Palacky University Olomouc

University of Clermont Auvergne

University of Pavia

Master Thesis

The role of participation in good governance through looking at the case of open government partnership platform in the selected country.

Arman Azizyan

Academic Year 2020-2021

Supervisor: Lenka Duskova

GLODEP 2021

GLODEP 2021

Erasmus Mundus Joint Master Degree in International Development

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I.   Declaration:

I, hereby, declare that the thesis assignment, entitled "The role of participation in good governance through looking at the case of open government partnership platform in the selected country," is written by me and is an original content prepared for Erasmus Mundus Joint Master Degree in International Development Studies (GLODEP). In addition, I confirm the prepared content is my own except when mentioned otherwise using references or acknowledgments. The master thesis has exclusively been prepared for the above-mentioned master program under the supervision of Mgr. Lenka Duskova, Ph.D., hence it has not been submitted anywhere else.

Signature:

Date: 08/08/2021

Done at Olomouc, Czech Republic

UNIVERZITA PALACKÉHO V OLOMOUCI

Přírodovědecká fakulta

Akademický rok: 2020/2021

ZADÁNÍ DIPLOMOVÉ PRÁCE

(projektu, uměleckého díla, uměleckého výkonu)

Jméno a příjmení:	Arman AZIZYAN
Osobní číslo:	R190252
Studijní program:	N1301 Geography
Studijní obor:	International Development Studies
Téma práce:	The role of participation in good governance through looking at the case of open government partnership platform in the selected country.
Zadávající katedra:	Katedra rozvojových a environmentálních studií

Zásady pro vypracování

Abstract

The discourse on participation led to oversimplification, as it has been interpreted as a means of de-politicization or self-liberation with respect to development thought schools (Williams, 2004). Though participation may be used as a way of political control, the results and subject of the process cannot be fully controlled. In addition to this, participation itself may not empower people, but Williams continues the argument that participation can be re-imagined as it may take a completely new political course. White suggests that understanding participation requires looking at the process of who participates, how they do it and on whose terms (White, 1996). Good governance relies on two main factors, the sincerity and the constant dialogue of the involved actors, thus fundamental understanding and practice of administrative transparency (Vilone, 2020). There is inconsistency with accepted governance practices and generic good governance mainly due to little agreement on what are the objectives of good governance according to Turnbull, S. 2016 . Open Government Partnership, established in 2011, with an aim to promote accountable, responsive and inclusive governance by co-creating an action plan of governance reforms with participation of government and civil society actors (Open Government Partnership, 2020). The research aims to analyze the role of participation in good governance by looking at the case of open government partnership platform in the selected country. The objectives of the research will be to identify different interests, dynamics and power relations of the participation process and its use for good governance. The data will gathered through primary and secondary qualitative research using methods like analyzing relevant documents, in-depth interviews and focus group discussions.

Rozsah pracovní zprávy:	20-25 tisíc slov
Rozsah grafických prací:	dle potřeby
Forma zpracování diplomové práce:	tištěná
Jazyk zpracování:	Angličtina

Seznam doporučené literatury:

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Vedoucí diplomové práce: **Mgr. Lenka Dušková, PhD.**
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Datum zadání diplomové práce: **29. ledna 2021**
Termín odevzdání diplomové práce: **31. května 2021**

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            děkan   vedoucí katedry

V Olomouci dne 29. ledna 2021

II.   Acknowledgments:

The Thesis would have been impossible to complete without a whole ecosystem of support of very dedicated people. Hence, I would like to express my gratitude to the following people and organizations that made my life easier and sometimes happier. First, thank you goes to the OGP Support Unit and especially the program manager of the Eastern Partnership Countries, Marina Mkhitaryan, who welcomed my research initiative and introduced me to many actors involved in the Open Government Georgia. I am also very grateful to the secretariat of Open Government Partnership Georgia, the central coordinating body within the Georgian government, for their cooperation in providing various contacts and information.

The work on this paper has taken on all the emotional and academic capabilities from me, which also stressed the patience of my academic supervisor and program. Hence, I can not simply describe by word how thankful I am to my supervisor, Mgr. Lenka Duskova Ph. D. for her continuous support and availability. The people behind this academic program, who have designed this multidisciplinary joint master's degree, transformed my life by providing quality education and a new family of international peers from all over the world. Hence, I am forever thankful to all the professors, staff members, consortia directors, and coordinators for tremendous opportunities and support throughout the whole program. I am also very thankful to European Union's Erasmus Plus program for this fantastic educational and life-changing opportunity and the generous scholarship that helped me survive during very uncertain times.

For thanking a family, it is crucial to define which one. Hence, I would like to express my most profound appreciation to my GLODEP, PRAG, Prevert, GAP, Armenian, and York family members for just being there in my life and making me a better person. My friends without whom nothing would be possible, Sona Martikyan, Rafayel Shirakyan, Artur Hakhverdyan, Ani Harutyunyan, Anahit Vardanyan, Davit Arakelyan, Emma Grigoryan, Gayane Haroyan, Ani Tovmasyan, Gevorg Sargsyan, Nara Hovhannisyan, Milena Sargsyan, Lilit Dallakyan, Mane Yeganyan, Armine Galstyan, Misha Aghamalyan, Karen Khachikyan, Yervand Abrahamyan and Davit Dadalyan.

Last but not least, I want to **dedicate this thesis assignment to Alen Margaryan, my friend, Sasun Arakelyan, my grandfather, Stepan Azizyan, and Aram Verdyan, my great uncles,** whose funerals I have missed due to my studies in this program.

III.   Abstract:

The discourse on participation led to oversimplification, as it has been interpreted as a means of de-politicization or self-liberation with respect to development thought schools (Williams, 2004). Though participation may be used as a way of political control, the results and subject of the process cannot be fully controlled. In addition to this, participation itself may not empower people, but Williams continues the argument that participation can be re-imagined as it may take a completely new political course. White suggests that understanding participation requires looking at the process of who participates, how they do it, and on whose terms (White, 1996). Good governance relies on two main factors, the sincerity and the constant dialogue of the involved actors, thus fundamental understanding and practice of administrative transparency (Vilone, 2020). There is inconsistency with accepted governance practices and generic good governance mainly due to little agreement on what are the objectives of good governance, according to Turnbull, S. 2016. Open Government Partnership, established in 2011 with an aim to promote accountable, responsive, and inclusive governance by co-creating an action plan of governance reforms with the participation of government and civil society actors (Open Government Partnership, 2020). The research aims to analyze the role of participation in good governance by looking at the case of the open government partnership platform in the selected country. The objectives of the research will be to identify different interests, dynamics, and power relations of the participation process and its use for good governance. The data will be gathered through primary and secondary qualitative research using methods like analyzing relevant documents, in-depth interviews, and focus group discussions.

Keywords: Participation; Good Governance; Open Government; Georgia; CSO; NGO.

IV. Table of Contents:

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VI. List of abbreviations:

UN - United Nations

UNDP - United Nations Development Programme

ICT - Information and Communication Technology

SMART - Simple, Moral, Accountable, Responsive, and Transparent

OGP - Open Government Partnership

EU - European Union

NATO - The North Atlantic Treaty Organization

CSO - Civil Society Organization

USAID - United States Agency for International Development

NGO - Non-Governmental Organisation

IRM - Independent Reporting Mechanism

EaP - The Eastern Partnership

GDP - Gross Domestic Product

1. Introduction:

Since the World Bank declared good governance as a condition for international aid to address the governance crisis in Sub-Saharan Africa, various interpretations of good governance came across and within international development agencies (World Bank 1998). Participation is usually a key component of good governance across various mainstream issues presented in this paper. According to Williams (2004), participation in its turn has been exaggerated either as a tool for self liberalization or a means for legitimizing governance.

Through a comprehensive literature review, this paper focuses on the importance of looking at participation as a process that can not have already determined outcomes (Williams, 2004). Hence, this work is outlying the importance of analyzing the politics, power dynamics, and interests of participation processes (White, 1996). As for good governance, this paper highlights the most common definition approaches while also highlighting the importance of coming to a sincere agreement over what it means for the involved actors (Turnbull, S. 2016).

For finding the answers to the questions raised from the literature review, the Open Government Partnership Platform was chosen, which brings together state, civil society, and international aid agencies on the same platform to set the governance reform agenda for the country (Open Government Partnership, 2021). Based on various criteria mentioned in the literature review, a specific country was selected to conduct the qualitative research for the case study.

The main goal of the qualitative research is to understand the role the participation of civil society and government representatives in the Open Government Partnership Platform plays in fostering good governance. The research objectives are to identify different interests, dynamics, and power relations of the participation process and its use for good governance through qualitative methods like an in-depth interview, focus group discussion, and documentation analysis.

2. Literature review:

In 1989, the World Bank declared 'a crisis of governance' in Sub-Saharan Africa (World Bank, 1989, p. 60-61) and identified good public management as a precondition of the development assistance strategies for developing countries (Azmat and Coghill, 2005, p. 626). Since then, international aid agencies and donor countries have called for good governance in developing countries as a prerequisite for aid assistance (Khwaja, 2004, p. 428-429). It is argued that citizen engagement is critical in transforming public sector service delivery, hence putting forward the need to emphasize "on the notions of the citizen, community and neighborhood" for effective service delivery (Jones, Hackney, Irani, 2007). Therefore this literature review will build a theoretical framework on a comprehensive analysis of participation and various understandings of good governance. There will also be a review of the Open Governance Partnership Platform and the selected country for the case study.

2.1 The Discourse on Participation:

In this section, the various perspectives on participation in the literature will be discussed. The discourse aims to see the positive, negative, and pragmatic approaches to participation, which is the crucial point for the case study.

Participation as a Key for Deliberative Democracy:

The participation of effective people can guarantee accountability, transparency, and legitimacy, i.e., good governance during the implementation of any development plan that impacts the local population. In this given context, the direct participation of people in many developed countries got momentum recently when elected representatives in those countries were seen to have failed to fully represent the grassroots in local development programs (Waheduzzaman, 2010).

The low level of political participation across liberal democracies, which is still decreasing, consolidates the political power and influence among the elites of the top end of the wealth. Participation of the citizens may prevent the rise of oligarchy and the failure of democratic institutions. The citizenry check ensures that democratic structures are not reformed in ways that result in the systematic exclusion of non-elites over the longer term (Chambers, 2009).

Deliberative democracy sets higher standards for citizens regarding the degree of participation and what kind of participation is required. As mentioned above, this is the main draw for many people. For deliberative democrats, democracy is about more than just counting

votes or encouraging citizens to participate more in politics. Hence, stimulating people to participate in specific forms of democratic debate, accept the rules of the debate, appropriately express concerns, and accept the results of these debates. Democratic citizenship is considered a more critical part of a person's life than non-deliberative politics: politics in deliberative democracy is more present and more apparent (Chambers, 2009).

Nevertheless, the problem for deliberative democrats is that citizens face structural deficiencies. These deficiencies are related to scale, complexity, lack of information and knowledge, and chances to raise their voice and be heard (Chambers, 2009). The stress on structural deficiencies explains the belief of deliberative democrats for increased opportunities for citizen participation. The lack of participation partially indicates that the system does not ensure adequate institutional means to participate. Deliberative democrats believe that the barriers of deliberation are mainly structural, which can be fixed by redistributing structural resources more fairly.

As discussed above, there is considerable and growing evidence that it is the membership in a particular community that people need to develop democratic capacity and participate. The community norms nurture and strengthen a specific identity in the members. The capacity and the willingness to participate in democratic life depend on a person's access to and immersion in a specific set of rules. It demands that people develop specific physical and mental habits within an extended period for becoming members of a particular normative community. There are democratic innovations that concentrate on identifying and later eliminating structural barriers to citizen participation, which disregards the importance of establishing citizenship among all members of the political system. These innovations have managed to increase the overall participation rate moderately. They have incentivized marginalized groups to participate in higher numbers. Plus, member participation has had little effect (Parvin, 2017). Equal capacity for participation requires the improvement of structural inequalities in social and economic resources and the establishment of a specific set of norms in society. These resources and norms can assist and stimulate the development of physical and mental habits and the concept of someone to whom the political activity is significant.

Participation Perspectives from the Post Development Authors:

This chapter will consider post-development ideas for development under the conditions of participation from donor countries. This analysis is based on the analysis of various literary sources and attempts to get a complete picture of what the critic can find meaning in order to contrast with the process of participation.

In his work, Aram Ziai (2007, p.49) examines a case between an actor, a person who implements a project, and between a consultant, a person who is invited to compile the "correct" documentation for a successful additional round of financing. Ziai raises the question of contradictions between the "desires" of the donor state and "reality." Bottom-up planning, which should reduce the human factor and maximize the project's usefulness, is subjective since the donor state does not observe the accurate picture of what is happening and tries to theorize the requirements in every possible way. In an attempt to exclude the influence of the external, the donor state creates conditions in which the project actor is forced to distort reality in order to obtain additional funding, and in this distortion, he makes gross mistakes, on paper the project is correct - in practice it is irrelevant.

The works of Mabrouka M'barek are also interesting for consideration. The authors write about the citizens of Makoko and how the State uses its residents to obtain funding and exploit the funds of donor states for its purposes(Mabrouka M'Barek et al., 2019, p. 205). So, the State created a system of an inevitable closed cycle and did it so that they managed to attract and exploit donor funds. In various organizations designed to protect democracy, the government puts its people and has the opportunity to commit actions to the detriment of citizens. The conclusion that arises from reading this book is that with detailed attention to smaller social groups ready to fight for their right to freedom of choice, it is possible to achieve greater efficiency than concentration on those who have power.

Sachs also talks about the downsides of the participation process in his work. The author considers the level of political power, innovations, media control, awareness in the modern world make it possible for modern authorities to control society in almost all spheres so that the State can manipulate the participation process (Sachs, 2010, p. 130). Another important argument against participation is that the positive results are exploited. It is believed that the participation process makes the citizens more civilly aware and politically active. So, there is an illusion that it is necessary to support the interests of the state power, increase participation in projects, and maintain a new standard of living. As a result, the minority exploits citizens at the expense of this illusion and legitimizes its power. Here it can seem exactly why Escobar said, "Nevertheless, the decision making and the control of resources remained at the national level, thus rendering local participation insignificant." (Escobar, 1995, p. 141). Also, another depressing moment in the participation in the crisis of states mired in debt. In other words, they are open to help, but in fact, they are doing everything possible to get funding and send it to their needs (Sachs, 2010, p.131).

The uses and abuses of participation

The discourse on participation led to oversimplification, as it has been interpreted as a means of de-politicization or self-liberation with respect to development thought schools (Williams, 2004 p. 559). Williams (2004) continues by saying that participation has an insignificant power to subject on an individual level when counting the effects and the consequences. The results of the participation process are never precisely predicted, so viewing it as a tool for manipulation is not very effective. Thus, to better analyze the participation effect, political analysis of the community is necessary in order to understand how, to what shape do the participatory methods alter with existing political methods, patterns, which will help to precisely see the political aspect of the development and help develop the process as a self-critical mechanism (Williams, 2004 p. 569-570).

According to White (1996, p. 6) it is crucial to recognize that participation is a political issue. The following questions arise: Who is involved? How? On whose terms? Although participation can challenge the dominance models, it can also be a means to consolidate and replicate existing power relations.

People's enthusiasm for a project depends much more on whether they have a genuine interest in it than on whether they participated in its construction. Participation can take place due to several unfree motives, so our second step is to analyze the interests that the general term "participation" represents. Four main types of participation can be distinguished: nominal, instrumental, representative, and transformative. (White S., 1996, p. 7)

Figure 1: Interests in Participation

Form	Top-Down	Bottom-Up	Function
Nominal	Legitimation	Inclusion	Display
Instrumental	Efficiency	Cost	Means
Representative	Sustainability	Leverage	Voice
Transformative	Empowerment	Empowerment	Means/End

Source: (White S. 1996)

Each type of participation has its own characteristics, including the interests of top-down participation: the interests of the people who design and implement the development plan in the participation of others; the bottom-up perspective: how participants see themselves their

participation, and what they expect from it: and the general role of each type of participation. (White S., 1996, p. 7)

Nominal participation is characterized by legitimation, inclusion and display, instrumental participation by efficiency, cost, and means to achieve cost-effectiveness. In representative participation, people have a voice in the character of the project, which in its turn ensures sustainability and leverage. Finally, representative participation is seen as empowerment, and a means to empowerment and an end in itself at the same time. (White S., 1996, p. 8-9)

Of course, this framework is just a tool for analysis. In reality, the uses (and abuses) of participation can be diverse. Any project generally involves varied interests that change over time, and almost none of these types appears in 'pure' form. However, setting them out in this way highlights some crucial distinctions. It shows that although participation has the potential to challenge the ruling model, it can also be a means to consolidate and replicate existing power relations. (White S., 1996, p. 14)

The third step is to realize that although participation and non-participation always reflect interests, they do not do so in an open space. The people's views on their interests and their judgment on whether they can express them reflect the power relations. The non-participation of individuals, or participation on behalf of others, may eventually reproduce their subordinate status. (White S., 1996, p. 15)

If a sense of dynamic is injected into the framework mentioned above, the form and function of participation itself will become a focus for struggle. We will have the top-down and bottom-up interests here and the forms and functions of participation as well. Each group will be different internally, and there will be tensions at any moment as to which element or combination of elements will dominate. (White S., 1996, p. 9-10)

So, the character of participation typically changes over time. The form or function of participation is itself a site of conflict and the outcomes of participation feedback into the constitution of interests. Finally, interests reflect power relations external to the project itself. In other words, if participation means that the voiceless gain a voice, we should expect this to bring some conflict. It will challenge any personal project and power relations in society in general.

Change hurts. The absence of conflict in many of the so-called "participatory" projects should raise our suspicions. Furthermore, the flat borders that present many debates about participation in development should raise questions in themselves. What interests does this "non-politics" serve, and what interests can it suppress? (White S., 1996, p. 15)

2.2 The Discourse on Good Governance:

Governance reflects all aspects of governing, including the institutions, practices, and processes of decision making and regulation setting on various issues of common interest (UN Human Rights Office of the High Commissioner, 2021). Due to the absence of an internationally accepted definition for good governance, the diverse definitions and quality of governance appear across the literature and international organizations (Gisselquist R. M., 2012, p. 5). Hence this section of the thesis is designed to present the complexity of good governance, which plays a crucial role in understanding this case study.

Mainstreams of good governance approaches:

The human rights approach is that the governing process transforms into good governance when an evaluative or normative aspect is added. This approach mainly reflects on public affairs, public resource management, ensuring human rights realization by the responsible institutions. Hence, the achievement of good governance is measured by the level of implementation of the promised human rights delivery **(UN Human Rights Office of the High Commissioner, 2021).**

The United Nations Development Program (UNDP) approaches good governance by highlighting the core values such as transparency, responsiveness, inclusiveness, and capability of the governing system. According to the remarks of Helen Clark, the former Administrator of UNDP, good governance should be built upon the inclusive and meaningful participation of more people in decision-making processes that shape their future (Gisselquist R. M., 2012, p. 8).

The World Bank approaches good governance through a combination of factors that support government efficiency and effectiveness of service delivery to citizens. The combination consists of transparency, accountability, the strength of competencies of public institutions, as well as their fundamental willingness to do the "right thing." The World Bank, an early bird, seeing good governance as a solution to crisis governance, has had various varying definitions of good governance over the years. However, of the variance of language use, the main principles of accountable administration, efficient public service, and the reliable judiciary are remaining the core of good governance. (Gisselquist R. M., 2012, p. 8)

The United Kingdom's Independent Commission on Good Governance in Public Services considers six principles as fundamentals for good governance, which are the following:

1. Performance effectiveness based on defined roles and functions,
2. Focusing on the mission of the institution and the results for the beneficiary citizens;
3. The promotion and behavioral demonstration of good governance values for the whole organization;
4. The improvement of the capacities and capabilities of the governing bodies for effective governance;
5. Stakeholder engagement for the realization of accountability;
6. The transparency of and being informed of decision-making, which also includes risk management. (Langlands A., Office for Public Management (London, England), & Chartered Institute of Public Finance and Accountancy, 2004, p. 4)

Besides the different interpretations of the international organizations, there is also the phenomena of E-governance as a way to good governance:

Information and Communication Technology (ICT) brought a new perspective to good governance by establishing e-governance. ICTs are considered as an aid for effective service delivery, hence good governance.

Electronic governance or e-governance refers to the application of electronic means in the various interactions of the government between citizens, businesses, or internal government stakeholders. The e-governance aims to support the government by facilitating government service provision, improving communication and information channels, and integrating stand-alone systems and services. The e-governance aims to transform public service delivery into more effective, efficient, speedy, accountable, accessible, responsive, transparent, and traceable using information communication technologies (ICT). In evolutionary order, the essential elements of good governance are the rule of law, accountability, transparency, participation, and people's control. (Garg, P., 2008, p 43)

According to Abdul, M. (2017, p. 26), ICT makes the administrative process more practical and effective while also bringing a paradigm shift establishing a new means for relationships within society.

The most significant challenge of e-governance is achieving the SMART (Simple, Moral, Accountable, Responsive and Transparent) Process, the main building block for any service delivery. Organizational culture should back this with an open communication policy,

easy accessibility to top management, well-trained and motivated personnel, and leadership with vision, commitment, and a political will to make the initiative a success and acceptability by the citizens. (Garg, P., 2008, p 47)

Deliberative, participatory, and monitory democracy shaping good governance:

The rules for the governance of society have both parallels and differences with the standards that regulate society under a democratic government system. Values like trust, cooperation, and transparency are, in any case, essential in each instance, although with different settings and processes. Concepts of public trust, public service, and public accountability, which pervade government systems and governance arrangements, are based on a set of democratic, constitutional, and other ideals (Edwards, M., Halligan, J., Horrigan, B., & Nicoll, G., 2012, p. 27).

In this process, it is essential to distinguish between horizontal and vertical governance. This distinction can be viewed successively from system-based, sector-based, and organization-based standpoints, with network-based governance cutting across one or more of these standpoints.

Democratic government's forms and structures are changing to fit new societal expectations and public engagement and accountability procedures. The transformation of contemporary democracy from a majoritarian democracy necessitates adaptation in governance to grasp "a government by dialogue," "a partnership view of democracy," and governance by multi-order monitoring of all institutional activities of power over the people.
The underlying subtleties of horizontal-vertical governance difference include the shifting core of governmental activity, the rise of non-state impacts, the importance and limits of hierarchical chains of institutional power and responsibility (Edwards, M., Halligan, J., Horrigan, B., & Nicoll, G., 2012, p. 22-23).

Democratic norms are also constantly recasting conceptually and operationally in response to changing circumstances. As our knowledge and practices of representative democracy evolve, so do the relationships between government and the people (Edwards, M., Halligan, J., Horrigan, B., & Nicoll, G., 2012, p. 30).
The core principles of the participatory and monitory democracy include:

1. improved relations between government and non-government actors,

2. increased public accountability for government actions,

3. improved public participation and oversight in the political process (Edwards, M., Halligan, J., Horrigan, B., & Nicoll, G., 2012, p. 31).

Other forms of governance, such as participatory and networked governance, can benefit from the contrast between horizontal and vertical governance (Edwards, M., Halligan, J., Horrigan, B., & Nicoll, G., 2012, p. 22-23). It also includes discrete and sometimes shared responsibilities in developing and implementing public policy and regulation, steering and ordering societal behavior, and monitoring and calling to account the use and abuse of institutional power across the public, private, and community sectors (and even national boundaries) (Edwards, M., Halligan, J., Horrigan, B., & Nicoll, G., 2012, p. 31).

Contemporary dimensions of governance are linked to the evolution of democratic governance. Public trust is also linked to the progress of democracy and its impact on governance in the following way. Public trust remains a crucial idea that builds the government's system, accountability to the voter, and democracy's progression beyond periodic elections to include genuine public involvement (Edwards, M., Halligan, J., Horrigan, B., & Nicoll, G., 2012, p. 31).

Therefore, discussions about public trust in law and government remain relevant and action-oriented, rather than purely aspirational or obsolete. Whatever the ultimate foundation for this public trust is, individuals in government who are entrusted with political and legal power wield that power for and on behalf of the people. This broad concept of making the people the masters of governmental authority rather than the servants concerns the distribution, conditioning, and proper application of power over people's lives (Edwards, M., Halligan, J., Horrigan, B., & Nicoll, G., 2012, p. 31).

Good governance between realism and idealism:

The critics of the good governance agenda point out several issues. One of the most prominent issues is connected to the conditionality of international aid with the governance reform agenda, which is seen as a path to promote the liberal democracy models of developed countries to the developing countries (Gisselquist R. M., 2012, p. 1). Good governance is also seen as weak support for policy due to its ad hoc nature and lack of connection to the country's historical developments (Gisselquist R. M., 2012, p. 1). According to Pritchett and Woolcock (2004), the singular best model for governance dismisses the variety of institutional governance models.

Hence, UN systems highlight the need to understand the complexity of governance. Arguing that good governance is more than multiparty elections, an independent judiciary, and legislative bodies associated with Western liberal democracy. Good governance consolidates all structures and processes that serve for public good delivery within the country. The

component of public good delivery includes transparent institutions, universal human rights protection, accountable decision making, meaningful participation, local-level decision making, non-discrimination, and efficient judiciary. Furthermore, arguing that political rights at the individual level and democratization indeed play a surrogate role for good governance (Weiss, T., 2000, p. 801-802).

In addition to the issues on idealism, the lack of governance literacy of the citizens is also pointed out. Many citizens are disconnected and do not trust the political system, limiting their engagement in governance. Lack of citizenry engagement is not just an instrumental problem on an individual or organizational level but also reflects the limitation of participation of communities and society in governance (Breslin, T., & Reczek, C., 2019, p. 30).

To sum up the discourse on various mainstreams of good governance, it can be concluded that there is a diversity of definitions across and within organizations. However, there are these primary areas usually seen: representation and democracy, the rule of law, human rights realization, public service efficacy, transparent and accountable governance. These various interpretations of good governance, however, of the necessity of each area can bring confusion in governance reforms(Gisselquist R. M., 2012, p. 21). This inconsistency with accepted governance practices and generic good governance arises due to a lack of agreement about the objectives of good governance (Turnbull, S., 2016, p. 2). Therefore, it should be highlighted that good governance relies on the sincerity and continuous dialogue of the involved actors, which is the fundamental understanding and practice of administrative transparency (Vilone, 2020, p. 345).

2.3 Introduction to the Open Government Partnership

As discussed in the previous chapters, the perspectives of participation and good governance are rather endless and at some points interconnected. From the participation discourse, the ending point was seeing it as a non-determined process and for good governance, it is understood the importance of clear understanding and agreement of engaged stakeholders about the reform agenda. Hence, in this section, a unique initiative of Open Government Partnership (OGP) is presented that has been founded to address the above-mentioned principles. It is important to have clear knowledge about the OGP history, values, principles, and processes, as this initiative is going to be the core research subject of the case study.

In 2011, government reformers and civil society actors came together to establish a unique partnership to promote transparent, participatory, inclusive, and accountable governance. The Open Government Partnership (OGP) was launched in a UN General Assembly meeting on September 20, 2011. During the meeting, the leaders of governments from 8 founding countries (Brazil, Indonesia, Norway, Mexico, United Kingdom, Philippines, South Africa, and the United States) endorsed the Open Government Declaration and introduced their country actions plans along with an equal number of civil society leaders (Open Government Partnership, 2021).

Starting with just eight countries, OGP currently represents a partnership that includes thousands of civil society organizations and members at the national and local levels. Nowadays, there are 78 countries and 76 local governments that are part of OGP. These involve more than two billion people, thousands of civil society organizations. (Open Government Partnership, 2021)

The main goals, values, and principles of the OGP:

The OGP is based on the ideology of having an open government that is more accessible, more responsive, and more accountable to its citizens. Improving the relationship between people and their government is key to having long-term benefits for everyone. Hence, this initiative aims to promote transparency, empower citizens, fight corruption, and harness new technologies to strengthen governance. In OGP, governments and civil society co-create two-year action plans with specific commitments across a broad range of issues. This unique model ensures that civil society organizations or direct citizen engagement have a role in shaping and overseeing governments (Open Government Partnership, 2021). This unique model ensures that civil society organizations or direct citizen engagement have a role in shaping and overseeing governments.

In the spirit of its operation, OGP has 11 policy areas, which have been determined by OGP members, with civil society representatives having in mind the need for reforms to make a positive impact in their communities. Currently, the following areas have been highlighted and separated: anti-corruption, civic space, digital governance, fiscal openness, gender, justice, marginalized communities, natural resources, open parliaments, public service delivery, and right to information (Open Government Partnership, 2021). OGP participants address issues identified in the mentioned policy areas by shaping and assigning specific commitments in their OGP Action Plans.
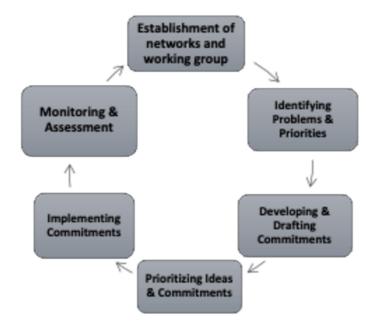
The governments that join the Partnership must endorse the Open Government Declaration and commit to the following principles:

➢ Ensure transparency and accountability: increasing the availability of information about governmental activities and taking public responsibility for their actions and decisions;

➢ Ensure integrity: implementing the highest standards of professional integrity throughout their administrations;

➢ Support civic participation: informing, consulting, involving, and empowering citizens and social organizations;

➢ Increase access to new technologies for openness and accountability: applying to new technologies to make more information public. This step will enable people to both understand what their governments do and to influence decisions;

➢ Access and simplicity: whenever possible, using simple and easy-to-understand language;

➢ Inclusion and diversity: strengthening the voices of the underrepresented, such as women, the disabled, minorities, and/or vulnerable groups;

➢ Collaboration and co-creation: encouraging collaboration and co-creation at all stages of designing practices and policies (Burle, Bellix, and Machado, 2016).

By joining OGP, countries are committing to uphold the value of openness in engaging with citizens to improve services, manage public resources, as well as to promote innovation, and create safer communities.

OGP Action Plans assumes the following chain of development and implementation:

Figure 2: OGP Cycle

The Open Government Partnership national and local action plan is a multi-cycle, and multi-stakeholder process developed and carried out by participant governments with the active engagement of citizens, civil society, private sector, and other entities at all stages.

Source: (Open Government Partnership 2021)

Developing a National Action Plan outlines what is expected of governments and other stakeholders that are involved in leading their national OGP process while developing and publishing a National Action Plan. Implementing, monitoring, and reporting in a National Action Plan outlines what is expected of the relevant governments and other stakeholders during the above-mentioned processes of a National Action Plan. Here it is important to note that the implementation of a National Action Plan is taken place for over two years. The monitoring and reporting are conducted in the following processes:

➢ By civil society organizations through independent monitoring and consultation;

➢ By the government, through self-assessment reports; and

➢ Through biennial reports, the Independent Reporting Mechanism of the OGP is presented in more detail in the following subheading (Open Government Partnership, 2021).

Involvement and Participation in OGP:

Indeed, civic participation is a core component of open government and an essential element of all the stages of the national OGP cycle. The OGP Articles of Governance explain that OGP participants commit to developing their country action plans by multi-stakeholder process, with the active engagement of citizens and civil society.

This requirement is set to follow the realities of making open government reforms work. To put it simply, it is about the importance of the collaboration of citizens, civil society,

political and official champions, and other stakeholders in developing, securing, and implementing lasting open government reforms (Open Government Partnership, 2021).

Participation is generally built on three essential directions: 1. First, disseminating information: the public, civil society, and other relevant stakeholders should be given relevant information regarding all aspects of the national OGP process, including feedback on how their inputs are taken into account. 2. Spaces and platforms for dialogue and co-creation: an inclusive and ongoing dialogue should be facilitated using various spaces and platforms appropriate to the country context. 3. Co-ownership and joint decision making – The government, civil society, and other stakeholders should jointly own and develop the process using a variety of tools and methodologies (Open Government Partnership, 2021).

On country-level participation, OGP has set minimum requirements for co-creation processes and created a Value Check tool for new members as a response to Civil Society Organizations' concerns regarding the shrinking civic space. For joining the platforms, governments sign the Open Government Declaration committing to open and transparent governance, as well as dedicate government departments responsible for the platform and involve civil society organizations(Open Government Partnership, 2021).

OGP structure:

OGP is all about action plans such as governments identifying ambition and selecting commitments for open governance, which ideally is co-created by engaging a range of stakeholders at home. Nevertheless, for the Partnership to be more than a set of disconnected action plans, it is essential to keep an eye on the rules and values of the Partnership, the glue that makes OGP a unique space for leadership in the area of government accountability. Proceeding from this, OGP has three separate bodies, each in its role and task scope.

OGP is chaired by the Steering Committee, composed of 11 member countries and 11 civil society organizations. They have equal authority in the decision-making process. Its role is to develop, promote and safeguard OGP's values, principles, and interests, establish OGP's core ideas, policies, and rules, and oversee the functioning of the Partnership.

In strong collaboration with the Steering Committee, the support of the OGP member countries is provided by the Permanent Secretariat of OGP (OGP Support Unit), which the OGP Board of Directors oversees. The Support Unit is a neutral third party between the OGP member governments and civil society aiming to maintain the balance between the two constituencies (Open Government Partnership, 2021).

2.4 The criteria for selection of the country for the case study:

The starting point for selecting the country was personal interest and basic knowledge of the Eastern Partnership Region (EaP) that consolidates Armenia, Georgia, Ukraine, Moldova, Azerbaijan, and Belarus. The interest and fundamental understanding came from personal experiences working with various civil society organizations and government representatives from all the countries of the EaP region. At the same time, these countries are connected with a similar past of the Soviet Union and Russian language use.

The second step for selecting the country was excluding the most apparent countries out of this region, Azerbaijan and Belarus. Belarus never joined the OGP declaration. As for Azerbaijan, the government was suspended from the OGP in 2016 for its actions against the civil society environment (OGP Support Unit, 2018).

The third step or even the initial step was to exclude Armenia for the case study connected to personal involvement in the OGP platform in Armenia and strong ties with the civil society organizations and the government of this country.

Therefore, the selection remained between three countries of the region, Ukraine, Moldova, and Georgia. This region is famous for its geopolitical shifts and revolutionary political changes. In order to exclude external factors like geopolitical shifts or regime changes, choosing the most politically stable country out of these three became the criteria. After the rose revolution in Georgia in 2003, the country has taken a clear pro-European course and committed to governance reforms. The political regime changed in 2012 through fair parliamentary elections. The leading Georgian Dream party is leading Georgia till now. Hence, out of these three countries, Georgia has been the most politically stable country during the last two decades. (Popescu N., 2016, p. 1)

In addition to political stability, participation and leadership of these three countries in the OGP platform were also researched. According to IRM Regional Snapshot: Eastern Partnership, the four EaP countries (Armenia, Georgia, Ukraine, and Moldova) have improved civil society engagement in OGP processes. Moreover, Georgia, Ukraine, and the Republic of Moldova have more ambitious commitments than the European and OGP average. Most interestingly, Georgia has had a leadership role in OGP by acting as a co-chair since 2016 and hosting the Global Summit in 2018. Georgia was re-elected to the OGP Steering Committee in 2019 (Open Government Partnership, 2021).

Considering the above-mentioned factors, Georgia was the most appropriate to conduct the case study due to its political stability and leadership role in the OGP platform.

2.5 Georgia country overview:

In this section of the thesis, a comprehensive overview of the selected case study country will be presented to develop an in-depth understanding of the country's overall situation, including political, geopolitical, and civil society developments.

Georgia, located in the Caucasus region, a geographical area known to be between Asia and Europe, has a population of 3.7 million (World Bank, 2021). Georgia's current Gross National Income per capita is 4290 USD classifying the country as an upper middle income country by the World Bank (2021). Georgia has a very high human development score of 0.812, which positions the county as number 61 in a list of 189 countries. During the 2000-2019 period, the country increased its score by 17.7 percent. (UNDP, 2021)

Georgia, a partially free country categorized by Freedom House, holds regular and competitive elections. Following the 2012 elections, the peaceful transfer of power was perceived as a possible sign for democratic improvements. However, Freedom House states that the recently worrying influence of Oligarchy on the media environment, political affairs, and policy-making has increased. Freedom House adds that the rule of law is being politicized, and civil liberties are protected inconsistently. Georgia is classified as a hybrid regime and has a score of 61 out of 100 for the Global Freedom score (Freedom House, 2021). As for the Economist Intelligence Unit's Democracy Index 2020, Georgia stands 91st out of 165 countries (Economist Intelligence Unit, 2021). Despite the worrying trends in freedom indices, Georgia's e-government and e-participation scores have improved by 0.03 and 0.02 points, placing the country in 65th and 80th place out of 193 countries (Department of Economic and Social Affairs of UN, 2021).

The political turmoil of Georgia:

Georgia has been at the center of the world's attention pursuant to its Rose Revolution, where the then corrupt government was overthrown by protesters, led by Saakashvili's United National Movement. The new government – mostly liberal in its outlook – changed the country dramatically. Speaking in economic terms, Georgia's GDP skyrocketed from $3.991 billion right before the Rose Revolution in 2003 to a whopping $16.448 billion in 2012 right before Saakashvili's United National Movement lost the parliamentary elections to the newly emerged political party, Georgian Dream (Popescu, N., 2016, p. 1-3).

Aside from the economy, other vital statistics showed tremendous improvements owing to Sahakashvili's policies. Transparency International reported that the corruption perception in 2003 was 1.8 while in 2012, the number stood at 5.2 (McDevitt, A., 2015).

Saakashvili, nevertheless, lost the 2012 parliamentary elections. The results, however, did not come as a surprise because there had already been a lot of accumulated discontent with the former president's policies. Nana Sumbadze (2009) writes the following in her encompassing article on the State of affairs in Georgia when it was helmed by United National Movement, Saakashvili in the public eye: what opinions tell us, she points out that were disrespect and lack of legal protection, fears of military actions, there was a split in society, fears and uncertainty - that's what really happened. There was no democracy built. Word and deed were very different. Naturally, everything has changed with the inception of the rule of Georgian Dream, led by Bidzina Ivanishvili, a billionaire with a lot of business interest in Russia, who won the elections as there was a vast public discontent with Saakashvili's policies. The public discussion focused on whether a billionaire who made a fortune in Russia should head the country. However, these discussions did not preclude Bidzina Ivanishvili and his Georgia Dream from delivering a blow to Saakashvili's ten-year rule (Popescu, N., 2016, p. 1-3).

By looking at some of the numbers, one can make a range of conclusions about whether the Georgian Dream has delivered its promise to change the country. GDP wise according to the World Bank, currently Georgia's GDP stands at $15.892 billion, which is less than what it was when Saakashvili left office in 2012 – $16.488 billion (World Bank, 2021). It is true that Georgia, like all other countries, was hit by the adverse effects of the coronavirus pandemic, but it is also true that from 2012 to 2021, the Georgian Dream failed to deliver any tangible and persistent economic results, a promise on which they based their entire parliamentary campaign.

The following data worth reviewing is the perception of corruption by Transparency International. As it was mentioned before, when Saakashvili left the office, the number stood at 5.2 (McDevitt, A., 2015). In 2020, 8 years into the leadership of the Georgian Dream party, the number is 5.6 (Transparency International Georgia, 2021). It can be safely assumed that, albeit there is an improvement, it is negligibly small.

The geopolitical situation of Georgia:

On June 27th, 2014, Georgia signed the Association Agreement with the EU, which poses a significant step taken by the young democracy in the Southern Caucasus on their

European path. Georgia has also developed closer ties to the Euro-Atlantic defense alliance. In 2008, at the Bucharest summit, the heads of state and government of the NATO member states had expressed their agreement regarding Georgia joining the North Atlantic Alliance. Although Georgia has not yet received the desired invitation to join the Membership Action Plan, it has been granted a "substantial package," which brings it to a high level of integration (Atilgan, C., & Feyerabend, F. 2015, p. 35).

Under the Saakashvili government, the relationship with Russia was characterized by disassociation and confrontation. The Georgian Dream coalition government has been in power in Tbilisi since 2012, and it is taking a more pragmatic approach in its relationship with Moscow by distancing itself explicitly from the policies of its predecessor government. Nonetheless, the government's efforts to reduce tensions have not reaped the benefits of fundamental improvement in Georgian-Russian relations. The government in Tbilisi does not have any substantial means of countering the creeping annexation of the Russia-backed breakaway regions of Abkhazia and South Ossetia. At the same time, Russia is utilizing the civil society and political organizations supported by Moscow to undermine the fundamental pro-Western foreign policy consensus, which still supports the majority of the Georgian population (Atilgan, C., & Feyerabend, F. 2015, p. 36-37).

Civil Society situation in Georgia:

According to Freedom House, the freedom of the NGOs, especially the ones carrying out actions for human rights and governance, is relatively robust, as it has scored 3 out of 4 (Freedom House 2021). The Freedom House adds that some CSOs are engaged in policy discussions, while others report political oppressions by some government and opposition officials (Freedom House 2021). Since 2017, Media Development Foundation has developed multiple reports about the growing negative propaganda against civil society organizations by Anti-Western groups (Latsabidze M., 2019, p. 36). The 2019 report also indicates that internet trolls attack the government's opponents, which includes Civil Society Organizations (Freedom House 2021).

Despite the worrying trends of the propaganda, the legal environment for the Civil Society Organization is favorable in Georgia. Due to the fast and accessible registration processes, there is a vast number of registered civil society organizations consisting of 29,072. However, of this number, it is estimated that only 1049 are active, and inactivity is mainly connected to the difficulties of liquidating the organizations (Latsabidze, Salamadze, and Iremashvili, 2020, p. 7). Most of the CSOs with strong capacities are concentrated in the capital

of Tbilisi, whereas the regional CSOs are considered weak. The most common topics covered by the CSOs are democracy, youth, human rights and civil society, and social challenges (Latsabidze M., 2019, p. 9). In addition, five CSOs from Georgia were included in the list of the most financially transparent think tanks in the world prepared by Transparify in 2018 (Transparify, 2021).

Financial sustainability is one of the main challenges for the Georgian civil society. Even though the financial support from the government has increased, enlarging the amounts and thematic range, still 95 percent of the CSOs are financed by international organizations. Many organizations depend on single donor support, and most of the newly established and small organizations struggle to meet donor standards and requirements for financial management. CSOs have obligations to report to the State only in situations when they have received public funding (Latsabidze M., 2019, p. 19-22).

Figure 3: CSO Sustainability in Georgia (Source, USAID 2020)

The overall sustainability of CSO is evaluated 4.0, which indicates an evolving level of sustainability. Though most variables contributing to the CSO sustainability largely stayed the same, the Advocacy variable has recorded some progress, whereas the Public Image variable experienced a decrease. (USAID, 2020)

3. Methodology

The thesis research is a case study, which is a way to study the social world through philosophical investigation of assumptions, core basis, and consequent justifications of methods (Denzin, N. K., & Lincoln, Y. S., 2005, p. 600). Hence, looking at the case of Open Government Partnership in Georgia through a critical realist lens by constructing different

realities and perspectives of the complex but yet unique platform of participation for good governance and examining this intercommunication against the environment of different literature philosophies and non-actors of this process (Byrne & Callaghan, 2014, p. 155).

The theoretical framework built through exhaustive bibliographical research draws on the discourse of participation and good governance and provides insight on Open Government Partnership Platform and selected country Georgia. The participation is reviewed critically through post-development authors and liberally through the international organizations' perspective, which brought the term. However, recent authors disagree with oversimplifications of participation and suggest looking at it from the perspective of a process that has no defined outcome. The idea is elaborated further by looking at the types and forms of participation. As for good governance, various literature defines it as a human rights approach, transparency and accountability matter, and even as e-governance. The secondary literature also draws on understanding the difference between idealism and realism of good governance, coming to the point that its meaning, in reality, is defined by the involved actors. Hence, insight on Open Government Partnership showcases how the platform is designed for participation processes to define good governance reforms, highlighting its appropriateness for the case study. As for the selected country, the criteria were based on personal interest and understanding of the Eastern Partnership region and the most political stability of the country in the selected region, which is objectively chosen Georgia. In addition to this, Georgian government is the only one from the region involved in a higher level of governance, the steering committee of this international organization and hosted the global forum. The theoretical framework also provides a comprehensive overview of Georgia.

The main goal of the research is to understand what role the participation of civil society and government representatives in the Open Government Partnership Platform plays in fostering good governance in Georgia. The objectives of the research are to identify different interests, dynamics, and power relations of the participation process and its use for good governance. The data is collected via primary and secondary qualitative research using methods like analyzing relevant documents, in-depth interviews, and focus group discussions. To address the research question and build the case, the sample of participants to be interviewed were selected to study various perspectives of different actors and non-actors of the process in principle with the idea of non-hierarchy of credibility (Taylor & Bogdan, 1998, p. 26). There are two main actors in the processes, state agency representatives and CSO representatives from the theoretical framework and documentation analysis. Indeed International donor organizations are active members of the process; however, the theoretical framework covers

their perspectives on participation and good governance; hence they were not selected to participate in the qualitative research interviews.

3.1 The sample of the research:

For direct participants of OGP Georgia processes, four key informants were selected for in-depth interviews from the State and CSOs. The selection was based on the list of participants provided by the primary gatekeepers of the process. As the list of participants did not include many participants, most of them were contacted for the interviews. However, most of them also have not responded to many emails. Considering the non-responding rate of involved actors, four key informants were selected. The selection criteria of the primary key informants were based on their engagement to the processes of the OGP platform documented in various documents published on the official website. It is also important to mention that all key informants were recommended to be interviewed through informal conversations with different stakeholders. The identified key informants have been engaged in all of the processes of OGP Georgia and had valuable insights. For in-depth interviews quantity of interviewers was not the priority rather than the quality(Taylor & Bogdan, 1998, p. 108). As Taylor and Bogdan (1998, p 116) mentioned, it matters what participants mention during the interviews, and it also matters the context of their actions. Hence, even though the gatekeepers of the OGP and Georgian government secretariat were open and cooperative, most of the participants of the processes have not been reactive to interviews, which has been acknowledged in the background of the key informants' interviews and documentation analysis.

For **understanding a non-participant** perspective, a focus group discussion was chosen to be conducted, and the sample of 9 participants was chosen through a "snowball" strategy. This strategy helps to decrease the likelihood of bias in sampling, as involved participants are not all personal acquaintances but rather randomly selected participants. This is achieved by asking the NGOs from personal networks to refer to other NGOs from their network to participate in the research creating the snowball effect (Taylor & Bogdan, 1998, p. 47). As all of the NGO participants were big organizations working nationally in Georgia, the profile of non-participants were chosen from the regions which either work or have interest in the areas of good governance and participation.

3.2 Data collection and the research design:

The data collection process has started with communication with the OGP support unit working to support the OGP processes within various participant countries. The OGP support unit has connected me with the OGP Georgia secretariat, the coordinating body within the Georgian government, and they were helpful with sharing information, relevant documents, and contacts. Selected key informants were contacted via e-mail and were informed about the research purpose. In addition to this consent form, see Annex D, was designed for participants of in-depth interview and focus group discussion, which not only asked permission from the participants to use their shared information and record the whole process but also informed the participants about their rights such as windrowing their consent and staying anonymous. Both the in-depth interviews and a focus group were organized online through a private zoom account. It was ensured that there are no intruders and the setting is private and convenient for the participants by setting the waiting list and sharing the link only with participants (Taylor & Bogdan, 1998, p. 113). Prior to the interviews, it was double-checked that all the present parties are the ones who are invited. Participants reviewed the content of their signed consent forms, and then the meeting got recorded. Pseudonyms were used for all personally identifying information, such as names of the organizations, regions, cities, and their names for ensuring confidentiality.

An in-depth interview was chosen for the four key informant participants directly engaged in the actions of the Open Government Partnership platform. To understand the perspectives of the participants' interview guide was prepared with open-ended questions; see Annex A and Annex B. The participants of the processes in Georgia are the interagency council of State and NGOs. Hence key informants were chosen from both groups, CSOs, and government, to analyze their perspectives. The in-depth interview format was semi-structured open-ended questions starting with questions that describe participants' general perspectives to their work, role, and perception (Taylor & Bogdan, 1998, p. 119). After which, participants provided more details regarding the research interests, the encountered challenges, and results(Taylor & Bogdan, 1998, p. 102). Though guides for the interview were designed separately for each target group, the logic of the questions and topics is similar, allowing comparison of the similarities and differences of opinion of two different actors on the same process in which they are engaged. As the primary principle of qualitative research is flexibility, there were probing questions as a follow-up, and the guide for the interview was

reviewed after the first pilot interview. Taylor and Bogdan(1998, p 102) mentioned that the in-depth interview is not all about getting answers but learning what to ask.

A Focus group with non-participants of the OGP processes was chosen from the representatives of Civil Society Organizations from the regions of Georgia working on and interested in the area of good governance and participation. This approach was preferable because it brought people with similar backgrounds to share their viewpoints and insight through open-ended semi-structured discussion (Taylor & Bogdan, 1998, p. 131). In this case, as an interviewer took the moderator role, ensuring equal and respectful space for the participant to share their thoughts like not letting interruption or monopolizing the time (Taylor & Bogdan, 1998, p. 131). As Morgan (1988, p. 12) mentions, the focus group is meant to uncover valuable insights by harvesting the group dynamics' interactions. However, it is also essential to note that the idea of the focus group is not for the participants to conclude a consensus, but rather to show the variety of their perspectives, bounce from each other's ideas, and even disagree at times (Hennink, 2014, pp. 1–2). The guide for the focus group, see Annex C, was in line with the logic of in-depth interview but was relatively open and focused on limited topics such as participation, good governance, and cooperation with the State and other CSOs (Hennink, 2014, pp. 1–2).

Documentation analysis: This approach analyzes official and public documents of the OGP platform published by the State, Independent Reporting Mechanism, and Civil Society Organizations. The idea behind analyzing the mentioned documents is to better understand the people involved in them and their perspectives, concerns, actions, and opinions (Taylor & Bogdan, 1998, p. 131).

	Figure 4: List of Analyzed Documents
Name of the document	Reference
Letter of request to activate the Rapid Response Mechanism	https://www.opengovpartnership.org/documents/georgia-letter-of-request-to-activate-the-rapid-response-mechanism-november-1-2018/
Official response from the Government	https://www.opengovpartnership.org/documents/georgia-official-response-from-the-government-november-8-2018/
Civil Society response to Government	https://www.opengovpartnership.org/documents/georgia-civil-society-response-to-government-november-12-2018/

Follow up letter from the Government	https://www.opengovpartnership.org/documents/georgia-follow-up-letter-from-the-government-november-20-2018/
Independent Reporting Mechanism (IRM): `Georgia End-of-Term Report 2016-2018`	`Gogidze, L., Gzirishvili, T., Sikharulidze, & M., (2018). Independent Reporting Mechanism (IRM): Georgia End-of-Term Report 2016-2018. Retrieved from:` https://www.opengovpartnership.org/documents/georgia-action-plan-2018-2019/

Data Analysis: The qualitative research analysis is done through inductive theorizing of concepts through looking at the data patterns drawn by thematic codes (Taylor & Bogdan, 1998, p. 165). The comparison and connection of different data patterns were used to refine concepts, identify specificities, understand the relationship of various themes, and build them into a theory. The labeling of the codes was done manually using word and excel files, which helped to group data patterns for further analysis.

3.3 Research limitations and reflexivity:

Due to Covid 19 restrictions, it was **impossible to conduct observation** of the process for closer understanding as both personal and process level difficulties. Personal reasons include the inability to travel to Georgia, and the process level includes the postponement of OGP processes by the Georgian government due to the Pandemic. The lack of observation was compensated with my previous experience with the OGP platform in Armenia, as I was involved both as a government official and as a representative of CSO. This experience helped me understand the core values and principles of the organizations while establishing academic curiosity to a particular factor of the platform, which is the role of participation. Moreover, the in-depth interview and documentation analysis helped to fill in the observation gap, as through participants' perspectives and constructed realities, the image of the participation dynamics got formed.

The research draws more NGO representation than State due to several factors. Firstly, the non-participant group was targeted for the regional CSOs as they were the main stakeholders of the platform not engaged in the processes. Secondly, the key informants from the participants of the processes are two main actors out of six participants, whereas for the State, there are way more participants in the council; hence the proportion of their

representation is not satisfactory. However, most of the State representatives were contacted to participate in the research via various means, but they stayed silent. In qualitative research, not only the answers of the interviews are analyzed, but also the context, in this case, the silence, which in this case is relevant to the information provided by the key informants (Taylor and Bogdan, 1998, p 116).

Reflexivity, as a beginner contemporary researcher, I understand that my previous experiences and background cannot be separated from the research. I accept the fact that because of my identity and experiences, I have developed the academic curiosity to study this particular topic and platform (Taylor & Bogdan, 1998, p. 25). However, I understand that my personal history with the platform and my experience with the government of Armenia and Armavir Development Center NGO do not represent the situation in Georgia. Choosing a different country to answer my academic curiosity was one of the means used to eliminate my personal biases. Secondly, I have set aside my personal beliefs and wanted to learn the perspectives of the participants of the interview. I have not hidden my involvement with the Armenian OGP platform, but at the same time, I have not disclosed or shared my experiences or perspectives with anyone involved in the research. Lastly, I did not look at this case study as a comparative one with the Armenian OGP platform; hence I never tried to find any similarities or differences.

4. The results of the qualitative research:

In the following chapter the results of qualitative research will be presented bringing the perspectives of the participants and non participants of the OGP processes. Based on their perspectives and experiences, common similarities and differences in the data have been spotted, which in their turn were analysed with the setting of the interviews and documents.

4.1 Perception of participation:

Taking part in decision making was the most common perception on participation during the in-depth interviews and focus group discussion. Most of the interviewees mention the importance of not just participating in the decision making process, but also having an impact on it. For example, some participant made the following statement:

"Active participation means to be fully part of the process, and also taking part in the decision making as well. And as I said, to be truly in the process, not only to attend the process, but also to make a decision with it."

From the participants of OGP perspectives it highlighted the importance of equality in voting for the adoption of the action plan. Hence, the ideas of the CSO can be included in the action plan, and the government is not the only side which is deciding what the problem is and what should be done to solve it. So, this means to open up the platform for other stakeholders, so that the government is not the only party which sits at the table and makes the decisions.

By non-participants of the OGP processes, participation in other activities, helping people and community, as well as in projects was also indicated as a defining factor. A participant from the CSO side also defines participation as a means for delivering people's ideas and voices to the government for telling them what people really want in real life.

Lack of trust as primary challenge for participation:

Besides positive attitude towards participation, some of the interviewed people have casted their doubts on the processes in Georgian context. Most common doubt on participation was the mistrust of the people towards the Government and CSOs, which creates fears for direct participation.

The mistrust toward NGOs was mostly described as a result of stereotypical views, politicization of CSO and media misrepresentation. The stereotypical view was described as people's perception of CSO not doing any real work for Georgia. The politicization of the CSOs was connected to the assumption of the CSO association with pro Western agenda and political parties. Media misrepresentation of the CSOs was connected with showcasing some politicized CSOs on TVs creating the illusion that all CSOs are connected with political parties.

The mistrust towards the Government was mainly connected with previous disappointments and informational gaps. For the previous disappointments, one of the participants said the following statement,

"About the government, I think, because of some disappointments that we had before. For lots of years now, it's really hard to trust somebody because we expect the same mistakes, maybe."

The information gap between the government and people is connected to the lack of appropriate information on what is happening in the country. The CSO representative also believes that this informational gap might be the important reason why people don't trust their government in the case of Georgia.

The participation is also prevented by the common perception that politics are dirty and people involved in it do not have good motives, which is mainly due to the lack of good

examples. The doubts on participation included also on national level of governance, as for the grassroot organizations it was described almost as non-existent.

Participation as a political process:

When asked if participation is a political process or non political process, most of the people took time to reflect and analyze their perception. Though most of them eventually answered that participation is in fact a political process, they had a hard time with several points. Though they acknowledge that impacting on decision making, encouraging youth participation and advocating for policy changes are part of political processes, they consider themselves as non-political actors. Hence, this was one of the main reasons that they don't want to be politicized or associated with any political parties.

4.2 Perceptions on Good Governance:

Unlike the perceptions on participation, the definition of good governance varied from interview to interview, and from one CSO to another. Key informants described it as institutions being democratic, transparent, accountable, and ensuring citizenry participation. Highlight the importance of the continuity of the processes contributing to good governance. Another key informant saw good governance as an access to the information that is generated in the state agencies to the citizens. For interviews, good governance was also associated with the using and investing of information communication technologies. Another key informant mentioned there might be 100 criterias for good governance, but mentioned the most important criteria is the assessment of the social contract and how it works in their country. This assessment includes the government's performance on human rights, public administration reform, anti-corruption work, and every direction of governance.

As for non-participants of the OGP processes, the majority mentioned good governance as a participatory and transparent decision making process. In addition to this, another common pattern was the highlight on agreeing on decisions on equal basis, for example, one CSO representative said the following,

"I would mean that this is the participatory process from the, let's say, service users and service providers, where all the parties are equally engaged, and it doesn't matter who is facilitating the process, but the process is quite transparent. It's acceptable for all the parties who take part in it and also it gives the chance to understand the benefits for both of the parties and finally, to agree on those."

The link between governance and human rights was also brought up by a grassroot organization representative, as provision of a sustainable environment to humans and helping them to protect their rights are the development goals of the political and institutional processes.

4.3 Geopolitics of Participation and Good Governance in Georgia:

Interesting occurrence of data pattern was the relevance of geopolitical influences and aspirations of Georgia to participation and good governance.

According to one of the key informants, Georgia wishes to become a Member of the European Union, which is their national goal and part of national security. Hence, considering all these factors, good governance, open governance, and transparency are what they need to be working on deeply. Another key informant added that the government believes that the international institutions see good governance as very successful in Georgia, so they don't want to lose this perception. For example one the key informants said,

"**They want to show international citizens basically, that they are very open, they are very transparent. And yes, they want to involve us there. But the implementation process always shows us what they really wanted from us.**"

Besides Georgia's pro western aspirations, the influence of international organizations in participation and good governance agenda is also mentioned. One of the key informants mentioned an example of how an international development organization and an embassy pushed for a good governance reform for implementation of their funded project. While this reform was on the agenda for four to five years, it was implemented after the push from the international community in Georgia. Hence, this strategy was sometimes used by CSOs to push their advocacy goals.

On the other hand, the geopolitical situation is sometimes working against the grassroot actors as they get some backlash from the people. As those people have so many stereotypes of "Europe" and CSOs being financed by "Americans."

4.4 Power and participation dynamics in the OGP Georgia:

All key informants provided similar answers that the government was not as active in regards to the open government's reform in Georgia due to the Covid-19 pandemic and changes in government. One key informant noted that the priorities, financial allocations and almost everything got changed in the government due to the recent pandemic.

However, there are some varied interpretations of participation processes in the past coming from the State representative and CSO informants. The State representative notes that the OGP process in Georgia was really active and it really triggered very important reforms within the country. The state representative explains this with the active participation of civil society organizations. Adding that they had realized that if there is good communication and engagement between the government and civil society organizations, they can deliver reforms that will have an impact for the societies.

However the key informants from the CSO side mentioned that besides the pandemic the political crisis and internal changes of coordinating body within the government of Georgia adversely affected previous participation dynamics. One of the key informants described their participation sometimes as false participation which does not really give them power to advocate for adoption and implementation of their proposed good governance reforms. An extract from the informants answer:

"We can say that, sometimes this is like false participation, like not truly involved in processes and they are using these participation mechanisms that they wanted to say yes, we are involving people to make decisions to make some changes in our decisions, but this is like a very starting process here. We are involved there. We somehow make some changes, but in the end, they are always doing what they want ..."

According to the key informant, there is a big number of actions and commitments for open governance that are not implemented. Hence, sometimes the action and commitment that was part of last year's action plan is included in the next year's action plan too, and then in the next one, and this lasts for about 10 years. An example is the Information act, which remains as a commitment since 2012. The key informant connects the problem of not implementing the Action plan with the political will for ninety percent of the time.

In addition to this, the participation dynamics recorded in the recent IRM report mentions that participation of the public was more on consultative level meaning that the public could give input.

Figure 5: Level of Public Influence during the Implementation of Action Plan (Source Gogidze,Gzirishvili, and Sikharulidze, 2019)

Level of Public Influence during Implementation of Action Plan		Midterm	End of Term
Empower	The government handed decision-making power to members of the public.		
Collaborate	There was iterative dialogue AND the public helped set the agenda.		
Involve	The government gave feedback on how public inputs were considered.		
Consult	The public could give inputs.	✔	✔
Inform	The government provided the public with information on the action plan.		
No Consultation	No consultation		

Conflict:

According to the key informants, there was one year when the Government did not take any commitments from the participant CSO. This happened when the coordination of OGP activities was in the Ministry of Justice and after that, CSOs made a rapid mechanism to report to the OGP steering committee that the Government is doing something wrong and asked help for making some changes in Georgia.

The escalation of the conflict is also seen in the documentation analysis of multiple open letters mentioned in section three of this thesis. This case that occurred in Georgia can serve as an example of the resistance of the authorities and civil organizations whose activities are aimed at protecting civil rights and fighting corruption. A number of employees of non-governmental organizations-members of the National Coordination Mechanism-the Open Government Forum of Georgia not only resisted, but also resigned their powers in connection with accusations of undermining civil rights and spreading fascism made by state bodies. This opinion was publicly expressed by the official authorities in the person of the Mayor of Tbilisi, Kakha Kaladze, who made slanderous statements, hinting that some NGOs in Georgia are politically radical and pursue fascist views, the chairman of the ruling party, Bidzina Ivanishvili, calls representatives of non-governmental organizations " active members of [the opposition party], and thanks to the media and other means, they oust and oppose organizations fighting corruption."

Solution:

And after this conflict, the coordination OGP was replaced in administration of the government of Georgia from the ministry of Justice. Secondly, the state representative mentioned a new format of the Council, which has been established in 2020, but hasn't yet held its first meeting. According to the CSO key informant, the Interagency Coordination Council is the new permanent body for OGP processes in Georgia, and the members of the civil society organizations and the representatives of state agencies have almost the same authorities. The key informants believe that it's a very strong council from the legal aspect, but it hasn't yet started to implement its real functions. They believe that the strength of the Council should be illustrated in the development of the new action plan and in its implementation.

CSO Participation in OGP Georgia:

The motivation behind CSO participation in the OGP processes is quite complementary among key informants. One of the main motivations of the CSO in the platform is the wish to increase the accountability of state actors. They want more transparency, more support for innovations and technologies, and more support for the involvement of citizens in the decision making process.

The informants from the State side believe that CSO's from the very first day and from the very inception of the open governance reform in Georgia are doing as much as it is possible to advocate the different issues. They are providing the government with new ideas and commitment, suggestions for the new action plans. They not only support the government when it is necessary, but also monitor as critically as it should be. The State informants also believe that the establishment of the OGP Council, was very innovative for Georgia because of the right to vote for CSOs. As the key informant says,-

"These kinds of opportunities are very useful, I guess for them and it is not a surprise. They are wishing to grasp the opportunity and take the table at the seat when it is offered."

Before going further it is also important to understand who is participating from the CSO side. From the list provided there are only six organizations working mainly on national level with specific areas of focus. There were no grassroot and small scale organizations involved. The State informant, talking about the general public and civil society organizations, mentioned that in some cases they have a very good background on working on different issues and advocating relevant change and also in some cases supporting the fixing of these issues by their human and financial resources. Hence, highlighting that usually strong organizations are involved in the OGP processes.

Besides mentioning that all the key CSO organizations, who are also the key players in Georgia are represented in the council and in the forum, added that the membership for new CSOs are always open. In this situation, the key informants from the CSO side also mentioned that there is enough CSO representation and the processes are open for new membership, finishing the statement by saying,-

"Basically all the interested parties who want to be members of the consultative group, are members of the consultative group."

One of the key informants suggests that sometimes they try to involve some organizations with their specific expertise to co-author commitment suggestions. The informant added that sometimes they mobilise little organisations to write down commitments. The same informant believed that maybe the grassroots organizations are involved in local level Open Municipality initiatives, so considering the national level CSO participation in this case as reasonable.

During the interview with non-participant of the OGP processes, none of the organizations heard about Open Government Partnership. The non-participant were mainly selected from the regions of Georgia representing a diverse group of grass root, youth, small and new organizations. Only one of those organizations mentioned one of the key informant participant organizations as an ally for advocacy. The non-participant CSOs did mention their interest in participating in national level governance reform, but at the same time noting that local level participation is way easier for them. One of the main reasons for the difficulties mentioned is the access to resources and international aid. The non-participants mentioned how for them to obtain funds usually requires involvement of bigger national organizations. Whereas, the key informants did mention that either their organizations or other organizations involved in the OGP processes have received funds for supporting and monitoring the OGP commitments.

State mentioned organizing 10 public consultation meetings with citizens in the regions of Georgia, where in some cases they have invited some CSOs. Unfortunately, none of the participants have heard or participated in these meetings.

Government Participation in OGP Georgia:

Looking at the formal members of the interagency council, all the state agencies at the central level, all the ministries are represented at the deputy minister level. The state representative described their participation as an opportunity, refusing to use the word power, to contribute to good governance by working on policy level. The state representative, talking

about participation of the public servants and their motivation in general, mentioned the highest political level decision. Hence, setting the tone of hierarchy of the central power and even using that public servant have to participate in this process. The state informant mentioned the following example,-

"The decision about the importance of good governance, open governance and public administration reform is defined in the governmental program and because of it, this is the document that every central institution will plan their activities and their objectives for the next four or five years."

The key informants fromCSO side find the participation of public servants below average and inconsistent. They do not believe their motivation is high, they are not willing to implement additional obligations. It starts as an initiative, then it becomes an obligation, so if they are not implementing it, then it means failing, which becomes the reason why they are not happy.

The inconsistency of participation is explained by the changes of the responsible people from the government. In some agencies that the key informant is working it is easy to communicate, but for other agencies it depends. In fact most of the public servants approached for this research have not replied to the multiple emails.

Stakeholder mapping:

Based on the interviews I have identified the following stakeholders: Public Servants, OGP Secretariat working from the government administrations, International Organizations, participant civil society organizations (meaning experience nation wide organizations) and non participant civil society organizations (meaning grassroot, youth, new and small).

Influence

Public Servants

OGP Secretariat

International Organizations

Participant Civil Society Organizations

Interest

Non-participant CSOs

The stakeholder mapping indicates the level of interest and influence in OGP processes for each stakeholder based on the information provided from the qualitative research. It can be assumed that public servants have the highest influence but the lowest interest. For international organizations and OGP secretariat it is safe to assume high interest and high influence. As for participant CSOs, they do have high interest and even though they just received the power of voting in the OGP processes, them being vocal and raising issues also qualifies as a high influence group. Leaving the non-participant CSO with high interest, but low level of influence due to being left out form the participation processes and having lack of access to resources and funds.

5. Discussion of the Qualitative Research Results and Conclusion:

The perception of participation among the participants of the research was rather close to Williams and White, who saw it as more process rather than empowering or manipulative action. In fact there were some cases of manipulative participation described by the key informants, which may go under Escobar's or Sach's reading. However the Civil Society resistance is proving th White's theory that participation is not a predetermined process and it can not happen without presence of conflict. In fact, it is no surprise to look at the conflict however of its nature as a healthy process and indication of real participation .

This situation resonates with Williams (2004, p.573) as he notes,-

"Actually existing participation, for all its shortcomings, provides a range of opportunities through which state power can be actively called to account. These opportunities will not be isolated moments of liberation or professional 'reversals', nor do they require a post-developmental retreat to idealised 'local' spaces to escape participation's totalising power. Rather, they will be found within longer-term political struggles and reshaped political networks that link themselves to a discourse of rights and a fuller sense of citizenship."

The power relations in the OGP processes are rather dynamic, as it was noted the State had to share some voting powers with CSOs to bring them back to the participation processes. It is clear how the State wants to please the international organization based on their pro-Western aspirations, but this motivation is becoming an obligation on the shoulders of public servants. Hence it is crucial to look at the motivation of the public servant not only from the perspective of hierarchical command, but also reasoning for motivation.

Post Development authors have highlighted multiple times about the exclusion of the vulnerable groups, which is relevant to the OGP Georgia. This is due to small, grassroot, youth and new organizations may not be aware of OGP processes. However, by saying that the OGP processes are open for anyone to join, it is not enough for anyone to be aware about it. Besides awareness, as the CSO meter indicates there is a divide between established nation wide CSOs and grassroot organization, which was also evident in the qualitative research. This divide is mainly connected to access to funds and capability to have impact on national policy making.

As in the literature review, in the qualitative research finding the understanding of good governance varies, raising the importance for a consensus on good governance agenda point mentioned by Turnbull, S. (2016). The role of Open Government Partnership in bringing this consensus among various stakeholders can not be concluded within this research due to looking at just one country that has so many various internal and external factors.

The geopolitical factor for Georgia plays a role both for participation processes and good governance agenda. As their aspiration to join European Union becomes a way to show off their progress and please the international actors giving some additional power influence to them. This in its turn as mentioned in the qualitative research also has a negative impact among some groups who do not fancy pro Western values.This type of unequal power relation and promotion of Western values is also observed by many post development authors.

6. Recommendations:

Consider the above overview of the literature, qualitative research findings and analysis. Following can be recommended:

1. In order to understand the role of Open Governance Partnership in facilitating the development and consensus of a good governance agenda, it is important to do a comparative analysis within multiple countries, as one country dynamic is not enough for conclusions.

2. To understand the local realities of participation on local level and impact on decision making on municipal level to conduct case study of local level OGP.

3. In order to ensure more inclusive participation and voice of vulnerable groups, it is important to be more proactive in engaging vulnerable groups, small and grassroot organizations in the OGP processes.

Appendices:

Appendix A: Guide for interview for the participants of the process for government agency representatives.

1. How do you see your individual role in the OGP platform?
2. What is/has been your and/or your agency's motivation to be engaged in OGP?
3. How did you contribute to the action plan creation within OGP processes?
4. Were you involved in the action plan implementation processes?
   a. If yes, how?
5. How did you monitor the action plan implementation?
   a. What were the outcomes and lessons learnt?
   b. Were there any recommendations?
6. At which stage of OGP processes have you been most active?
   a. Why?
7. How would you describe participation?
   a. Can you describe the participation dynamics during the OGP processes?
   b. What forms and means were used for participation?
8. How would you describe your relationship with the involved CSOs?
9. In your opinion, why do CSO representatives participate in this process?
   a. How would you assess their participation?
   b. Do you think there is enough CSO representation in the OGP processes?
   c. Why?
10. How would you assess the participation of other government agency representatives in the OGP processes?
    a. Why do they participate?
11. How would you describe the role of open parliament?
12. Have you personally or your agency come across any challenges or difficulties in the OGP processes?
    a. Were there any challenges that any of your peer government agency representatives or agencies faced?
13. What is your understanding of political and non-political participation?
    a. How would you label yourself?
    b. What does it mean to you?
14. What is good governance in your understanding?

15. How would you describe the role of OGP in good governance?

16. What would you change in the OGP framework for better participation and good governance outcomes?

17. How would you evaluate the efficacy of the OGP framework and its impact on good governance from the case of Georgia?

Appendix B: Guide for interview for the participants of the process for CSO representatives.

1. How do you see your individual role in the OGP platform?

2. What has been your and/or your agency's motivation to be engaged in OGP?

3. How did you contribute to the action plan creation within OGP processes?

4. Were you involved in the action plan implementation processes?

    a) If yes, how?

5. How did you monitor the action plan implementation?

    a) What were the outcomes and lessons learnt?

    b) Were there any recommendations?

6. At which stage of OGP processes have you been most active and why?

7. How would you describe participation?

    a. Can you describe the participation dynamics during the OGP processes?

    b. What forms and means were used for participation?

8. Have you come across any challenges or difficulties in this process or was it all smooth and successful?

9. How would you describe your relationship with government representatives during these participation processes?

10. In your opinion why government agency representatives participate in this process?

a) How would you assess their participation?

b) Why?

11. How would you describe the participation of other CSOs in the OGP processes?

    a. How would you describe your relationship with other CSO representatives during these participation processes?

    b. How can other CSOs join the process?

    c. Do you think there is enough CSO presence in the process?

    d. Are there any restraints or challenges towards civil society participation?

13. What is your understanding of political and non-political participation?

    a) How would you label yourself ?

    b) What does it mean to you?

14. How would you describe the role of open parliament?

15. What is good governance in your understanding?

16. How would you describe the role of OGP in good governance?

17. What would you change in the OGP framework for better participation and good governance outcomes?

18. How would you evaluate the efficacy of the OGP framework and its impact on good governance from the case of Georgia?

Appendix C: Questionnaire for the non-participants of the process.

1. Can you please tell me about you and your organization and what is your role in the organization?

2. Can you describe what participation is for you and your organization?

3. How would you describe good governance?

4. What is your understanding of political and non-political participation?

a) How would you label yourself ?

5. Did you and/or your organization have the opportunity to engage in dialogue or reform making with the current government?

Can you describe the details and how?

6. Have you engaged with other civil society organizations and or networks ?

How was this experience? Any challenges

7. Have you heard about OGP? From where?

8. Have you tried to join the platform? If yes how was the process? What has been your motivation to join this platform? If not, why?

9. How would you describe the role of OGP in good governance?

10. How would you evaluate the efficacy of the OGP framework and its impact on good governance from the case of Georgia?

Appendix D: Consent forms.

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Thesis Assignment for Academic Year 2020-2021

Palacky University Olomouc, Faculty of Science

Department of Development and Environmental Studies

The research aims to analyze the role of participation in good governance by looking at the case of the open government partnership platform in Georgia.

Consent for participation in an online focus group

- The participant agrees to voluntarily take part in this focus group for the research purposes.
- Participant understands that they may withdraw their consent to participate during the focus group or reject to answer any question. Participants may also withdraw the permission for using their data provided during the focus group and within one week after the focus group (in this case the information will be removed).
- Participant understands that their participation requires about 1 hour of time for an online focus group.
- Participant assures that they are aware about the aim of the research and its nature, as well as had the chance to ask questions about the research prior to the focus group.
- Participant gives an authorization to the researcher to record the zoom focus group.
- Participant understands that their full focus group, all the shared thoughts, ideas and information will be dealt with confidentiality protecting the anonymity of the participant. This will be ensured by changing/disguising the names of the participant, or disguising any other detail that may reveal their identity.
- Participant is also aware that anonymized extracts from their focus group may be used and/or quoted in the thesis assignment, which will be presented to the evaluating universities, and might also be published and/or presented in conferences and other public events.
- Participant understands that signed consent forms and zoom recordings will be kept under the responsibility of the researcher until the defense of the thesis assignment.

· Participant allows that the identity protected transcript of focus group be kept for 2 years after the defense of the thesis assignment.

· Participant realizes that they are free to contact the research for further clarification and information for any question and/or issue.

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Signature of participant   Date

Arman Azizyan (hereinafter the researcher)

Email: armazizyan@gmail.com, Tel: +420773281639

Thesis Assignment for Academic Year 2020-2021

Palacky University Olomouc, Faculty of Science

Department of Development and Environmental Studies

The research aims to analyze the role of participation in good governance by looking at the case of the open government partnership platform in Georgia.

Consent for participation in an online in-depth interview

- The participant agrees to voluntarily take part in this interview for the research purposes.
- Participant understands that they may withdraw their consent to participate during the interview or reject to answer any question. Participants may also withdraw the permission for using their data provided during the interview within one week after the interview (in this case the information will be removed).
- Participant understands that their participation requires about 1 hour of time for an online in-depth interview.
- Participant assures that they are aware about the aim of the research and its nature, as well as had the chance to ask questions about the research prior to the interview.
- Participant gives an authorization to the researcher to record the zoom interview.
- Participant understands that their full interview, all the shared thoughts, ideas and information will be dealt with confidentiality protecting the anonymity of the participant. This will be ensured by changing/disguising the names of the participant, or disguising any other detail that may reveal their identity.

- Participant is also aware that anonymized extracts from their interview may be used and/or quoted in the thesis assignment, which will be presented to the evaluating universities, and might also be published and/or presented in conferences and other public events.
- Participant understands that signed consent forms and zoom recordings will be kept under the responsibility of the researcher until the defense of the thesis assignment.
- Participant allows that the identity protected transcript of interview be kept for 2 years after the defense of the
- thesis assignment.
- Participant realizes that they are free to contact the research for further clarification and information for any question and/or issue.

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Signature of participant Date

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