

The Breadth and Depth of Smart Geospatial



With the summer now well past us, I'm sure many of you (like me) are reminiscing of peaceful days in amazing and beautiful places, escaping from the desktop. I really did opt for remote this year, with an escape to Shetland – time in the most northerly settlement in the UK and never 3 miles from the coast, it made for spectacular views and a feeling of being incredibly close to nature.

Over recent weeks, I'm reminded that our planet is breathtakingly beautiful the world over – but also incredibly fragile. It's impossible to avoid the news of environmental devastation wrought by hurricanes in the Americas, and life-taking earthquakes in both Mexico and Japan.

Unless you're involved first-hand in these events, the loss of life and damage is on a scale that's difficult to take in. As the UK is not on the edge of a tectonic plate, we do not have to suffer monsoon rains. However, we do co-exist on a planet that has a very delicate eco-system – one that's changing rapidly and needs smarter and smarter solutions to help protect and preserve the lives that are affected by it.

In the geospatial industry, we have some incredible tools, technologies (and people) that are providing much-needed support. Most recently, I was delighted to welcome delegates to the annual AGI Risk & Insurance SIG & RSPSoc breakfast briefing at Lloyds of London, with a focus on quantifying earthquake risk – fascinating! And of course there are many examples of geo-specialists helping to save lives – I'm so proud to know that a number of AGI Members are involved with supporting the work of MapAction for example, including recent deployments for hurricane relief.

Does it not seem strange then, that there's sometimes still such a disconnect between the application of benefits that our discipline can deliver so well 'in the worst of times' and the way we're managing to meet the needs of citizens sometimes 'in the best of times'?

We must be diligent. We must remember the importance of advocating greater and better use of geospatial across the board. The smartest use of geospatial intelligence doesn't always mean there's a technology-laden solution to a problem.

From the smallest of businesses who embed a map on their website, to the largest public sector organisations that are desperately trying to reduce costs and improve their asset management on behalf of the public purse – and from the outlying regions of wind-blown Dominican Republic to the hi-tech air-pollution sensors being deployed in the public areas of Smart Cities such as Glasgow, Peterborough or Manchester ... geospatial is the discipline that knows no limits to scope, potential or boundaries. Smart is making sure it's part of the mix.

Perhaps that's the reason we can find our role quite challenging sometimes, at the AGI, as the organisation that represents an entire industry.

We want to service the needs of all those working with geographic information at the same time – and our industry is now multi-talented, multi-directional, and multi-purpose in the extreme. And as I'm writing, I'm reminded of this fact – and of the great progress we're making across the board.

I'm looking forward to seeing who'll be joining us, from around the industry, at our annual conference – GeoCom. Our topic this year? You guessed it: Smart Geospatial. Our speakers will be almost as varied as the strands of expertise that go to make up our organisation's membership, and we'll have insights on the influence and importance of geospatial in everything from infrastructure, tech, agriculture, policies and decision-making, Big Data, and neuroscience.

At the AGI, we're determined to make ourselves heard: better use and greater integration of geospatial is essential, everywhere. The UK has a lot to offer the world in that regard. So, if you're curious about getting involved with our advocacy work, or you'd like to stay updated on what we're doing to support you, wherever and however you're using geo in your work, I urge you to stay in touch – and, of course, to come along to Smart Geospatial, #GeoCom17, in October.

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