

Date

Monday 13th July 2009

Title of session

Breakout Discussion Group:

What are the impacts of economic turbulence on mapping in your country?

What are the impacts of economic turbulence on your institution/organisation?

What are the measures you have undertaken to cope with the challenge?

How do you think mapping (and your institution/organisation) can support your societies and countries in overcoming this period of economic turbulence?

Name of presenter/chair

Željko Obradović, Company Director, Federal Geodetic Administration,
Bosnia and Herzegovina - Facilitator

Name of rapporteurs

Luke Hampson & Emily Dover

Željko informed the group about his role within Bosnia and Herzegovina and he then put the following question to the group –

“What are the consequences of the economic turbulence for your country?”

Robin McLaren, Know Edge Ltd voiced his concerns regarding the impact of the current economic climate. He stated that there may be serious consequences if certain datasets that exist in the market place today disappear through lack of money and investment.

Additionally, there is an apparent threat to the quality and currency of certain datasets eroding over time due to the cuts in budgets that are currently occurring. This was a common view that was shared through many of the developed country representatives in the session. However, John Wright, Land Registry (LR), UK informed the group that despite the LR cutting 1,200 jobs, they have in fact been

diverting their staff to build upon the quality of datasets that currently exist in their organisation.

Despite this largely gloomy outlook, there was one positive spin-off that came out from the group. From every crisis, there are opportunities that arise from such situations, including the fact that there may now be a chance to review, improve and rationalise the current processes for data collection and maintenance in both the public and private sectors.

However, Habtemicael Weldegiorgis, Cadastral Office, Eritrea stated that it is not so much the current economic conditions that are having a great effect on his country. Historical events, such as war and conflict have had the most significant impact on Eritrea's mapping agency.

Dr Sang-Ki Hong, Anyang University, South Korea stated that their Government has recognised the importance of the Geospatial industry so they have not cut budgets in this area despite the gloomy economic conditions. In fact, their Government have been funding more building projects that require spatial data – so as to stimulate their own economy. As a consequence, they are quite challenged to keep up with the demands for such information.

Dr Antonio Arozarena, Instituto Geográfico Nacional, Spain added that a more collaborative approach has been adopted by Spain in response to the global recession. Spain has a different political set-up to the other countries represented in the session with nineteen different governments administering the various states in Spain. There has been a shift in recent times to ensure that one central cartographic institution should be responsible for managing the data that the various states have collected. This has been extremely challenging however.

Kari Craun, National Geospatial Technical Operations Centre, USA added that the state of the US economy has affected both Local and National Government. The US has a “bottom-up” as opposed to a “top-down” approach for harvesting data – meaning the smaller levels of government collect Geographic Information and then feed the information up to a national level. Economic challenges have meant that local governments have been affected just as much as the federal government – so a vicious circle has been created. Kari cited an example where a local GIS officer that worked for a local municipality may have been laid off and this has meant that the national government in turn do not get as frequent an update as they previously did.

The session then moved on to the second question regarding:

“What the impacts of economic turbulence have been on your organisation?”

Stuart Haynes OBE, Defence Geographic Centre stated that a cut in central government funding has led to a reduction in staff numbers as most of their costs lies in the staff. Consequently, skills are been lost and there are increasing worries that, as and when the economy picks up, the DGC will be faced with a staff/skills shortage in the future.

UCL responded by saying that they are seeing the other side to that point. UCL has more students enrolling on GI Masters courses this year, a reflection on job losses and the economy. This was identified as a positive spin-off as when the economy picks up there should be a skilled workforce to choose from.

Robin McLaren, Know Edge Ltd summed up a popular theme that emerged from the group by stating that the Public Sector has a good relationship with the Private sector in terms of mapping organisations. Although they compete, there is a need to keep a good relationship and to retain capacity so that when economic prosperity returns they can flourish once again.

Professor Marinos Kavouras, Ktimatologio SA, Greece informed the group that Geospatial data is part of a countries infrastructure and there is a need to convince Governments of the importance of this. Magnús Guðmundsson, Head of National Land Survey in Iceland confirmed that Iceland’s recent economic troubles are deeply hurting their national mapping agency. However, an opportunity has been created to review the infrastructure and processes and how they can improve their output.

The following question was raised - What *should* be done in the public sector and what *could* be done in the private sector?

At this point it was recognised that all of the answers previously provided had, undoubtedly been linked to all of the questions.

Stuart Haynes, OBE, Defence Geographic Centre confirmed that national mapping organisations, following a period of growth now need to focus on where they need to go; what they are currently doing and what they should be doing in response to the global recession. If technical advances were to appear in industry as a whole and if these were to offer efficiencies – there is a possibility to improve productivity in mapping organisations.

Most of the session focused on issues faced by developed countries and Hablemicael Weldegiorgis, Cadastral Office, Eritrea confirmed once again that they are faced with a challenge to hold on to their skilled workforce. However, there are now more affordable solutions available to developing countries. There is a need to start at a low level and feed upwards so that developing countries can afford the GI solutions.

Questions/Comments	Answers