The Légilocal project: the local law simply shared

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Abstract. The Légilocal project aims to help local authorities to improve the quality, interoperability and publication of French local administrative acts in the same way as Légifrance does at the state and EU level. The originality of the approach is to unify the management of contents and the interactions between actors on these contents. The Légilocal platform combines various tools (content management, networking, semantic annotation and search) and resources to assist clerks in the drafting and publication of local acts.

Keywords. Legal documents, local administration, semantic search, social drafting

Introduction

The Légilocal project ("Local law simply shared") aims to solve the content management problems of French local administrations by developing the tools and infrastructure that help administrators to prepare and publish local acts, decisions and regulations in such a way that they are easy to search for themselves and for the citizens, thus ensuring the accessibility, transparency and quality of local law. The approach combines content management tools (semantic search [3] and annotation [5] technologies based on Metatex Interchange Format [1]) and interaction management services in a single platform that is easily accessible to clerks and citizens.

This project is leaded by Victoires Editions, a legal editor specialized in the right of local communities. It gathers industrial and academic partners in charge of the technological and resource developments on which the Légilocal platform is built. A pilot group of small municipalities is also associated with the project for testing purposes.

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1. Légilocal platform

The Légilocal platform has two main functionalities. 1) It enables local jurisdictions to make public their acts in a searchable form on their websites. This is achieved through the use of semantic vocabularies, the annotation of the documents, which are enriched with searchable metadata, and a semantic search engine that helps to find relevant documents. 2) The platform also enables clerks to work faster and produce safer acts through the sharing of documents among various municipalities and with experts, through tools supporting content management and human interaction, and through a warning system based on the checking of the validity of the document.

To support the above functionalities, a whole platform has been set up (Fig. 1). It is composed of a complex set of tools and repositories (resp. boxes and cylinders) and presents two simple front ends: the REZODAC network for the internal use of clerks and a semantic search engine embedded in the municipalities websites for the citizens.

The unified management of contents and interactions on contents relies on the following tools that have been developed or adapted within the Légilocal project:

- The network management system enables to setup the REZODAC network which controls the flow of information among actors and the processing of documents. Jamespot\(^2\) is a Digital Social Workplace & Enterprise Social Network software that enables collaboration among documents and people. The SocialReady technology extends applications with social objects and actions.
- The annotator enriches the documents with markup, metadata and semantic annotations. Annotation is performed with Luxid\(^3\) and the RTF Skill Cartridge\(^3\) trained on legal corpora.

\(^2\)http://www.jamespot.com/en/
\(^3\)http://www.temis.com/home
A semantic search engine enables document-based faceted navigation and query refinement. It is based on Solr™ open source search platform⁴.

A networking system enables expert search and chatting in REZODAC.

The resource management tools are not part of the platform per se but they are used to design and maintain its semantic resources: Terminae⁵ for the collaborative building of thesauri or ontologies from textual sources [4] and Smart content factory⁶ [2] for the aggregation of relevant domain data models and vocabularies.

The platform also relies on resources. Part of the document base is published by the editor to assist the clerks but its growing part is composed of administrative acts produced by the clerks in REZODAC and enriched with metadata and semantic annotations. The semantic resources are used to annotate and search the document base.

Three categories of users interact with the Légilocal platform. The editor administers the platform, sets up and maintains REZODAC, manages the semantic resources and publishes editorial sources. The clerks are responsible for the edition and publication of the administrative documents (in REZODAC and on the web) but they can also search for documents and expertise within REZODAC. The citizens have access to the Légilocal semantic search engine, embedded as a simple widget in the municipalities websites.

2. Use case and scenario

The Legilocal platform is being tested on a use case related to the right of trails, paths and roads. One scenario aims at testing the added value of the network-based approach for the production of a new administrative document (DAC). The clerk can interact with others and has access to legal expert knowledge provided by Victoires Editions.

Let’s consider a fictitious municipality, Abirée, and Mrs. Irène Proust, its administrator, who has to publish a new decree related to 4-wheel drive vehicles, which use on the municipal roads will be prohibited, according to the decision taken by the last council. She connects herself to REZODAC to get some help. There, she has access to her own working space with the documents she has already drafted but also to the group of Mairie d’Abiree collaborators and to a group of clerks of surrounding municipalities. On REZODAC, the drafting and publication process goes as follows:

Step 1 Irène Proust sends a query ”décret AND 4x4” (”decreet AND 4WD”) or ”décret AND chemins” (”decreet AND trails”). She could try to get in touch with experts, but she begins with seeking documents (the query is sent to the search engine).

Step 2 The systems returns some documents related to these keywords or concepts: acts that have already been published, legislative texts, editorial documents (e.g. feature articles or news) or even comments posted on REZODAC.

Step 3 Irène Proust decides to start with a document that she has found on REZODAC, a decree uploaded by another clerk of her network and which is similar to the one she has to produce. It is a word document. She edits it and adapts it to her needs.

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⁴http://lucene.apache.org/solr/
⁵http://lipn.univ-paris13.fr/terminae/index.php/Main_Page
⁶http://www.mondeca.com/
Step 4 When it is ready, she publishes it as a new document on REZODAC. She press the button "New act" in her interface, which opens a new editing space for the new DAC. She associates some metadata to it (e.g. the type of act and keywords), uploads the draft document and adds a comment "to be reviewed before publication, thanks". When she closes the editing space, the new DAC is posted in the group "Mairie Abirée” with additional semantic information that have been automatically computed (status, locations, actors, themes and references to external legislation).

Step 5 The mayor is notified through REZODAC. He/she looks at the document and validates it by clicking on the button 'Reviewed and validated”.

Step 6 Irène Proust presses the button "Publish". She fills the fields required by the final web publication (e.g. official date) and clicks on the "OK" button. A PDF version of the decree is automatically created with the requested metadata. At that point, the new Mairie d’Abirée decree is accessible to the REZODAC members and posted on the website of Mairie d’Abirée, which ensures the obligation to inform citizens.

Conclusion

Légilocal aims to help local authorities to improve the quality, interoperability and publication of French local administrative acts in the same way as Légifrance does at the state and EU levels. The originality of the approach is to unify the management of contents and the interactions between actors on these contents.

The Légilocal platform is going to be progressively deployed in small French local communities, thus building a large network of interacting clerks and a rich base of acts. It is designed to be easily accessible to clerks through their professional social network and to citizens through a widget embedded in municipal websites.

The first version of the platform is being tested with a pilot group of municipalities. Future developments should improve the control of documents and enable to match the prosaic language of citizens onto the legal or administrative language of official documents, in order to further improve citizens’ access to local information.

References