

Bon Voyage on the GI Road!

After a long journey through the French mapping agency IGN and its sister organisations in Europe, I arrived at the French ministerial departments, firstly as an outsider at the French National Council for GI and then as an insider at the Directorate General for Spatial Planning, Housing and Nature as advisor for geographic information to the director general: the last stop on my professional journey. After so many years of spreading the good word about geoinformation and evangelising my colleagues, I'm satisfied that much progress has been made, both technologically and in terms of the role of GI in daily management and decision-making.

Along the route I have encountered various 'vehicles', including housing, spatial planning, landscape, non-energetic and water resources, biodiversity and coastal zone management. I oiled the workings of the Flood Directive and green infrastructure, and I helped to refine property files and other such key data.

Continuing with this vehicle analogy, while IT is the engine, the geographical data remains the fuel and we will not get far without it. Central and local governments have made progress on both those aspects of geoinformation as reported in several editions of *GIM International*. New types of fuel have also been emerging from community- or crowdsourcing, and renewable energy is now available through mobiles and RFID.

But if we do not know where we want to go, there is a risk we will go nowhere. Therefore, identifying the questions – and hence the destinations – must remain the key focus of the action. Geomatics is one of the tools to help answer important questions related to social, societal, environmental and economic issues once they are properly formulated. The GI professional is an essential catalyst for stipulating the operational question and hence finding the best route.

Then comes the answer to the question – spatial analysis, cartographic rendering – with its related information on the response relevance – the quality, requirement meeting – which is still an area for improvement.

One must still arrive at the destination on time, which in this context means providing 'just-in-time' information. This implies being able to anticipate vehicle maintenance needs: the availability of tools, and filling the tanks with fuel (in this case data). And of course you must know how to drive (i.e. training), respect the rules of the road (legal aspects) and treat other road users with courtesy (sharing information and good practices).

This editorial, in the form of modest allegory, has been an opportunity for me to share my vision of the technical area in which I have spent my entire career. A new spatio-temporal perspective lies ahead for me as I will be retiring on 1 November 2014.