

Chapter 4.20

Usability Driven Open Platform for Mobile Government (USE–ME.GOV)

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ABSTRACT

This chapter introduces the USE-ME.GOV project that supports and encourages the authorities with

the access to new e-government services at any time and anywhere through the use of mobile communications and Semantic Web technologies. The USE-ME.GOV system addresses openness,

interoperability, usability, and security scientific goals, and throughout the chapter the methodology and main outcomes are described.

MOTIVATION AND GOALS

IST initiatives for improving services to citizens and businesses are increasingly being promoted and implemented by individual authorities and organizations. Even smaller towns operate their own Web site with access to general public information, whereas larger cities and institutions generally offer a wider range of more sophisticated electronic (Web-based) services.

However, the richness and quality of these services can vary significantly. In particular, small authorities, for example, in rural areas, have limited financial, technical, and human resources in order to implement and deploy electronic services with the same quality as large organizations (Leenes & Svensson, 2002). This aspect becomes even more critical for the deployment of mobile services because of a higher complexity of service implementation, the required organizational changes as well as higher costs for commercial exploitation due to the complexity of the value chain.

Authorities are usually organized in departments, each with their own responsibilities, tasks, structure, and customers. Unfortunately, the IT infrastructure and equipment, as well as the corresponding technical background knowledge, are often different in each department. Mobile operators or portals are searching for content to promote their new mobile technologies and approach public organizations to deliver services on Internet and wireless networks. Once contracted, one department connects to a particular mobile operator and “somebody” implements a proprietary bridge to one specific operator interface. This bridge can normally not be reused for other applications or other mobile operators.

Authorities are now actively searching for mobile solutions to implement regulations and recommendations from state, national, and European bodies calling for e-government, e-governance, and of course m-government. But due to a lack of adequate technical background, monetary shortcuts, legal restrictions on innovative partnerships and business plans, and less experience in mobile markets and their interdependencies, the authorities are hesitant about investing time and money in stand-alone proprietary solutions that require major investments.

The deployment of an open service platform, that can be shared by networked authorities and institutions (e.g., on a regional scale) in terms of technical resources as well as commercial exploitation, would harmonize the quality of public services and overcome related *divide* phenomena. On the other hand, resource sharing on the basis of attractive business models would also provide the conditions for cost-efficient m-government services especially in geographical areas with low Internet penetration.

Therefore, the USE-ME.GOV project aims to provide an open and interoperable platform that can be shared by different local authorities and diverse organizational units. This sharing of the platform means that the cost of ownership of such a solution is reduced. Also, by emphasizing the openness of the platform, any involved party is given the choice of providing services in any suitable or available technology.

Hence, the USE-ME.GOV project’s key objective is to support authorities entering the mobile market with an open source platform that allows:

- The sharing of common modules with other departments or other authorities (for example, subscription, alerting components);
- Making development and operation more secure through open source transparency;

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