

Interview BPOST

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Case study Best Address: Very relevant according to respondent because it is a long-lasting project that, in his opinion, will not end anytime soon.

Reaction on requirements: Lack of financial resources are a big issue but FLEXPUB will not have an impact on that. On the other hand, the Open Source movement could be a very interesting solution to cut costs in order to avoid licenses, and to have a better interoperability.

Opinion on FLEXPUB : The true objective would be to go out of best practices and go on the field to get the knowledge. It is interesting to talk about lack of political support, lack of financial resources but we will have no impact on it. It is more interesting to tackle concrete issues (like Best Address,...). It is better to take into account the challenges in order to make recommendations. For instance in BEST, it would be interesting to go in Local Communities.

Presentation of respondent

Respondent does not represent the whole organization of Bpost. Respondent is a geographer that is implicated in Best-Address. Their position is ambiguous because they are considered as private sector (with an entry in the stock market). But this position of “public-private” leads to difficult access to data (difference between Flanders and Brussels that are open >< Wallonia where it is expensive).

At company level, he works at operational level (logistic). But there is also a marketing and sales service that wants to generate money out of the two services. At operational level, they have an open access vision whereas the marketing department thinks about money. It leads to difficult conversations internally.

BEST Address

With regard to geo-data, he is responsible of the Address office that tries to concentrate all projects that are linked to address. Thanks to this office, they have connections with a lot of stakeholders and a leading position with Best-Address. Best has advantages for everybody and not only for Bpost. Their implication in Best make them realize that bureaucracy is an issue (operational level where OK but political will of not acting). They have arrived to a point where he thinks that Best Address will arrive at a dead end. They have a double role : Federal partner but also private. The time that the public spends on this is frustrating because, in the private world, it could have been done faster with results.

He advocates for a privatization but not a total liberalization. This means that there are qualified people within the administrations but that are stopped due to the public culture. The other aspect of privatization is to inject good sense in public sector to meeting efficiency. For instance, we should avoid meetings where everybody don't take decisions.

There are two main issues with best :

- The regions are official suppliers of addresses registries. Although there were agreed conceptual models, each of the regions developed the addresses separately. The result is that the implementation of the model leads to problems to build web-services. The agreement was that the address is linked to an object (Flanders OK but Not OK for Wallonia and Brussels. Wallonia asked for an external partner that did not do his job well). When it is not linked to an object, When they build a web-services across regions, it is not possible due to different conceptual models. So now, BOSA cannot find solutions, Flanders is tired of the project and Wallonia/Brussels stay on their position.
- Link with CIRB: these are two incompatibles way of working. But he advocates for the other way around with Wallonia/Brussels that work in “a more pragmatic way”.

Operational Databases of Address within BPOST

BPOST has the best operational databases of addresses of Belgium. Firstly, this database is designed and build for the specific requirements of BPOST (postal services, concept of address where they have different postal boxes. They need to give postal time to the postman and thus have two addresses for two entries. In the case of BEST, there is only one address). In the case of Best, the requirements are different. BPOST aims for postal needs whereas Best aims for all identifiable objects.

Secondly, they need to work on the other way around with the regions that need to send their addresses to BPOST. Thanks to their algorithms, they will review the variability of all addresses (they can work with different languages, synonyms,...) and integrate this within their database. In his opinion, these algorithms work better than the geo-coder of person X. Thanks to this processing, they don't say that it is "the truth" but that it is a deliverable address.

Thirdly, there is a legal issues with all address that should be in the register must be "official". However, the local communities have trouble validating these addresses. Best is a premise to the solution that will lead to other problems. The position of BPOST is to deliver a good service to the citizens thanks to the official register. The hope to constraint the communities to work thanks to their relation with the regions that might have an impact on the communities.

In the cooperation agreement, their role is a "federal partner". But they want to re-create the relation with the communities. They sometimes have problems because the communities say that they don't understand why they should mention it. The explanation is that if they find the problem directly on the ground, the citizen will not receive its letters for a long time. He hopes that BEST will formalize this relation. He hopes that, on a regular way, they will thanks to the feedback mechanisms, receive feedback from the communities.

The blockage due to the different models of the regions comes from:

- The fear of losing face, political problems.
- They will try to an "arranged" solution.
- BOSA must find a technical solution although he only finds

Pressure from BPOST that MUST use BEST on the 1st January (due to the cooperation agreement). The put pressure to have this database.

BPOST has the project of bypassing FEDICT/BOSA and go directly with the regions (he has a meeting directly with AGIV next week).

The goal of BEST is to have the same address for everybody in Belgium. That is where the DTO should intervene but don't have the resources. They will develop in SOAP although all regions are ready to go in REST (Urbis will develop in REST for instance). They have a large delay on technological level although they should have a lead on technological level. They don't realize that developing in SOAP and make the modifications in all regions will have a higher cost. They chose for short term easy instead of high level change. Finally, they also play will different playing fields with digital divide in administrations and in citizens.

Why to problem of change management ? They have a lack of resources although it is easy to hire people in REST. There is also the willingness to have security and don't go into an innovation. He also thinks that the directors of BOSA don't know about new interfaces and lack arguments in front of the political representatives. That is why we should not wonder why they are bypassed.

BPOST is happy not to be an administration within such structure and do not have to go through a lot for structure to deliver their e-service.

Requirements centric services vs Data-centric (where e-services are build thanks to a database).

The web-services of BPOST came a lot later comparably to their database. There was probably a reflection at the beginning because the database was the core-business of BPOST. They started from the needs of the users (for address validation for instance). There is a concept of requirements of final users that is missing from current administration.

The problem with BEST was that they were not functional requirements analysis of the final users from the beginning (of the local community). Furthermore, the software developers firms (CIVADIS) are not in the loop as well. Starting of the DB would be ideal but the requirements of users are more pragmatic.

BOSA, in its culture, sometimes lack of transparency and sometimes want to have a 100% solution that will stuck everyone in the process. The leadership is missing at federal level.

Evolution towards Privatization

The rentability of the private sector leads them have closer deadlines because of constraints. In public sector, he feels that this willingness to go forward is not there because people feel that somebody else will be able to do the work. Two causes : people don't want to go to fast to not raise question + the objective of making everybody agrees is not possible. Sometimes, the political decisions need to be made without taking care of ALL requirements just to move on. At BPOSt, the willingness to move on came from two aspects :

- Top-Management: The person in charge of the leadership needs to drive people.
- The organization at global level falls in the private sphere : rentabilization, financierization, stock markets, objective to sell one day → Leads to increased motivation.

Now the people that worked "too slowly" are not in the organization anymore. The mentality of "working within 7.36" is not in BPOST anymore.

In his "Open Source" strategy, the respondent encountered an Infrabel member that had to justify the purchase of an old license and did not have time to foster Open Source. .

Sometimes he feels that BPOST are pressed to get deadlines, BUT there is the possibility to ask for time to work on a better quality software. There is a tension between meetings to be sure to have good project but that don't have to last too long.

Willingness to build e-services

They have some enterprise architects that take care of high level view to be sure there is no silo structure at ICT level. However, it is hard to reconcile the requirements of all departments. At the level of geo-data, they have all licenses, all contracts that all do the same thing but for different people. The respondent tries to acquire generic services for everybody. The boss of respondent challenges to architects to have new technologies, new projects because the inertia challenge is still here. All services that they build are re-usable in plug-and-play. He also does internal promotion to foster the applications on these web-services.

For the purchase of Geo-data, they use multiple sources (including the NGI)