# SDI: Simple as Five Fingers

A SDI is a framework of technologies, data, policies, institutional arrangements and people aimed at increasing the availability, understanding and use of spatial data and services to support policy, business, research and society at large. Remembering its component parts is as simple as counting on the five fingers of one hand.

The forefinger (in French, l'index) shows the route, designates a point, and calls the professor's attention. It designates what geographical data exists, where to find it and how to get it. This is the area of metadata and catalogue.

The middle finger (in French, le majeur) is the largest one. Having simple, easy-to-use (constraints-free at point of use), up-to-date and maintained reference data enabling all data holdings to register to each other (be interoperable from a data perspective) is the main challenge of any SDI. If all actors in a given territory share the same reference data, then spatial analysis combining knowledge from various perspectives will be easier.

The ring finger (in French, l'annulaire) bears the ring symbolising union between people. Agreements between partners in the SDI, either contractual, ethical or gentlemen's, make possible levelling of the SDI playing-field. Fairness on the part of participants is required for sharing data and service. In an economical sense, a stowaway, or user who fails to pay the 'just' price for using the SDI, entails underproduction of reference and thematic data and overexploitation of the SDI. It is an area for public-private partnerships.

The pinkie (in French, l'auriculaire) is the little finger, the one nature designed for the purpose of cleaning the ears. This corresponds to servicing. SDI provides services over the network: simple services such as access to metadata or viewing geographical data, complex services such as chaining existing services. The challenge here is inter-operability between services offered by private or public organisations.

The thumb (in French, le pouce) has a position in the hand different from the four other fingers. It indicates "yes" (thumbs up) or "no" (thumbs down). SDI has an economic and social impact; if not, why create one? Monitoring and reporting on SDI implementation, maintenance and effective use enables decision-makers to continue to allow SDI to exist and to provide adequate resources for this.

The INSPIRE directive, as it currently stands in the co-decision process, contains the five fingers here described!

But all these fingers are linked together by what is called the palm, the inner surface of the hand (in French, la paume). This links the fingers to the rest of the body. The users are on the palm of SDI. They provide the connection between SDI and real life, allowing it to be part of the general endeavour of social, societal, environmental, entrepreneurial administrative nature. Understanding users' requirements and meeting them in an economic and efficient way is challenging!

The INSPIRE directive may be seen as the prototype 'hand' for future SDIs, taking benefits from existing SDIs to enable INSPIRE to learn from the past. The challenge will be to design implementation rules that create a balanced and harmonious hand.

Continuing the analogy with SDI, territory knowledge might be the nervous system, technology its bones, funding its blood…We all have two hands: our territory, our life. Let them applaud the adoption of INSPIRE as a challenging directive!