

PSI Alliance – a voice for the re-users

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The European market for the re-use of Public Sector Information (PSI) is estimated to be 27 billion Euros a year. A huge amount of money. But we are not there yet and it is a large market to be exploited by the re-users. Why does it take such a long time to do what US re-users have already done? Why is Europe so far behind? I think that we have the answer in the way the different government authorities handles PSI in Europe. They act as if PSI belongs to them and not to the people and they are especially reluctant if private companies come and want to make profit out of “their” information. So when EU calls for PSI re-use the authorities continues the same way that they always have done – being restrictive and often preferring to distribute the information by themselves.

But what are the re-users doing? They often handle the discussion about access and re-use one by one with the authorities. Sometimes they complain about their situation to administrative courts or in some cases they complain to the EU Commission. But often they remain silent to avoid disturbing the relationship with their supplier of information, normally an authority in a monopoly situation.

Some of the re-users have started an organization to be stronger in their struggle to get better conditions for PSI re use. The PSI Alliance was founded last year (2008) with ambitions to exchange good and bad practice among its members and to speak with one voice to different stakeholders.

The PSI Alliance is now one year old and is active in the debate about what actions could or should be taken in order to raise the activity on the re-use market. On the 25 June PSI Alliance held a members meeting in Brussels to discuss different ways of going forward. We all agreed that the best way of doing that is to highlight good practice or good thinking and spread the best solutions among the re-users and PSI Holders. This was the theme on our re-user conference and is the theme for PSI Alliance during the forthcoming year.

Key examples of good practice and good thinking highlighted at the conference were:

- New pricing policies in the Netherlands. They are moving towards **marginal cost/delivery cost** on PSI. Of special interest in the meeting was pricing in the meteorological area. As from January 2009 prices on synoptic and radar observations are to be based on delivery costs.
- A new and more flexible **re-dress mechanism** has been implemented in Slovenia. In Slovenia you can apply to the Information Officer if you are dissatisfied with the decisions from Public Sector Bodies. In 2008 the Information Officer had to deal with 328 cases when Public Sector Bodies denied access/re-use to PSI or did not make any decision at all.
- The Competition Authority in Sweden has suggested (in a report to the Swedish government) that central government agencies should be prohibited to sell goods and services (including information) in competitive markets. **Competitive distortions should be reduced** by more effective rules for public selling activities.

This is good news for the PSI Alliance. We have for a long time struggled for better solutions when it comes to fair prices (marginal costs/delivery costs), fair competition (only competition among private companies) and more flexible ways to appeal when re-users and companies disagree. Now we can see signs that changes may happen in different European countries. So, if you have examples of good practice or good thinking please send them to the PSI Alliance and we will publish it on our web site for others to follow.

Rolf Nordqvist

Chairman PSI Alliance