EUROCITIES Statement on Open Data

Information is of course a powerful resource. Responding to the opportunities and challenges of open data requires innovative and creative thinking, using new solutions and existing resources.

The data that local authorities collect is an extremely valuable resource. City governments, together with different stakeholders, are increasingly tapping into this to deliver new services, improve liveability, stimulate business and engage and empower citizens.

Open data can be used as leverage to stimulate the transition to modern (local) government fit for the continuous digitisation of our society.

The opening of private sector data also has great potential for added social and economic value. However for the purpose of this statement we concentrate on public sector data.

BENEFITS OF OPEN DATA

Open data for economic growth

Opening up public sector data and making use of available resources can unlock the benefits from untapped economic opportunities. The 2011 European Commission communication on open data states that opening and re-using public sector information can potentially create economic gains of up to €40 billion annually in the EU.

Transparency

Local authorities are actively pursuing open data strategies to increase transparency, and collaborate with citizens and the private sector in developing services from this data. Citizens are increasingly 'internet citizens', who expect city services to be available online. Re-using public sector data can lead to the development of improved, more efficient online public services, whilst increasing transparency by providing more information to citizens and developing more open forms of government.

Quick responses to rapidly evolving problems

Local authorities can use their data to provide (real time) information to address issues from traffic congestion to peak load electricity management. Other services such as reporting tools can allow citizens to report local problems to the council just by locating them on maps. Not only are decisions made and solutions found more quickly; this approach also drives citizen participation.

Citizen engagement

Open data can also stimulate behavioural change and citizen engagement as it relates to issues such as: citizens' energy use; housing energy efficiency; real time public transport information; and easy access to online information (regarding everything from public bike rental to cultural

events). Hosting hackathons and open data days promotes co-creation and user-driven innovation.

Improved city administrations

Merging data and information digitally leads to improved collaboration between city departments and more efficient internal information sharing. This can also lead to improved e-government services being developed by public administrations.

Addressing societal challenges

One of the key benefits of making data available on open platforms is its potential to address societal challenges, for example:

- encourage and develop digital inclusion
- enhance the sustainability of healthcare systems
- improve sustainable mobility (e.g. real time public transport information, traffic flows)
- develop new services to measure and cut GHG emissions and change energy behaviour and increase energy efficiency
- increase government transparency and build citizen trust
- activate and strengthen quadruple helix co-creation (research, government, industry, civil society)

Smart cities

Open data can play an important role in the European Commission's Smart Cities and Communities Initiative. It can be used to develop smart technologies integrating data from the ICT, energy and mobility sectors. For a city to be truly smart, it must have smart citizens and with open data, they have the capacity to take the initiative, to 'do it for themselves', to innovate and to co-create.

CHALLENGES IN OPENING AND RE-USING PUBLIC SECTOR DATA

Financial

Working with open data requires careful planning, and city governments need to allocate a budget that guarantees the success of their endeavours. Costs associated with re-use may be marginal in most cases, and with the potential gain in efficiency it could prove to be a zero-cost operation. But for some processes, such as building open data platforms that enable API data release, linked data or server extensions, additional costs exist. Given the current economic climate, this can be a considerable barrier for many local authorities.

Administrative

City administrations need to develop organisational approaches aimed at disclosure and access to data involving all departments, developing common criteria for data disclosure and possibly the creation of dedicated data management teams. Developing an internal open data strategy can be challenging in terms of reorganising city administrations to alter existing management processes, legacy (existing IT departments, protective software) and purchase structures.

Privacy

Data protection issues can often be used as a barrier to publishing data. It is vital that data is aggregated to the correct level before publication and that the privacy of the individual is protected.

Data format

To maximise the useability of the data it should be made available in open, non-proprietary and easily processable, machine readable formats. Local authorities should use internationally accepted semantic ontologies and link the data to other open data formats. This requires new skillsets in the administration. Releasing data in human readable format will also maximise its reach and effect. Publishing mechanisms and portals for open data should aim to make data accessible and support its processing. It should not focus on creating data repositories (storage), unless the local authority sees added value in this.

Data quality

Data should not only be published in machine-processable formats. Disclosing meta-level information such as, for example, their management process and validity period is also valuable. There is a need to identify institutional audit mechanisms that guarantee the quality of data and the protection of sensitive information. An efficient feedback mechanism for open data users is also advisable.

Accountability

There must be a clear licence covering re-use of the data. Establishing a clear licence between the licensor (in this case the local authority) and the licensees (those using and developing services from the data) will address concerns about liability. Permissions and service level agreements need to be respected and protected in re-use licences.

Legal

The revised EU Directive on re-use of public sector information provides a good framework for minimum harmonisation of national practices and regulations on the re-use of public sector data, consistent with the relevant access regime. Whilst the revised Directive can help remove some of the barriers to the growth of the open data market it must be ensured that EU level action does not result in excessive administrative and cost burdens for local authorities.

RECOMMENDATIONS TO CITIES [1]

For city authorities developing an open data strategy, it is important to:

- have the correct internal organisational structure
- have well trained staff to ensure quality and privacy of data published
- publish data in an open machine readable format, and make it available on a well organised open data portal
- aim to engage citizens and build trust
- support citizen engagement with, for example, local hackathons and data

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[1] The EUROCITIES open data guidebook will be published by the end of 2013 and will set out a comprehensive overview of the benefits and challenges associated with open data as well as technical guidance for local authorities

demonstrations

RECOMMENDATIONS ON EU LEGISLATION AND FUNDING

Further harmonising re-use rules across the EU will lead to increased data sharing and improved service delivery from available data. Our comments on the revised Directive on the re-use of public sector information and other areas for future focus are:

- Public sector bodies that generate a substantial part of their operating costs from public service tasks should be allowed to charge over the marginal costs of production.

- Data should only have to be made available in machine-readable form and together with metadata where it is feasible and appropriate to do so.

- A European standard licence model would be helpful to align the different licencing models and to maximise the potential of using datasets originating from different data-owners.

- The Connecting Europe Facility should provide funding for open data infrastructure and processing, and take account of the needs of local government.

- Horizon 2020 funding should address the development of innovative open data projects, with a focus on open data for smart cities.

RECOMMENDATIONS TO MEMBER STATES

Member states should engage with local governments in the implementation of the revised EU Directive on the re-use of public sector information.

Member states should consult with local open data experts when developing any open data and open government strategies.

There is also room for more national coordination on open data. Municipalities often have to drive the development of open data themselves, but lack the resources to do so. National open data coordination strategies and platforms could offer better value, quality and quantity.

RECOMMENDATIONS TO PRIVATE SECTOR

The re-use of data can also be further enhanced through privately-owned companies opening up their data to government in order to support urban development and governance, without such privately owned data becoming publicly available.