

The Issue of Public Sector Information Resources at the Threshold of Big Data



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There is a renewal of the diffusion of public information and public sector information. It is much related to the rise of the knowledge economy.

The project

The projects in which I participated provide relevant information about the challenges and deficiencies of public policies and the state framework in Portugal. The deficiencies are: ignorance, inertia, incompetence, arrogance (of decision-makers and consultants), reductionism and bias as well as lack of capacity and compliance with the law by the structures involved and their decision-makers.

There is a co-existence of disciplinary and professional traditions and interest groups (lato sensu) that foster an anti-political system, averse to genuine public service, transparency and the intrinsic interest of citizenship and that revolves around the state, the public system and partisan, partisan or private entities that do not understand or do not want to understand what a democracy implies (entités qui font fi de la démocratie et de ses institutions).

¹ The editor's version can be found at <https://critiquema.hypotheses.org/1309>. See citation at the beginning of this copy. Same text.

Portugal, within the European Union is a relatively small state with unitary organization. The total population is slightly more than ten millions inhabitants living mostly on the Continent, with the exception of the autonomous regions of Madeira and the archipelagos of Azores.

Regional autonomy is provided by the Constitution and there are two autonomous regions: Madeira and Açores (Azores), that we have not studied specifically.[1] Both Madeira and Azores have legislative and administrative competencies, besides the power to create public organizations, but, in their action, they have to cooperate and subordinate to the central state.

Most of the public sector information, that has been subject of the research, is information that is provided by central (state) organizations.

The organizations surveyed are mostly at situated the national level. At the regional or local level, municipalities, municipal organizations and port administrations are the entities dealing with public sector information. In the case of municipalities, the organizations are mostly related to the transport sector, like the public bus companies and the underground transport (metropolitan).

The autonomous regions proper, Madeira and Azores, do not have specific organizations in the survey that answered either the Web survey or the public content survey. For lacking answers, it was not possible to get contact persons. However, such covering problem is offset by the fact that most of the organizations contacted in the different public domains are at the national level, except, as mentioned above, the public transport.

Most of the public sector information in Portugal is provided by the central state or organizations with a national scope of action. Often the entity that provides the information is a Ministry (*Ministério*), a Secretary of Ministry (*Secretaria- Geral*) or a specific organization (a private firm, a foundation, etc.) The urban areas of Coimbra, Lisbon and Porto were studied, especially in the domain of transport with organizations under the control of the municipality. We have tried to give a national coverage that gives a general picture of what is the state of affairs in the public information sector in Portugal in 2005.

Several organizations, such as the *Direcção Geral de Registo e Notariado* (Car registration, firm registration), *Estradas de Portugal, CP, INE*, etc. do appear in different domains or sub-domains two times.

We were able to identify an organization for each sub-domain in all domains. This was not easy to do given the bureaucratic structure of the Ministries and Secretary of State (or Ministry). The information on the internet was in the vast majority insufficient for doing the web survey properly, so we had to telephone most of the organizations at least once.

We were able to get an email address and, less frequently, the name of a contact person. When the name was missing because the organization did not give us or was not willing to give us the name of a respondent, we usually had either the proposal of the Director (*Director-Geral, Director de Serviço*) or the public relation service.

All in all we had to make some more than 250 calls, if not 300 for getting the information about the organization that was dealing with one specific domain or the contact person in the organization. We have to recognize that in some cases there was a real difficulty in getting the contact of the right person.

We have also sent a first email explaining in a brief letter the purpose of the research and asking for collaboration with the forthcoming survey. We have to recognize that about 15 to 20 % replied to the email we have sent, usually acknowledging reception and saying that they will transmit it either up to the hierarchy or to a specific person. These answers could have taken, in some cases, more than six weeks.

This text was written before my more recent thinking on big data. Some of its conclusions remain. Part of the research was done during my sabbatical year in Belgium in 2015-2016.

References:

Jacquinet, Marc, João Relvão Caetano and Henrique Curado (2006): "Interim report on mepsir project (Measuring European Public Sector Information Resources). State: Portugal," pp. <http://hdl.handle.net/10400.2/9045>

Jacquinet, Marc, Henrique Curado and João Relvão Caetano (2008): "A miragem do e-governo e a questão da cidadania: uma perspectiva sociológica," pp. <https://repositorioaberto.uab.pt/handle/10400.2/8787>

Update from 2021 - I have translated the present study and adapted it for teaching purpose in 2021, see Jacquinet, Marc (2021): "A questão dos recursos de informação do sector público," pp. <https://repositorioaberto.uab.pt/handle/10400.2/10531>

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