

Dimitris Ptochos interviewed on the Greek Government Open Data Portal

Submitted on 30 Oct 2013 by Charalambos Bratsas



A month ago, the Greek government launched the official portal of the Greek State for open data (data.gov.gr). The creation of the portal is a very important step for the dissemination of open public sector data, following the relevant EC directive addressed to all EU Member States.

This initiative, for Greece in particular, is considered one of the most important tools to achieve growth and development and as a way out of the current crisis. In this direction the Vice President of the European Commission Ms. N. Kroes encouraged the Greek counterparts with a [personal letter to the OKFN GREECE](#) in March 2013.



Representing Greece and Cyprus in the ePSI Platform as [Okfn Greece](#) coordinator, I had the honour and pleasure of having a brief telephone conversation with **Dr. Dimitris Ptochos, who is the coordinator of this effort and Head of the Strategic and Digital Planning Bureau of the Prime Minister.**

Q. What was the reason for the creation of data.gov.gr?

A. Free access to public data is a clear objective of the Prime Minister and its government. We believe that open data and its reuse creates conditions for economic growth, enhances entrepreneurship, reinforces transparency, and provides new value added to services to the citizens.

To achieve this very important goal for Greece, in May 2013 the General Secretary of the Prime Minister sent a letter to the Line Ministries regarding the opening of their data, welcoming their support and some indicative datasets now available on data.gov.gr.

Q. Who will be the data providers? Does it concern only government agencies or will businesses also be able to publish data sets?

A. We are focusing on public datasets, paying attention of course, to issues related to the protection of sensitive and personal data.

The portal is now available in Beta. Nevertheless, we have already begun, in collaboration with the Ministry of Administrative Reform and E- Governance, the needed procedures in order to make it an integral part of the Administration's operational and organizational plan. The objective for the next few months is to have the majority of datasets held by public agencies published on data.gov.gr.

We are considering the possibility of businesses publishing, in the future, their own datasets on data.gov.gr.

Q. Is there any legal framework that regulates in detail the conditions for the opening of public data?

A. In Greece, legislation regarding access and disposal of public data has been based mainly on the transposition of European directives and particularly directive 98/2003, also known as PSI directive, via the Law N.3448/2006. Law 3979/2011 for electronic governance constitutes

also the legal base for data publishing on data.gov.gr.

In addition, Greece actively participates in the discussions carried out in a European level for a major revision of the PSI directive.

Although we consider that the existing legal framework is adequate for the open disposal of public data, it could be improved regarding issues of standardization and licensing.

The pilot operation of the central public data repository effectively uses the institutional framework, in order for public information to become available and exploitable without any legal or technical restrictions.

Q. How are you going to get the most out of data demanded from citizens, which will come as a result of the community awareness?

A. Data.gov.gr pays particular importance in collaboration, allowing anyone to request the opening of a dataset, as well as to submit applications that have been developed using open data. *We focus on the opening of datasets that citizens ask for, always respecting sensitive and personal data.* To this end, we have already taken into consideration good practices mainly from the UK and USA.

It is our belief that the number of datasets available on the public repository will increase exponentially as soon as the first applications based on them are created. Besides, this is the course observed in other countries as well. Time is needed in order to foster a culture of openness by default and reap the relevant benefits. Organizations such as OKFN can have a significant impact in this process.

Q. On the occasion of the Open Knowledge Conference, where I am right now, I would like to ask you if you are aware of CKAN, as an option already tested by the United Kingdom, the United States, European Union and many other countries. If yes, do you intend to use it?

A. Yes, of course we know CKAN.

Data.gov.gr derives from “ENGAGE”, a project financed by the European Union and coordinated by the National Technical University of Athens (NTUA). This platform was selected for several reasons, among others its public financing, openness, reliability, direct implementation, collaborative characteristics and the support of the country’s major research institution, NTUA.

We consider that both CKAN and the “ENGAGE” platform are excellent tools for the publication of open datasets. What is most important, however, is the organizational processes and technical features which should facilitate information reuse, regardless of the platform chosen.

We are currently evaluating how to integrate this platform with CKAN and we could collaborate with OKFN and OKFN GREECE on this.

Q. What do you think are the benefits of this portal in the long run?

A. It is in the long run that we can find most of the benefits resulting from opening up public data. Quoting the Vice President of the European Commission [Ms. Neelie Kroes’s blog post on data.gov.gr](#) “*In today’s world, public data is the new oil*”. They allow the development of new value-added services, assist in the dissemination of scientific research, promote the production of new knowledge and foster innovation.

In recent studies conducted by the European Commission, it is estimated that the free disposal

of public information from the 28 member states of the EU can lead to direct and indirect benefits of roughly 200 billion Euros in an annual basis, doubling productivity of local authorities, as well as strengthening innovation and research.

The free disposal of public data contributes also to transparency reinforcement. Democratic values are undermined when restrictions prevent citizens from accessing government information and data. The proactive disposal of public datasets also enhances accountability within the public administration.

There is a lot of activity in Greece for the time being around the opening of public data. OKFN Greece participates and monitors these efforts, trying to help towards openness, because it considers that such efforts should be supported in practice by all public bodies and especially by the government. Open data should not be a missed opportunity for Greece on the way to development and creating transparency. After all, history does not repeat itself.