

Openness, Certainty and Ambition

Dorine Burmanje has chaired the board of management of the Netherlands'™ Cadastre, Land Registry and Mapping Agency (Kadaster) since 2004. 'œWe strive for excellent quality, low costs and a high degree of customer satisfaction,' she says. 'œKadaster wants to be the supplier of property and geographic information in the Netherlands, and the leading supplier in Europe.'

Could you outline Kadaster mission and ambitions?

Our mission is to promote legal certainty in the movement of real estate within society, including ships and aircraft, to optimise geographic infrastructure, and to effectively keep society informed in these areas for social, legal and economic purposes; all at the lowest possible cost. Our key values are openness, certainty and ambition. So we carry out our tasks for customers and in consultation with partners and stakeholders based on clear agreements. We strive for excellent quality, low costs and a high degree of customer satisfaction. The ambition is to improve tasks and position further; Kadaster wants to be the supplier of property and geographic information in the Netherlands, and the leading supplier in Europe.

What is the business vision behind such aims?

The vision is built around three strategic objectives: the first is improving our quality and efficiency, not least in comparison with other European organisations. Between now and 2010 Kadaster further aims to provide access to all relevant geographic and real-estate data in the Netherlands, above and below ground level. It also aims to use its knowledge and information to bring about improvement and innovation in these areas of public service, both in the Netherlands and within Europe as a whole. The third strategic objective is to design the organisation such that Kadaster complies with long-term requirements relating to efficiency, effectiveness and innovative capacity. We strive to offer our staff an inspirational working environment that enables them to develop and make maximum use of their knowledge and competencies. These strategic objectives can best be achieved with a business model in which Kadaster is accountable both to its customers and government.

What are your main activities?

Kadaster maintains records concerning the characteristics of land and buildings and who owns what rights to them, and we do the same for ships, aircraft and subterranean networks. This statutory task is aimed at guarantying legal certainty: the records preclude uncertainty as to who owns what, and the precise location of assets. These extensive data sources are maintained in the land registry and cadastral register. In managing them Kadaster fulfils a pivotal role in the field of property and geographic information in the Netherlands. In 2004 Kadaster was joined by the National Mapping Agency, formerly for many years part of the Ministry of Defence, so that Kadaster's role now lies in management and provision of small-scale topographic key data. We maintain the National Triangulation Network, the national system of coordinates that serves as reference-point framework for local landscape measurement. We also serve as advisory body for land use and spatial planning, and participate in the public/private partnership responsible for maintaining and supplying information for large-scale topographical base-maps. Our scope in terms of tasks and activities is extending, and projects are underway to position Kadaster as the national supplier of geo-information for public encumbrances, buildings and addresses, cables and pipelines. Discussions have begun on adding other geographical datasets.

Who are your main customers?

Today our main customers are notaries, the property sector, financial institutions, utilities, the geographic sector, private individuals and government, including ministries, water boards, municipalities and provinces. There have been about 21 million instances of the provision of information to these groups, mainly via the internet. Kadaster updates the geo-information systems of many government and private institutions every month or quarter.

How do you arrange for feedback from your customers to improve on products and services?

At strategic level, the User Council, which represents our fifteen principal customer groups, advises the board on matters

affecting customers; this includes quality and efficiency of service, long-term policy, and rates. In addition to customer input, technical working committees have been installed for implementation of improvements. The marketing department takes care of the important direct contact with customers. Customer suggestions are channelled into our organisation through account managers and our national Customer Contact Centre. Our annual and comprehensive Customer Satisfaction Survey makes it possible for us to swiftly detect deficiencies and in response make prompt improvements.

Your organisation is in a process of “continuous development”. What does this mean, and how is it implemented?

Technology offers ever-increasing possibilities for improving and expanding our services. In addition, both government and business sides initiate enhancements to the geographic-information infrastructure in the Netherlands. Such developments propel us forward on our own development trajectory. As a result, 2005 saw the start of an Organisation Development Programme in which continuity and innovation join hands. We are transforming our regionally operative organisation into one managed at national level. Since business activities are less dependent on location, fewer local branch offices are required and we are therefore closing ten, while also reducing the number of national directorates from sixteen to five. The core business is organised under two directorates: Legal Certainty and Geo. The Services directorate is responsible for IT, Internal and Customer Services. Two staff directorates have been formed: Strategy and Policy, and Finance, Planning and Control. Our experience in nation-wide property and geography information facilities has resulted our receiving requests from other parties for the provision of IT facilities for the distribution of their data.

What are the main trends in Kadaster product and service supply? Will these have an impact on your application of spatial-data acquisition technologies?

A significant trend is the worldwide expansion in geo-information as citizens become fully aware of its possibilities through navigation systems or Google Earth, the benefits of which they experience on a daily basis. Real-time, fast access to up-to-date information, regardless of space and time. Governments recognise the value of basic registration in bringing down costs and time-consuming duplicate collection processes. Further standardisation of exchange processes is underway. To deliver the benefits, Kadaster is adopting new technologies at every step of the general procedure: collection, storage, retrieval and information supply. Information from notaries is collected by electronic means. In the surveying process, solo survey and mobile online processing has been introduced. The collection of topographical and legal data will be integrated. More survey data will be provided by third parties, acquired in concordance with our legal directives.

Storage and retrieval of data is done using the most modern application- and database-management systems. The potential offered by the internet and mobile communications (SMS) are fully exploited for purposes of information supply.

Is the 'spatial' in spatial data infrastructure (SDI) still special, or is it fated to become simply a component of the general social information infrastructure?

Geographic information is increasingly becoming a commodity. Society is getting used to the idea that location-related data is exchanged via geo-data services. If both the obtaining and management of geographic information are organised professionally, SDI can become a fully-fledged part of a general information infrastructure. But this does not mean that the spatial component should be neglected or undervalued. On the contrary, at national level, but also within a European and worldwide context, huge effort is required to improve SDI in all its components, from standards and interoperability through to management skills and education.

You operate independently of government, in contrast to sister organisations in many other countries. What do you see as the advantages for you, and what are the challenges?

In our business model the customer pays for our products, thus financing our processes. Knowledge of the customer experience and feelings concerning costs, quality and services is essential to us. The main advantage of this model is the direct influence of the customer as an important driver for strategic development; we can focus on them fully. We can consult our customers through our User Council, through Customer Satisfaction Surveys and directly, in face-to-face contact. Because the User Council has formal competency, extensive political or government intervention is not needed. Holding on to this advantage is one of our main challenges. Although our tasks are undisputed, there is recurring discussion in the Netherlands as to whether non-departmental public bodies such as Kadaster ought to exist as such. This provides an additional incentive for us in striving to meet the constant challenge of satisfying ever-increasing customer expectations. Also highly significant here is government influence, as enshrined in law. The Minister for Housing, Spatial Planning and the Environment is responsible for approving Kadaster strategy and financing. It is always a challenge to find a balance between customer, stakeholder and government influence.

What are the opportunities for Kadaster offered by the INSPIRE initiative, and how are you preparing for these?

The INSPIRE directive supports the policy of realising a geo-information infrastructure; obstructions to the exchange of data will decrease. We expect this to have no big impact on the registrations that we are managing: they are already fully accessible digitally. However, it will become easier to combine our data with that from other sources. We expect to play a role in this development, for instance by managing the Dutch portal for INSPIRE data. Since our organisation is legally mandated by the

European Commission, we are co-determining the guidelines for implementation of INSPIRE in different countries and participating in various working groups.

How might western countries support developing countries in their need for geo-information?

Western countries can contribute by sharing the things that developing countries lack: knowledge and funding, and we are supporting many projects in different countries around the world to help them build solid land registers, mapping and geo-services, and strong institutions. Our efforts range from organising study tours for foreign delegations to the Netherlands, to actually setting up and participating in projects abroad. A solid land register remains an important condition for economic development and fighting poverty.

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