

Special

Gone are the years of special status for geo-data. It is increasingly considered an integral part of the whole story upon which decision-makers should base their plans. Of course, geo-data has always been part of the whole picture, but all the new collecting and processing techniques developed over recent years had the effect of setting it apart. Luckily, the trend now is towards integrating data. A good example of merging geo-data with other sorts, and so ceasing to regard it as something different, is what is happening at Rijkswaterstaat. The Dutch public authority responsible for securing water balance in the river delta that basically constitutes the Netherlands is discontinuing its Geo-Information Branch. The Branch will be merged with the new internal Data ICT Service that is to combine geo-data with all kinds of other information collected and managed by Rijkswaterstaat in the service of roads and waterways.

This combined strength behind decision making is the most important benefit of integrating data. Getting it all together. Over recent decades, big, new infrastructure projects have all too often been executed on a standalone basis. Highways have been planned to lighten traffic density, dykes raised to meet new and expected sea levels, industrial areas developed to provide room for a lot of new activity. But has all this been done in the best possible way, to preserve or create the best environment for citizen and nature alike? The intention was undoubtedly there, and undoubtedly many projects led to improvements. But dividing up decision-making responsibilities and prerogatives or not taking all available data into consideration has also often meant projects being halted when it would have been better to carry them through, and others executed when a rethink would have been the better option.

To summarise, the aim must be to develop a single overall vision on the modelling of a country such as the Netherlands (in other parts of the world the area may be a region, province or even a county) to meet the challenges of climate change, growing population and urbanisation. Only in this way can a better living environment be ensured for those who must live there. Rijkswaterstaat, always in the forefront of developing leading infrastructure projects with the purpose of protecting the country and its inhabitants against high water, is taking the right decision. Integrating geo-data into the entire decision-making process will make it even easier to arrive at a single, large-scale, co-ordinated vision. That geo-information will stay special, in the sense that it is key to decision making, even when integrated with other data, is something that goes without saying.

A happy, healthy and special 2008!

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