

# AppsforGhent, Moving Open Data Forward in Belgium

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In Flanders and Belgium, things regarding Open Data are moving. But not only the federal government and the Flemish government make progress with [their open data repositories](#), also the local level starts to get the wheel spinning. In Ghent, one of the major cities in Flanders, a group of enthusiasts organized [Apps for Ghent](#), stepping into the footsteps of New York and Amsterdam, and convinced the city government to make Open Data a real policy to become a trendsetter for the Flemish municipalities.

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Together with Pieter Colpaert, one of the guys behind [iRail](#), one of the first open data projects in Belgium concerning railway information reuse, I went to the city of Ghent to promote open data also at the local level. We found an enthusiastic listener in Bart Rosseau, strategic information manager at the Ghent municipality. An active search for data sets which could be opened up in a very limited time span, began. The organization of *Apps for Ghent* would even become the release of the new Ghent policy concerning Open Data, an experiment for opening data and creating interesting applications during a hackaton. The IBBT, the Flemish interdisciplinary institute for broadband technology, proudly hosted the event as it is also working on Open Data topics, for example in the LODGE project proposal, represented by Erik Mannens, which tries to create a linked open governmental data environment. Also the Flemish public transportation company De Lijn attended the event with some good news: for them, the event was the start of opening up their data. With the attendance of the Flemish cultural platform, some webdevelopment companies and Outerthought, founders of the scalable Big Data based data and content repository Lily, and of course the 75 attendees, the event also resulted in an interesting exchange of ideas concerning open data and how to make this a win-win for economy, democracy and the data providers themselves. Monitoring how your data is being used, can result in a very valuable return stream of information.

No less than 13 applications were created or developed during the four hour hackaton. Some of them used the brandly new information set of De Lijn to create some nice visualisations of traveling times, a personal time shedule PDF, or even a dating site. *Wakankdoen* (to be pronounced in Ghentish, standing for “what can I do?”) combined information from the cultural event database, the geographical information database of the City of Ghent containing public spaces, monuments and musea, with other public information like Wikipedia to create an interesting suggestion service where user feedback is generated and reused. The *Twinseats* project also used the cultural event database to suggest people with the same cultural interests to become cultural neighbors and join some events with you, or even more... Another one, *Kadee* (a friendly name for “kid”) combined information related to kids: events for kids, public spaces for kids (play gardens) with accidental information which can be very handy when going out with kids: nearby doctors or public toilets for example. An interactive map showing the coverage of GSM signals (using technical details from then antennas like their antenna gain and angle) was also a nice example, and we even got a little flashback with real VR-helmet allowing you to walk along the borders of the river Nederschelde in Ghent.

A jury awarded the [Wakankdoen](#) and [Twinseats](#) project a prize, a full blown brunch for the whole team and partners, donated by Outerthought. Today however, the votes of the public were counted, resulting in a public price for [Kadee](#). They received 400 euros in cash from Xplore+ and a real 1 day consulting by the Ghent University College Centre for Entrepreneurship. Because that's also what Open Data is about, next to powering democracy: powering the economy and creating new services and companies by making money from (mobile) applications.

These applications, based on a quit limited set op open data, clearly show the interest of developers and public in reusing public sector information. This is an encouragement towards policy designers to further open up public sector data and stimulate and facilitate reuse, eg by creating a uniform license model. More similar events can pave the way towards a more opened up government and public sector, and more usefull apps. One small step for the organizers, a little more steps to take for policy designers, hopefully resulting in a leap for economy and democracy.

A description of all projects can be found at [www.appsforghent.be](http://www.appsforghent.be), partly in Dutch, partly in English.