**The Society for Location Analysis**

# The Open Data User Group – an inside view!

Sarah Hitchcock

I admit that I’m relieved to be writing this blog after working with Open Data User Group (ODUG) members for 4 months, rather than within my first few weeks. Our first meeting on 10th July was held in trendy Tech City, Shoreditch. Already feeling too ‘corporate’ I sit down and pull out my notepad and pen – at that precise moment, my thirteen new colleagues open iPads, laptops and other ‘smart’ devices. Add ‘old school’ to the list of my insecurities.

As the meeting commences I realise I’ve never heard so many acronyms – it’s going to be a steep learning curve just following the conversation! It dawns on me that this is payback for being at Sainsbury’s for so long and understanding the language inside out. I’m going to have to learn the ways of the public sector – quickly!

Heather Savory, our ODUG chair is an impressive lady, and as an open data newbie she brings with her a fresh approach. Heather has a lot of experience and is chomping at the bit get things moving and to make a difference. It’s quickly apparent her strengths will be her objectivity and an ability to mesh our views together to ensure we drive results.

Having collaborated every few weeks over the past 4 months, I’ve got to know a great group of people in ODUG, and I’m really enjoying the experience. A key benefit of this group is that each participant brings experience and knowledge, between us we’ve worked across numerous different industries and sectors. Most importantly, we’ve worked with data, developed with it and have managed teams that purchase data and deliver results with it.

ODUG was set up to work with the Transparency Team in the HM Cabinet Office. We are here to represent the views of the user community and to clearly set out the arguments to release the datasets that have the potential to deliver broad benefits.

My initial concerns upon joining ODUG as the ‘large company representative’, was addressing the contentious ‘they’re big enough to pay for the data’ issue. But following our discussions, it’s clear that budget holders in large organisations are willing to pay for the value-add this data provides, and you don’t always want to spend the time doing this, providing opportunities for the smaller guys. Naturally budgets will always be tight, and some data costs may always be prohibitive – whatever the size of company.

As a relative newcomer to the world of open data, it also struck me how many different organisations are looking into the open data strategy. This is so encouraging, particularly when we all work together. We have many links through the ODUG members that will help with this:

* Heather Savory advises the Data Strategy Board
* Jenni Tennison is the Technical Director of the Open Data Institute
* Mick Cory chairs the UK Location Group
* Roger Taylor is a member Open Public Service Network at the RSA which works to make open data usable and relevant to the public

Personally, I’m staying close to the work that DUG (Demographic User Group) are doing, led by Keith Dugmore, the support the Duggers are providing is invaluable – thanks everyone!  
So what progress have we made? In our first few months, we’ve made a promising start:

* Initial paper to the Data Strategy Board (chaired by Stephan Shakespeare) on ODUGs plans and processes
* Form set up on Data.Gov.Uk to capture data requests – a process set up to prioritise the requests. We want to talk to the data owners to get some quick wins. For the bigger requests we’ll build evidence and pull together a business case. <http://data.gov.uk/node/add/data-request>
* Published a paper sharing our view on a national open address dataset  
  <http://data.gov.uk/sites/default/files/Open%20Data%20User%20Group%20-%20The%20Case%20for%20an%20Open%20National%20Address%20Dataset%20-%20November%202012%20%282%29_0.pdf>

<http://data.gov.uk/blog/odug-calls-on-the-government-to-deliver-an-open-national-address-dataset-under-the-open-government-l>

Many of you have also discussed the issues of data formatting, the ability to link data sets together and the issues around not releasing national UK files. ODUG’s primary objective is to push for data release, but I’m more than happy to discuss any other concerns. Hopefully we will make a few other fixes along the way…

Data requests are shown on the Data.Gov website so take a look – you may find out about data that you didn’t know existed that would help you in your role. Please request data, even if it’s already requested – this growing interest in open data helps us collect more evidence to support our quest.

Oh – and my iPad is on order.

I’d love you to get in touch to discuss your views on open data – email me at [sarah.hitchcock@odug.co.uk](mailto:sarah.hitchcock@odug.co.uk)