26

CONSUL CON

DAY 2 - 13:45 - AI Stage

Open Source Adoption in Local Governments: Lessons from a Case Study

KEYNOTE + Q&A

NICHOLAS GATES - Open ForumEurope

Session recap

At a glance

Nicholas Gates of OpenForum Europe, speaking on behalf of the European Commission-funded Open Source Observatory (OSOR), presented a study on open source collaboration dynamics at the local government level, carried out with Johan Linåker of RISE Research Institutes of Sweden. Most previous OSOR work focused on national governments, leaving a knowledge gap on cities and regions. The research combined a literature review, a mapping of more than 1,000 projects, policies and institutions, and 19 interviews with 21 people across five case studies. CONSUL DEMOCRACY was the anchor case. The session included a lively exchange with the CONSUL Foundation team and the City of Munich on code fragmentation across CONSUL forks.

Key messages

- Local governments use and co-develop open source in very diverse ways, from international foundations to ad hoc city-to-city networks, in-house development and municipal IT companies.
- Service suppliers often become de facto maintainers and holders of institutional knowledge, which brings both stability and dependency risks.
- Open source licences can help public employers attract better developers and break down silos between departments, even when cross-border collaboration is not the goal.
- Without capacity building, municipalities tend to consume open source as a service rather than becoming active contributors.
- For CONSUL, decentralisation kept the project alive after Madrid stepped back, but led to fragmented code across forks. Financial sustainability and effective governance are critical.
- Collaboration can be analysed from three perspectives: local government, community and supplier. Any two working together can unlock constructive collaboration. All three is ideal.
- Mature open source projects generally need to move out of the public sector into a foundation or similar governance structure to scale.

Facts, figures and references

- Research partners: OpenForum Europe and RISE Research Institutes of Sweden, for the European Commission's Open Source Observatory (OSOR).
- Method: 60+ sources reviewed, 1,000+ initiatives mapped, 19 interviews with 21 people, 5 case studies.
- Case studies: OS2 (Denmark) and Swedish municipalities; Prague's municipal IT company; a civil society parliamentary tool; Helsinki's journey planner; CONSUL DEMOCRACY.

Takeaways for the community

- CONSUL is seen at EU level as a reference case for open source collaboration among local governments.
- Building municipal capacity (for example through OSPOs and associations) is key to turning users into contributors.
- A structured EU-level network for cities and regions working on open source would fill a recognised gap.