

# Empowering citizens to make meaningful use of open data

## Results in Brief

### Open data empowers citizens to co-create new public service solutions

Digital progress brings an abundance of data about our public and private lives. Yet how many people know that much is publicly available and can be used?

Open4Citizens unites that data with the citizens who can best use it for innovations that support everyday life.



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Open data can be defined as data which we, or our surrounding infrastructure (for example internet services or roads sensors) constantly produce. Given that it does not include personal, identifiable information, EU regulations stipulate that it be made publicly available. Offering evidence-based understanding about the functioning of urban environments and how they evolve over time, open data can act as a real driver for impactful innovation.

However, if citizens are to benefit from this opportunity, the current distance between them and the sources of open data need to be reduced.

The EU-supported Open4Citizens project set out to bridge this gap by creating opportunities for stakeholders to co-design solutions based on open data to enhance community cooperation and public services. The project did so by founding not only spaces (such as the OpenDataLab) or events (such as hackathons), but by inculcating a wider culture of open data engagement.

## Linking data supply to demand

So far, it has chiefly been private companies that have seized the open data opportunities for the creation of innovative and useful services (such as train schedules or public procedures). The Open4Citizens team wanted to raise awareness amongst citizens about the possibilities that open data offers for a new generation of services to improve everyday life.

One way that the project did this was through the organisation of hackathons, where interested parties and specialists from start ups, the world of IT and public administration, collaborated on collectively agreed tasks. As project coordinator Prof Nicola Morelli explains, “By involving citizens, public authorities, data owners, students and others, we created the conditions to link open data demand to supply. The hackathons clarified what can be done with the data, alongside outlining ways to organise and publish it.”

Prof Morelli cites an example from Milan where the theme of the first hackathon was to increase data transparency about public road works in the city. An app was developed offering information to property owners along the metro route, during periods of public works. It has subsequently been integrated into the Milan metro website.

Open4Citizens is also working to create a series of physical or virtual locations called ‘OpenDataLabs’ in each of the five pilot cities (Copenhagen, Karlstad, Rotterdam, Milan and Barcelona). These will function as hubs for stakeholders to develop innovative services based on open data.

## A more self-service culture for citizen engagement

Open4Citizens substantively contributes to the EU’s objective to increase transparency, especially with the management of public data. As public servants often do not know the value of the resource they manage, so they under-utilise it. Indeed, public administrations are often requested to publish their data, but in many cases do not. As Prof Morelli elaborates, “Open4Citizens has helped to explain the value of open data, the need for services it can help develop, along with a better understanding of which data formats or aggregations are most useful.”

The team are currently further developing the OpenDataLabs, to make them more than primarily information centres. Rather, they are intended to be places for experimentation and the active incubation of ideas, where innovations based on open data will be matched to those related to public administration or research.

# Keywords

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brainstorming

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