

# Immaturity

These months are seeing national and regional workshops held throughout Europe, aimed at the promotion of cross-border dialogue and exchange of best practices on Spatial Data Infrastructures (SDIs). I was invited to join the eSDI-Net+ Workshop for United Kingdom and Ireland in Liverpool, UK, and my report appears on page 33. The Thematic Network, now halfway through its European Commission funding, is organising these SDI Best Practice Workshops and preparing a Best Practice Award for later this year.

One conclusion of the workshops so far is that it is difficult to find a mature SDI. None but one of parties at my workshop had used the term SDI until recently, and the exception had a document mentioning SDI. It dated back to 2001! The majority of SDIs so far observed are less than three years old. Another interesting finding of these workshops, according to Joachim Rix, co-ordinator of the eSDI-NET+ project, is that some 'GIS' are designated 'SDI'. He thinks this conflation of GIS with SDI highlights the fact that the regions that do so regard their SDI as an evolution of their GIS. What clearly emerges is that you don't give birth to a SDI overnight. According to Professor Ian Masser, the best SDIs are those that have been around the longest.

Among the common unresolved problems listed in the workshop I attended was that of interoperability and standards. I recently heard Mark Reichardt, president and CEO of the Open Geospatial Consortium (OGC), on the subject of interoperability: "You know when you don't have it." He illustrated his remark by likening it to trying to fit a square block into a round hole.

Some people think OGC has not moved fast enough on the issue of security and access management. As an example, for the Infrastructure for Spatial Information in Europe (INSPIRE) it is very important that the securing of web services is taken well care of. One workshop participant commented that his organisation had initiated its own project for securing OGC web services, because in his view OGC was immature in this area. So that it is with especial pleasure that I introduce this month's interviewee, Mark Reichardt (see page 6), who elucidates the OGC position on this. Before leaving you to read, it goes without saying that an organisation like OGC deserves all our applause for producing a comprehensive and almost universally recognised set of geospatial standards.