Interview FPS Internal Affairs

For more information about this interview, please contact Mr. Maxim Chantillon (KU Leuven Public Governance Institute – maxim.chantillon@kuleuven.be)

Presentation of the organization

Crisis Management Agency is a coordinating actor between a lot of different federal administrations and regional emergency centers and emergency services. That is why they need to work with a lot of stakeholders and get data from NGI. So, the needs of the crisis center don't come from the center per se but from their relation with all stakeholders.

They are currently developing an new crisis system that aims at working with a lot of different stakeholders (private or public) in the preparation and reaction of the crisis. They need to have a good transmission and update of the data with a good security as well. The problem with the data lifecycle (production, update, dissemination,…) comes from the high stakeholder number.

Furthermore, the complexity of the data exchanges continues as the exchange become more complex because they were first at macro- strategic level (by giving advices to communities). But now, they identify a need for data although the data does not exist (for instance, what is in the ground at Ghislangien?). So the operational actors ask for the data from the crisis management to know where the (for instance) pipelines are. So there need to have two cartographies : high level and operational level that need to be complementary.

Interoperability Problems

They sometimes realize that some datasets are better than other for several aspects. They need to combine several sources as a role of geo-broker. But the idea of having one dataset for one use is also a dream.

The quality of data is the big problem but the sources of data pose less problem. The sources of data come from private federation but sometimes from FPSs. The financial arrangement also evolves and need to be re-done for each data source. Searching for the authentic sources of data is really time consuming. The key of the problem in crisis management are the conflicting data sources. They are now developing a new system to have this data library in order to have a common data sources.

At the moment of selecting the sources of data, there are not tensions such as "my source is better than yours". It is a case-by-case choice For instance, the data of Synergrid depends on the quality of the work of the data producers. Sometimes, you realize that the authentic sources are not the best sources.

The Belgium structure also impacts the data as the (for instance) waterflows don't have the same level of detail depending on the region. Wallonia will study some things and Flanders other : the data are not conflicting or incompatible but simply do not speak about the same things. There is the strategic user and the operational user that lead to non-universal data. Each data is produced for a goal. There is work to be done, not on uniformity but in consistency in usages.

The technical standards could improve the situation although is it often the case already. But the problem resides in the usage of the data (what means the data). The progress resides in metadata that needs to be improved.

Involvement of users

try to integrate the different stakeholders but it is sometimes easier for some than for other. For instance, with federal partners it is easy as they are almost "colleagues". For the firefighters, it is hard to know who is representative (experts that is not really representatives vs operational level but no expert). They need to take 34 stakeholders into account. The problem does not reside in the technical issues but in the culture that is totally different in the approaches of geo-data. The spend a lot of time of building systems that fit to all cultures (for technical level,, you can do anything with web-services).

For the concrete implication, they involve one Flemish representative and Walloon representative that are involved in the design and test of the process. For instance for the police, there send 10 representatives to have a complete view of cultures. However, they have difficulty conflicting requirements. They want to avoid having specificities because it is hard to integrate all these specificities for each system.

Quality of Data

For the update, do they impose requirements ? It depends if they have a crisis or not. They have more easily updated data because of some incidents. They have conventions for some partners and sometimes not. There is always a check of the quality but it depends on the data producer.

Do they prefer 100% quality data or minimum requirements of quality ? It depend up to how far they have to go in the system they want to build. It depends if it is a strategic or operational intervention. If the user improve the data, do they get the update ? It is also case-per-case. They have some information from the local communities. But for other sources such as TomTom, they send themselves the update to TomTom to improve the quality to TomTom. Some other actors, such as the firefighters, improve the quality because they need it but they don't send the update to Crisis Center. There is also the improvement by themselves like Data enrichment where they input data from a data producer. The problem resides when they have another data from the producer, the enrichment is lost. The case of the waters is a good example because they imposed some requirements for datasets.

Best-Address

They were a bit involved in best-address. They don't need BEST to have good addresses because regions already provide good addresses. BEST is better for more high level users. They will re-use the output of BEST when it is done. The difficulty resides in the different identifying of the addresses. In that case, the problems resides at local community due to local communities merges that need to differentiate different street names. In the crisis centrum, they need to identify dangerous objects (with XY identifiers) that will stay the same nevertheless the addresses. But will Best-Address be able to influence TomTom ? The precision of the data depends on the use we want.

Open Data

The fact of working on Open Data helps them in their work. They mostly work with Open Suit Map: They work during 12 years with Data specialists. On basis of the specialist, the quality of the data is sufficient for the strategic level but will maybe be insufficient for several operational use. They now are in open Data with control.

Support from FEDICT

For ICT architecture of dispatching services, they work with Proximus and FEDICT and Smals (→ but maybe ask to more technical profiles). The only application they develop right now is the 112 application. A few years ago, they went to see FEDICT but they have declared themselves incompetent for the development of applications. Now they have seen Smals to have SLA and will send soon the most fitting experts.

Private Sector Involvement

No problem of using this sector. It is so specific competencies that they need to turn to the private. The only difficulty is that they need to beware of the data sources that don't need to turn of the sensitive data. You have many experts in the administration that may be afraid the private sector will be stealing their job.

Need for IT Skills

They don't need computer scientists in their core business. However, they search for engineers (biochemists) or profiles in telecommunications. Often, this is a choice between vocation and salary.

However, the tendency seems to be shifting due to the financial crisis to privilege the stability of the work instead of the salary. The administration is also changing by becoming more agile. The problem comes from the budgets as a motivated person can be incapable of performing interesting tasks due to budget cuts (example of informaticians that did not last 2 years at the crisis centrum).

Role of the NGI
There is a lot of data sources with different quality but what is for you a potential solution ? It would be good to have one common repository of data (ex: NGI as Geo-broker). NGI distributes TomTom but TomTom does not have a Belgian focus. It would be nice if the NGI would repository other sources of data but also simply indicate the best authentic sources of data (as data exchange bank). NGI cannot replace the regions as main producers of data in Belgium (because AGIV has more than 100 people)
At the crisis centrum, they have stand-alone app and access to multitude of data (through Web-apps and access to WMS). With the web, they would depend on the willingness of other actors to access web (ex: Police is more in a stand-alone).
The problem with TomTom Data is that they conduct themselves as commercial. Furthermore, you have to delete all TomTom data at the end. There should be an agreement because TomTom re-use data from the regions. They would want to use public data but the quality is sometimes an issues and leads to private sector data.