

GIM INTERNATIONAL INTERVIEWS JACQUELINE MCGLADE

Cadastrals Need to Rethink Role



Mapping and cadastral agencies will need to reconsider their changing roles in the near future. One of the most important challenges will be their ability to manage near real-time data and information. After ten years as director of the European Environment Agency in Copenhagen, professor Jacqueline McGlade will be leaving the position in May 2013. At the High Level Forum of the United Nations Global Geospatial Information Management Initiative (UN-GGIM) which took place recently in Doha, Qatar, she spoke to GIM International and explained in more detail her call for mapping agencies and cadastres to reflect on how they will need to change in order to respond to future economic and societal trends.

First of all, what do you think of the United Nations adopting geospatial as a major point of focus through the UN-GGIM Initiative?

It's long overdue, and therefore a very good initiative. The spread of geospatial thinking is a powerful unifier to make progress on delivering sustainable development around the world. Whilst everyone's location can be found on a map, the map itself could be a good or an inaccurate map, depending on how a country has invested in such activities as mapping, cartography and geodesy. However, with the growth in satellite programmes and the science and knowledge that is now available, the emancipation of geospatial knowledge has become a reality. I would like to suggest that today more than ever, geospatial information is rapidly becoming a tremendous tool for social change.

You've seen the use of geospatial information change in the last ten years. What has been the most striking shift?

The biggest shift has taken place across generations. Young people are taking it absolutely for granted to have a map instantaneously available and on hand, to which they can upload all kinds of data and information and turn into relevant, geolocated information for themselves and their peers. This transformation has been happening over the last two to three years, but was already building up in the years before as a spin-off of Moore's Law and the fact that geographic information and analytical tools and techniques have become increasingly more accessible, cheaper and more powerful. In general, the constellation of what we have at our fingertips has driven a massive amount of innovation during the last few years.

Are national mapping agencies and cadastres taking on these changes well enough, in your view?

No. One of the biggest problems we are experiencing these days is a lack of institutional fit for the real world. Many of the agencies were created as separate institutions and as such 'hold the pen' on all things geographic. However, this has meant that many of these institutions are far removed from the centre of decision-making as well as from the daily lives of citizens. This lack of institutional fit can be rather dangerous because it creates the nightmare scenario of a fragmentation of values, such as whether or not to support open data, to the point where the institutes end up delivering completely inferior solutions to users, and not least to citizens.

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