On September 5, the Smart Country project partnered with the city of Münster to organize a workshop on the topic of open data. Participants collaborated to identify the potential that local-level open data offer nonprofit organizations.

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In many communities, the approach taken to open data has been strictly supply-driven. Public administrators make those datasets available that the community’s various departments feel are suitable for publication and whose preparation requires as little time and effort as possible.

A demand-driven perspective has often been lacking in the area of open data. Which local-level data is the public really interested in? Communities which have been addressing the topic of open data for years are often in contact with developers who volunteer their time to create applications based on publicly available data. Hackathons, for example, make it possible for public administrators to interact with tech-savvy members of civil society. One group,
however, has been neglected in these demand-driven efforts: nonprofit organizations.

On September 5, the Smart Country project partnered with the city of Münster (Thomas Werner, citeq) to organize a workshop for nonprofits located in or near the city. The goal of the workshop was to identify which open data would be useful for the organizations’ work. The participants were mostly representatives of local charitable organizations, such as Arbeiter-Samariter-Bund, Lebenshilfe, and Bürgernetz e.V., as well as municipal employees, including those working with statistics and data.

How can open data support nonprofit organizations?

Open data can be used by nonprofit groups in a variety of ways: documenting where funding is needed, creating reports or articles based on hard data, identifying which social issues will play a role in the community in the future, etc. During the workshop, we examined the basics of open data. We looked at how data can be integrated into an organization’s work and applied to practical situations. We showed not only that open data are available, but also that they can be used to drive change. In addition, we presented various sources of open data and illustrated how they are being deployed. Together with the participants, we created a list of useful datasets that should be published by the city of Münster. At the end of the workshop, the concept of an Open-Data Steering Group was introduced, which would help Münster’s public administrators consider on an ongoing basis civil society’s perspective in the area of open data. In their written feedback, the vast majority of participants
said they would like to be involved in the group. (Note: Not all participants were from Münster.)

The idea for the open-data workshop originated with open-data activist Nathan Coyle from the UK, whom the project team met a year ago when traveling through England and Scotland to learn more about open data there. Communities beyond Münster have also expressed an interest in including nonprofit organizations in the development and implementation of open-data strategies, allowing them to potentially follow Münster’s example. The open-data workshop is part of the project activities geared toward creating a sample catalogue of open data at the local level. A prototype for North Rhine-Westphalia was developed in May. In cooperation with the Open Knowledge Foundation, among others, a sample data catalogue will be published in the coming months which will include all open-data communities in Germany.

PROJECTS

Smart Country