Chapter 5
Finding and Sharing e-Government Resources: Challenges and Approaches

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ABSTRACT
This chapter is intended to give an introduction to reasons for collaboration and reuse of e-Government resources and a summary of the results so far of some European e-government initiatives, including related projects within the European standardization CEN/ISSS like the workshop eGov –Share, and some projects within the European Commission’s IDABC program. From an e-Government practitioner’s viewpoint and experience, it analyses the ideas and results behind these projects but also identifies some of its shortcomings and weak points and gives some recommendations of future activities in the field.

INTRODUCTION
Much effort has been invested in establishing technical standards and developing system solutions supporting those standards. But from the interoperability and resource sharing aspect, often things do not work very well together, even when standardised technology solutions are put in place. So standardised technology was obviously not enough, and we need to analyse and identify problems in different dimensions and develop solutions from different stakeholders’ viewpoints.

Apart from technical issues on how to produce, transfer and store information in agreed, secure and sustainable ways, we also need to take adequate measures so that the meaning of the information is understood as intended.

We have many obvious language and cultural barriers in the Pan-European perspective, but also more subtle differences between sectors, organisations and vocations that can lead to severe misunderstandings if we are not aware of and take care of those semantic issues. But still, we cannot realistically expect everyone to agree on using unified, standardised terminologies. Traditions and old relations are mostly too strong to make such an approach feasible. Instead, we
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need to start out with admitting and recognising the differences, documenting them and making them visible, as a first step towards harmonisation, or when that is not possible, towards finding practical workarounds that can bridge the gaps where necessary.

In addition, organisational and administrative differences between jurisdictions may be hurdles difficult to overcome that need to be observed and taken into account in the design of sharable e-Government components.

BACKGROUND

To build a pan-European e-Government service, where responsibilities are differentiated in a way that a central authority in one country may need to interact with several local authorities in neighbouring countries can lead to lots of organisational and other issues that need special attention and new approaches.

The consciousness of the need to collaborate between stakeholders from different viewpoints is steadily growing. However, these extended needs for collaboration tend to become very complex, so to be able to do that in a structured and controlled way, we need an architectural approach and we need to develop new structured models and methods to apply.

e-Government programmes and projects across Europe have been describing services and other resources for use by systems and applications to serve citizens, business and administration agencies. One of the main challenges across those programmes is to bring together information that is created and maintained in different places under different mandates and authorities and to offer that information in an integrated way to the various audiences. Providing cross-organisational e-Government services thus involves a substantial amount of co-operation and sharing.

The increased cooperation between government agencies on all levels needs to be supported by systems and tools that have been developed to manage an appropriate level of interoperability enabling exchange of information describing services and other resources.

Traditionally, many portals and repositories have attempted to increase visibility through centralizing information in one portal or repository. This approach can make a lot of sense but it does not scale. And organizations strive to retain control over its own resources and their descriptions and to present them to their customers. This is sensible: the best knowledge about individual resources usually resides with the maintainers of those very resources themselves, so it is something inherently decentralized.

But there is also a need for centralisation, or more exactly, one or more central interfaces that aggregate information in one or more places. Regions or nations want to present information about resources in their area, and on a larger scale, the European Union needs such data on a pan-European scale to implement pan-European e-Government Services (PEGS). (CEN eGov Share CWA, part 0, p. 3)

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The basic ideas of facilitating to find and share e-Government resources may vary from different stakeholders’ perspectives, but in essence, the following are essential motives for the promotion of such activities:

- To avoid reinventing the wheel. Government authorities on different levels (international, national, regional, local) in many cases have essentially similar tasks to solve, so it is reasonable to argue that the methods and tools used to solve those tasks, especially in the electronic world, are also mainly similar. It would then make sense to save development costs and reuse...