Making Open Data Work For Local Government

At the Open Government Data Camp in Warsaw (http://ogdcamp.org) on 20 and 21 October a workshop was held on 'making open government data work for local government'.

If open government data is here to stay then only because it has become an instrument to government bodies themselves, and not because government are releasing data only because of compliance with transparency and re-use demands from others (central government or citizens)

This workshop started from the premise that there is opportunity in local governments treating open data as a policy instrument to find new solutions to the issues local communities face, amongst others in coming up with new ways of working in light of budget cuts.

Contributions were made by the local open government data initiatives of the cities of Berlin, Munich (Germany), Amsterdam, Rotterdam, Enschede (Netherlands), Linz and Vienna (Austria), who all shortly presented the current status of their initiatives. The workshop was hosted by Ton Zijlstra (Open Data Enschede, and ePSIplatform.eu). Slides of the introductory presentation are available from http://www.slideshare.net/TonZijlstra/how-to-make-the-case-for-local-open-data.

The workshop participants worked in little groups on identifying local issues where open government data could be used towards new approaches by local government and citizens.

This was done in three steps:

1. Identify issues that are currently relevant to your local community.
2. Try to define which datasets might be connected to these issues.
3. Discuss what new steps are possible, using the datasets mentioned.

Listed below is the collected output (25 issues in total) of this working format. It can be used by local open data initiatives as inspiration source to increase availability of local government data, as well as to help engage local government bodies in making effective use of open data as a policy instrument.

Issue	Datasets	Approaches
Mobility interruptions for commuters (due to flash flooding of e.g. underpasses after rain fall, road works)	Sewers, sewer maintenance, height lines, road blocks, public transport, traffic intensity.	Real time route planning, alternatives/detour routing.
Stimulating local business (e.g. by reducing waste)	Data released by businesses (e.g. restaurants announcing special deals to avoid throwing away food) , public transport data, business locations.	Announcing specials/deals (through location based services) combined with public transport data from your current location to where the deal can be found.
No budget to jump on a good mobility opportunity (Helsinki suburb wanted a good rail connection and can now get it but is missing the 2 million Euro to realize it)	Demographics: how many local inhabitants commute to the city, how much new revenue will come in from new inhabitants of ongoing building project, other demographics used in municipal planning.	Is expected new revenue a reason to offset the needed investment right now?

Moving a healthcare center for the elderly from hard to reach location, to new location that is central geographically but just as hard to reach.	Distribution of age groups across the municipality, average travel time to locations in the municipality.	Finding a more optimal location by optimizing travel time for target groups.
Empty building lots versus difficulty to get a building permit.	Zoning information, which building permits are now in the 'pipeline' and where will building permits be possible in the future.	Setting realistic expectations on possibilities to build inside a city (if I wait 5 yrs, is there a chance that....)
Justify or deny building permits to maintain livability of neighborhoods with changing demographic make-up. Increasing efficiency of available building stock / activities.	Geographic data, demographic data and projections,	
Aging problems in a municipality	Demographic data on neighborhood level and projections, professions of citizens, educational information.	What will happen, what is the professional make-up of remaining working population (is it enough to be self sustainable), job/career expectations of young people, justifying immigration.
Increasing active citizen participation where budget cuts reduce service level city can offer, like park / green area maintenance	Cost, frequency, activities, make-up of services, impact of participation on micro / activity scale, demographics	Use data to be able to let citizens make informed decisions or negotiate with the city about their participation.
Boosting morale of a previous self-contained community that is now being absorbed in a metropolitan area and loosing previous character.	Demographic data and projections, city plans for future positioning.	Using data to let neighborhoods create a new future oriented narrative on how they want to shape their direct living environment.
Real time congestion fighting during daily commutes.	Real time positioning of public transport, real time traffic intensity (based on mobile phone density, or road detection systems), bike lanes, geodata, commuting patterns	Multi modal mobility planning
Reducing child care / kindergarden / school waiting lists, and optimizing with actual place availability.	Schools, kinder gardens, child care facilities, place availability, waiting lists, info on type/orientation of facility, cantine food choices, quality reports, inspection reports, opening hours, location reachability, demographic changes/expectations, transportdata	Parents better able to optimize school / kinder garden / child care choices based on realistic expectations of being able to place their child there.
Reducing retirement home waiting lists.	Similar as above.	Similar as above.
Lack of transparency in spending, suspicion of corruption	Spending data, subsidies given, procurement contracts	Making more public scrutiny possible
Making mobility more efficient	Real time traffic, transport, and road block, traffic jam data.	
Inefficient / ineffective procurement of IT systems	cost/spending data, quality of service data, procurement data	
How to find near-by and the right doctor or health professional	Locaton of doctors, healthcare facilities, availability/opening hours, quality/inspection reports, track record regarding certain	

	diseases/afflictions	
Which restaurants should I avoid / choose, reducing need for healthcare for food poisoning.	Restaurant inspection reports	Publish them.
Making school choice easier	School inspection reports, parent/pupil feedback	
Increasing accessibility for wheelchairs, signaling where access is currently not possible.	Broken elevators in (public accesible) buildings	E.g. as done in wheelmap.org
Reducing urban segregation (in Helsinki some areas are in decline, others rising, likewise in Rotterdam)	housing price indexes, social housing quanitity and location, crime statistics, education data, location related to services available, citizen generated data	Start mapping trends
Improving Bratislava (public) transport and roads		
Increasing trust and participation of Bratislava citizens		Use data as input for conversations.
More people in Birmingham want an allotment (garden) than space is available. At this moment it's not possible to identify potential spaces to make new allotments.	Landowners, Index of allotments (already in OSM), Destinations of land, Quality of the land, History of the land (former use, where there chemical dumps <for mutated tomatoes), Polution (environment), Health figures of the neighborhood , Criminal facts (for tomatoe thiefs), Health figures of people having an allotment (comparing with other people)	It seems there is a need for an overview of public or privately held spaces without destination which are potential for allotments. IDEAS: temporary parks, matchmaking facility
Bad accessibility, routing for bikers/cyclists of the center of Utrecht due to a lot of construction work. If there are any routes, they changes weekly.	Original infrastructure, Construction works, actual and planned, Actual data from constructors about situation, Detour plans, maps, Real time data about movements (how's the flow going in the new situation, go with the flow or go where no-one goes), Public censoring (through telcom operators for example)	
Lack of cheap, low profile empty spaces for start-ups, artists, projects, local initiatives, in newly built urbanized area Leidsche Rijn (NL).	Who's offering empty space, Property registration (owners of space), Where are empty buildings, Use energy data to track buildings that are not used, Planned destination, purpose of space, Price data, Identify potential users by screening corporate registers, Initiatives in the neighborhood (are they registered, for example by tracking who received connect types of subsidies)	Create a marketplace for spaces.

Apart from specific issues as listed above a few general observations were also made:

- There is a need for standardized data elements – good practice examples are welcome.
- Local government should explore crowd sourcing as way to collect citizen data.
- Data can be used in general as a good way to start increasing participation, by making the data input for conversations. See for instance http://www.zylstra.org/blog/archives/2011/09/data_is_a_socia.html

About the ePSIplatform.eu:
ePSIplatform.eu is your one-stop-shop for all information and developments on the re-use of government held information and open data. It provides you with material and examples of open data initiatives across the EU, and is funded by the European Commission to help raise awareness for open government data, as well as stimulate community building.

You are kindly invited to join the ePSIplatform by registering as a member (free of course). You can connect to others, share your opinions as well as form groups. Get inspired, and help bring open data forward.

Ton Zijlstra is the community steward of the ePSIplatform.eu. Feel free to contact him at ton@epsiplatform.eu with any questions, suggestions or feedback.