

EuroGeographics Briefing Paper

Digital Single Market Strategy: the importance of dependable geospatial information

Reference: April 2015 V1.0

Briefing

- A common understanding of location is vital to connecting Europe
- That in turn requires dependable geospatial information and a shared location framework
- The INSPIRE Directive has already established the ground rules for a European Spatial Data Infrastructure created by the Member States
- Now the European Location Framework project is developing a cloud-based platform of harmonised INSPIRE-compliant national geospatial information
- The Commission's forthcoming Digital Single Market Strategy can help to ensure that geospatial information is able to play its full part in the Digital Single Market

Digital Single Market Strategy

Following Vice-President Ansip's press conference on 25 March, EuroGeographics presents this paper as its contribution to the current discussions. We believe that the Commission's forthcoming Strategy offers an opportunity to make sure that geospatial information is able to play its full part in completing the Digital Single Market.

EuroGeographics is the membership and representative body of Europe's national mapping, cadastral and land registry authorities. We have long been aware that the internet, while intrinsically non-geographical, has been held back in Europe by technical and legal differences among member states. In the past this has also been true of digital geospatial information. But a common understanding of location is vital to connecting Europe; to linking disparate information sources through the common factor of location - and thereby contributing to better policy and better delivery.

With help from the EU in the form of the INSPIRE Directive and funded research projects we have made substantial progress towards implementing a European Spatial Data Infrastructure or European Location Framework. Now we want to look at the new opportunities presented by the Digital Single Market, grouped under the three main areas on which the Commission intends to focus during this mandate.



1 Better access for consumers and businesses to digital goods and services

Geospatial information is ubiquitous in European life; location is a powerful common element that can link together disparate data sources to offer new insights and possibilities – be they in health, transport, planning, agriculture, environment or consumer applications such as, ‘Where is my nearest...?’ Consequently Europe’s national mapping and cadastral authorities play a vital role in supporting their national economies and services for the citizen.

By combining data from our members, EuroGeographics has been able to supply the European Commission with pan-European geospatial datasets. Now, in the European Location Framework (ELF) project, co-funded by CIP ICT-PSP, EuroGeographics members are working with commercial partners to develop up-to-date, authoritative, interoperable reference geospatial information for use by Europe’s governments, businesses and citizens. This cloud-based platform of INSPIRE-compliant geospatial information, harmonized at cross-border and pan-European levels, will include full **e-commerce** facilities. In time ELF will offer one source of dependable geospatial information for Europe.

In the area of **copyright** many of the Commission’s concerns are familiar to us. They apply to government-to-business and business-to-business transactions just as they do at the consumer level, so we shall want to study the Commission’s proposals carefully. Meanwhile we continue to make significant progress within our own sphere of expertise: the geospatial information arena. Already EuroGeographics’ current products, as supplied to the Commission, come with a single agreement without the need for multiple national licences; but in future ELF will introduce harmonized pan-European licensing of a much greater range of geospatial products and services.

2 Shaping the environment for digital networks and services to flourish

The ELF platform will provide interoperable cross-border content, using both proprietary and open source technologies, and services that will provide access regardless of where the user is located. In this way ELF will support improved e-government, e-health and intelligent transport to the benefit of EU citizens, businesses and public administrations.

3 Creating a European Digital Economy and Society with long-term growth potential

One of the key challenges of **big data** is to find common elements among unrelated datasets and unstructured data to enable useful analysis. Location information often fulfils precisely this function – by identifying objects and the spatial relationships among them – and consequently the importance of geospatial information is further increased in the big data world. It is of fundamental importance to have a shared location reference framework and this is where the dependable geospatial information provided by EuroGeographics and its members comes into its own.

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