Sánchez -Ramos and Martínez Martínez, 2016).

Martínez Puón (2012) justifies open government from the perspective of the organization and its capacity. He points out that the benefits that this type of government provides include a) the provision of information that is taught how to use and at the same time is accountable, b) greater and better use of ICT, and c) a citizenry that is more committed to the use of information. public information, assuming a participatory and collaborative role, in addition to exercising constructive criticism towards public actions. This author (2016) also proposes that to achieve open government effectively, an *e-leader is required*, that is, a chief executive information officer. He argues that this process of advancing and overcoming the challenges of open government is not the result of improvisation or superficial ideas, but is the result of information management, based on the modernization and innovation of governments. This is a task that requires specialized and professional knowledge in information management, *expertise* capabilities, greater clarity in direction and a strengthening of institutional capacities (Maríñez Navarro, 2016). In other words, it requires new public leadership and the strengthening of a new management that stands out for its *expertise*, accountability, public deliberation and ability to solve problems. Therefore, innovation is based on collaborative participation, social control, civic commitment and civic intelligence, which demands a committed response from citizens.



Mejía (2016) justifies open government from the perspective of democratization, considering it necessary for the recognition of citizen rights to access to public information and as an obligation of the government to make its decisions transparent. Transparency becomes the way to reduce corruption. Furthermore, it adds the ethical dimension as another justification for open government.

In this line of seeing the government as a new way of doing politics and as a democratizing expression, is Parrado (2013), who maintains that open government promises a more transparent administration, capable of offering better accountability, where ICTs have a shaping role in government administration. For example, social networks can serve as a strategy to manage complaints and claims from interested parties, tracking and providing attention to daily problems. In this regard, Parrado (2013) points out: “Facebook and the like serve to exchange information dynamically” (p. 31). In addition, wikis can be useful in the formulation of collaborative content. In this way, open government is transformed from a passive or active government to a proactive government, which not only provides information, but also redefines its way of operating.

A comprehensive and challenging approach includes open government from the perspective of smart cities (Jiménez-Gómez, 2015). In this approach, open government is considered as part of the governance paradigm, as discussed in this section. Governance in the generation of open government implies citizen maturity and the ability of the ruler not only to interact, but also to establish effective participation and collaboration in decision-making and in the promotion of transparency.

Today, open government becomes a reality by connecting to the international network and using ICT for the benefit of the public good, which encourages citizen collaboration. It is an institutional technological platform that stimulates public decision-making processes (Sandoval -Almazán, 2013) to create a transparent, collaborative and participatory government that makes intensive use of ICT (Merlo, 2016).

Open government action is inspired by a perspective and vision of the world that allows us to understand the role that each actor plays in this strategy. According to Cruz Rubio (2015) and Sánchez-Ramos (2018), open government is a political-administrative philosophy and a paradigm of social interaction in which the citizen occupies the center.

In short, open government becomes an ally of governance, as it optimizes it and facilitates its reach to a greater number of citizens in a short period thanks to the use of ICT. These technologies allow conversation, debate and the elaboration of legitimate public



decisions, a highly conducive scenario for their implementation in local communities, which represents an alternative that, with innovation, can generate synergies for development.

## Results in local governments

The methodology used to obtain the results presented below is based on documentary research and the review of publications that have analyzed the Mexican municipality from the perspective of open government. The inclusion criteria focus on literature related to a) open government; b) local or municipal level; c) Mexico; and d) that contains empirical information in the period from 2011 to 2023. Cases that did not develop the perspective of open government in the Mexican municipality were excluded, and data were collected from twelve specific references (Coral, 2021; Criado and Rojas, 2016a; Criado, 2012; Cruz Meléndez and Zamudio Vázquez, 2017; Martínez Becerra and Hernández García, 2014; Martínez López, 2014; Puron-Cid, 2012; Ramírez Zamarripa and Rodríguez Macías, 2019; Sánchez Valdés, 2016; Sánchez -Ramos and Martínez Martínez, 2016; Sánchez-Ramos and Beltrán-Gómez, 2017; Sánchez-Ramos and Domínguez, 2022).

According to the Political Constitution of the United Mexican States, the municipality in Mexico represents the organizational, social, political, territorial and administrative base for the States. Its responsibilities cover the provision of essential public services, territorial control, urban planning, territorial reservation, control of land use, land tenure and regularization, and the promotion of inter-municipal coordination. Although municipalities have autonomy to manage their finances, they depend largely on federal resources, which represent on average around 90% of their income.

The institutional strengths of the Mexican municipality center on a government composed of a city council as a collegiate body, with the power to enact local compliance regulations. Local government is characterized by its ability to respond immediately to the demands and expectations of citizens.

Among the weaknesses of the municipality is an isomorphic institutional tendency (Sánchez -Ramos, 2007), financial dependence, fragile institutional frameworks and a marked disconnection between design and expectations. Most municipalities face considerable economic constraints.

The opportunities lie in the fact that the municipal government receives legitimation through democratic processes and periodic elections. In addition, there are signs of willingness to collaborate, a governable population, committed personnel and ethical public

servants who find in ICT an alternative for action. Threats to the municipality include global competition, the multiplicity of complex problems, social destructuring and distrust of institutions.

In this diverse and complex context, some Mexican municipalities have made significant efforts to move towards an open government model. Although progress has been made in this direction, it is important to recognize that, in many cases, the open government approach at the municipal level depends largely on personal styles rather than solid institutional structures and standardized strategies. The results presented in this section are based on the aforementioned sources and are complemented by ongoing research that focuses on the area of local open government, where the following stands out:

1. Regarding the use of technology, municipalities have increased their inventory of computers. According to Puron-Cid (2012), in 2010, 98% of municipalities already had an internet connection. By 2022, more than 98.6 million Mexicans have access to the internet, most of them browsing through their *smartphones* (Statista, 2022). However, it is important to highlight that there is no legal obligation that requires municipalities with less than 70 thousand inhabitants to have a website where they publish government information (Cruz Meléndez and Zamudio Vázquez, 2017).
2. The greatest use of technology by municipalities (50.4%) is allocated to adjective functions, such as treasury, internal comptrollership and social communication, while to a lesser extent it is used for substantive functions (46.9%), such as public services, health, traffic, firefighters, among others (Puron-Cid, 2012).
3. Despite the availability of technology, the number of municipalities that have implemented open government actions is small. Not all municipalities that have a web portal have developed a minimum open government strategy.
4. There is a wide gap between municipalities in terms of open government, as the pace of implementation varies significantly. While some municipalities have a solid open government approach, others have barely taken minimal measures or even completely lack actions in this direction. In this regard, it is worth noting that Jalisco is the state with the largest number of municipalities with open government.
5. It is important to note that municipalities with higher scores in open government usually coincide with a higher score in the area of transparency. Although this is a fundamental issue due to legal requirements, it is not sufficient to constitute an open government, since there are other equally important requirements.

6. The main weakness of municipal open governments lies in the issue of open *data*. The information offered is not sufficient or easily accessible to allow citizens to collaborate and participate in joint policy formulation. This trend is similar to that observed in the behavior of state governments in relation to government and open data (Luna Reyes *et al.*, 2015).
7. There is no correlation between achievements in open government and population, as evidenced in cases such as Puebla and Guadalajara, which obtained high marks in open government, in contrast to Ecatepec and Nezahualcóyotl, which did not achieve equally high marks (Sánchez Valdes, 2016).
8. Nor is there a correlation between open government and the political party that governs (Sánchez Valdés, 2016).
9. Municipalities with lower open government scores often face serious communication problems with their communities.
10. The best evaluated municipalities are usually linked to the use of social networks such as Facebook, Twitter and YouTube. For the most part, these municipalities present a high degree of human development, while municipalities with low human development register insufficient levels of participation. Blogging is an uncommon practice.
11. In few municipalities, virtual services are offered, such as paying taxes. These tools are usually available in municipalities with a high degree of human development.
12. Citizen collaboration is a weak aspect in the general result. Many town councils are reluctant to propose topics for debate and, in turn, citizens are reluctant to present their own ideas. According to Sánchez - Ramos and Martínez Martínez (2016), the openness in terms of citizen collaboration is practically limited to Toluca, out of a total of thirty municipalities observed.
13. *Open data* strategy is in an embryonic phase.
14. Among the municipalities evaluated, those of Oaxaca are the ones that receive the lowest ratings or, in some cases, report the absence of an institutional website (Martínez Becerra and Hernández García, 2014; Sánchez -Ramos and Martínez Martínez , 2016). This indicates an underuse of technology, since, despite having an internet connection in the municipality, the city council has not established a website focused on the needs of users (Martínez López, 2014) .

15. The open government index shows a positive correlation with the degree of human development. Municipalities with higher human development tend to have better open government, while those with lower human development have limited access to open government actions and some even lack a website. Notable examples of this trend are Coacalco de Berriozabal and Toluca, municipalities in the State of Mexico with a high degree of human development and superior ratings in open government. This pattern is repeated in Oaxaca de Juárez, Salina Cruz, Santa Cruz Xoxocotlán and Heroica Huajuapam de León, Oaxacan municipalities with high human development and outstanding ratings in open government (Sánchez-Ramos and Martínez Martínez, 2016). Although some municipalities have shown improvements by 2022, they have not yet managed to consolidate actions in favor of open government (Sánchez-Ramos and Domínguez, 2022).
16. The best quality websites are found in municipalities with higher human development, such as Toluca, despite not having forums. On the other hand, municipalities with lower human development, such as Donato Guerra, Ixtapan del Oro, Sultepec and San José del Rincón in the State of Mexico, or several municipalities in Oaxaca, even lack a website, according to research published in 2016 (Sánchez -Ramos and Martínez Martínez, 2016 ).
17. Most municipalities that have a website also have a solid presence on social networks. This translates into content syndication and categorization, as well as the ability to rate, comment and share posts. In almost all municipalities with a website, the presence of wikis is observed, although in most cases these are linked to Wikipedia. However, no strategies have been developed to create forums, with the exception of Coacalco de Berriozabal in 2016, which had this functionality on its website. Direct chats on web pages are a feature that is conspicuous by their absence (Sánchez -Ramos and Martínez Martínez, 2016).
18. The context plays a fundamental role both in the study and in the implementation of initiatives such as open government. An environment with solid institutional capacities favors the execution of actions that support open government (Sánchez-Ramos and Domínguez, 2022). A significant correlation is observed between open government and human development ( $r=0.875$ ). Furthermore, there is an important correlation between open government and municipal institutional capacities ( $r=0.6123$ ), as well as between human development and the functional institutional

capacities of municipalities ( $r=0.6807$ ). This shows that development drives better manifestations of open government, as highlighted in the article by Sánchez-Ramos and Domínguez (2022).

19. Municipal governments have failed to institutionalize actions related to open government beyond the government period, resulting in the restart of policies or their disappearance with each new triennium. This fact is a cause for concern, since open government has not been properly institutionalized and, consequently, depends largely on personal styles of government. This is evident when comparing the studies by Sánchez -Ramos and Martínez Martínez (2016) and Sánchez-Ramos and Domínguez (2022), which show that the same municipalities obtain different evaluations over a period of six years.
20. The lack of institutionalization of open government actions puts at risk the implementation of strategies that promote public innovation. Furthermore, the high staff turnover in the municipality (Ramírez Zamarripa and Rodríguez Macías, 2019) contributes to the low professionalization and lack of institutionalization of programs such as open government.

Based on the results recorded in some municipalities studied, it is evident that the challenges are major, although not impossible to achieve if there is will and leadership in the municipality. Among the main challenges are:

1. *Governance* capacity by including its citizens and employees in the formulation of joint policies.
2. Dialogue is a practice that needs to be promoted and expanded. This can be facilitated through the use of ICT, since it can encourage debate on some action so that it is enriched and implemented with high legitimacy as it is the product of several actors.
3. For the debate to be effective, there needs to be data availability, which is why the *open data strategy* is transcendental. Open *data* implies that information is easy to access and understand for citizens and public collaborators. This will allow interested parties to formulate their proposals to enrich them. Furthermore, levels of interaction and public action can grow to the benefit of all.
4. Municipal transparency is a great challenge, which will foster honesty and a culture of accountability that restores trust in those in power, which can encourage collaboration and participation.



5. The use of ICT with greater clarity and definition of objectives is required to respond to a pre-established plan, and not to personal occurrences of the ruler or his emotional state. Therefore, it is urgent to develop protocols for the management of open government and limit the personal styles of rulers in this matter so that actions are institutionalized, and do not depend on emotionality.

### **General recommendations on open government for municipalities**

Based on the analysis of various results and ongoing research on open government that has focused on the municipalities of Mexico, and considering the contributions of the Network of Digital Municipalities of Castilla y León (2010), as well as various studies by Sánchez -Ramos and Martínez Martínez (2016), Sánchez-Ramos and Beltrán-Gómez (2017), a series of recommendations can be made that are beneficial for municipal governments. These will promote open governments that, with critical action and appropriate adaptation, will contribute to improving local governance and its development. In short, an open government in the municipalities of Mexico must address the following essential aspects to establish an open government policy that is institutionalized, sustainable and sustainable.

1. Municipal website: It is essential to have a municipal website that is synchronized with the use of information and communication technology (ICT), which will help reduce operating costs. This site should include features of a social website, such as content syndication and categorization, comments, sharing of posts, and the creation of forums and polls. In addition, it should encourage the construction of municipal wikis, provide maps and facilitate communication through chats with the community.
2. Participation in social networks: Participation in social networks must be institutional and not limited to personal initiatives of the executive. This involves the creation of municipal blogs, Facebook groups, Twitter channels, YouTube channels and the formation of virtual communities in which citizens can interact with the city council. In addition, virtual services must be offered and virtual world environments explored.
3. Listening on social networks: The city council's ability to respond to citizens' comments and interaction with the municipality's virtual communities are essential. It is not enough to create communities and chats; What is crucial is to encourage conversation, which is the basis of governance and government openness.
4. Citizen collaboration: Citizen collaboration implies that the city council generates proposals and presents them to the community for debate, making them available on



the web and networks. It is also crucial that citizens have the opportunity to submit their own proposals, which is the essence of this principle: the willingness of citizens to make proposals and use available ICT.

5. Open data: Open data is a fundamental element for a comprehensive open government. It is not just about transparency, but about making data available to citizens in easy-to-read and understand formats. This will allow citizens to manipulate, recalculate and use the data to present proposals and develop concrete public policies.
6. Public applications: Public applications become tools that can promote the inclusion of citizens and improve the quality of management. These applications allow public service problems to be reported in real time, leading to agile management response and timely action, which, in turn, restores political trust.
7. Transparency: Transparency must be addressed in two aspects: reactive dissemination, which is governed by law, and proactive dissemination, which responds to the real needs and interests of citizens.
8. Collaborative work: Employees and administrative departments must also assume an open role and contribute to the discussion and debate, providing joint solutions.
9. Internal participation: It is important to have a space on the website exclusively for officials and employees, where systems, information services and administration reports can be managed.
10. Change management agenda: Institutionalizing open government requires strong leadership and effective change policies. The standards and programs related to open government should be available on the web and serve as a reference for both internal and external actors. This will transform open government into a municipal policy rather than an action merely related to a government leader.

This decalogue is a starting point and can be enriched based on the individual experiences, strengths and opportunities of each municipality. It is a suggestive guide, but not restrictive. Its purpose is to encourage innovation in municipalities and promote the implementation of mechanisms that place public conversation at the center of governance.

## Discussion

The results of this work suggest that municipalities are moving towards the implementation of open governments, since the current dynamics require greater participation and openness in government expressions (Morales et al., 2023). In this sense, the new open government model promotes transparency, collaboration and participation between the government, administration and society (Ramírez, 2019).

However, in the case of Mexico, there is a high percentage of municipalities that still lacks a website, and no reliable data is found in this regard, compared to Peru, where only around 35% of municipalities without a website are registered (Morales *et al.*, 2023). This situation offers the institutions in charge of promoting transparency the opportunity to develop programs that promote the systematization and institutionalization of efforts to establish open municipal governments.

Data transparency mechanisms, participation in policy formulation and collaboration contribute to generating trust (Morales *et al.*, 2023), a fundamental element to promote synergy in the implementation of new proposals in all areas, although participation requires the interaction of non-governmental actors that represent social demands (Sánchez-Ramos and Domínguez, 2022).

Open government implies the inclusion of citizens and the specialization of administrative spaces to address the pillars of participation, transparency and collaboration (Coral, 2021). The lack of professionalization in the institutional capacities of municipalities hinders the institutionalization of open government. Expert collaboration comes from staff experienced in their roles and responsibilities, providing them with solid practical knowledge. Therefore, high staff turnover weakens the open government approach in this sense (Ramírez Zamarripa and Rodríguez Macías, 2019), which is costly for society in terms of the learning curve.

On the other hand, electronic government, as a precursor to open government, has revealed limitations in the use of technological tools, which in the best of cases have focused on the management of services and the simplification of procedures (Cruz Meléndez and Zamudio Vázquez, 2017). However, these tools have not been developed to foster the essential dialogue of open government, much less for the creation of policies based on collaboration and consensus.

Rivera and Peña (2022) highlight that one of the key obstacles in the limited progress of open government lies in the lack of democratic experience in Mexico and the limited

literature that supports the integration of transparency, participation and collaboration. Therefore, the social construction of open government involves the interaction of various actors, and the optimal environment for this is governance. Thus, open government becomes a strategy that promotes governance and vice versa. Therefore, the process of scientific debate is constantly evolving until consensus recognition is achieved (Sánchez-Ramos and Domínguez, 2022), and works such as this one contribute to the social construction and improvement of open governments.

Governing from this perspective requires a horizontal approach, with less hierarchy and more cooperation, focused on the construction of networks (Mariñez Navarro and Valenzuela Mendoza, 2016), since collaboration is the basis for the social construction of open governments at the local level. The use of technology facilitates this purpose, and it is crucial to take advantage of it, especially considering that more than 90 % of the population and municipalities have access to the internet, an opportunity that should not be missed in government innovation and in the construction of governance. This requires, of course, interconnected subsystems (Baena del Alcázar, 2005) that can thrive at the local level and can be promoted through the use of social networks, given that many municipalities have already begun to adopt them.

## Final considerations

Open government constitutes a strategic alternative in the context of governance that can be implemented in local governments. This perspective, in turn, contributes to the promotion of open governments. Thus, it is a bidirectional relationship that meets the objective established in this article, and the results obtained show the need to promote open government and guarantee its implementation.

The social construction of public administration and government function is based on the legitimation that arises from the subjective interactions between citizens and authorities, that is, between the governed and the rulers. This legitimation is not limited to the isolated vision of the ruler. In this sense, the administrative technologies that are being developed and that adjust to the demands of higher quality, taking advantage of information and communication technologies, include concepts such as *governance* and *open government*, which can become fundamental tools to promote intersubjective interaction that shapes open government at the municipal level.

A government that promotes development is one that makes decisions based on the common interest. Given the current complexity, local governments that adopt systems that facilitate the participation of diverse actors have a greater capacity to legitimize their actions. In this framework, open government stands as a strategy that simplifies this mission, since it can help local authorities promote development in a consensual manner.

Being forged by a variety of actors, municipal life lays the foundations for local *governance* that, in turn, ensures the development and recovery of public trust in politics. Thus, open government promotes communication, debate and collaboration between various actors to design and carry out significant actions for the municipality. At the same time, it promotes transparency, which goes hand in hand with honesty, participation and collaboration, essential principles for the legitimate development of communities.

In this sense, both science in general and public administration in particular face the great challenge of not only documenting what happens, but also proposing alternatives that transform reality and seek to achieve improved living conditions. Academics also have an important role in opening their spaces and sharing their knowledge, so that the gap between the political, the administrative and their study can be reduced.

However, it is worth highlighting that the construction of openness is not the exclusive responsibility of the government, but must be embraced by various institutions and their members. On the one hand, other political powers must adopt open practices and provide accessible data, while citizens, as well as the social and private sectors, must contribute collaboratively adopting an open mentality. Furthermore, it is important to reflect not only on open government, but also on the concept of open State or network State.

### **Future lines of research**

In future research on open municipal government, it is suggested to focus on local governments' efforts to institutionalize innovations. Likewise, it is crucial to explore the balance that municipal governments achieve in their open government actions in order to generate alternatives that promote progress in aspects of transparency, participation and collaboration.

Furthermore, it is relevant not only to document existing actions, but also to propose implementation approaches that facilitate the union between scientific research and the practice of public administration. This integration is vital to improve governance conditions and the quality of life of society.

On the other hand, it is necessary to apply greater conceptual rigor to the principles of open government, that is, transparency, participation and collaboration. This conceptual precision will contribute significantly to the construction of more horizontal, less hierarchical, more cooperative governments that are inclusive and sensitive to the needs of society as a whole. Finally, it is important to remember that openness not only involves the government, but extends to society and the State as a whole.

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