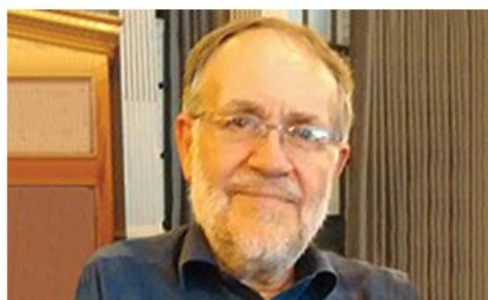# Brexit and Geospatial - Could it Spur Better Services?

The uncertainties created by the Brexit vote seem to have receded for the moment. The dire economic warnings that preceded the referendum have not happened (yet) and the UK seems to be enjoying not only unseasonably good weather but an economic Indian Summer too. But this is not to say that there are not many in our sector who face a worrying future, either because their job depends on EU projects or funding, or are themselves citizens from continental Europe working in the UK. As David Hannay, our former ambassador to the EU points out, "Why not assume that it was all over on 23 June, like some sporting fixture, and that there is nothing more worth talking about? Because that is simply not so. Most of the hard choices remain to be made and none of them were properly aired in the campaign that preceded the referendum."

An example is the EU's Erasmus programme which has enabled thousands of young people to study in Europe. More than 200,000 students have benefited from the scheme since it was launched in 1987. In the last academic year alone, 15,500 UK students participated. David Davis, the Brexit Secretary, is being urged to protect this £112m EU funded exchange scheme. It is difficult to imagine that anything positive could come from its loss for Britain's young people.

And what of INSPIRE, the EU scheme to harmonise geospatial data? With all the effort put in by local and national government to date, it would surely be foolish not to complete the project. Prof Ian Masser in his article on INSPIRE progress (page 10) observed, "it is essential that these benefits are not lost in a post-Brexit Britain."

We asked several industry watchers what their thoughts were about the UK's impending departure from the EU. Gary Gale thought the consequences were twofold. "I can imagine a lot of people going "whoopee, we don't need any EU directives like INSPIRE anymore" and making plans to that effect, which will waste time and potentially squander existing investment. But on the other hand, this may stimulate people to actually make datasets and modern lightweight services that work the way more and more people work today and that might not be a bad thing."

Those in consultancy are worried that work from EU countries will no longer go to the UK. Andy Coote observed that "I have started to hear stories of work being won by Irish consultancies over British ones, where the customer has European owners, driven in part by uncertainty over trading tariffs."

And then there's the common agricultural policy. Steven Ramage reminded me that the CAP is nearly 40% of the EU's budget at 58bn Euros a year and provides financial support to approximately 12m farmers across Europe. He comments, "From a geospatial industry perspective I wonder about the knock-on effect of less funding (unless matched by the UK Government ad infinitum) for software and services provided by individual consultants, small to medium-sized enterprises and multinational geospatial organisations with offices in the UK. It will require guidance and feedback from organisations, such as the Rural Payments Agency and Defra once the terms and conditions of Brexit are better understood and plans are in place for future funding, but this is only one sector impacted by EU policy and there are many others that could be impacted."

These are all serious and deeply concerning issues, which I expect we will return to in these pages. In the meantime, we have an issue with serious heft: a report on FOSS4G in Bonn; a highly topical Big Map feature; how data collection technology is speeding mapping for a US utility company; how a drone is helping preserve an Irish angling river; how the American Red Cross is helping map vulnerable communities; and in the second part of Dr David Green's article on SpatioTemporal Geography for Analysis of Medical Data, how analysis is revealing some worrying conclusions, especially for schools close to heavy traffic routes.

This article was published in GIS Professional October 2016