# Boosting Open Data Service Culture in Finland: Guest Post by Jarkko Moilanen

Submitted on 21 May 2013 by ePSIplatform Team

I attended KIDE day organized by Ministry of Transport and Communications. The event was opened by the Minister of Housing and Communications Krista Kiuru, which was followed by a discussion panel in which I participated as Open Data and Open Source 'ambassador' and promoter of community-driven ecosystems. The topic of the panel discussion was "How to enable digital service culture in Finland?"

I took the Open Data approach (naturally) and listed four items: Open data, lead developers, open data evangelists (change agents) and community building. To get good momentum regarding Open Data nationwide, we need to make some efforts in some 6-7 major cities.



## Open Data Sets

Without opening the public sector and, in some cases, private data, we will not be able to build a sustainable and fast-growing digital service culture. We need open access APIs to data, but we also need data dumps from systems and databases. Furthermore, the data must be detailed, accurate and machine-readable. Even that is not enough. We need to describe and list available data which often comes from multiple sources. So far Finland does not have a national Data catalog, but it's under work and should be in alpha version some time around Jan 2014. In the meanwhile, we must rely on regional and local data catalogues such as hri.fi (Helsinki) and data.tampere.fi (Tampere). It is also likely that in the future even when we have a national data catalogue, regional and local data catalogues will be used and needed since the National catalogue will not store the actual data itself, it will be most likely metadata catalog.

Ok, now we have data. What next?

## Open Data Evangelists

To make sure that data is opened as widely as possible, without enermous problems and fluently, we need to have change agents in the public sector in each of the selected 6-7 cities. These open data evangelists help other city officials open data, promote good practices, and act as Open data liaisons between cities and the national sector. In addition, these evangelists implement a silent revolution in governmental practices inside cities. We need revolution, not evolution. In evolution, new layers are added on top of old. That is not going to work in the long run. We need changes that really shake the ground. That is revolution, not evolution. Ok, now we have 1)open data sets and 2) revolution engine in place. What else is needed?

## Lead Developers

Data without use is ..hmmm..useless. We need to get it in use. Some say that we have a lot of ICT companies that can produce applications for citizens to use. Some say that cities should hire developers. The latter option has been shot down at least in Tampere. ICT companies can indeed make some of the apps needed by citizens, but their resources are also limited. Besides, actions of these companies are based on business logic which in some cases places some more restrictions, however not always. Instead of relying on business driven application development, we should enable volunteer-based developers, startups and even users. This can be started by getting lead

developers to each of the selected cities. One option to organize lead developer activity are efforts like Code4Europe. Of course above mentioned evangelist and lead developer would act as one, supporting each other.

These lead developers would act as local developer community heads. They would harmonize and orchestrate efforts of local developer community so that it will create SDKs and libraries for all to use as well as needed applications. Naturally efforts should be open source driven, because that empowers volunteer developer base and boost application development. Lead developers should also make some examples available for other developers to look at and learn from. Of course skillful developers from the community can take part of this task as well. Ok, now we have 1) open data, 2) evangelists making sure that data keeps on expanding and 3) lead developers orchestrating efforts. There's one more thing to do in each selected city.

## Community

The lead developer alone can hardly develop all needed applications. She/he needs community, users and even business-oriented groups such as startups. We need to start organizing Open Data Developer events in selected cities. This work has been started in Helsinki and Tampere. Helsinki has Helsinki

Together, lead developer and other developers can start building SDKs and implementing applications based on the needs identified by citizens. We need to get users involved too and that can be done with online tools as well as selecting interesting topics to events. Cities can promote selected apps in their PR and thereby raise interest towards development. Most efforts are most likely open source driven, at least the SDKs should be. Some of the applications will most likely be popular and startups build services around them. In other words, it makes sense to include startup scene in this effort/community too. This in turn will create more job and revenue.