Reuse of public sector information – The Norwegian story

Submitted on 28 Sep 2010 by

A few weeks ago I was invited by the ePSI Platform team to blog about Norway and our work on reuse of public sector information. The timing couldn't have been better.

A little while ago, the Norwegian ministry of government administration, reform and church affairs launched the web site data.norge.no — this web site — as a blog. Data.norge.no is not going to remain only a blog, however. It will soon become a national data catalog as well.

Interestingly enough, this blog post is our first blog post in English. And the timing is perfect. Yesterday's announcement, which I'll get back to in a moment, is a small step into the international open data community. Blogging about our project in English is another.

We've been working on a national data catalog for a while, aiming to create something I would like to call "cleverly unspectacular". I believe we have succeeded.

First of all, we called the web site data.norge.no. We were not the first, nor the second or the third. We are, however, one of an increasingly large number of countries and cities participating in the global movement to realize the potential in public sector information.

To get there, we need to establish certain principles. A corresponding web site naming pattern might seem trivial, and probably is, but it helps to establish a small sense of common ground between all the different countries working on this subject, preparing us for the larger challenges to come.

And the larger challenges will come if we really want to realize the full potential of public sector information. This is especially true for what we might label "Public sector information 2.0", meaning raw data that has been published in machine readable formats. To enable the kind of creativity and effort only a potential market of hundreds of millions of people can ignite, we need to agree on certain fundamental principles that make it possible to create an app in one country and sell it in ten or twenty, merely changing the URL of the raw data stream for each new country.

This will not happen overnight, and for some kinds of data it will not happen at all. But for all the kinds of data that is, by and large, similar across national borders, we should endeavor to have them all published in the same way, and make sure they are truly interchangeable.

Therefore, our decision to follow the budding data-dot web site naming pattern is not the only decision we have made in this regard, nor the most important. To participate in this nascent and informal work on establishing shared principles regarding public sector information in machine readable formats, we have also decided to reuse some of UK's brilliant work on creating open source data catalog software, and to contribute back to this project in all possible ways.

During the next few months, data.norge.no will be set up as a national data catalog using CKAN, Drupal, and the integration module used by data.gov.uk. By doing this, we hope not only to contribute to this specific software implementation of the concept of a data catalog, but also to do our part in the establishment of a common set of principles on the publication of public sector information in machine readable formats. Copying data.gov.uk is not in any way spectacular, but at this point in the history of public sector information, it is certainly clever.

This blog has been published simultaneously at data.norge.no Sverre will be following this up with further blogs to let us know how things are going.