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Developing the contribution of Geographic Information to the Digital Agenda

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Briefing

- Geographic information is used across all sectors of European life.
- Much of this geographic information is created and made available by national mapping, land registry & cadastral agencies (NMCAs). This stimulates PSI[1] re-use and helps satisfy digital agenda objectives.
- Web portals and services provided by Europe's NMCAs provide access to high value information for government, business and civil society.
- Revenue for commercial re-users increase when geographic PSI is fit for their purpose while e-government services benefit from the increased interoperability achieved by working to common standards.
- Products and services provided by EuroGeographics benefit from EU programmes and commercial contracts for their development. CIP ICT PSP pilot projects are an important opportunity to help make better interoperable geographic information available for re-use by industry, commerce, all levels of government and civil society.

Geographic information arena

[1] PSI is public sector information as defined in Directive 2003/93/EC of which geographic information is a significant and substantial part.

Geographic information is not only re-used by incorporation into products and services but also provides a definitive base for information analysis. This dual core activity is one of the reasons why geographic information is so highly demanded and relied on by re-users. For example vehicle navigation service providers have agreements with NMCAs for regularly updated definitive geographic information and similar data is provided to Eurostat for the analysis of a wide range of conditions across Europe. The internet giants also re-use substantial and significant NMCA data in many different ways. National, regional and urban development, town and country planning, network operators (utilities, water, transport, telecommunications and energy) all require reliable and sustainable definitive geographic information. EuroGeographics and their members are the providers of this essential information in Europe.

In an assessment, for the European Commission, of the re-use of geographic information, a 2008 study found the income from sales of geographic PSI by 27 EU NMCAs was 356€ million[2]: this is now a conservative estimate. In many cases, re-users of geographic information aggregate the data with other data sources, for example, thematic data in order to create added value product and services. The assessment recorded that: "the income of geographic information re-users is increasing and the market is enriched by the many new re-user groups which offer innovative applications for geographic information".

Commercial and non-commercial re-users of PSI often use long term business models to sustain their products and services. Their products and services, which may be at national, regional, European and global level, require, as a result, reliable and sustainable information to maintain services on which the public often rely, in order to deliver a commercial return on their investment.

Increasingly users need geographic information that is also interoperable across national borders. Its availability enables them to develop continental (pan-European) solutions without the costs arising from resolving differences in nationally unique data offerings. Often it is this continental market which supports the commercial viability of their solutions. To satisfy this and meet the needs of the EU, candidate countries and the EEA, EuroGeographics, working with NMCAs and bodies of the EU, makes available for re-use, seamless and consistent pan-European reference datasets and web services for a rich variety of purposes.

How ICT PSP and related programmes can foster the contribution of EuroGeographics and NMCAs to the Digital Agenda

An increasing number of internet applications use geographic information while mobile applications and location based services share and combining geographic information with data from a variety of sources. This combining often includes user's own data and services. As a result new web portals and services are being implemented enabling users such as SMEs to quickly develop value added services and in some cases support millions of users to access geographic information and, if they wish to, integrate or superimpose their own data on to it.

The drivers for geographic information offered through web portals and services may be legislative, as in the INSPIRE directive or societal, for example; "what's in my backyard"[3]. Web portals and services are not only important as PSI distribution platforms, they can also relieve re-users from the costs of having to manage and maintain large complex databases: a real bonus in current economic times.

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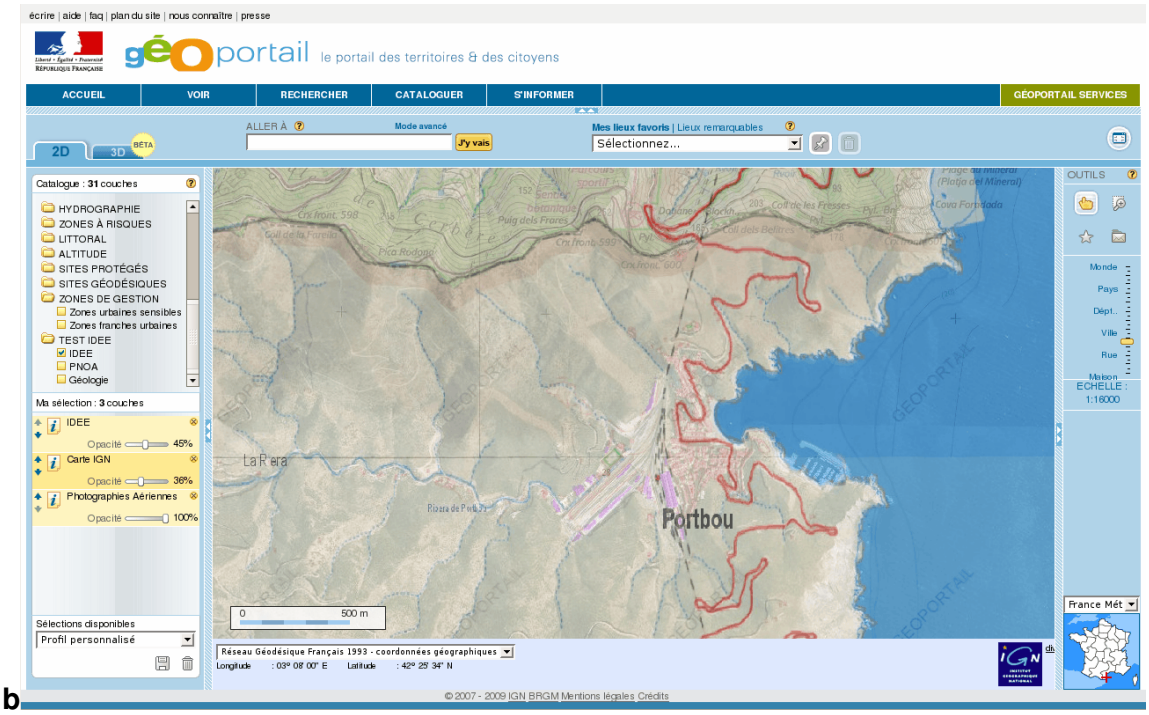
[2] Assessment of the Re-use of Public Sector Information (PSI) in the Geographical information, Meteorological Information and Legal Information Sectors - Final report - 2nd December, 2008 - MICUS Management Consulting GmbH

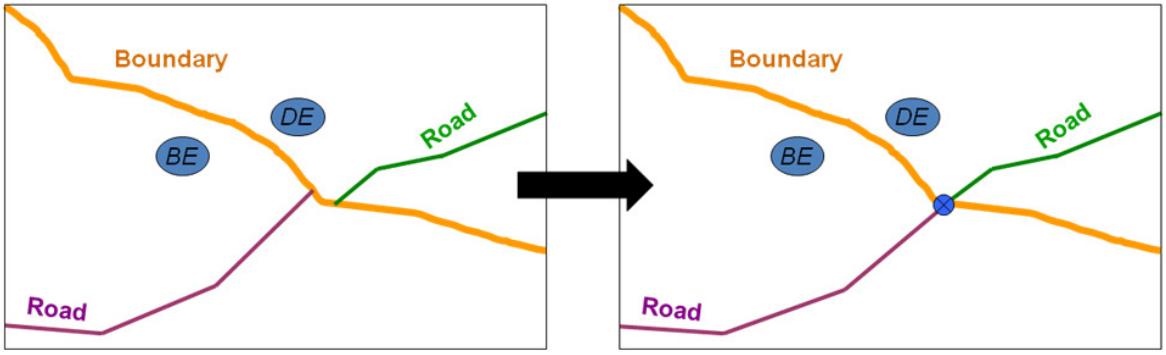
[3] http://www.environment-agency.gov.uk/homeandleisure/37793.aspx

In line with the Digital Agenda's aim to improve European interoperability between ICT products and services, EuroGeographics is developing cross-border interoperability services through eContent*plus* innovation projects. For example the ESDIN[4] project is federating EuroGeographics members' web services by developing a pan-European seamless geographic information viewer. At cross-border level, for example, the French national geoportal enables seamless viewing of French, Spanish and Swiss data by interoperating with the geoportals of the other countries:



b

ESDIN is also exploring a service for edge-matching geographic information, and information related to it, at national boundaries for all Member States:



Whilst ESDIN is providing 'proofs of concept' deliverables for these interoperability services; CIP ICT PSP pilot projects could help these services to become operational and available for re-use in commercial applications. Commercial exploitation of an operational edge-matching service would not only benefit all the public bodies responsible for meeting national INSPIRE obligations but has the potential to develop commercial services able to harmonise any location related information globally. A potentially large market! We therefore strongly support new opportunities for geographic information in the ICT PSP programme.

[4] www.esdin.eu

Geographic information and European Policies

Geographic information has long underpinned important policies at all levels of government including, and increasingly, at the European level. An early benchmark of this underpinning was described in a European Commission document on the spatial impact of EU policies[5]. Since then, geographic information, and in particular public sector geographic information (as made available by the NMCAs) has figured more prominently in EU polices and initiatives, for example; in the Communication on the European eGovernment Action Plan 2011-2015 and subsequent Council Conclusions, the Digital Agenda for Europe, and the GMES Regulation.

About geographic information

Geographic information, taken in its widest sense, is location information about land, sea and air. Geographic Information (GI) relates to the earth's landscapes, people, places and environment. GI, for example, records official names and the location of features, from points of interest (a post box) to linear features running through many countries (such as the River Danube). GI provides the essential framework which allows attributes about features to be related or connected to them. This includes information about ownership, construction, environmental conditions, and the existence of essential services.

About the national mapping & cadastral agencies (NMCAs)

The national mapping, land registration and cadastral agencies (NMCAs), as a public task, produce, update and distribute reference and other geographic information (including topographic, cadastre and land information). Countries need geographic information that is reliable, sustainable, coherent and continuous at national level to deliver public services and underpin economic activity. Public sector geographic information has been the subject of particular attention under the PSI Directive. Therefore NMCAs, as holders of public sector geographic information tend to have a high profile among PSI stakeholders, including those in their respective member states. NMCAs have paid close attention to the requirements of the Digital Agenda, the PSI Directive, INSPIRE, GMES and policy thinking in these areas.

About EuroGeographics

EuroGeographics is a non-profit organization formed in 2001 as the membership association and representative body of the European national mapping, land registry and cadastral agencies. Earlier this year EuroGeographics moved its operational centre to Brussels putting it at the heart of European policy development and decision making. We currently bring together 56 definitive information authorities from 44 countries across Europe, providing a strong, unified and well-respected voice. We provide a single point of contact for communication with our members, and a platform for the exchange of information and best practice. Our geo-spatial products and services make a significant contribution to the operational delivery of a wide range of national and EU polices.

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[5] The Spatial Impact of European Union Policies. JRC. 2001