Free Software in the public sector: Getting it right & getting value

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Library of France awards open source maintenance contract

Germany's public authorities moving to open source mail and groupware

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Belgian government makes available source code of voting machines

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Brazil's Parliament studying reuse of Estonian e-government solutions

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White House makes public software to create and sign petitions

Law makes open source the default for Italian public administrations

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Good reasons for Free Software

- Use, study, share, improve
- Vendor independence
- Open Standards
- Adaptability
- Reuse
- Access for citizens
- Cost savings

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Success factors for migrations

Hard factors

- Proper planning & execution
- Training for IT staff & users
- Communication & buy-in

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Success factors for migrations

Soft factors

- Strategic thinking

- Motivation

- Political backing

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The next frontier: procurement

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Problem: brand names

Art. 23(8) of Directive 2004/18/EC:

"technical specifications shall not refer to a specific make or source, […] with the effect of favouring or eliminating certain undertakings or certain products".

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Reality

Almost one in five software tenders on TED mentions a trademark

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FSFE pilot project in Finland

- Regularly review public calls for tender

- If brand name mentioned, inform the authority running the tender

- If no fix possible, FSFE may push to have call invalidated

Favouritism

Procurement process tailored to favour particular suppliers

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Favouritism

Procurement process tailored to favour particular suppliers:

- European Commission hasn't run a public call for tender for office suites & desktop operating systems for *20 years*

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Old habits die hard

- Public bodies sometimes prefer to work with established partners

- Lots too big for SMEs

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Doing it right

- Functionalities & standards, not brand names

- Include exit costs. Break dependency on proprietary formats & macros

- Buy Open Standards

- Get the rights to use, study, share and improve the software

Easy action items

- Establish Free Software working groups in existing public sector associations

- Train procurement people, reduce reliance on vendors' sales pitch

- Create best practice awards – e.g. Best call for tender

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Doing it better

- Framework contracts for Free Software (Kammarkollegiet, Sweden)

- Release software developed with public funds (Basque Country, Spain)

- Make Free Software the default choice (Italy)

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Conclusions

- No longer "why Free Software?", but "why not?"

- Procurement is broken. We need to fix it.

- Government & public bodies can do much, much more to take advantage of Free Software.

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Thank you!

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