

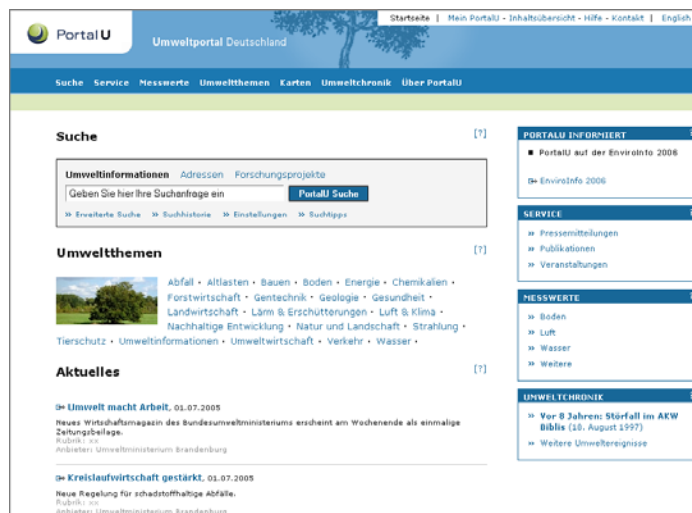
PortalU – a New Gate to Environmental Information in Germany

Dr. Thomas Vögele
Coordination Center PortalU
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Our natural environment is precious and has to be preserved for future generations. Human interference with the environment, no matter how benign, has the potential to change environmental conditions, for the better or for the worse. To be able to understand the consequences of our actions and to actively participate in political decisions that affect the environment, we need to be well informed. Public participation in issues related to the natural environment and its sustainable development has to be fostered through public education and information, which can only be achieved through easy access to environmental information.

The right of each European citizen to have access to environmental data and information was acknowledged by the participants of the 1998 Aarhus Convention. It was transferred into European law by the EU-Directive 2003/4/EC on public access to environmental information. Based on this directive, the administrative bodies in the European member states are forced to make their environmental information available to the public in an easy, systematic and understandable way. As an enabling tool, the directive refers explicitly to electronic media and the Internet.

In May 2006, PortalU, the new German Environmental Information Portal (<http://www.portalu.de>) went online. PortalU provides one-stop access to government-owned environmental information in Germany. It is the latest in a series of online systems set up by the environmental administration in Germany to cope with, among others, the requirements of EU-Directive 2003/4/EC.



The PortalU Front-page

In PortalU, features like a user-friendly and simple interface, advanced search tools, and a visualization client for digital maps help citizens find, access, and view environmental information in a fast and effective way. All information in PortalU is guaranteed to originate from “official” sources, like government agencies and private firms working for the government. PortalU forms a national entry point to web-sites, databases and data catalogs. It enables experts and non-experts alike to retrieve and access information like full-text versions of national and regional legislation, environmental policies and programmes, environmental reports, monitoring data, and digital maps.