Intergeo Round Table Focuses on Digital Infrastructure

Regular exhibitors, members of the Intergeo advisory board, organisers HINTE and hosts DVW recently came together at this yearâ€™s Intergeo Round Table in the German capital city, Berlin. Experts agreed that the digital infrastructures we need are not so much a technical problem as an organisational challenge.

Whether it's the energy revolution, megacities or demographic change, said the DVW's president Karl-Friedrich Thöne, geoinformation is the key to unlocking the main challenges of the 21st century. This is because, alongside providing and processing data, there is also a need for networking - in other words, the classic land management activities, he explained.

In concrete, everyday terms, cutting-edge sensor technology can be used to tackle issues such as "How to avoid traffic jams? How can the over-80s be offered a (safe) means of continuing to drive? How might we solve the energy problem?" – to name just a few key examples. Sensors will certainly play a role in meeting these challenges of the future, but not as much as intelligently networked geoinformation. Sensors already play a vital role in terms of environmental monitoring, disaster protection and forecasting floods. Humans themselves are also important sensors. They send a constant flow of real-time information with their smartphones that can be collected anonymously and used in a whole variety of ways to support intelligent networks.

Networking systems

It is not just the non-stop flood of data being sent and recorded for professional or mundane purposes all over the world, but more an issue of how to process it. Experts are agreed on this point. When asked about this during the Round Table discussion by host Hagen Graeff from DVW, the participants were almost unanimous in their response. It is not just sensors that will determine the digital infrastructure. It's more a matter of networking systems and of thinking backwards from the desired outcome and planning with an eye to the future, as Gerd Buziek from Esri Deutschland said. Peter Hecker from the GEOkomm association agrees. He said he doesn't believe that sensors determine our infrastructure at all anymore. Instead, it is more a matter of organisation.

More often than not, it is political issues that thwart networking rather than technical hurdles, said Trimble's Jörg Amend. His colleague Fernando Calvo agreed, pointing to the need for multiple approaches to processing the vast volumes of data that are stored real-time in the Cloud. A simple increase in data doesn't automatically constitute progress in itself. Jürgen Dold, Leica Geosystems, backed them up by stating that among other things, sensor technology provides professional, high-resolution data. The technical challenges this presents are not unduly problematic. The issue is an organisational one, because from a data point of view Germany is quite a mixed bag.

Esri's Peter Ladstätter illustrated the point with a very pertinent example from a different sector. The case of subsidising solar panels (as in Bavaria, unfortunately) reveals how a fundamentally good idea can fall foul of scattering resources too thinly. In summer, too much energy is produced and no-one knows quite what to do with it – then in winter there's none at all. What's lacking is the networking needed to resolve matters meaningfully and for the long-term, he said.

More than a technology showground

This is precisely where Intergeo comes into play, according to DVW president Karl-Friedrich Thöne, who addressed calls from the sector's representatives for greater political networking. Intergeo is much more than just a technology showground. It demonstrates the entire spectrum of GIS applications along with solutions for data capture, processing and distribution in the fields of geodesy, geoinformation and land management. The conference represents a vital forum for bringing together politicians, interest groups and representatives of industry.

The Round Table concluded that a great deal can be achieved by intelligently networking geoinformation, which has been captured at least in part using sensor technology, and marrying it with a uniform data language.

This is just one of the many subjects to be covered at the 20th Intergeo, which will be held in Berlin from 7 to 9 October 2014. Pictures, statements and videos from the Round Table can be accessed in the media library at www.intergeo.de.