

## Events, hackathons and challenge series - stimulating open data reuse

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### **“We opened up some data, held a hackathon, fed people pizza, now where are all the cool apps?”**

When engaging with the open data community, an organisation may hold an event to achieve one or more of the following aims: data awareness; understanding demand for, and improving the quality of, their datasets; and to encourage the reuse of datasets to create apps and other services.

This session will explore a classification scheme placing these (and other) aims against the sort of activities that organisations might engage in to achieve them.

A rich source of experience in this regard is [Apps for Europe](#), an EU-funded support network with a mission to help turn open data based apps into viable businesses. The project developed a concept named "Business Lounge" which can be deployed at local app contests and hack events across the continent. The concept is focused on accelerating the relationship between developers and investors.

The culmination of these open data events is an International Business Lounge at Future Everything where the best apps, either invited after a local Business Lounge, or selected from an online competition, have the opportunity to pitch their idea to win investment for the future development of their product.

This session was used to demonstrate to an organisation what they might get out of different activities, and in addition, explore what the blockers might be for ensuring sustainable data reuse following the investment of data publishers and consumers at such events. Reflecting on experiences from Apps for Europe and the Open Data Challenge Series (a programme managed by NESTA and the ODI), significant investment in time and resources that can create credible services, products and businesses was explored.

### **Further:**

People present at this workshop were asked what their experiences were w.r.t. the organization of events such as hackathons.

Simon Whitehouse said that a couple of years ago they organized a hackathon where 2 really interesting concepts were introduced, but nothing happened afterwards. Concepts, he said, tend to only show results when receiving a certain amount of funding.

Amanda Smith introduced us to the activities of the ODI & NESTA & their efforts to facilitate Open Data events and the way this was done.

Eva Beers told us about Apps for Europe. She also introduced us to the aim of the OKFN organization & the Business lounge which aims at bringing together business owners, developers and organisations in a speed dating effort. She cited the example of Citybike as an example. One of the lessons she learned was that one has to foremost find out what businesses need & want in this respect.

Alberto Abella, also from OKFN, pointed out that investors are not at all interested in technology. One needs to demonstrate the business opportunities, the possible revenue to be made. He also made us aware of 4 important elements to keep in mind: the necessity of open licenses, data models should be shared, the data must be available in real-time and the importance of Geo location.

All present introduced themselves.

The following details were discussed:

- A hackaton is organized, and nothing happens afterwards;
- How do you present interesting ideas to incubators or investors;
- OGC (Open Geospatial Consortium) organizes something similar to hackatons, but this is mostly to test their own standards in the open geospatial space;
- How can we make sure that apps created at hackatons are picked up and are further developed;
- What about interoperability of standards used and scalability. Open data does not scale enough at present;
- Should government run an open data community to deal with the challenge of apps conceptualized at hackatons but not followed up;
- Should government pay for the further development of apps defined at hackatons;
- How can we further develop a shared data model making use of open source techniques & open data.
- How can people work together with private companies and the voluntary sector to make things happen in this regard;
- Having developed a CKAN portal, there is no uptake of the data. How can we make this happen;
- Although there is no problem in engaging the community in hackatons, businesses don't seem to be interested in the apps conceptualized in these hackatons;
- There is doubt whether present data portals address the needs of the business community;
- The idea of setting up registration of some sorts to facilitate feedback was rejected by most present;
- People need and want to hear about challenges and success stories when organizing OD events;
- One shouldn't just look at hackatons in realizing added economic value. Hackatons are perhaps not the right instrument to do this. Hackatons are mostly organized to engage people from the local community and nothing more;

- We should focus also on open data delivered by private companies. This is mostly not happening at present;
- The maintenance of apps after events is mostly overlooked, but is an important issue;
- The market for apps conceived at hackatons must be big enough in order for business to be interested in further developing them;
- Business will always develop their own apps, not apps created at hackatons;
- How do we go from a hackaton to product development;
- There is general consensus that there are very few hackatons resulting in an app which makes money;
- Hackatons are not only about producing successful apps, it teaches data providers to ask the right questions when talking to developers;
- A goal of hackatons or similar events could be to explore ideas who will hopefully survive and live on as part of other products;
- An example is Scotland where they started from a real world problem: how do we improve health in our country and what are the constraints that they have on spending and the aging population. People clearly needed information in this regard and access to that info. A successful open source ecosystem was developed together with all stakeholders to approach these challenges. An ex-nurse developed a prototype of this system. This was then trialed in a local small community which then caught the interest of the Scottish government who funded the development and roll-out. This is an example of a successful effort going from a blueprint developed at a hackaton to full roll-out. Challenges were the quality of the data and the willingness of certain entities at government to open up. There were clear benefits for all which explains the success of this project;
- It was pointed out that one does not need to be a developer these days to build apps. One can use and combine “out of the box” existing code;
- It is difficult enough to find people who are experts in a certain field and developers at the same time;
- The value of linked open data is discussed;
- Open data and the use thereof is not a priority of incubators and investors, they have their own priorities;

It was agreed upon that this workshop was necessary and should be repeated.