

The big data revolution

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There is no doubt that we have entered the era of big data.

Some reckon that, currently, every two days, we create as much information as was created from the dawn of civilisation to 2003. Every two days! And it's growing at 40% per year.

We can't miss out on that kind of growth opportunity.

And this is an opportunity. In terms of economic value alone, this is a market worth tens if not hundreds of billions of euros per year.

At a time when Europe desperately needs growth, this is exactly where we should be looking to create new jobs and new opportunities.

That's why I've called data the new oil. Because it's a fuel for innovation, powering and energising our economy. Unlike oil, of course, this well won't run dry: we've only just started tapping it.

It is ICT that enables this revolution. ICT that gives us, for the first time ever, the tools to share, manipulate and use data, on a scale which once we could only have dreamed of.

But this isn't just by the ICT sector, for the ICT sector; nor just for big global organisations. Because when you can model millions of observations, you don't theorise anymore, you see through. This is an opportunity for organisations of every size and every sector. An opportunity that can benefit everyone: so people in business, agriculture, policymaking, education, medicine - you name it - can start making their decisions based not on intuition, but information.

Already today, scientists are learning the benefits of collaborating on a large scale, across the world, using huge amounts of data and huge computing resources.

Already today, governments - and the public they serve - are learning that open public data can boost transparency, improve public services and fuel innovation.

Already today, ordinary citizens are using new apps and services to make everyday tasks quicker and more convenient, and open up new possibilities too. Apps which, whether they know it or not, rely on the power of big data.

Because the fact is, whatever you're trying to do these days, the answer may well lie in data. Whether you want to unlock the human genome – or open up government. Whether you're

trying to predict the economic future—or decrypt a foreign website. Whether you're trying to locate a traffic jam or a Higgs boson: big data tools will be helping you.

But this data revolution, moving to a data-driven economy, won't happen by itself. It needs a helping hand, and the right framework. Data needs to be freely available for use and re-use. It needs to be easy to transport and inter-operate — without different rules and standards for every country and dataset. And it needs the framework that safeguards privacy and builds trust.

Here are three ways the European Commission is supporting that.

First, we are opening up new seams of data within a vibrant single market.

Much of this data is already here with us: but held by our public administrations, locked up or unusable. This is data that is rich, comprehensive, and that taxpayers have already paid for. We need to open it up. The benefits could be worth tens of billions of euros per year.

That's why we've proposed legislation to unlock this goldmine. That legislation is making good progress: yesterday the trialogue seemed conclusive. I hope it can now be agreed within the coming months – and make it easier for people to use and re-use public data, generating value again and again at low cost, across the single market.

We are practising what we preach in the Commission, too: our own open data portal, although still in "Beta", is already getting hundreds of hits per day. And in the coming months, we will be working intensively towards a pan-European data portal, a one-stop shop for Europe's open public data, for every country and every level of government.

Plus there is a host of scientific information we can open up too. And we are. All EU-funded research results will be available under open access. That's tens of billions of euros worth of research that can be used by other scientists, other entrepreneurs, or the taxpayers who paid for it: stimulating further research, innovation and creativity. Plus, we will progressively open up access to the underlying scientific data – powering whole new fields of research. And we are encouraging member states to do likewise for their own funding programmes.

Second, we need to build trust. People have understandable concerns— like about how health data might be used. We can't do all these wonderful things until we build public understanding and confidence.

Because without that level of trust, the data won't be released in the first place.

A sound, modernised data protection framework can allay those concerns, unlock those data, and enable this revolution. And that's what we have proposed. All together our reform could be worth over 2 billion euros a year to the economy.

And third, Europe needs the industrial capacity to take the global lead in data.

We are helping that from the EU. We will continue to fund innovation in the area of data

products and services: from business intelligence and decision support to added value services.

Because I want to support a strong European data industry: the companies who can produce and market all this innovation. Some European companies like SAP, ATOS and Telefonica are already established, well-known, and successful; but I'd like to see more, so Europe can become a decisive global player.

We will focus on data-intensive sectors: like transport, health, finance, retail and the public sector. These are areas that open data can really boost.

But we will also engage small companies and startups. Because this is a great place for them to be. The barriers to entry are low, the capacity for innovation and creativity almost unlimited. I know we have here today some "Young Leaders", young entrepreneurs and students, working in this field. People like you fill me with a lot of hope: you have shown the innovative potential and value of data, and well done to you all.

Plus, staying competitive in this field needs the right human capital. Like all digital skills, demand for data experts is booming: it has grown twelve-fold over twenty years. Jobs like "data scientist" – a concept that hardly existed a few years ago – are now in high demand.

Let's make sure we are responding. Let's ensure our education and training systems, and our industry, are preparing the ground for tomorrow's digital job market. That's exactly what we're doing with our grand coalition for digital jobs.

All in all, open data is a huge opportunity for Europe. A chance for citizens to benefit from amazing new products and services. A chance to boost many sectors of our society – from healthcare to democracy itself. And a chance to stimulate our economy, energised by a strong European data industry. This is a revolution: and I want the EU to be right at the front of it.

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