

# Generous or Wise

Travelling to India earlier this year, I was struck by the amazingly modern interior, numerous multimedia devices at my chair, and the service offered by the airline I flew with: one based in the United Arab Emirates. I wouldn't be surprised, either, if their planes were also less polluting than those of the established European and American fleets. I translated this into an economic law I learned in school, the law of the 'braking head start': if everything is in place and you are in the lead, turning everything around takes time and you run the risk of losing your lead to your opponents (say, other countries) which are starting out from scratch. A good example would be the outdated manufacturing plants in the United Kingdom during the seventies compared to those of Western Europe; the UK factories had all survived the war, while those on the continent were all built post-1945.

Arriving in India, where I was attending the Geospatial World Forum in Hyderabad from 18th to 21st January, I was once again struck by the optimism in this immense country, but also by the deep poverty on every street corner. Geospatial information is known to have had a positive effect on living conditions of people in developing regions, and it was heart-warming to hear the positive effects of geospatial technology developments being discussed from a different point of view: that purely of the poor. Here the positive effect on living standards for the impoverished is seen not just as a nice side-effect of business developments. Rather, support and stimulation in the geospatial domain serves just one goal: people power. As Kapil Sibal, Honourable Minister for Science & Technology and Earth Sciences, expressed it, "...putting the people central is the main reason for developing the geospatial information business" and "geo-technology needs to be used for empowerment of the people."

Franz Josef Radermacher, Professor of Informatics at the University of Ulm (Germany) and Director of the Research Institute for Applied Knowledge Processing, took the idea even further. As one of the co-founders of the Global Marshall Plan Initiative, he added the idea of eco-sociability and issued a warning about uncontrolled growth. Where growth was needed, it needed to be "green", he insisted, and geo-information lay at the heart of this, providing insights for all-round sustainability. It's not just about technology, he emphasised; global intelligence and social contracts were needed to make eco-social turnaround a reality. Both India and China agreed at the recent climate-change summits in Copenhagen and Cancun to lower their growth rates to help reduce CO<sub>2</sub> emissions; a truly generous gesture on the part of governments whose citizens' per capita emission rates are already far lower than their European and American counterparts. But perhaps this is not only a generous, but also a wise move? How about that 'law of the braking head start'...could it be that the new eco-social societies of the future arise, with help of geo-information, in just these parts of the world?

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