

Interview BRIC

For more information about this interview, please contact Mr. Maxim Chantillon (KU Leuven Public Governance Institute – maxim.chantillon@kuleuven.be)

CIRB values

- Client orientation
- Cooperation
- Respect
- Innovation
- Service to the public

Remarks during the presentation of the FLEXPUB project

CIVADIS seems to be a problem – CIRB not so much, iMIO is also working in the right direction. So, problem of technological innovation in the administration seems to be dependent on a number of specific factors.

ASTRID is a good case, I was witnessing an accident on the highway. A grave accident, so I call to the emergency services. And they were not able to understand where I was on the basis of the 'hectometerpaaltjes'. That is a problem, and there is work to be done.

For us, in the field, it is sometimes difficult to get the helicopter view and to understand the main difficulties.

We tend to hide each other behind the complexity. But it is not the case. We have often the need to say that we have the federalization problem, but this is an excuse. (comes back to the need for better coordination).

DTO will not be an improvement, there is an ongoing regionalization and the budget of the FOD BOSA is being cut in two.

E.g. head of the administration of the parliament has to sign the bills, however, that is a problem. And there will be no digitalization, because the person working there does not want to work in it.

In Brussels we have to work on the open data, because the companies have need of real-time info on the public transport. But the politics aren't doing anything, they are not interested. There is nothing to win in it. The real work for the open data is the political world that has to force the administration to open their data. It would be good if the ICT would be in the hand of the Minister President: it would already be much better. However, now it is in the hands of somebody with all kind of things that nobody else wanted. There is absolutely no interest in digitalization. But on the federal level there seems to be some action: Alexander De Croo. But now the budget of the DTO is reduced by half, how can you work with that? It is necessary to create a centralized IT structure, but currently there is SMALS and the others. Why is this necessary?

Problem with all the Directives: it is a lasagne, it is all falling on our heads from above. INSPIRE has improved the cooperation, it has stimulated this. It was an investment, but it is especially a tool for collaboration. We have text for collaboration now, we have cooperation agreements

etc. We can move forward, thanks to INSPIRE. But it is going slow, because of political support, budget, priorities etc.

It seems to be a complete picture. But one of the problems that there is the priorities between the different regions or levels. Always when we wanted to simplify the administrative actions, based on the language of the citizens/users and create a search tool for this. But it was developed only in one language, but in Brussels it had to be in French and Dutch, as well as English. However, what we asked from them was not usable for us, because we had other needs. So, if we had the same planning, it would have worked better. But now we have different agenda's. The exchanges are happening in a forced and politicised way.

Very often questions of having the same needs on the same moment: That is almost never the case, so always a forced way of working. I don't know how you will solve this, but this is a problem.

CIRB

Offers ICT services. So like FEDICT but advantage is that don't really have any competition in Brussels, except GIAL (originally ICT service for Brussels city but tries to extend).

Offer ICT services for Region, Communes, CPAS, OIPs, ASBL but COCOM, COCOF and VVC.

This grants a form of unity as locket for every communes in Brussels is Irisbox.

Also very active in cartography in Brussels. They retook all the data created beforehand by communes, certain Brussels administration and also private sector. In beginning decennia 2000, CIRB "rebought" these geo-data that were, at that time, a co-property of all the previous actors, as it had great value.

Best Address

I work on BA sinds 2002-2003, it started in the Committee Strategis. A group de travail that was called 'Best Address'. It was chaired by the Cadastre. It is linked with the leave of person X. Since 2007 I work on e-government, before on geomatics and on the Cabinet of Vanhengel (Open VLD). So I now BA very well, I saw it from the politics, and administrations.

When geomatics departments was stopped, it was split in two groups. But it didn't work at all, so when INSPIRE started I was appointed as the chair, and I am now also coordinating the two different groups. But there is currently no real post for INSPIRE, but I am taking it on me. In the beginning I thought that I had no role to play, no real powers. But now I realised that I have a role and some powers. We see that parallel structures that exist, some people ask me to discuss a point with their hierarchy, but I talk with all the hierarchical higher positions. Brussels is however complex, we have the CIRB but the City of Brussels has its own service. We do regional, local, OIP, etc. But also the "gemeenschappelijke gemeenschapscommissies". So there is a unity, we can ensure that there is unity. So we are working with all, we are also partially recognised.

Initially the geomaps of Brussels were produced by some kind of bank for the local level, exist no longer, then it was changed to other levels. But everybody was working together on the geospatial data: partially the private sector, partially the public sector. In that way we could work together on the same data, data standardization and harmonization. In the late 90s it

was no longer useful however, so we bought all the data and we have put it in the structure of the CIRB – since 2000 probably. That was person X who did it, and then he went to the AAPD. And he started the work on BA, in a Belgian working group. The objective was to ensure the operability in the address structure. He has continued this work in the Cadastre. He created a platform, and it was a tool to ensure that all the address would have the same structure as the other were all developing their own systems and geospatial maps.

And then it started to now good points and bad elements. ‘Strategis’ (= the working group) has stopped working. The work was moved to the Administratieve vereenvoudiging, but I don’t know why it happened in this way.

The AV organised a number of meetings to ensure that a cooperation agreement could be develop. It took them six years to finalize the agreement. The first years nothing happened, it was the period of the ‘governmental difficulties’. I have taken it out of the fridge, it had to be concrete because INSPIRE was also created. 2010: start of the agreement negotiations, then nothing happened for almost two years and then we restarted. In 2014 we worked, and in February 2016 the agreement was reached.

There were several working groups formed. One working group was interested in the technical elements, and then we have found that it was necessary to create another working group (“Attribuer et constater”): they created the judicial norms: how to name a street, how to create house numbers etc. The rules have been created. E.g. we don’t create street names that sound the same, or have only one letter that is different. The person that was working on the final documents in the working group, is on maternity level. And I am the president of the address group (not really), and so I am the one that works on it. I ensured that the final text was created, and then it went upstairs to the cabinets and the ministers.

Cooperation agreement said that it was FEDICT that should ensure the creation of a platform for exchange of address data between the official data collectors (National Register, Company Crossroad Bank...) as it was the federal service integrator. FEDICT didn’t do anything about it for a long time, probably because didn’t have enough budget. Lately they had started to work on it. Objective was to have a real authentic source of addresses. But there are some difficulties: users need an address for Europe (INSPIRE → but that is not for our authentic source) or Belgium, but not for the regions. And Brussels and Flanders has a service to access addresses for free, but Wallonia doesn’t have it because of legal difficulties.

Issue now is “history and mutations”. In Flanders, when an address is changed, the old identifiers decays and a new one is created, without link between the two. Indeed, for them, the address is a data as such, different from the geo coordinates. In Wallonia and Bxl, more pragmatic approach that if address name changes, the identifier should stay the same, with a modification of the address. Therefore, when update, the identifier stays the same but the other data (street name, number...) linked to this identifier are adapted. So these are two incompatible ways of working and real challenge ahead with short deadlines to have a functioning authentic source of addresses (before end 2017). But that is something that we didn’t thought about, and that is a problem. And that leads to problems for the federal government, but the changes have to happen 2018 or 2019, but that is impossible because of the elections. So we have to change it this year. And that is all what you found in the cases.

Plus, BA is also a problem for the local level. And that is rather chaotic. We have 589 local communities. So how should they be included all around the table. So we contacted the associations of the local level, they could send representatives and that is also what happened. Flanders did it very well, the once’s that were coming were involved, and had an opinion. In

Brussels they assigned two people, they never participated. They have sent somebody of the citizens department, not of the urban department. In Wallonia some people came, but they were not really involved. In the end it was mostly the SPW that was involved for Wallonia. So I started to look at the specific points in Brussels, our address is more complete than the one of the CRAB. So we have a very good address basis. So I started to create a working group in 2015: first a motivation, and then the first meeting in 2015. 40 persons only from the regions came for the HIC project. The Flemish region came as well, they did the validation in four years: CRAB started in 2011 and they had four year to do it, and since 2015 has it not moved anymore.

Brussels has a really reliable address database as they had field agents, which is easier for them than in other regions as smaller region. But the communes were scared of the Best Address project. Major issue is box numbers (ex: rue du lac, n°1, box 401) in the addresses as there is nothing done in any of the regions so far.

Address are seen as authentic source but, in reality, the authentic source should be the objects to which an address can be attached (buildings, parcels, etc).

Of course complexity of the issue is the divergent political stakes at hand, different regions, different political parties, etc. For example on crossing data, and if the addresses are better, this would, for example, allow to better identify illegal immigrants living in unifamilial houses. Another political issue case study is the identification of unoccupied buildings. E.g. Salah Abdeslam: they were on the correct address but no on the correct floor, so that is a problem as he was able to get out of the building. But this is of course an extreme situation. So although the cooperation agreement is signed at the highest political level, it is important to know that the execution does not happen because they just don't want to implement it. Sometimes it is just better for the mayors at the local level to do nothing and not to implement it.

Best Address: how should we have done better?

Would start with finding "active allies"¹ in the Bourgmestre and administrations in order to support the project and make it move forward. These active allies can then relay the project in their administrations. You have to find them, and see how you can work with the positive once, and against the active negative actors. E.g. St-Gilles is supportive because it might simplify their work. However, it is difficult to do it in Flanders and Wallonia, less in Brussels.

FD is only at the beginning of this reflexion on, what could have done better. But you feel that the real issue was support to the project from the start.

So far, no clear implementation, as an authentic source, of Best Address. National Register is just a box filled by communes which includes the streets' list, but the communes are free to put the street number and the box number that they want. So National Register doesn't have a list of addresses, but only a list of street names (not numbers and box). Now the National Register wants to receive a basis version on 1 January 2018 and then receive modifications every day from PIC, CRAB and URBIS.

For FPS Finance and Company Crossroad Bank (KBO), Best Address committee has no vision on what they want to do, what they expect from it. Right now, addresses of KBO are addresses

¹ In a project, there are active allies = agree with project and want to invest in it; passive allies = agree but don't want to invest; active opponents = don't agree + want to ruin the project; and passive opponents = don't agree but won't do anything about it.

coming from “company guichets”. Ideally, these guichets should also adapt and only use “Best Addresses” as of 1 January 2018.

For the respondent, the civil servants should work more with coordinate position of the object that interests them, rather than trying to absolutely provide an address to this object (ex: idea to give an address to wind turbines is insane).

Real reflexion should be: what to we want to put in the database and what for? Right now there are no such reflexions and this leads to situations where we try to fit in these databases stuff that shouldn't be in there and becomes a mess.

So work should be done around authentic sources of buildings, parcels, addresses (street, number, box as these three elements are what allows to deliver mail to a specific person/company) for what they are, and not for extrapolated use. For example, address is of capital importance for emergency services and mistakes can be fatal.

Cooperation with BPOST is complicated because they do not want to give their address lists to the Region (either because no will to do so, either because they don't know how to do it technically, either because it is in the hand of external service providers, or maybe because they are scared of the competition).

Major administrative use case is crossing data based on addresses.

The communes don't really want to get involved in all these additional issues as this would create more work for them, yet it is absolutely vital! This asks to handle much larger issues of society: how do we give a roof to homeless people.

For the respondents, Flanders and Brussels, Best Address should be opened. In Wallonia, they still have to convince minister that it should be freely opened (as right now they ask for money). Moreover, it is not the data as such that is problematic from a privacy perspective, but the use made of this data and the possible cross-referencing of several datasets.

In Best Address, idea is that only the addresses present in the best address authentic source database can be used. If the database doesn't contain an address which is used by someone, then this will be signalled to the relevant commune who will have to say if this address exists or not. So Best address could be used to fight against fraud and corruption. This is already done in certain communes, such as Uccle.