

Privacy-aspects of addresses

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Addresses have been around for quite some time: they provide us with the means to easily identify and locate certain places and buildings. However, there is a price to be paid for this convenience. Since we become locatable, we give up a certain piece of our privacy. For example, by putting a postal address on a letter, we can be pretty sure that the letter will be delivered to the right person. On the downside there is the fact that we relinquish our privacy when we receive a letter: everybody who gets hold of the letter will know that we live at that address.

Our research will deal with the privacy issues regarding addresses from a legal perspective. The European Privacy directive will be our starting point: it will help us define what can be regarded as personal data and determine if addresses fall in its field of application.

To make our research more concrete, we will then focus on a rather recent Flemish initiative, called CRAB (Centraal Referentieadressenbestand). This initiative tries to implement on a Flemish level an address model and model standard that should enable a more efficient exchange of address data. The idea behind CRAB is that there should be one single authentic register for addresses to be consulted by as many (governmental) organisations as possible. To study this initiative, we will look, with our privacy-related research question in mind, at both the technical specifications of the model as well as at the rough draft of the CRAB-decree.

To conclude we will present our observations and draw some conclusion from this preliminary research. One of the main arguments that will be debated in this section is that it may very well be that addresses have to be regarded as personal data, but that it may no longer be reasonable to protect it in the strict way that privacy-legislation seems to require. Since addresses have become more or less common property, it might not be feasible any longer to hide them from prying eyes...

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