

2012

Open Innovation Week Moldova 2012

By Veronica Cretu

Key Take Aways from the Open Innovation Week initiatives implemented in the Republic of Moldova during May 2012



SUMMARY and KEY CONCLUSIONS/TAKE AWAYS

Moldova Open Innovation Week 2012 aimed at implementing / piloting a number of high profile events intended to build on the Government's recent approval of **the National Action Plan on Open Government** and the launch of www.date.gov.md in 2011.

This commitment to the global Open Government Partnership has been led by the e-Government Center with the support of the World Bank and other development partners. The Action Plan is just the start of a process, and Moldova's progress will be reviewed and compared to the more than 50 other countries already in the Partnership.

The World Bank, the e-Government Center and other partners contributed to the implementation of a programme of events to support key local stakeholders and contribute international expertise to help build the different aspects of an ecosystem around Open Government and Open Data innovations required to achieve the Government's objectives of greater competitiveness, transparency and citizen engagement.

In line with the above, 4 important events took place during the period of May 14-20, 2012 and more specifically these were:

- Data-Driven Journalism Bootcamp for Moldovan Media (May 14-15, 2012);
- Multi-Stakeholder PFM Training and Data Analysis Workshop (May 16-18, 2012);
- The Open Government Day (May 16, 2012);
- The Open Innovation Weekend (May 18 -20, 2012)

Up to 300 participants representing different stakeholder groups participated in the events: mass media, civil society, Government, Developers' community, etc. However, the results of these events are not based only on the efforts put as part of these events, they can in synergy with initiatives launched in Moldova some time ago.

Is the context ready for active take off on Open Data? Is the community in Moldova prepared to challenge the Government to become more opened and intelligent? Is there enough capacity and talent in the developers' community? Is the Government willing to embrace more commitment, involvement and dedication?

Key Conclusions

1. Open data portals/applications should start soon to move from the pioneering stage to the mainstream: they will be considered in the near future as a recognized flagship initiative of government technology policy. www.date.gov.md should continue playing the role of the liaison portal between different Governmental Agencies and Ministries and showcase new applications, etc.

2. The momentum for Open Data Portals as well as for crowdsourcing data applications in Moldova is growing. The results of the Open Innovation Challenge „Apps for Moldova” showed that such initiatives can become apps generating events, during which teams of developers and civil society organizations can brainstorm on non-standard solutions which address the open data, and contribute to the increase of the value of the data in general.
3. Developers community manifested a growing interest in downloading data and developing apps, and Open Innovation Challenge created a context for developers to ask for opening up of new data sets by certain Ministries/agencies. Developers start to understand the added-value services which might be highly used by citizens, as well as (more rarely) generate revenues.
4. While it is still too early to assess properly the overall impact of the Open Innovation Week Moldova 2012 events, it is fair to say that the available evidence suggest that its short term direct impact has a great potential for further development and growth if proper mechanisms are set up in place. Impact is more likely to become visible in the long-term if it results out of the combination of technological and organizational innovation.
5. In long-run, Moldova might look at identifying success factors about „How” applications based on Open Data as well as Open Data portals can be implemented. Open Data are a means, not a goal, and it is an important aspect that key stakeholders should be emphasizing more and more often. This is important in order to help avoiding getting into the ‚extreme’ side of Open Data. That is why it was crucial that the Open Data events bring in together not only developers’ community, but also mass-media representatives, civil society representatives, Government representatives (E.g. during BOOST Training).
6. Developers’ community and NGO’s community might be interested in looking at initiatives that pursue the goals of improving public services and promoting web-based innovation, thus, covering the policy priorities of good and open governance, service delivery and innovation. However, the biggest challenge lies in the understanding of the type of services needed, type of services for which the local context is ready, type of services that have the potential to serve a wider community of users.
7. In line with point 6, it is important to note that developers’ community in Moldova has acted more towards ad-hoc initiatives, that concentrate on specific issues and are not necessarily based on Open Data (alerte.md, etc.);

8. The Community of Open Data Development Moldova should also go beyond itself as a community. Engagement of grassroots developers community, civil society organizations, donors community, top policy level, etc. is crucial for future developments.
9. In order to solve problems through open data, Moldovan Government should learn to engage with independent developers and make use of their skills. And there is quite a dynamic community of developers in Moldova which is interested to join efforts in this sense.
10. Participants in Data Journalism, BOOST and Open Innovation Challenge acknowledged the value of these events for the current phase in Moldova, when these type of trainings are not delivered yet by local partners. There is a large scope to reach out and involve the community intelligence, with specific initiatives such as contests, challenges, and open innovation services.
11. In Moldova, and not only, successful initiatives require most of the time top political commitment, and the good part is that there is a top political support on Open Data, Open Government but all requires some time to deliver impact, and a critical mass of published high-value data are needed before any difference is visible.
12. Small start, internal growth and coordination with other initiatives are crucial factors for future success of Moldova Open Innovation Week events 2012:

For Data Journalism – close coordination should be done with the Media institutions such as Independent Journalism Center, Mass-Media Program of the Soros Foundation, Faculty of Journalism at Moldova State University, local network of TV stations, other media associations. To keep up the momentum, there should be some follow up actions and online platforms for interaction between interested participants should be in place. There should be local capacity developed in place on training and capacity building.

For BOOST – work should continue with Government champions, and encouraging, stimulating them in order to continue working with the platform. Civil society organizations, think tanks were actively involved as well and they should be further involved as they have local capacity to deliver trainings, organize exchange events, publish in mass-media, conduct studies, etc.

Open Government Day – merged with Moldova ICT Summit 2012, was a great way to create synergy with local efforts in ICT sector. Creating synergies has both advantages and disadvantages. When it happened during an important event such as ICT summit, the message and the value might have been „diluted” given the numerous parallel sessions and workshops. On the other hand, this synergy allowed more people to learn about the current efforts, upcoming events, recommendations, etc. – which would have happened at a lower intensity if done as a separate event from the Summit.

Open Innovation Challenge „Apps for Moldova” – demonstrated that events with pre-cooked apps ideas are a great way to manage the process and to insure that generated ideas are taken during the Hackathon to a higher level of development (technical and conceptual). The event has proven that there is an interest and demand at the local level, and this demand should be sustained and supported through different means. One of the ideas that will be put in place starting in June will be inviting members of the developers’ teams to a TV program to present their ideas and provoke interest amongst the general population for web or mobile applications that they can use for different purposes. Work should also be done with the donors community/partners in development so that their future strategies for development in Moldova envisage ICT related innovations and solutions. Thus, civil society and developers’ community will join efforts to address the challenge. Participation of international experts with solid experience in Hackathons, etc. was a significant added value, and was much appreciated by the local organizers and participants. Efforts should be put in place to built local capacity to organize such events/contests in the future with local resources.

13. Open Data Portals/Open Data based applications as well as crowdourcing apps – are a cost-effective tool for cultural change, of key stakeholders: government, developers, civil society and citizens in general. It delivers medium-term impact by acting on specific incentives (e.g. transparency by default) and delivering short-term benefits (e.g. better apps for public services). Moldovan Government should understand that to open up by default to external input and to deliver is a much more constructive approach than opening up on request all the time.

Developers’ community should understand that they can concretely make a difference in the quality of life of citizens as well as launch entrepreneurial ventures. Because of the low market and great competition, developers still tend to think in terms of „now and here” and focused on immediate financial outcomes.

Moldovan Civil society should be more active and more engaged, and should learn to scrutinize government and take more responsibility for the co-delivery of services.

14. In conclusion, Open Government and Open Data initiatives, and the overall Moldova Open Innovation Week 2012 proved that all these issues are useful to kick-start the development of a broader „Moldova Innovates the public system with ICT”: and we are at the very beginning of this process.