

Hackathon on Open Data at International Journalism Festival in Italy

Submitted on 30 Apr 2013 by Matteo Brunati

Hacking is the Italian way to help extend “data reuse” to society, but starting from the field of journalism. To this effect, the Italian community passionate about Open Data and Data Journalism organized a hackathon called “**When data tells stories**” during the [International Journalism Festival](#) in Perugia.

[This hackathon](#) had two main actors: the [Spaghetti Open Data community](#) and [Dataninja.it](#): Spaghetti Open Data is the biggest Italian community interested in Open Data and PSI in general, and Dataninja is an information hub about Data Journalism, made by a team of journalists and developers.

We had several goals: doing something interesting and useful with data, learning methods and new ways to do stuff, and sharing knowledge with each other. A lot of people participated: developers, journalists, biologists, scientists, citizens, hackers, and so on. [The page that collected who subscribed to this event](#) shows 64 persons: not bad, isn't it?

During the hackathon the atmosphere was electric: spreading of knowledge and practices at work. It was exciting to be part of something big. We divided the work into 6 tracks, with different topics:

- a “**data access right**” track: the goal was making a shared document to make a formal request to obtain public data from government.
- a water track, we called it “**acquathon**”: we collected data from water analysis, to tell the story about nitrates concentration in drinking water.
- a track about **schools**: how important is matching schools and vocational trainings? Mapping them in the area around Rome was the story to tell.
- a “**monithon**” using Open Data from [OpenCoesione project](#): a monithon is an effort to make a crowd-checking of projects collected by OpenCoesione site. A sort of crowd “wheredoesmymoneygo” clone, focused on cohesion policies related projects.
- an “**info-trailer**”: the idea is that a trailer tells more than a complex interactive dashboard to non-technical people. One minute video to tell something about reuse and the importance of the pollination of knowledge.
- the last one was an [experimental usage of an Italian storytelling platform, SeeJay](#): a sort of storify and content curation tool, useful for journalists.

The results are collected on this page, but we are working to complete the tasks, especially because data is not available in many cases:

<http://www.dataninja.it/projects/hackathon/>

Speaking of “acquathon”, the data was in a lot of different containers: PDF, scanned images, tables without a shared order of columns, and so on. This is a sad story by itself: data related to water analysis has to be available online, there are laws and regulations on this topic.

The idea behind this wonderful initiative is a simple one: a team with different kinds of expertise is the only way to manage the complexity of our society, and of our information era. Journalism is the main area to experiment with, Data Journalism has a lot of potential, especially in countries like Italy, where spreading knowledge isn't often seen as valuable. It's a challenge from a lot of different points of view.

The community is working on this, and there is a light at the end of the tunnel.
Events like this hackathon are the proof.