Chapter 20
The German Environmental Information Portal PortalU

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ABSTRACT

In Germany, public environmental data are in the responsibility of several different public organisations and institutions. The German Environmental Information Portal PortalU® (www.portalu.de) is a web service operated by the environmental administrations to make digital environmental information easier accessible, usable and exploitable for both citizens and environmental experts. The fruitful long-time co-operation between the environmental administrations is an example for a well working organisational structure within a federal state. In this chapter the PortalU technology and the content of the portal are presented. Due to the current discussion referring to INSPIRE, a special focus is set on publishing INSPIRE conform metadata.

INTRODUCTION

Finding and using relevant digital information are getting more and more difficult in times of the overwhelming range of information in the World Wide Web. Search engines like Google or Yahoo will thereby be helpful to solve general questions. But are these search results in fact always relevant? And what is about the quality of the results? In the field of public environmental information,

the German Environmental Information Portal PortalU offers an alternative to Google and co. In Germany, public environmental information are widespread over many public organisations and institutions and thereby collected and preserved in different ways, both technically and semantically. This makes it difficult to find, exploit and analyse environmental information in a broader context. The web service PortalU, operated by the German environmental administrations on federal and state level, aims at making digital environmental information easier accessible, us-

able and exploitable for experts and non-experts. Thus, the portal enables information providers as well as users to improve the potential of digital environmental information. The chapter aims at giving an inside in the technology behind PortalU and the current content of the portal. Due to the current discussion referring to INSPIRE, a special focus is set on the InGrid®Catalog, which can be used to publish information about spatial data and services in terms of INSPIRE.

BACKGROUND

The central web application PortalU offers access to publicly owned environmental information especially on federal and state level, but also increasingly on municipal level in Germany. The portal aims at establishing a fast and reliable survey of all relevant public environmental information. PortalU plays an important role within the strategy of the environmental administration in reference to the Aarhus Convention, the EU Directive 2003/4/EC and the INSPIRE Directive.

The Aarhus Convention is a convention of the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe Committee on Environmental Policy from 1998 with focus on access to information, public participation in decision-making and access to justice in environmental matters (UNECE 2009). The convention aims at strengthen the rights of access to information, public participation in decision-making and access to justice in environmental matters in order to contribute to the protection of right of present and future generations to an environment adequate to his or her health and well-being. The Aarhus Convention is the first contract according to international law which assigns each person rights referring to environmental protection. It was signed by 35 nations, including Germany, and the European Union. Based on the Aarhus Convention the European Parliament and the Council passed the EU Direc-

tive 2003/4/EC on public access to environmental information in 2003, which is shortly called the Environmental Information Directive (EU 2003). This directive aims at guaranteeing the right of access to public environmental information and setting out the basic terms and conditions of and practical arrangements for its exercise. Above this the directive aims at ensuring that environmental information is progressively made available and disseminated to the public to achieve the widest possible systematic availability and dissemination to the public. A further EU directive which concerns environmental information was passed by the European Parliament and the Council in 2007: the EU Directive 2007/2/EC for establishing an infrastructure for spatial information in the European Community, which is shortly called the INSPIRE Directive (EU 2007). As the title of the directive already implies, the directive aims at establishing an infrastructure for spatial information. The INSPIRE Directive thereby defines 34 spatial data themes, which are described in the three annexes of the directive. In order to implement the INSPIRE Directive, separate implementing rules for metadata, network services, data specifications, data sharing as well as monitoring and reporting are defined. The implementing rules for metadata for instance are already passed in December 2008. The corresponding metadata for the spatial data themes, which are described in annex I and II of the INSPIRE Directive, has to be provided until December 2010. Metadata for INSPIRE annex III spatial data themes has to be provided until December 2013.

Due to these legal obligations, one important focus of PortalU is the evidence of environmental information according to the Environmental Information Directive. Moreover PortalU will be the central nodal point for collecting environmental metadata in Germany referring to INSPIRE. So especially the active dissemination of environmental information as well as the discovery of

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