Results of 'The future of INSPIRE'

INSPIRE Conference Antwerp 2018 – 20 September 2018

At the 2018 INSPIRE Conference in Antwerp Geonovum organised a workshop on the future of INSPIRE. Around 70 people from a great variety of European member states (from coordinating bodies, data providers and implementors) and European institutions like the Commission, EEA and JRC participated.

In an interactive session they discussed three main questions on the future of INSPIRE:

1. What needs to be done before and after 2021?
2. Can we identify common threads?
3. What should we focus on and what do we need?

This presentation summarises the key findings of the workshop.

Disclaimer:

The participants were asked to share their personal views and ideas (as INSPIRE experts) and discuss these. The findings have been collected and aggregated by Geonovum, The Netherlands, and documented in this presentation. This presentation serves as discussion material. This document does not reflect a formal position of the Netherlands or participants of the workshop.

As we see INSPIRE now

The past years a lot of effort has been put in providing INSPIRE datasets "as-is" and as harmonised datasets, especially for Annex I themes. As a result a lot of datasets are available in the INSPIRE infrastructure. So a lot has been achieved already.

However, many see that the use of INSPIRE data lags behind what is expected. Some reasons mentioned for this are:

- datasets are not available (yet)
- datasets are hard to find in practice
- datasets are not complete (yet)
- better alternatives are available
- juridical and practical limitations in access and use.

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The question arises now:

Have we made INSPIRE too complicated?

Focus on demand, not on usage only

When asked how they see the future of INSPIRE, participants from all groups mentioned that INSPIRE needs to pay attention to the usage of INSPIRE data more. For example:

- The EC should use their own products more: use INSPIRE data and enforce INSPIRE in other Directives. (A popular saying is "Eat your own dogfood" or maybe nicer "eat your own icecream"). For Member States and dataproviders the same is said.
- The private sector and general public should be stimulated or better: *tempted* to use INSPIRE. For example by creating high quality pan-European datasets and making data truly findable, also outside the geospatial domain.

- By using the data, shortcomings and enhancements to fit the demand may be found
- In fact, the future should not be about focusing on using the existing infrastructure only, but *focusing on demand*: shape INSPIRE to the demand.
  - Priority datasets are an example of connecting datasets with demand

About technology and demand

In general the technology and technical specifications of INSPIRE are perceived as static and outdated in some cases. Participants would like that:

- the current technology is modernized

- demand should be leading, technology should follow

- technology is simplified and more in line with common practice. Avoid specific INSPIRE requirements as much as possible to ease the implementation and use:
  - there should be no need to be an INSPIRE or GIS expert to use INSPIRE data
  - connect with other widely used platforms like common search engines and technological principals, for example the use of (REST) API's.

- technology is continuously kept up to date (be more flexible in the technology)

Focus on true open data

Participants recognize the fact that the current implementation needs to be finalized to be (more) valuable to the users:

- First: get missing data out there as-is, instead of waiting for "perfect" and harmonized data
- Then harmonize data and improve data quality, where applicable

There is a need but also a challenge in Member States to deliver the data as true open data (no limitations, open data licenses).

Adapt governance to focus on demand

For the near future particpants would like a more dense but also in some regards different community around INSPIRE. Following (organizational) consequences are mentioned:

- Organize collaboration and feedback more explicitly: all INSPIRE stakeholders should actively reachout to users, dataproviders, system integrators and application developers. And the Commission should adopt standards "continuously" based on their feedback.

- Rethink user groups. Who are the users, also in domains where INSPIRE is not used? What do these users want? And how do we organize users in such a way that they can contribute or determine the priorities for demand and supply.

- In the governance of INSPIRE both the demand side and supply side should be incorporated. (Currently the supply side seems to be more present)

- To facilitate this, a more agile process is required (also in the maintenance of existing guidelines and other documents):

"Continuous improvement is better than delayed perfection. – Mark Twain"

INSPIRE as a platform

There is a general concensus that the concepts behind INSPIRE are still valid. Also, the organizational foundation that has been created over the years is usable now and, with changes mentioned before, will remain usable and valuable for the upcoming years.

From an infrastructure, INSPIRE could then grow into a platform for geospatial data and applications, where:

- the INSPIRE infrastructure is the means, not the end;
- data standards (harmonization) follow demand
- the platform is so attractive that data from the general public (like citizen science) and private sector is published too.