

REUSING INFORMATION IN THE TOURIST SECTOR: INDUSTRY ACCESS TO ADMINISTRATIVE INFORMATION AND ITS SUBSEQUENT REUSE IN BUSINESS

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By nature of their activity public administrations possess huge volumes of information that could be valuable to the market. Today, transparency, responsibility and reuse are issues of importance.

Public data can be source of wealth that generates new services for citizens, who should always bear in mind that these data have been generated from tax revenues, and therefore constitute a public good.

This paper broaches the analysis of information reuse in the tourist sector. Given that tourist activity is one of the great job providers in the world, and especially so in Spain, tourist administration will, by nature, generate a huge amount of information for potential commercial use.

The arrival of information technologies and knowledge, accompanied by their incorporation into the information activity of public administrations, not to mention the Internet, has increased accessibility to administrations' information. However, there has been some lag in the development of rules regulating administrative dissemination over the Internet.

Public administrations are aware that they can reuse the information they generate by commercializing it directly or through third parties. This new situation has led to public powers adopting various rules to regulate the reuse and commercialization of information by the private sector.

Yet it was not until 2003 that the concern about the reuse and commercialization of information would be recognized and envisaged under Directive 2003/98/EC of the European Parliament and Council of November 17 on the reuse of public sector information (hereinafter, RSP). This constituted an attempt by the European Union to establish a general framework of conditions for the reuse of public sector documents by all the member countries. The Directive aims to establish a common framework for the conditions for reusing public sector documents in order to get conditions that are «fair, *proportional and nondiscriminatory*.

In Spain, Act 37/2007 on the reuse of public sector information aims to regulate the legal system applicable to the reuse of documents drawn up or held by public sector administrations and bodies.

Of relevance here is the «*Characterization Study of the Infomediary Sector*» which covers the gap left by the absence of studies analyzing the infomediary business sector in Spain. It is the first Opendata X-ray in the country.

For the purposes of this study the Infomediary Sector was defined for the first time as the «*set of businesses that generate applications, products or services of added value for third parties from Public Sector information*».

The role of Public Administration has been rated by businesses as being fundamental and indispensable in the development of the Infomediary Sector. The opening up of information by Public Administrations has had positive repercussions for the development of its applications, products and services and had increased the number of customers.

The mid to long-term view of the businesses belonging to the Infomediary Sector is highly positive as regards growth and economic consolidation, job creation, development of the Information Society and increases in investments in R+D+I.

Public data of importance for the tourist sector which should be worked with in order to enhance current approaches. Two stand out: the normalization of formats and improved description of the information; and the other is to regulate licenses and income models and so establish a homogeneous competition framework.

Although the economic crisis does not seem to be hitting the tourist sector as hard as others, the World Tourism Organization at its last General Assembly published a «*Roadmap to Recovery*» which offers a set of guidelines on this issue: 1. An attempt to increase collaboration, research and information exchange between the public and private sectors, to prepare new tools for this and to analyze the data. 2. Simplification of procedures and rules to increase productivity, which requires boosting «*cooperative competition*». 3. Encourage all agents to adopt innovative practices and to increase their technology applications.

These three guidelines, approved by the WTO, are a clear reflection of the shift in direction in this matter.

We consider that the information of interest to the tourist sector is not merely that which refers to tourist resources but also public data on culture, geography, meteorology and administrative procedures. The administration itself and the infomediary firms devoted to reuse could mix these data (of different typologies and origins) and so obtain very valuable information given the multifactorial nature of tourism. In any case, there is a general consensus that rates very positively the fruits of information technologies in terms of growth of productivity, reduction in costs, elimination of barriers to international trade, multiplication of internationalization possibilities for businesses and, in aggregate terms, in terms of the acceleration of economic growth and increased employment.

Nevertheless, it is necessary to consider some legal problems that may be generated by reuse practices with respect to issues like copyright which may arise from the use of geographical data, administrative procedures and tourist resources which are important for the tourist sector.

A fair number of Public Administrations are already facilitating data for the purposes of reuse. Indeed, it is significant that the portals of these very institutions not only provide these data but also encourage their reuse, either by proffering information about them or even by offering examples of applications based on data available on the same website, *«with the aim of serving as inspiration for reusers»*. The «Sociedad Estatal para la Gestión de la Innovación y las Tecnologías Turísticas, S.A.» (SEGITTUR), a state company for managing information and tourist technologies, declares that the data on Internet used together with the services and applications created through the spread of smart-phones show that *«interaction between users and destinations is a reality. This new reality has benefited companies that have been able to find new opportunities»* – a clear reference to the infomediary sector.

After consulting the tourist databases provided by the Administrations that are fully involved in encouraging reuse, the conclusion is that they are still not abundant.

In any case, the creation of databases would be very useful for the development of the infomediary sector in the tourist industry. These should cover the tourist resources available to businesses (trade fair areas, meeting places, etc.); existing restaurants, bars and cafeterias (contact details and information of interest on establishments in the catering industry); leisure facilities (theme parks and attraction parks, play areas, bars, casinos, aquariums, bullrings, etc); transport facilities (airports, stations, ports, parking areas, motorways, etc.); Tourist Information Offices (contact details, opening times, directions, etc.); tourist destinations (description of places, how to get there, information of interest, etc.); and the different types of accommodation for visitors (hotels, pensions, apartments, rural accommodation and campsites). Some infomediary companies have begun to make applications and products based on data published by public administrations. These have normally required several sources of data (e.g. «aquí os quedáis», «Antenitos iplayas», «Aparca», «Bicity», «Denaske», etc.).

It would be highly beneficial to the tourist industry were public administrations to make their data available, since they are depositaries of a huge amount and variety of information of common interest. The use of these data focuses on the area of administration but it can have many more applications. Of interest would be the Registry of Companies and Tourist Activities as would information on the prices charges by these companies.

We propose two types of data reuse:

1. For application for the potential tourist. An application could be made that takes in and crosses existing public data on tourist accommodation in a destination with personal data on the structure (name, situation, availability, contact details); accommodation capacity; accessibility; quality certification; opening hours; languages spoken, reception and reservations; daily room rates; common installations, equipment rooms; services offered; sports and leisure installations; data on the movements of tourists staying in hotels (arrival, presence and origin). We also consider that it would be useful for potential tourists to be able to compare the location, category and price of the accommodation.

2. The chance to compare, the places where there have been the greatest number of complaints by customers and the sector in question. This would mean publishing data on tourism sanctions by administrations (type of establishment receiving complaints, the motives, the sanction imposed, date of the infraction and the sanction). Such an application would be useful for potential tourists and for assessors and consultants; not to mention the Administration which, by generating this cash flow, would be in a position to plan its inspection activity better.

One proposal for reuse, directed now at accommodation businesses, could be for the Autonomous Communities to create an application for subscriber accommodation establishments that would consist of customers booking in at hotels receiving a text message in their cell phones with the events to be held in the area during the time of their stay.

Obviously the type of data put forward here would have to be published by the administrations and with due regard to any limitations and possible legal issues that might arise.