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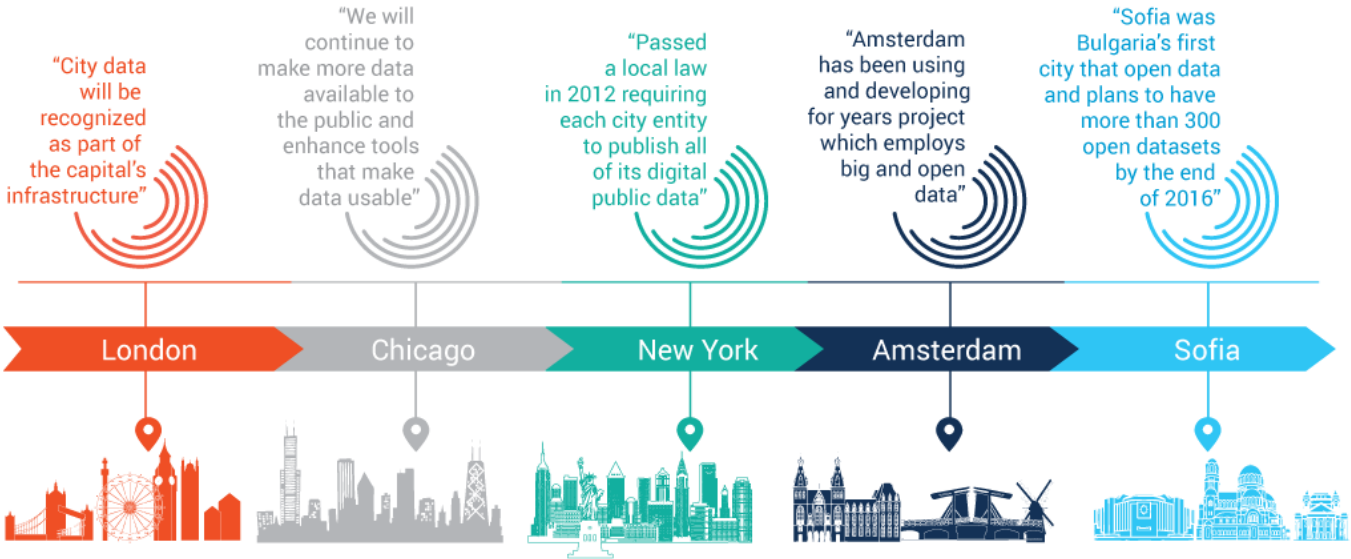
In Victorian London, Dr. John Snow drew a map pinpointing cholera cases to prove his theory that the 1854 Soho outbreak was caused by a water pump and the disease was not airborne as it was believed at the time. Snow had the handle of the water pump removed and cases of cholera started to rapidly decrease.

Imagine how he and many other visionaries before and after his time could have helped cities improve public health if they had the open data resources we have today. The use of open data enhances efficiency and quality of public services and increases transparency and citizen control. Share on XAt the same time, open data use spurs innovation, creates new business models, and engages individuals and companies to take part in applications development and social projects.

More than a century and a half after the 1854 cholera outbreak, the City of London is creating value out of open data, as are hundreds of other cities around the world. Let's take a look at how London, Chicago, New York, Amsterdam and Sofia benefit from open data.



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London Calling

The Greater London Authority (GLA) – winner of the Open Data Institute 2015 Open Data Publisher Award – states in its City Data Strategy:

> City data will be recognized as part of the capital's infrastructure. We will use it to save money, incubate innovation and drive economic growth.

GLA's London DataStore hosts more than 500 datasets bundled into topics like jobs and economy, transport, environment, safety, health, housing, population. Developers can use DataStore's figures from Transport for London, the Office for National Statistics or the Department of Health, for example, to create third-party apps to help Londoners, visitors and local businesses.

The School Atlas map shows school performance data, population data and housing projects. GLA's own Workspaces interactive map helps SMEs search office spaces by price, length of stay and types of businesses already located in a particular building.

Transport apps are the most popular use of London's open data. Transport for London is releasing real-time data for which more than 5,000 developers have registered. Developers have created hundreds of apps, including such for Tube travel news updated every minute, or a personalized journey planning tool for public transport.

The Windy City

Across the Atlantic and into the heart of the US, we saw the City of Chicago launch earlier this year the OpenGrid open-source app. OpenGrid provides citizens with a single interface in which they can use keyword search and filters to explore their neighborhoods.

The app can also be deployed to enable real-time situational awareness and lets governments, NGOs and corporations access historical events through a simple map-based interface. In addition, the OpenGrid interface can be customized to work with different database engines or APIs.

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Back in January when the city announced the OpenGrid launch, Brenna M. Berman, Commissioner & CIO of the Chicago Department of Innovation & Technology, said:

> We will continue to make more data available to the public and enhance tools that make that data usable, and in doing so, put the power of data into the hands of Chicago's communities.

New York, New York

Of course, Chicago is just one of many US cities that have released open data and continue publishing and aggregating databases. New York City passed a local law in 2012 requiring each city entity to identify and ultimately publish all of its digital public data for citywide aggregation and publication by 2018.

The NYC OpenData contains more than 1,300 datasets on the topics of business, city government, education, environment, health, housing & development, public safety, recreation, social services, and transportation. The huge datasets are being used by both public and private organizations as well as individual developers to build visualizations or apps.

For instance, the Tunnel Vision app, created by Bill Lindmeier as a thesis project at ITP/NYU, layers data from the Metropolitan Transportation Authority (MTA) and the US Census Bureau on MTA subway maps. Tunnel Vision turns any MTA subway map into an interactive exploration of NYC through data.

The New York City Fire Department has been using a predictive analytics model to track buildings at the highest risk of fire. The smart analytics model creates an algorithm out of some 60 factors – including the age of a building, electrical issues, the number of sprinklers, and the presence of elevators – and rates each building with a risk score. The Fire Department uses the scores to target inspections to buildings with the highest risk.

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The Port of Amsterdam

Back in Europe, Amsterdam has been using and developing for years the Amsterdam Smart City project, which employs big and open data to offer residents, businesses and tourists insights and help them make data-backed decisions.

Amsterdam has an interactive-maps website combining open geo data from various departments of the city. The Energy Atlas project deploys open data to map energy use across the city as it targets to go greener. Amsterdam is committed to saving energy, reducing CO2 and identifying opportunities to boost the use of renewable energy in its energy transition push.

Live in Sofia, Bulgaria

While some cities are way ahead in opening data and extracting social and economic benefits from datasets, others are just beginning to publish open government data. The capital Sofia was Bulgaria's first city to open data.

Sofia's urban mobility website has been providing detailed information on urban transport, schedules and routes. Bulgaria, which started publishing public open data only last year, plans to have more than 300 open datasets by the end of 2016, the government said last month.

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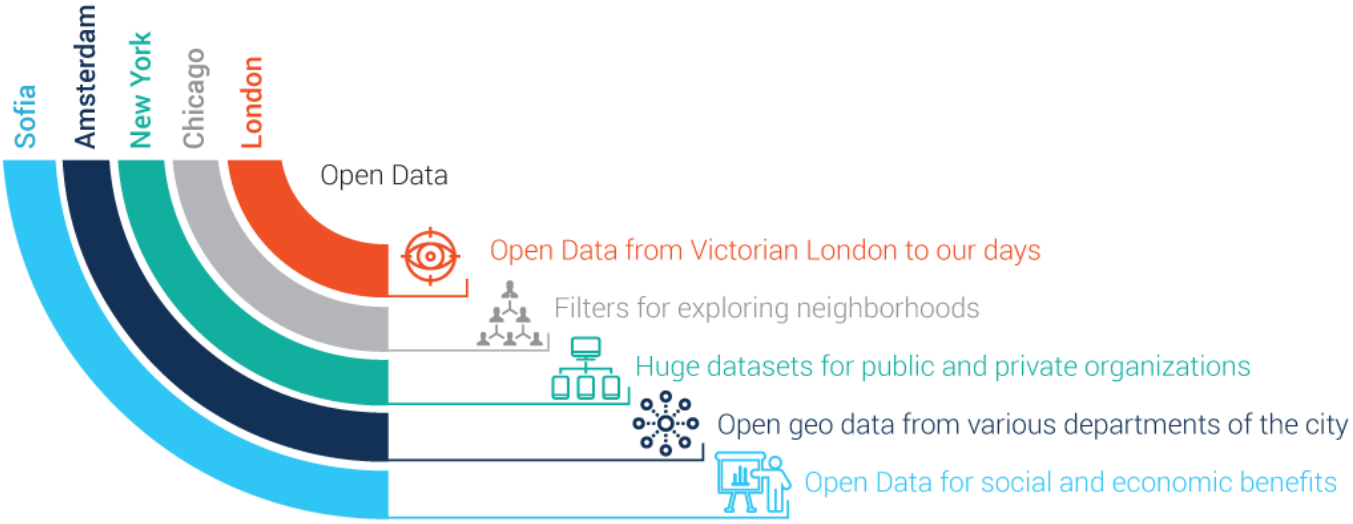
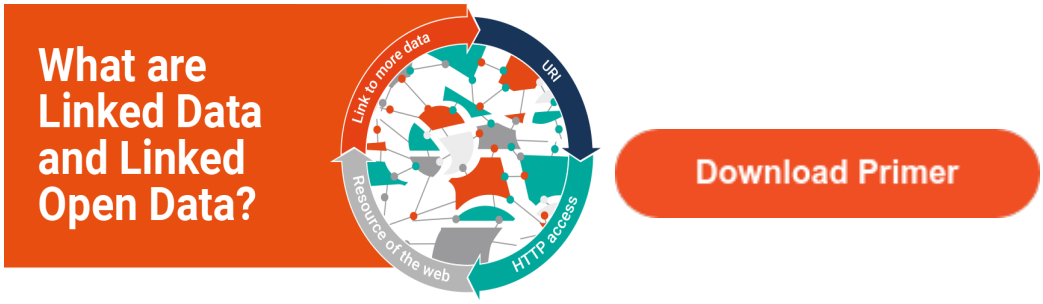


At a recent open data and linked data meetup in Sofia, Bozhidar Bozhanov, adviser to the Deputy Prime Minister at the Council of Ministers of Republic of Bulgaria, explained that the resistance to opening data and to change could be overcome by making open data cool, amending the Access to Public Information Act, and creating a state agency for e-governance responsible for open data.

Additional proposed measures include mandatory requirements for software systems without which government agencies will not be eligible to get funding as well as organizing trainings and events to promote the initiative and train talents.



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