

NEWS

Called upon without being named

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In many city offices, a name is still called out across the room. “Ms. Brandt, counter three.” Everyone looks up. The person whose name was called stands up, walks to the front, and everyone in the waiting area now knows that she’s here, what her name is, and what she’s here for. This is everyday life, and it shouldn’t be anymore.

People who go to a government office rarely have good news to share. A change of address after a breakup, an application for financial assistance, a certificate following a death. None of this is anyone else’s business. A name called out loud turns a private matter into a semi-public one.

On top of that, there’s the question of who even understands the announcement. People with hearing difficulties miss their name amid the clamor of voices. Those who speak little German can only guess at it. A government agency that is supposed to serve everyone must not allow access to be determined by hearing ability or native language.

The better option has been here for a long time. A screen in the waiting area calls up numbers silently, in multiple languages, with text that’s legible even from the back row. Anyone who takes a number keeps their name to themselves. Systems like ScreenWay process this data locally and within Europe, without creating any data records that don’t belong there.

The objection comes quickly: that it costs money. It costs less than a single lost data protection case and far less than the trust a government agency squanders when it humiliates people. How a government agency communicates with the public is not a matter of technology. It is a matter of respect.