Government mashups -- better contact with public authorities

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Mashups will enable people to inform public authorities about potholes and cracks in the road quickly and without bureaucracy. Credit: Fraunhofer

Potholes in the road or a park bench in need of repair – we all come across these or similar problems every now and then. If only there were a simple way of reporting them to the right department of the public administration! The latest mashup technology and mobile applications make it possible to come up with solutions.

Inspired by the UK website fixmystreet.com , the Fraunhofer Institute for Open Communication Systems FOKUS in Berlin is taking this

approach further. Damage reports can be assigned [GPS](#) coordinates by cell phone and entered. The system then provides an overview of communications received and indicates whether the same matter has been reported by someone else.

As used in information and communication technologies, the term 'mashup' refers to the mixing or combination of data, types of presentation and functionalities from various sources in order to create new services. One example is the placing of restaurant reviews in online maps such as Google Maps. Fraunhofer FOKUS's Government Mashups research project is putting the technology at the public sector's disposal. Solutions that already exist are being developed further to meet the requirements of government administration and the relevant public sector staff are being assisted in the technical implementation of these new services. "Mashups hold enormous potential for public authorities because they link up internal and external data quickly and cheaply," says project manager Dipl.-Ing. Jens Klessmann. "Without any knowledge of computer programming and at little cost administrative staff can create new mashups which can be adapted effortlessly to changing requirements."

Numerous possible applications exist: In addition to complaints management, the use of public funding can for instance be graphically represented, restaurant reviews can be linked to the results of food hygiene inspections, statistics and other official data can be made more easily accessible, and capacity utilization at different airports can be illustrated in order to coordinate rescue services in the event of a disaster.

Such projects are underpinned by statutory regulations and political requirements. For example, laws on the freedom and re-use of government information already require public bodies to provide official data. In its current program to promote networked and transparent

administration the German government has announced that it intends to develop a common strategy for open government. This will include the provision of open data, which are the raw material for government mashups. In addition, governments and public bodies find themselves under growing pressure to justify and explain the increasingly complex procedures underlying their actions. Mashups can be used to explain and visualize these matters.

At CeBit 2011 Fraunhofer FOKUS will present two advanced demonstrators for mashups. Visitors will be invited to take a photo of a pothole on a smart phone and send it to a fictitious city authority as a complaint. And the research scientists will use statistical data from the World Bank to demonstrate how such information can be translated, processed and visualized so that anyone interested can download it.

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