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Standards for Citizens

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Abstract

This chapter faces the theme of standardisation oriented to smart communities. This represents a great challenge for all the standardisation bodies in the EU as it needs to immerge technical ICT-based approaches into a civic and social based framework and raise acknowledgment on the importance of such an issue by all the involved parties, city administrations, and citizens.

The chapter provides the background on standardisation activities carried out by European bodies and provides some insights on current work in the field of citizens' standards in smart communities, in terms of both ongoing initiatives and failings faced. Eventually, a view on further needed actions is provided to enhance citizen services, including the data aspects, citizen-oriented management of local authorities, and citizens' security, both physical and online.

10.1 Introduction

Like every other aspect of information and communication technologies affecting our daily lives, smart city and community implementation requires a modicum of standardisation, whether this comes from a large multi-national imposing its own "standardised" solutions, from consortia of like-minded industrial companies devising solutions for interoperability or from formal international or European standards with a wide consensus.

Standardisation in the smart community domain is somewhat in its infancy. It mainly seeks to address either the technical requirements for

communities to carry out their processes or how a community manages these. For various understandable reasons, these solutions do not yet normally take proper account of significant aspects taken from the perspective of the citizen in such a community.

Nevertheless, the smart community concept offers considerable opportunity, not only for citizens to have an improved living environment in which they can benefit from effective services but also for them to influence matters affecting their daily lives. At the same time, we need to ensure equality of treatment for all citizens, and account needs to be taken of data privacy concerns relating to their personal information. So far, the needs of the citizens themselves have been somewhat set aside in the debates concerning smart communities, but, more than ever in a post-coronavirus world, it is important to keep these needs at the forefront of societal development.

This will require increased cooperation, and, indeed, it strongly reinforces the need for standardisation. Of course, some standardisation activities not specifically aimed at local communities as such, for example, the standards in support of data protection and privacy, will nevertheless benefit them. But, equally, it will be necessary to ensure that the development of these wide-reaching standards takes proper account, not simply of the needs of a local authority but those of its citizens.

10.2 The Background

There is a regulatory framework to standards-making at European level. For many years, legislation has set forth the overall concept of standardisation within the European system, and given due recognition to the three European Standardization Organisations, CEN,¹ CENELEC,² and ETSI.³ Many of the standards of interest to the regulator are described as “harmonised” European standards and are drafted in support of legislation. However, these are of relatively small importance in a smart community context – the bulk of activities within the European organisations is purely “voluntary”, in that the standards (and other documents produced by the consensus of participants) are drawn up on the basis of the consensus of participants.

European Standards, nevertheless, undergo a formal process of open comment and national voting (in the EU, the EEA and some additional countries, to a total of 34, or more in the case of ETSI) prior to their publication,

¹ www.cen.eu

² www.cenelec.eu

³ www.etsi.org

and conflicting standards which may exist at national level must be withdrawn. But, in addition, the standards organisations publish many documents that reflect simply the participants' consensus without that formality.

The current overall framework is described in a European Regulation (EU) 1025/2012. This regulation imposed an additional set of obligations on the European standards process to take improved account of the needs of societal stakeholders and SMEs. However, it is difficult for these entities at an individual level to drum up the resources to send a lot of representatives to standards meetings, even to find the time to participate in electronic meetings.

The European Commission and EFTA have, therefore, provided support to four European-level associations representing multiple stakeholders to participate in the European standards process. The result is the existence of the "Annex III" organisations (so-called from the relevant Annex to Regulation 1025). One represents SMEs, and the others act as advocates for the particular aspects of civil society – environmental organisations, organised labour, and consumers.

Thus, the organisation representing consumers, ANEC ("The European Consumer Voice in Standardisation")⁴ has as its member's national consumer bodies in many European countries. As only one of many activities, ANEC is seeking to improve consumers' (i.e., citizens') contribution to standards for smart cities and communities.

Early in 2022, the European Commission adopted a new European standards strategy, and this lays even more emphasis on the urgency for the standards organisations to take account of the needs of all interested parties and, therefore, to improve participation from civil society and SMEs. In response, the European Standards Organisations are considering how they can be more inclusive, given that these organisations lack expertise and indeed resource to be fully participating, except in the most niche and specialist areas.

Thus, for example, a sub-group of the ETSI Board is examining during 2022 and 2023 the ways to improve processes and procedures with an inclusive approach, as well as how to involve potential end-users – including local communities and citizens themselves – with some worthwhile contributions to make, but who are not, for whatever reason, currently adequately involved.

10.3 Citizen Standards in Smart Communities

Several years previously, the standards organisations had been seeking to address the smart community aspects relating to citizens.

⁴ www.anec.eu

Thus, at the European level, a co-ordination Group of CEN, CENELEC, and ETSI had proposed the development of a technical report⁵ on these citizen-related issues, and this proposal was later taken up in the European Commission ICT Standardisation Rolling Action Plans for 2016 and 2017.

This report – not a standard but a narrative setting out what is required – has sought to clarify what further standardisation is needed on citizen issues in the context of smart cities (e.g., standards on what, where, when, etc.), while taking full account of other relevant standards activities under way.

The document – ETSI Technical Report 103 455 – is available free of charge to download.

The report cites a number of serious issues specific to smart cities standardisation, before reaching a number of recommendations on how to try to overcome these and on particular standards activities that are desirable in the interests of the citizens.

On the first, “organisational” aspects:

- cities do not know standardisation and are confused by the plethora of standards and indeed committees with complex rules;
- cities find it very difficult or impossible to participate;
- funding models for standards in this area are inadequate;
- services are not designed for or even accessible to citizens;
- protection for citizens’ data protection and security may be inadequate.

In order to address these failings, the report suggests better financial support for the participation of cities in standards activities, perhaps along similar lines to an existing scheme under Horizon Europe to support participation of experts in international ICT standards activities. In terms of cities’ understanding of standardisation, the report recommends a better engagement between standards organisations at national level and local government structures, to improve policy-makers’ understanding of the importance and relevance of standardisation in their universe. Such engagement can also result in a better process for taking smart community views into account in the standards process to reflect the difficulties local authorities may have to participate.

Turning to the actual standardisation recommendations, these have been divided into three broad categories. First, there is an acute need for

⁵ https://www.etsi.org/deliver/etsi_tr/103400_103499/103455/01.01.01_60/tr_103455v010101p.pdf

consensus-based guidance material, to help smart communities engage better with citizens' needs. Examples include material for training local authority personnel on citizen-related issues, how best to protect citizens' security (both physical and electronic), and how to ensure data protection.

This need can extend in, perhaps, a more binding way to the second category, codes of conduct, or good practice to be observed, albeit on a voluntary basis. This might include citizen-oriented complaint and redress procedures, perhaps along the lines of the existing European On-line Dispute Recognition arrangements or of a good practice in management of services for the individual citizen.

Last but not least, there is the need for more formalised standards. These should cover how services should be designed to meet the needs and capabilities of the citizen, thus making these services user-friendly but also accessible to the less privileged (bearing in mind also the requirements of the European Accessibility Act).

Other more specific citizen-oriented standards are needed for security and data protection, to supplement existing more generic efforts. For example, a standardised approach is needed to cover citizen uses for, and requirements from, the data spectrum. Shared data needs to be involved – for what purpose the data is being shared, for what purpose it is being used, and what security and access controls are required to meet both privacy-preserving and security-minded requirements for the citizen.

10.4 Looking Ahead

The implementation of these recommendations is challenging. Where there are immediate commercial incentives for standardisation, industry seldom has difficulties in ensuring participation in the interests of its markets. Clearly, the commercial incentives for smart city standardisation are limited, and, as noted above, into the bargain local communities' understanding of standardisation is rather poor.

The implementation of the recommendations of the ETSI Technical Report has been affected by these considerations, which, of course, have been exacerbated by the pandemic. The European Standardisation Organisations have agreed to package the recommendations into three broad projects, of which the highest priority has been given to citizen services, including the data aspects. A second project is intended to enhance citizen-oriented management of local authorities, and a third should examine citizens' security, both physical and online. CEN, the European Standards Committee, has started a new Technical Committee (identified as TC465) on Sustainable

and Smart Cities and Communities, and this has now adopted a first work item on citizen services, which will be in the form of an overall work programme proposal, noting that this new field for standardisation needs a number of separate and parallel actions. This activity will start – hopefully with a good involvement of representatives of local communities – as soon as the resources are available.

However, this Committee must not work in isolation. It needs to be linked to a wide range of other generic standards initiatives, and also to regulatory needs, for example, those stemming from the EU Data Governance Act and the future Data Act. The standards produced need to privilege the rights of the individual citizen and provide a non-burdensome set of recommendations to be easily and fruitfully fulfilled by all involved parties.