

On the COM(1998)585
“Green Paper
on Public Sector Information in the Information Society”

Q1:

Creation of any type of listing means necessity of including all corresponding objects in the listing, it should be full and correct. Definition of the public sector by list of bodies will result in uninterrupted changes in the listing because various reforms in state and local administration will take place during development of information society.

Not only state budget and other public funds can be sources for financing bodies that produce, process and disseminate public sector information. Some non-administrative functions the state can delegate to state owned companies too (e.g., several privatisation, road traffic supervision, health care etc. have been delegated in Latvia at present), they have incomes depending on the success of their activities.

Therefore the functional approach would be the most advisable and practical decision, focusing on the subject of the information as a primary factor.

Wide spectrum of public information subjects should be defined:

- real estate and movable property (land, water, forests, buildings, cultural heritage, vessels, vehicles, etc.);
- legal persons (enterprises, educational and cultural institutions, health care facilities, public organisations, etc.);
- private persons (the population as a whole and its separate categories – pensioners, schoolchildren, drivers, taxpayers, the unemployed, etc.);
- substantial for the country and society processes (legislation, statistics, economy, finances, health care, environment protection, etc.).

Q2:

No, different conditions exist, they could be and will be in various countries. There are different traditions and approach to availability of public information in details and elements in various countries. The basic principles should be equal (access according to normative acts, equality in state scale, absence of discrimination etc.). There are not advisable and necessary to press all countries on implementation of equal conditions, because it is possible to put in practice principles of open systems ideology for interchange of information.

Q3:

In order to realise user-friendly search and access mechanisms for a wide range of users, both domestic and international, it is advisable to create the central nucleus (communications server) for public information systems in each country. The basic functions of this server:

- maintenance of meta-data base -- what kinds of information are available, where the necessary information is stored;
- one stop access point – to allow standardised access of users through a single contact point, including identification and authorisation of users, receiving complex information from various data bases, financial transactions for usage of information, etc.

All categories of public information must be included in and available through the communication server.

In line with development of Transeuropean co-operation creation of European scale communication server would be advisable as a next step (as an integration of national servers).

Q4:

It is not necessary to equalise prices for information in all countries, but it is very advisable to equalise basic principles of pricing policies:

- all end-users of information (administrative and commercial institutions, private persons etc.) in the same country must pay equal price for the same information;
- several categories of public information should be available free of charge, each country should define these categories (e.g., laws and other normative acts, basic statistical, environmental, reference information etc.);
- because public information is collected and processed for money of taxpayers, all other categories of information would be available for symbolic payment, e.g. 10-20% of prime cost; particular payments should not be a source of extra income or defrayment of expenses, but a disciplinary measure only, all information services should be used whenever it is necessary.

Q5:

In addition to general rules on competition the basic principle for fair competition in provision of information services should be defined and implemented: really (and not only theoretically) equal conditions for access to necessary raw information for public and private information brokers who provide value added information and services. Really it concerns only to provision of business and finance information, the single category that is interesting for private information brokers.

Q6:

Yes, different copyright regimes will represent some barriers, but quite small because the basic copyright principles are quite equal in all countries.

Q7:

All personal data must be collected, processed and held in very confidential manner, including creation of data bases that contains personal data. Only statistical and comparative information (nonpersonified) can be available for use in both public and private sectors. No exceptions and indulgences could be permitted for any purpose.

Q8:

The main issue is: the liability regulations should be elaborated and approved in each country. The differences in regulations in various countries are not so principal.

Q9:

It seems that availability of information from EU institutions is much better at present than access to the national information resources. Therefore in the first stage the accent should be put on national level.

Q10:

All issues are important, but legislation and general awareness (plus demonstrations to raise awareness) seems to be the prior.

Prof. Edvins Karnitis (Latvia)

Deputy Chairman of the Co-ordination Board for the National Program "Informatics"

Member of the European Information Society Forum