

Introduction by the Chairman – Session 3: The Policy Framework

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At this session we will deal with many issues which were raised already in the first Cambridge Conference in 1995. I refer especially to the papers by:

- J Hugh O'Donnel, National Mapping Agencies – looking to the 21st century.
- J L Morrison, What is the status of worldwide topographic mapping in the twenty-first century?
- Peter Jakobsen, An experience in the pursuit of stability and long term security through change.
- W A Robertson, A strategic response to turbulent times.
- U Sandgren, Reform of the Swedish National Mapping Organisation.
- Carolina Gartner, Commercialism and the Public Sector - The New Zealand Experience.
- Other papers presented in session G given by J.P Grelot, David Rhind and Nancy Tosta.
- And last but not least, also the Hotine Lecture given by Peter Dale, titled Surveying with 2020 foresight, covers many important items related to the themes of this session.

In many of these papers emphasis is put on the general development of external influences on mapping agencies. They see some mega trends, which direct the development in all fields of society, such as:

- World economy.
- Internationalism and globalisation.
- Development in technology.
- Environmental issues.
- Commercialisation.

These trends have had impacts also on national administration and therefore on mapping agencies as well. Especially in the western world the question has been raised what the core tasks of the state are. Is nationwide mapping for instance a field where government could decrease its involvement?

The extreme alternatives are that:

- Nationwide mapping (at least in certain larger scales) is solely the task of the government and governmental organisations and collected data is kept as a state secret, funded by the government (usually by taxpayers money).
- Mapping is left totally to market forces and thus to private enterprises; government purchases the maps and GI data it needs in the market.

There are still many countries in the world who implement the first alternative while, as far as I know, there is not a single country in the world whose government does not have any involvement in mapping. All countries want to influence mapping even though the degree of the involvement largely varies from country to country. The minimum need for every government is to be aware of its own area of jurisdiction. This is not possible without nationwide maps.

The big change in the status of mapping agencies during the last few decennia has been a shift from military organisations to civilian ones. This has been the first step to decrease the government's involvement in mapping.

The second step has been the impact of the general economical situation in countries. In many developed countries this has resulted in consideration of what are the core tasks of the government. Funding of these activities has also been under consideration. In many countries a 'user pays' principle has become more popular, which means at the same time that a mapping agency must have more liberties to direct its products and services in a more custom oriented direction and thus decrease the governments' involvement in the activities of the mapping agency. The market defines which products and services are profitable.

The 'user pays' principle also means that other governmental agencies, research institutes and universities have to pay for GI data. In many cases this seems to be extremely difficult for these organisations to understand, and they complain of mapping agencies behaving selfishly and acting in their own interest. However, mapping agencies only implement the policy of the government. The 'user pays' principle is the only way to direct the costs of the administration to the right sectors of administration. It is certainly not the task of a mapping agency to subsidise environmental administration or universities with low prices of data when the government has set up a very strict cost recovery demand on the mapping agency. If the government wants that these institutes must obtain data 'free of charge', it has to pay on their behalf if it implements logically its own policy. Unfortunately, politicians in charge have seldom one will.

The 'user pays' principle also means that investments in more custom oriented products and services must be guaranteed. It leads to the strict implementation of copyright laws. Public domain data does not give any income.

The problem how to organise the data collection, maintenance and delivery has been under consideration in many countries. Outsourcing and privatising at least part of activities has taken place in many countries. This is based on thinking that private enterprises can do the job in a cheaper and more efficient way than governmental enterprises. This is true in most cases but not in all. The private sector does not necessarily function in a more efficient way than the public sector if there is not enough competition between private sector enterprises. So, if a factual monopoly situation exists, public monopoly can be controlled, which, in practice, is not the case of private monopoly. Lack of competition in this field is often a problem in small countries.

A more fruitful approach would be a public/private partnership. In the real world there is room for both sectors. The public sector could, in principle, produce basic data and the private one value-added products based on this data.

I have tried to show that the current policy framework for mapping agencies is dependent on governmental decisions which are not especially made for the mapping sector but are the implementation of the government policy in general. When this policy applies to the mapping and GI sector, consequences are such as I have described above.

Another development trend, which may radically change the policy framework where mapping agencies function, is the development of technology. Technological innovations will make a user to a cartographer, as was said by J L Morrison in the last Cambridge Conference. So far, this has not greatly influenced the status of mapping agencies, but when new very accurate satellites begin to work and new easier to use software applications are introduced and everything is available via internet, does it leave to mapping agencies nothing else to do than to maintain an internationally accepted reference network and standards? The development of technology is a field where the governments are unable to make any clear decisions; they just have to react to the development, which then may largely influence the policy framework of mapping agencies.

Globalisation is also a factor which will influence the policy framework of mapping agencies. Mapping has been a very national activity. Many countries have begun to draft National Geographical Data Infrastructure. Preparatory work has also been made at European level, which has not led to any concrete results so far. A start with the process of creating Global Spatial Data Infrastructure has also been made. From the standpoint of mapping agencies it will mean that mapping agencies have to move from nationalism to internationalism. 'All the mapping agencies, join together!' At the same time some actors have raised strong criticism against mapping agencies. They think that topographic maps do not form an appropriate basis for Spatial Data Infrastructure.

The objective of this session is to consider how autonomous National Mapping Agencies should be within government. What is the stage of freedom for NMOs in defining and implementing policy issues?

The variety of ministries under which the NMOs are subordinated is large. When the European Commission invited representatives from the ministries in charge of mapping in member countries to a meeting in Luxembourg at least the following ministries were represented: Ministry of Environment, Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry, Ministry of Housing and Physical Planning, Ministry of Finance, Ministry of the Interior, Ministry of Defence, Ministry of Justice. This shows how mapping and geographic information issues cover all the sectors of administration and it is in many cases a matter of taste which the most natural ministry for these issues is.

The fact that geographic information issues touch several sectors of administration, academic and business world, has led to the establishment of coordinating bodies in many countries. In most of these bodies, mapping agencies play a leading role. Under this item we will try to find out answers to such questions as:

- Can NMOs influence the policy of their governments?
- What is the policy and practice of exchange of governmental information?
- What kind of copyright and pricing policy is implemented?
- How NMOs' activities are funded.
- Is there a cost recovery demand or is the production based on tax payers money?
- Is it of importance in which way the agency is organised?

During the session we have an excellent opportunity to hear what has happened in the Mapping Agencies of Sweden and New Zealand since we last met in Cambridge in 1995. In addition, we have a presentation from totally different conditions, an interesting paper from Kenya.