Big Data, Polygons, Land Registration and Geohazards

In articles and in the news columns we have an eclectic mix of topics and geography this month – from land reform to lidar, from pricing and licensing to centralised address maintenance and from Wales to the south Pacific via eastern Europe. Throw in crowdsourcing and Big Data and I think we have something for everyone.

Last month we commented on the Land Registry being rushed towards the private sector and its simultaneous attempts to offer wider services to local authorities. This month it seems that Ordnance Survey is following suit and, although there are no (public) consultations on privatisation, it has now set up a GeoIntelligence Team to 'deliver bespoke solutions and consulting services built around location data'. No prizes for guessing where the data will come from! At the same time, there is a move to centralise maintenance of the national address gazetteer by developing in-house software at GeoPlace – part-owned by Ordnance Survey. This would presumably replace gazetteer maintenance software provided by several small GIS companies that have supported local authorities for many years. The logic for a centralised online service is compelling though the monopolistic nature of such ventures could easily lead to an overengineered solution with potential for chaos if it breaks down!

The most important OS product for many users is OS MasterMap and particularly the Topography Layer. Land Registry use this layer for producing Title Plans that are the basis of land registration in England and Wales and for the Index Map that shows the relative positions of all Titles. Exactly how much of OS MasterMap is used by the Land Registry is now the main issue in a dispute over the licensing and pricing of the Index Map data to a third party eager to exploit it commercially. We summarise the Office of Public Sector Information (OPSI) report and we suspect that the final outcome will have implications far beyond property boundaries. One hopes that they will sort this out before either or both move to the private sector. 'Read all abaa. . .t it!' as they say on page 15.

Starting more or less from scratch, and with not even a Domesday Book to go on, the newly established land registration systems in the ex-socialist countries of eastern Europe are enthusiastically described by Gavin Adlington from the World Bank and Rumyana Tonchovska from the UN Food and Agriculture Organisation. Some of these are already much larger than our own LR and at least two of them – in Russia and Ukraine – may now be tested in unforeseen ways. However, if you prefer the balmier climes of the South Pacific, read on. We have an article on how lidar systems are helping island nations to come to terms with rising sea levels (see page 31).

Meanwhile, Andy Coote reports on Big Data in the context of GI and Adena Schutzberg suggests that we need to get used to the idea of 'our' data being swept into crowdsourced products that benefit us all. While Tony Bracey writes on the award-winning Welsh Multi-Agency Information Transfer (MAIT) – a potentially lifesaving system that depends on building trust between data providers in local authorities and data users in the emergency services. This reduces duplication and should lead to improved data quality for everyone. Local authorities have also contributed to, and benefited from, the satellite-based geohazard mapping PanGeo, as described by Claire Roberts at NPA (see page 10 and our eye-catching front cover).

I am afraid Eurofile is missing again from this issue – not a reflection on recent election results but at least partly due to your editor having been hospitalised in Majorca and not being able to type very fast on a tablet! Next time I might even come up with one of my Oz files; doctors permitting I will be down under for most of June and July.

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