

# Making Public Data Public

While the end of November marked the 24th International Cartographic Conference (ICC) in South America, my personal organiser said I was unable to make it. But before the conference was even over I received a LinkedIn email saying, "Don't quote me as the source, but it has been fun here. Sorry you missed it." What came next made me feel as if I had indeed just been there too, so I want to share it with you.

The ICC got off to a splendid start the Military School in Santiago, Chile. The military band played, dancers danced and colonels speechified. The corridors were crammed with poster boards which soon filled up. Sessions featured a lot of interest in 'crowd sourcing'; a hot topic at the moment, especially for a group with traditional links to national survey. Wednesday's schedule included Vanessa Lawrence of Great Britain's national mapping agency Ordnance Survey (OS), whose presentation was to explain the business model for a (partially) self-sustaining enterprise. But behind the scenes the sands had shifted. To prove it, Prime Minister Gordon Brown himself twittered the release on Tuesday of a UK government announcement called 'Making Public Data Public'. The PM then set out at a seminar how, as part of a government drive to improve transparency, it and OS would from next year open up data relating to electoral and local-authority boundaries, postcode areas and mid-scale mapping information.

Ms Lawrence faithfully presented the shift in policy, admitting that it would change her business model. She went on to make much of the power of crowd sourcing, without ever naming or mentioning the force of Open Street Map; a group certainly involved in pushing the UK government into this radical shift of business model. The UK government will pay OS for the data, which will be released free of charge (by OS). So much for my source.

It is no news to us in the geomatics field that free data puts power in the hands of the public and challenges innovation and improvements in public services. My source ended the aforementioned email: "It is a victory for a small determined band of counter-mappers." I should like on my own account here to congratulate the British government, Ms Lawrence and OS for taking this important step, and I am thrilled to know which mapping agency will be following hot on their heels in this New Year!

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<https://www.gim-international.com/content/article/making-public-data-public>

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