Quality information for the Digital Agenda – a briefing by EuroGeographics

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Briefing

> ➤ A vibrant digital single market requires quality content. Geographic information is a proven and growing example of quality information.
> ➤ Interoperable geographic information crosses national borders and is a vital link between otherwise unconnected information.
> ➤ Geographic information provides the location for place-based as well as thematic policy delivering benefits to European society and meeting social challenges.

EuroGeographics has identified ways in which quality geographic information can contribute to the Digital Agenda, its policies and actions, to maximize the benefit of the Digital Revolution for all. As the Digital Agenda offers great opportunities for Europe, it also offers a great possibility in realising the vision[1] of EuroGeographics and the contributions of our national members. The ever-present nature of geographic information means that it contributes in many ways to the Digital Agenda's seven pillars. In this briefing we focus on our contribution to three of those pillars:

- a vibrant single digital market;
- interoperability and standards;
- enabling benefits for EU society.

A vibrant digital single market
"It is time for a new single market to deliver the benefits of the digital era."

While this pillar requires ICT infrastructure for its delivery, it also needs quality content. We are working solidly to deliver a digital geographic information single market. Furthermore, we have a proven track record of making our information widely available and we are keen to maximise its use.

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[1] EuroGeographics aims to achieve interoperability of members' national land and geographic data to provide an information asset supporting Europe 2020, including the development of the European Location Framework.

A fundamental area to which geographic information (GI) contributes is in o*pening up access to content*. However good Europe's digital infrastructure and however interoperable its systems, a vibrant digital single market needs the availability of, and accessibility to, quality content. The GI sector is one in which commercial and non-commercial exploitation of content, often provided by the public sector, has really taken off. GI contributes to virtually every aspect of life; there are already excellent examples of successful online use of GI in government (planning, environment, health for example), in business (transport, insurance, agriculture) and in citizen services (e-government, satellite navigation).

The GI sector continues to encourage innovation in the re-use of public sector information (PSI) participating in initiatives such as GeoVation® (UK) and the OpenData Challenge, which encourage individuals and communities to come up with new ways of exploiting PSI resources.

Other work within *access to content* concentrates on the need for better licensing frameworks for digital content, including across national borders. EuroGeographics is working towards a public sector information framework that maximises benefits and accommodates all our members' contributions. Hands on examples are GeoProductFinder and ESDIN deliverables.

Interoperability and standards
"We need effective interoperability between IT products and services to build a truly digital society"

We have helped develop standards and with our members and the GI community made them real world tools while through the European Location Framework we are driving European geographic cross border interoperability.

In the GI sector the INSPIRE initiative provided early impetus for the development of technical interoperability among data sets and services. Countries are making impressive progress though there is more to do, especially at cross-border and pan-European levels; along with our members we are leading collaboration in these areas. This is vital work; the better the interoperability between Europe's geography the more rapidly will progress be made in other areas - because geography is such an important link between otherwise unrelated data sets.

While there remains some way to go to achieve the European Location Framework as a fully effective EU infrastructure for GI, the national mapping agencies of Europe continue to work together in EuroGeographics to meet the demand for pan-European GI by combining national information into European products and services used extensively in EU policy delivery.

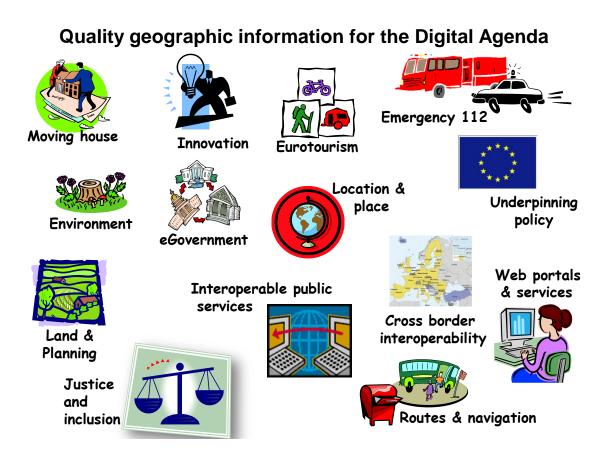## ICT-enabled benefits for EU society
"Smart use of technology and exploitation of information will help us to address the challenges facing society like climate change and the ageing population"

Our data is widely used in delivering citizen based benefits. This includes through sector and theme based polices and with a future focus on place-based policies our information will be even more fundamental to delivery of inclusive public services.

Geographic information acts as a common reference, linking information together, often as an enabler of evidence-based policy making and operational delivery. A place based location element is crucial in analysing, modelling, planning, implementing and monitoring policy interventions that support sustainable development and benefit communities.

Similarly the provision of e-government and commercial services to Europe's citizens often relies on location information. For internet-based services to be useful and relevant to citizens they often must be linked to real geography. Systems need to be aware not only of the citizen's absolute location, but also his or her proximity to facilities, transport networks, natural and man-made hazards.

The ability of GI to support both better policy making and better information for citizens has the potential to drive transformational change: reducing energy consumption, supporting ageing citizens' lives, revolutionising health services and deliver better public services. For example, citizens request on-line information about their environment - the air, the water, the soil – and while available environmental information shows the *state* of these elements it is geographic information that shows the *location* of them and enables a rich picture to be displayed.

Quality geographic information for the Digital Agenda

Moving house

Innovation

Eurotourism

Emergency 112

Environment

eGovernment

Location & place

Underpinning policy

Land & Planning

Interoperable public services

Cross border interoperability

Web portals & services

Justice and inclusion

Routes & navigation

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[2]. Since then, geographic information, and in particular public sector geographic information (as made available by the NMCAs) has figured more prominently in EU policies 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 including reference data, 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 and NMCAs, as holders of geographic information tend to have a high profile among information 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. EuroGeographics has its operational centre in 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 geographic products and services make a significant contribution to the operational delivery of a wide range of national and EU policies.

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