

The new Tech Park in Sofia and Open Data policies

Submitted on 10 Aug 2015 by Andra Bucur

On the 14th of July, Sofia hosted the [first conference in Bulgaria on smart governance and open data](#), a first step in recognizing the importance of a political commitment to open up public data and to provide access to scientific and scholarly research - both seen as important resources for innovation and better policy making.

The event was organised by [Tech Park Sofia](#) which is a governmental company, aiming to be a hub for innovation, by partnering with private and public entities, implementing projects and commercialising new technologies. The activities and scope of the Park are very vast, as it has just recently been established, but if it will be able to attract financial and human resources it may become a centre of expertise and facilitator of e-government and open data initiatives in Bulgaria.

The success of the conference consisted in having both the views of the public bodies and civil society organisations at the event and also in the fact that important public bodies were represented, such as the Municipality of Sofia, the Cabinet of the Deputy Prime Minister, the Secretary for Healthcare and Innovations of the President, the Ministry of Education and Science Technologies and the Committee on Transport, Information and Communications. Nonetheless, having the business sector as part of the discussion would have brought a significant value, as well as putting together rather than separating panels with speakers from the public and NGO sectors.

In terms of open data, Bulgaria is currently developing its national open data portal, using open source data portal CKAN, in close partnership with civil society, containing data visualisations apart from mere datasets. However, few datasets were published so far and the portal doesn't yet have a license specifying the terms and conditions of the reuse. [Bulgaria is also a member of the Open Government Partnership](#) and a member state which has to implement the new PSI Directive. Concerning the implementation of the directive, Bulgaria will change its current access to information law in order to render it compatible to open data trends. The new law is still in the making and there are concerns regarding its content and adoption and discussions around the idea of making it compulsory for public bodies to publish open data.

A very good initiative discussed is introducing a requirement for open source in public procurement contracts that involve software development for government. This would be a good example for the region in terms of smart governance, if it will become a reality.

The general atmosphere at the conference was a mixture of faith and reluctance as civil society representatives from ex communist countries know how hard it is to convince public bodies to give up the monopoly on information, to shift the mentality and to provide an alternative for the traditional and almost obsolete bureaucracy. At the same time, young and informed representatives of important public bodies were embracing open data and open access concepts, well aware of the necessity of efficient and open governance. Only time will tell if this was just an isolated event or a real open governance commitment for the future.

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