In addition, by utilizing satellite imagery and machine learning methods, we’ve successfully recorded all the objects in the Republic of Serbia and, in financial savings. perform street name and number demarcation. Not only are we saving time by introducing these updating technologies, but we have also achieved tenfold managed to completely update the address registry in record time (two years to be exact), plus we are currently working together with municipalities to platform, new methods of collecting data – such as crowdsourcing – can be integrated into a National Spatial Data Infrastructure (NSDI). We have new way of thinking (digital), as well as the introduction of new and innovative technologies and business processes. By utilizing the Geosrbija geospatial and embarked on a path less travelled – a less certain path, but one that will lead to our goal faster and more efficiently. This path requires a completely address registers and datasets, which led to new procedures and placed new burdens on citizens and the economy. We have now defined our challenges which housed inaccessible and imprecise analogue data that was of little real use. As a result of our inefficiency, other institutions created their own RGA) for their own inconsistencies, ineffectiveness or rising prices.

That is correct, there are still some cadastral challenges to be faced. The major change compared to the past is that we are now talking openly about these challenges and how best to solve them. Previously the problems were just brushed aside, and underwhelming legal solutions and inefficiencies of other institutions were blamed for the existing sad state of affairs. That led to such huge issues that we became an irrelevant and dysfunctional institution. Regulating this state of affairs and legalization of property allows for economic development of the country, legal certainty and the creation of an attractive investment environment. Today, in accordance with the national government’s activities and with considerable help from the World Bank and other partners such as the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (UNFAO), RGA is solving the issues inherited from the past by making great strides, digitalizing data within business processes and introducing innovative solutions and technologies. We have completely changed the regular, inefficient property rights registration system following the passing of the Law on Registration in the Real Estate Cadastre and the Utility Cadastre in June 2018. We operate as a modern and pragmatic institution; it is no longer a traditional register of properties, but a digital public-sector platform that allows citizens to access geospatial data in a transparent, reliable and efficient manner. Our plans and activities are outlined in our 2021 Development Strategy. The vision and its implementation has invoked some strong and even judgmental reactions, but it is motivating other parts of the system to be proactive and participate in the reform of the entire country. The demand for geospatial data has multiplied, and geoinformation professionals are becoming a regular part of working teams.

In view of the millions of unregistered buildings and so many people without an official address, I guess it would be fair to say that the Republic of Serbia still faces some cadastral challenges. What is your main focus when it comes to tackling them?

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cooperation with other institutions within the country, we are working on their registration in the real-estate cadastre system. So as you can see, new technologies and a different mindset, together with a dedicated and professional team working within RGA, are allowing us to solve problems that spanned decades and to give our institution the central position it deserves in the 21st century. It is important that everyone in the system understands that digitalization does not mean simply introducing IT systems and converting analogue processes. Instead, it involves digital business processes, digital legal frameworks and a digital mindset along with the relevant technical solutions for successful and operational digitalization. Otherwise, the door is open for misuse and a dysfunctional and unsustainable system. We are focused on this challenge, and are mostly working on the introduction of complementary digital processes, paying particular attention to simple solutions that are defined clearly and precisely.

**In your country, you have been recognized as 'Reformer of the Year'. What were the main achievements that led up to this?**

We made it possible for other state authorities to be visible. We offered all the institutions the opportunity to present their data on a national digital platform free of charge and in a simple manner. Their data is spatially defined in the UTM system (Universal Transverse Mercator coordinate system), with all the datasets overlapping, thus providing a plethora of information to users. We currently have 250 different datasets, and we are especially proud that we have mapped and digitalized the historical period that shaped the territory of Serbia, such as the Great War. It has been an achievement of the entire professional team. That helps to portray the spatial georegister the central role in managing the workflow of different systems. In addition, our idea is to unify and host all the services, information and data of one central hub so that data can be accessed by other users and made available to the user in the most efficient manner possible. We are developing new services; today all of our data is available via API so it can be optimally utilized by public-sector organizations, businesses, citizens and educational institutions alike. They have access to the most up-to-date data at any time. Similarly, not only can we help the public sector to make genuine and high-quality decisions, but we can also help to develop business and the economy in the country as a whole for our citizens.

We have always emphasized strong cooperation, both regionally and internationally. In this time of rapid technological advancement, knowledge and experience are quickly exchanged and no one has the right nor the luxury to work alone and endanger the sustainable development of the planet. And in the upcoming period we see it as a necessity to continue to connect with other regional institutions, with institutions from Europe and with the rest of the world. Besides the World Bank, the United Nations and the European Commission, our friends from the Netherlands, Sweden, UK, Norway and others have also played an active part in our success. Also, we wish to provide assistance to other countries interested in achieving similar results.

**How does RGA see its role in this age of digital transformation?**

If we succeed in realizing the reform project, we will certainly be one of the leading and most important state institutions. Economic advancement crucially depends on high-quality land administration – Serbia cannot be successful unless RGA is successful. Geospatial data, and therefore our institution, is indispensable in the process of making smart decisions and creating legal certainty. Our goal is to establish a complete platform of public-sector geospatial data. The spatial georegister will play the central role in managing the workflow of different systems. In addition, our idea is to unify and host all the services, information and data of one central hub so that data can be accessed by other users and made available to the user in the most efficient manner possible. We are developing new services; today all of our data is available via API so it can be optimally utilized by public-sector organizations, businesses, citizens and educational institutions alike. They have access to the most up-to-date data at any time. Similarly, not only can we help the public sector to make genuine and high-quality decisions, but we can also help to develop business and the economy in the country as a whole for our citizens.

**What is the prevailing attitude towards the economic value of 3D geoinformation in Serbia right now?**

Due to activities and results we achieved in the previous period, the government of the Republic of Serbia and the public have now come to understand the importance of spatial and 3D data in the economic development of state and society. As evidence of that, we only need to consider the improvement of the NSDI, the improvement of geosector and the adoption of strategic changes at the national level – such as the government’s economic reform programme, Serbia’s rise in the World Bank’s ‘Doing Business’ index, Serbia’s public-sector strategy and the government’s Action Plan. Hence, geospatial data remains a key factor in developing state and society, all based on our results and that make us proud. I should also point out that RGA’s new approach has also resulted in considerable advancement of the private sector. As RGA began to provide up-to-date and high-quality data in a contemporary manner, big and small private firms began to expand their businesses, to provide new services and also to employ geoinformation professionals. However, due to the country’s geopolitical position and human nature in general, the prevailing thought still seems to be that although everything being done is probably good, it should be kept ‘at arm’s length’ – which is the Serbian equivalent of saying ‘not in my back yard’.

**What role do you foresee for institutions such as the United Nations (UN-GGIM) and the World Bank, not only in Serbia but throughout the world?**

In our experience, it is practically impossible to see the wider picture without the support of the UN and World Bank. The geosector and land administration are both complex systems, and geospatial information management is inconceivable without a global framework. The United Nations 2030 Sustainable Development Goals are a beacon for the development of missions, visions and goals to strive towards. So in our opinion, UN-GGIM and the World Bank will play a key role in the further development of the geosector and institutions such as RGA at both a global and a local scale. Activities on integrated frameworks for geospatial data worked upon by both UN-GGIM and the World Bank will provide a basis for the further development of geospatial data infrastructures, taking into account the fact that different countries operate in different environments. Recommendations allow countries to create action plans in accordance with their priorities and circumstances. I think this ‘global for local’ approach is excellent, and the only feasible one.

**How do you expect the Serbian land administration system to look in five to ten years’ time?**

I expect it to be a highly transparent and reliable system, with considerably improved efficiency and accessibility. In five years’ time we will have achieved all of our projected goals, meaning that we will be one of the most successful land administrations in the world. We will certainly be within the top 20 in the Doing Business index, and we hope to reach the top 10. The system will also be fully functional, with all the inherited problems solved. In ten years’ time, if we use the new technologies wisely for the common good, in line with the new user needs and in accordance with technological trends, we will be transformed and integrated into a uniform technological geospatial system of the highest order.

**Lastly, Mr Drašković, you recently have organized a joint international conference in Serbia, together with the EU’s Joint Research Centre (JRC), the World Bank, UNECE, UNFAO and UN-GGIM Europe. What was the topic of this event?**

The main topic of the conference was the importance of digital transformation of state and society, including a focus on digital spatial data and the introduction of innovative services that relate to regional and spatial planning, smart cities and next-generation agriculture. The goal of the conference was to inform the different stakeholders (public sector, private sector, academic community, etc.) about the importance of applying ICT technologies and about the trends in Eastern Europe. RGA was chosen as host and organizing partner due to the results achieved previously relating to digitalization of its services, introduction of modern technical and technological solutions, and innovation in the field of managing geospatial information and real-estate cadastre. This is a special honour for the Republic of Serbia, RGA and our employees who work hard to provide our citizens with high-quality and efficient services. Thanks to our work, RGA is today an institution where colleagues and students from abroad (e.g. Kingdom of the Netherlands, Republic of Slovenia, Guyana, North Macedonia) arrive to exchange knowledge and experience and organize important international meetings. Hence RGA has shown, together with the government of Serbia and supported by the World Bank, that it is now on the right path to respond to all the challenges of the 21st century.

Borko Drašković has been director of Republic Geodeic Authority (RGA) of Serbia since July 2015, during which time he has helped to improve transparency in the real-estate cadastre and work of RGA. As a result of the reforms he has undertaken, he was named ‘Reformer of the Year’ by the
National Alliance for Local Economic Development (NALED) in January 2019. He is also a member of UN-GGIM and played a key role in laying down the foundations for Serbia’s crowdSDI. The digital geospatial platform for Serbia’s NSDI has been in operation for more than a year, during which time it has gathered over 240 datasets from many institutions in Serbia.

Borko Drajković, general director of the Republic Geodetic Authority (RGA), Serbia