

Dear Heads

EuroGeographics General Assembly 2024 – Highlights and Reflections

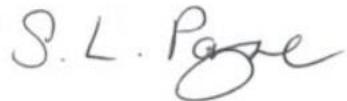
Our 2024 General Assembly focused on your high-value geospatial data and its role in providing fundamental information about location to find solutions for global challenges.

The agenda highlighted the ways in which we are all helping to realise the aspirations held by people around the world for a better future; we must continue to demonstrate its value and its role in serving the common good across national boundaries.

With more than 100 members travelling to Seville to join us for the two-day event, the desire to continue our cooperation is clear. Our keynotes and panellists provided some thought-provoking insights and I wanted to share some of the highlights, as well as the feedback from our Roundtable session.

Feedback from the session on the long-term sustainability of official geospatial data will be sent separately.

Best wishes

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "S. L. Payne".

Sallie Payne Snell
Secretary General and Executive Director
EuroGeographics

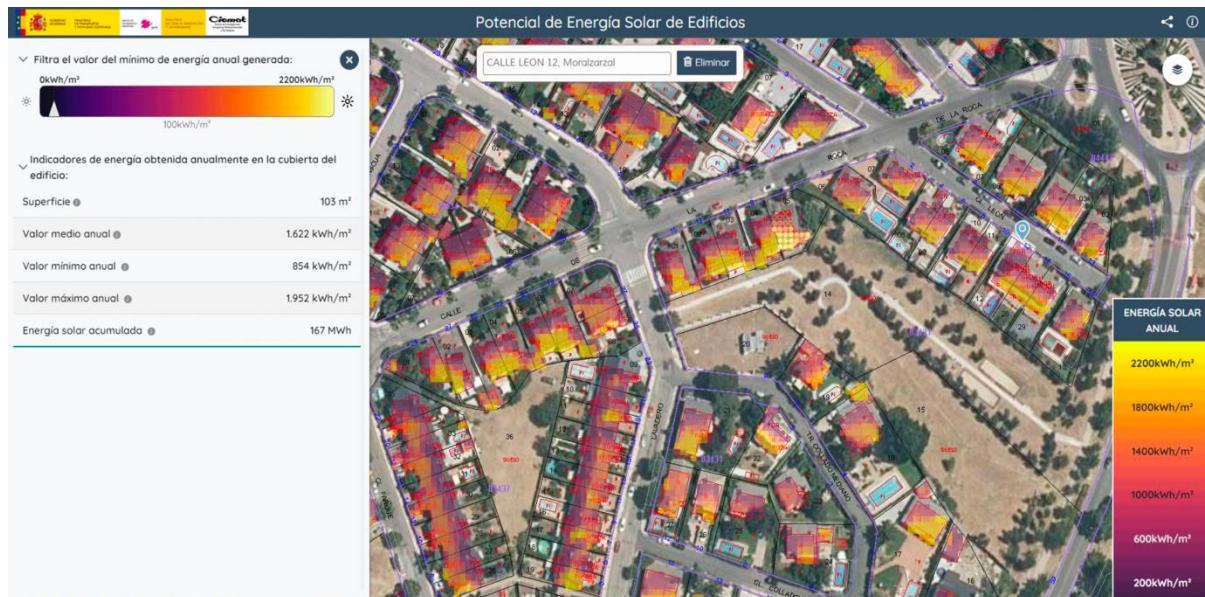
Six Ideas for NMCAs – A Spanish perspective

Welcoming members to Seville, Emilio López Romero, Director, National Centre of Geographic Information outlined six ideas that NMCAs could consider when addressing national, regional and global issues.

First, he gave the example that the Spanish National Geographic Institute cannot act alone if it is to provide the best possible official geographic information. He suggested that NMCAs also considered changing the focus of their actions to demonstrate the wide range of resources that are available from national providers, and pointed to an increase in downloads to show that free and open data is not worthless.

Mr López Romero then talked about the Spanish experience of public and private partnerships, particularly in the context of meeting the needs of the biggest users – other public administrations – before highlighting some of the work taking place with the academic sector and new technologies.

He suggested that European mapping agencies ‘need to get their act together’ to support European and global customers, particularly when open-source data is available and being used by the UN and European Commission. His concluding remarks were a call to action: Let’s work together and we get much more!

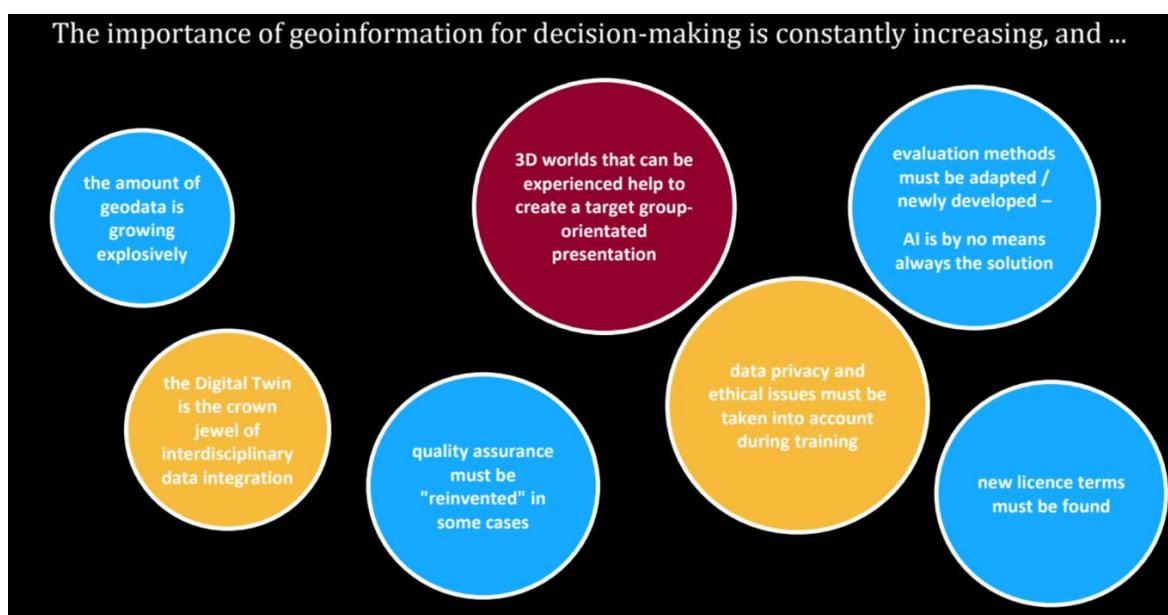


The future of geospatial information – A German perspective

In his keynote, Prof. Dr. Paul Becker, President BKG Germany, outlined not only the impacts arising from increased demand for geodata, but also some solutions.

More and more geodata is needed, and produced to support decision-making. As a result, we are seeing exploding volumes and varying quality of data, and despite open data, licence conditions are often complex. Added to that, the issues that need addressing are increasingly interdisciplinary and time-critical, experts are not always adequately trained, and it can be difficult to present results in a way that is appropriate.

In terms of proposing possible solutions and analysing possible effects, he said Digital Twins remain the ‘crown jewels of interdisciplinary data integration’. He also showed how Germany’s 3D/4D digital lab enables decision-makers to ‘dive right into a simulation’ that translates geospatial to show, and align, the presentation of results to target audiences.



Geospatial data addressing global challenges

During the first day of our General Assembly, we heard many examples of how location is being used link information and action nationally and across borders to benefit both people and planet.

Toby Wickes, Chief Executive, REACT Disaster Response not only tested members' situational awareness but also their knowledge of trends in humanitarian aid. He stressed that the immediate need following a crisis is a good, fast and cheap response – and 'direction' matters in both the short and long-term.

Simon Kay, Deputy Head of Unit DG CLIMA outlined two key aims of European Policy: Climate-neutrality, and immediate Union targets in relation to land use. NMCA data is important for the Green Deal and, in particular, better monitoring for climate neutrality.

The value of authoritative geospatial data – and the partnership between the European Environment Agency and EuroGeographics – was also the focus of Jose Rubio Iglesias' presentation on Copernicus. For example, Spanish national data is vital for assessing the impact of wildfires and post-disaster management.

European Dataspaces: The Green Deal Dataspace and panel discussion

Members heard that the Green Deal Dataspace goes beyond open data and is built on previous infrastructures in the keynote by Sotirios Kanellopoulos, DG Environment. During the panel debate, he added that it was not necessary to have a specific geospatial dataspace and the focus was on the implementation of the Green Deal Dataspace with a mix of solutions that focused first on priority areas.

Use-cases demonstrating synergies are encouraged



Thematic Data Spaces



Destination Earth



Digital Product Passport



Local Digital Twins



Panellist, Jani Kylmäaho, NLS Finland said for interoperability purposes a geospatial dataspace is needed, whilst Dorus Kruse, Kadaster, Netherlands, gave the view that that geospatial is 'core' and can be used in every dataspace. Both spoke about the importance of combining and sharing data from different sources.

In Finland, the Location Innovation Hub supports this and integrated data models are progressing. In The Netherlands, Kadaster combines data with its ministries, and there is extra work to do to include private and research data, and predicted that there will be more pressure on NMCAs to provide more data.

The Governance of Artificial Intelligence

In his keynote to the General Assembly, Gianluca Misuraca, Executive Director, AI4GOV and Vice-President, Inspiring Futures, described the ‘trilemma’ for AI policymakers in the digital age: the Governance ‘of, with and by.’ And, as the journey from the EU strategy for data governance evolves, asked what’s next, the ‘Ides of March’ or a way to human-centric AI – and if so, are we ready for it?

He suggested that some solutions are found in a compass comprising four steps to steer policymakers towards digital governance:

- Developing a shared framework of action
- Enhancing digital and capacities of public sector leaders
- Strengthening a multi-lateral and multi-stakeholder approach to digital cooperation and development
- Accelerating development and adoption of AI and Digital Transformation in the public sector.

Mr Misuraca concluded that in doing so, we will be helping to dive into a digital Europe!

Mastering AI – Towards a Digital Governance **Compass** for Policy-Makers





Governance and policy aspects of AI



Human-centric principles for AI systems and service design



Focus on use cases and procurement of AI in the public sector



Technical knowledge of on-demand AI techniques



Global Networking and partnership-building



- **Develop** a shared framework of action encompassing norms, institutions and standards that shape Global Digital Governance
- **Enhance** Digital and capacities of public sector leaders in future-oriented systemic thinking change
- **Strengthen** a multi-lateral and multi-stakeholder approach to digital cooperation and development
- **Accelerate** development and adoption of AI and Digital Transformation in the public sector

Technology and Innovation

Charalampos Tsitlakidis, Head of Sector for Destination Earth, DG CNECT, introduced delegates to this highly accurate Digital Twin. The first priorities are digital twins that will simulate scenarios and tailor information for climate change and weather-induced extremes. These will optimise use of renewable energy and explore possibilities for the future.

Next, Francesco Pignatelli, Strategic Advisor, Digital Economy Unit, JRC gave a comprehensive introduction to the Interoperable Europe Act. He outlined the European Framework as a model and set of recommendations for legal, organisational, semantics, and technical interoperability as well as governance, which includes a Board. He ended with a call to action for members to participate in the Interoperable community.

Climate change and the economic, social and political consequences of the impact of human activities were addressed by Nicolas Paparoditis, Deputy Director, IGN France. He talked about new technology and mix of data acquisition sources, and in particular the use of LiDAR in producing land use and land cover, automated information extraction, and regularisation using vector data and collaborative sourcing with local authorities.

Embracing technology: Panel Discussion

Innovating to remain relevant and deliver what society needs were key takeaways from the panel discussion featuring Tambet Tilts, Estonian Land Board; Saulius Urbanas, Ministry of Environment, Lithuania; and Suzanne McLaughlin, Land and Property Services Northern Ireland.

The panel also identified that it may be necessary to take risks when embracing technology but that the benefits could include working more efficiently and quickly.

A Knowledge Buzz: Roundtable Discussion Feedback

Business Models

Challenges

Open Data

- Policy is not necessarily reflected in business models or additional funding.
- Funding received does not meet members' costs for infrastructure needed to implement high-value data.

Economic factors

- Weaker real estate market.
- Higher data storage costs.

Long-term funding for innovation

- Projects can fund this to a certain degree (European Commission offers funding for several projects right now) but long-term funding remains an issue.

Diversity of business models across the membership is a strength.

There is wealth of knowledge to share, which could include:

- Common rules to demonstrate return on investment and value.
- Common strategy to overcome reduced income due to open and high-value data requirements.
- Common operational and technological plans for more cost-effective activities.
- Cataloguing different models and national reports on building business case.

Geodata in the development agenda

Key findings

- The agenda is driven by statistics, geospatial needs to be in the conversation – and action needs to be taken now to influence the next framework.
- Geospatial needs to show it delivers more value than simple data visualisation.
- In addition to data, members can provide knowledge. Their data should enable and underpin user knowledge.
- NMCA and NSIs need to work together more at national level: Ireland's SDG portal is an example of true partnership.
- Legal mandates are important for NMCA/NSI cooperation.
- Focus on the policy side, not the data side of the SDGs – stating the value the different domains bring to the framework, not where the date is failing.
- Key people / organisations are needed that can join up and translate what data is available between the NMCA and the SDGs.

Future of GI in the AI age

Key findings

- Members are investing in, and implementing, AI in different ways.
- Overwhelmingly seen as a useful tool but not a universal solution to issues facing the geospatial sector.
- AI is more than a tool to improve efficiency, it has the potential to change the nature of geospatial products and services, and make them more accessible.
- Interdisciplinary collaboration may be useful – non-geospatial public authorities, such as statistical institutions, face the same challenges.

Challenges

- Trust: Can members' trust AI to produce reliable data?
- Quality: Members need to assure high-quality data and need to decide the requirements for AI derived geospatial data.
- Skills: Do people have the correct skills and competences to use AI in the context of authoritative data, if not how do they gain them?
- Ethics: Members have to consider their responsibility to the public regarding the use of AI in authoritative data.
- Investment: The public sector should be cautious in investing in AI as it requires a large investment to get results but by sharing methodology and learning, it can further innovation to benefit the economy.

Membership Strategy

General Consensus

- Members do not want to expand membership beyond the geographic Europe.
- Organisations with responsibility for the NSDI could be approached.
- Most members do not want anything to change significantly.

No overall agreement on

- Allowing more than 3 members per country
- Additional categories of membership
- Inclusion of military or defence organisations

Other thoughts

- Consider political implications of widening membership on existing members.
- There are potential membership organisations in countries which are already part of EuroGeographics.
- Reducing costs may be a solution, including reducing EuroGeographics team and operations.
- Budget should align with clear articulation of the organisational goals.