Case Study:

Open Data Manchester

Type: organisation, website

Organisation(s): Open Data Manchester, FutureEverything

Tags: open data, process, standards, website

Open Data Manchester is a community interest company based in Manchester with a strong interest in open data. The organisation engages with a wide range of partners, including councils, local communities, universities, and private companies, to support more responsible and intelligent data use.

Through its project-based work, ODM aims to simultaneously broaden the appeal of open data within the wider community, and make open data and technology work better for citizens. ODM provides advice, advocacy, events, research, support and training for public, private, and voluntary sector clients, supporting their open data goals.

Background

Open Data Manchester is a not-for-profit community interest company that was formed in 2010 by a group of open data advocates. It was developed as part of FutureEverything's Open Data Cities programme, which sought to bring together people interested in using open data to make a difference to their community. In its early years, ODM was heavily involved in DataGM, Greater Manchester's first attempt at an open data portal.

ODM promotes good data practice through advice, advocacy, consultancy work, technical support, and training. It runs a portfolio of community-focused projects and also earns money through consultancy work to fund its activities. ODM has a remit that focuses on engaging with people and making data more oriented towards real needs, rather than merely addressing the technical side of open data.

ODM has identified three key open data challenges that it seeks to address:

1. Committing to the intelligent and responsible use of data
2. Building understanding and skills around data in communities
3. Ensuring everyone is involved in decisions that are made using data

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Since its foundation and its early work on DataGM, ODM has been keen to engage with partners around Greater Manchester who are already pursuing open data projects. However, in recent years this has not been the focus of ODM's work.

The ODM is supported financially by the global philanthropic organisation Luminate and the Cooperative Foundation.

ODM Projects

Data for Communities

Data for Communities is a workshop delivered in community spaces to address a lack of awareness of data and how it used in policymaking, and equipping people with the tools and knowledge to understand how to get the best use out of public data.

Participants are encouraged to explore crime stats, demographic data, grant funding data, transportation, and statistical geography data. The workshops also work with GMAL (Greater Manchester Accessibility Levels), which contain a representation of the accessibility of each geographical point by various transport links.

There is a positive response to these workshops, as participants are passionate about where they live and want to do something to help understand and support their community.

Lexicon Experience

Lexicon Experience is a programme that explores how the government can better represent the voices and interests of deprived and marginalised communities in technical systems. ODM is working with academics, including a socio-linguist and a Professor of AI, to understand how to capture people's lived experience with technology, particularly in novel technological situations.

This work demonstrates a need to take a people-focused approach to data and technology to help maintain a consistent focus on applicability and ensure high standards of inclusivity.

Consultancy work

ODM often partner with other organisations to help co-design and manage grant-funded projects or work on a specific element of them. For instance, the organisation is starting work on a Climate Action project in collaboration with Walk Ride GM, Groundwork, and Sustans. This will involve using data from a range of sources, including TfGM, ODM pollution sensors, and from traffic surveyors that the ODM will train up.

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ODM also works with the [Open Data Institute](#) (ODI) through [data stimulus funds](#), which are used to fund discrete projects for innovative uses of data. One example of this is building a data cooperative model for small energy cooperatives to improve energy data-sharing. Another example is the development of a single data standard for municipal waste to try to increase recycling rates.

ODM Data Expeditions

ODM also facilitates events called 'Data Expeditions'. These involve a series of guided workshops led by trained facilitators that take a data-related research question through from start to finish.

This has led to collaborations with Oxfordshire County Council, Birmingham City Council and Manchester City Council, who all helped to develop research questions for the expeditions, including around grant-giving and planning.

International Work

ODM has worked on some international collaborations, including the [Knowable Building Framework,](#) an ODI-funded joint project between the cities of Rennes and Manchester. This framework used sensors and analytics to help owners and managers identify potential energy savings. It also helped develop an understanding of how to respond to data insights to improve efficiency using control measures and behavioural changes.

ODM is also now working with the [International Finance Corporation](#) arm of the World Bank to help develop a data strategy for the City of Izmir, Turkey. It is also working as an expert advisor for the European Commission's [Digital Cities Challenge Programme.](#)

Blockers and challenges

Open Data Manchester has sometimes struggled to engage with individual data portals locally for strategic collaboration. This may be a result of a lack of capacity, with organisational and funding constraints making it difficult for local data teams to stray too far beyond their defined remit.

What can Greater Manchester take from this?

- Any future Greater Manchester-wide local data programme should engage positively with Open Data Manchester and draw on its expertise and experience, as well as its strong networks in the open data field.

- Collaboration with groups like ODM may be more easily coordinated at a wider Greater Manchester level as a result of local funding and time constraints.
- ODI funding can be an effective way of supporting any projects that involve more sophisticated uses of open data.
- When publishing open data it is important to consider the human component and engage well with the user base. This includes using plain English, user-friendly portal design, and explaining anything that is not clear for a non-expert user.
- Many more complex datasets need to be contextualised and explained with more than just the formal metadata requirements to be accessible to the general population.
- Local data programmes have a responsibility not merely to remain within the law, but also to ensure that data and their work on it have a net benefit for the wider community.
- Tying in local data work with the goal of net-zero might be an effective way to build engagement in this work by demonstrating its real-world impact. There are many challenges around climate change that better data sharing can solve. These include: improving recycling rates by better understanding waste flows; joining up data on local energy production and storage; and supporting the roll-out of electric vehicle charging networks.

Find out more:

[Open Data Manchester website](#)

[The Open Data Institute - The ODI launches three collaborative data innovation projects between the UK and France](#)

[The Open Data Institute - IoT and sensor-based systems in Manchester and Rennes](#)