

Geo Momentum



Geospatial. Commission. These two words are sending shivers of eager anticipation and, perhaps, just a little trepidation down many of our spines. But are we likely to feel the impact anytime soon?

The government is pulling the UK's land resources into sharp focus. It's making reference to new housing, in particular, and we know the pressure is on to rapidly develop services that can improve vital infrastructure. I'd like to think the UK's new Geospatial Commission will adopt 'geo momentum' as its motto (wouldn't that be good).

We also know that the new Commission's remit will be that of strategic oversight. It is widely accepted that the 'cousins' – HM Land Registry, Ordnance Survey, the Valuation

Office Agency, the Hydrographic Office and British Geological Survey – would benefit from working closer together. And the Commission will have to develop a strategy that ensures public sector location data can support economic growth, pro-actively: stimulating investment in the UK economy, generating jobs, and improving services. As a British citizen, that sounds good to me.

Every government feels the pressure to deliver value from its resources. It's hard to recall a moment in peacetime when our public sector has ever been so constrained by tight budgets. The advent of this Commission could not come at a better time – for anyone living in or doing business with the UK, and for all of our AGI members.

The truth is, we're not seeing drawn-out, linear, gradual technological advances anymore. The potential uses for location data aren't likely to diminish thanks to forward-thinking geospatial organisations and their desire to share the #geojoy. The challenge with this exponential development of technology is that its impact can take people by surprise. For the new Geospatial Commission, this is something to bear in mind along with the rest of us.

To keep the UK competitive in the geospatial arena, we particularly need to see a focus on skills – how do we make sure everyone is made aware of the potential for geospatial? How do we keep our organisations equipped with the very best talent to integrate location data into their workflows? We need this, while exploiting the advances in spatial data usage that we know (as geospatial enthusiasts) have the opportunity to be transformational – from digital twins to autonomous vehicles. This will be a key area of focus for AGI during 2018 and one our members have told us is important to both them, our wider community and the UK economy as a whole.

Geographic information reaching the point of ubiquity and the ability to permeate every aspect of our lives, but there is still a real role for us as specialists – and a mission for AGI. We heard this loud and clear during AGI's annual GeoCom conference this year.

David Johnson, deputy director, ONS Data Science Campus, shared the interdisciplinary nature of the work at ONS: "We have to bring all of these skill sets together - but geo is the absolute key to everything we do." Helen Ferrier, chief scientist, National Farmers Union, spoke about the challenges of meeting the drive for increased productivity in the Industrial Strategy through driving value out of data.

As we look ahead to 2018, this is our challenge. The AGI is the membership organisation that's focused on sharing the value of and potential for geographic information in the UK. We are being presented with an opportunity at the highest level. It is *our* challenge, now, to share the #geojoy even more – and ensure we're all working closely together to help bridge the gaps.

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