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Explaining Local Government Transparency: An Analysis of Information Disclosed in Official Websites

SPEAKER | ABSTRACT



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Despite the general agreement that government transparency is instrumental in promoting accountability and integrity, and that it can function as a deterrent of maladministration, empirical research on what drives certain governments to be more (or less) transparent, is fairly recent. The main reason for this has been the lack of suitable tools to assess government transparency. This seminar discusses the theoretical and empirical limitations of prior attempts to develop transparency measures and proposes a stakeholder-based alternative using Multicriteria Decision Analysis to look into the determinants of local government transparency. The Portuguese Municipal Transparency Index (MTI) measures local government transparency based on the information disclosed online (in the official websites). The MTI was developed for the first time in 2013 through a participatory process where the opinions of a comprehensive group of stakeholders (practitioners, academics, activists) were taken into account to select the indicators included in the MTI, decide on how to measure each dimension of local government transparency, and estimate the weights to aggregate the partial scores (i.e. in each dimension). Econometric methods are employed to estimate models using the partial and global scores obtained in 2013 and 2014 for the 278 municipalities of mainland Portugal as dependent variables. Empirical tests use a wide range of explanatory variables encompassing institutional, political, and socio-economic aspects. Our objective is to uncover which variables relate to which “transparency profiles” and discuss the reasons behind these patterns. In addition, this investigation provides some initial pointers regarding any potential trade-offs between transparency and other “desirable outcomes”, and frames arguments around the costs of being transparent.

VENUE | Auditorium Fraterna
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SHORT BIOGRAPHY

António Tavares is Associate Professor, Director of the Ph.D. in Administrative Sciences, and Chair of the Department of International Relations and Public Administration at the University of Minho, Braga, Portugal. On July 1 he was appointed

Adjunct Associate Professor of the United Nations University Operating Unit on Policy-Driven Electronic Governance (UNU-EGOV) for a two-year period. He is co-editor of the *Urban Affairs Review*, the journal affiliated with the Urban Politics Section of the American Political Science Association. His research interests comprise topics in the fields of local government and urban politics, including policy-driven electronic governance, territorial reforms, urban and regional governance, and political and civic engagement. His research has been published in a wide range of journals in political science, public administration and urban studies, including *Journal of Urban Affairs*, *Local Government Studies*, *Policy Studies Journal*, *International Review of Administrative Sciences*, and *Public Management Review*. He is a member of the team that annually publishes the Municipal Transparency Index, based on information available on the official websites of Portuguese local governments. António Tavares received a Ph.D. in Public Administration and Policy from the Reubin O'D. Askew School of Public Administration and Policy at Florida State University, a Masters in Public Administration from the University of Minho, Portugal, and a B.A. in Organizational Sociology from the University of Minho, Portugal. He teaches Local Government, Theories of the Policy Process, and Public Policy Analysis and Evaluation and is involved in professional training for upper level civil servants in the fields of public policy and public administration.