

INSPIRE: Infrastructure for Spatial Information in Europe

INTERNET CONSULTATION PHASE I

Preliminary notice of a proposed new EU initiative to provide data to support Community policy-making

What inspired INSPIRE?

When you travel by road or rail, you expect to continue smoothly across borders to your destination within the EU. You do not expect to have to get out of the car or train, walk across a field, and get into another car or train each time you cross the border of a local council, region or Member State.

In the European Union, governments collect massive amounts of information relating to the environment, particularly at regional and local level. However, this information is fragmented: it contains gaps and duplications and we very often have to “to walk across fields” in order to use it in a broader context.

These obstacles prevent our governments from dealing efficiently with the increasingly complex and interconnected issues that affect our quality of life today. Many of our policies need to be underpinned by information on spaces and places in order to assess the need for action, to inform policy-making and to evaluate impact.

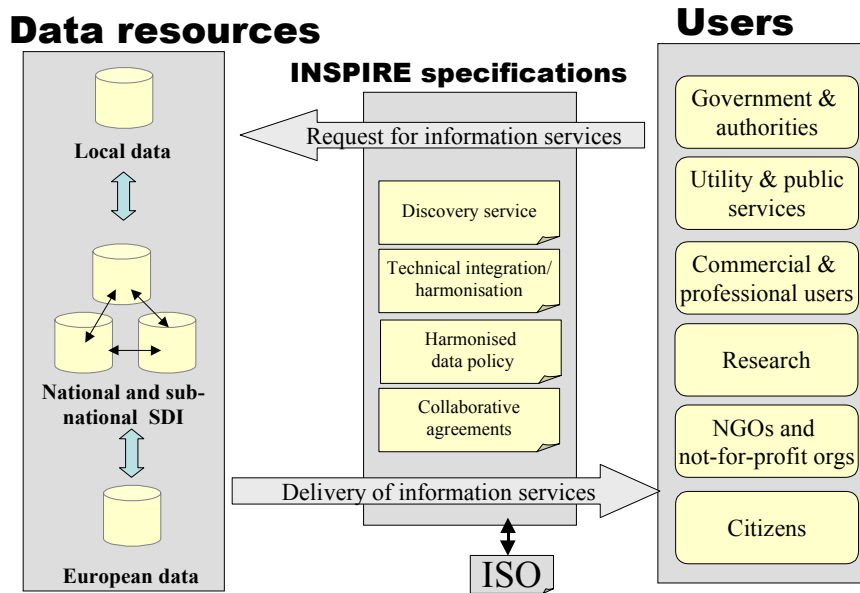
But sometimes it is difficult to get hold of this information. Sometimes we do not know what information is available, or we cannot easily get access to it. Sometimes different sorts of information do not match, and so on. This can have severe consequences, particularly in an emergency. It also makes it difficult to take the environmental dimension into account into all policies, as is required by the EU Treaty, and to support integrated policies, such as the Water Framework Directive.

So how can INSPIRE help?

INSPIRE recognises that there are many reasons for the above problems, and proposes creating a spatial data infrastructure to deal with them. You could think of this spatial data infrastructure in the same way as the transport infrastructure that allows the mobility of people and goods. It comprises rules (e.g. we stop when the lights turn red), equipment (railways, canals, etc.) and organisations (like Eurocontrol that provides a co-operation framework for European air traffic management): in other words, everything we need to use the data across the boundaries within which it has been collected.

The spatial data infrastructure will allow users to co-ordinate their needs with data providers, so that they will then be able to easily find, access and combine existing data from various sources (e.g. various regions in Europe, different levels of government, different government departments). This diagram shows how INSPIRE works.

INSPIRE information flow



SDI – Spatial Data Infrastructure

What kind of data will INSPIRE make available?

INSPIRE covers a wide range of data on areas or on specific sites, sometimes referred to as geographical data. We call it “spatial data”. INSPIRE focuses on two kinds of data: cross-sector data and environmental data.

Cross-sector data is data that is needed across different sectors. It is often needed when using spatial data. Examples are elevation data (for water management and flooding, for looking at information in three dimensions, etc.), soil data (for nature protection, groundwater management, etc.), transport network data (for modelling air quality and noise, traffic management, etc.), and so on.

Environmental data relates more to the protection of the environment. Examples are data on air quality, vegetation, etc.

Later on, INSPIRE should be supplemented by input from other sectors, such as transport, energy and agriculture, which will use the same cross-sector data so that coherence between those sectors and environmental policies will increase.

Who will use the data?

The data will be used first and foremost by policy-makers and authorities at European, national and local level - to begin with mainly for environment policy, but later for other purposes too. The infrastructure will help those who need it for work, school or home. For example, it would be possible to find the best data on environmental risks (e.g. risks of flooding) in any area of the EU and know whether it is comparable with similar data elsewhere. Researchers could combine air quality data in certain regions with data on public health. Businesses will find many uses for this data, for instance for insurance,

utility planning and operation, exploitation of natural resources, communications, agriculture, tourism, etc.

How did INSPIRE come about?

INSPIRE is an initiative launched by the European Commission, and developed in collaboration with Member State and accession country representatives and key stakeholders at local and regional level, including from EFTA countries. It has been developed through a number of working groups. Further information is available on the INSPIRE Internet site <http://www.ec-gis.org/inspire>.

What happens next?

The Commission is working on a consultation document to describe the issues to be addressed by INSPIRE, the measures to be proposed and their expected impact. As part of the consultation exercise, the Commission would also like your views.

Following the consultation process, the Commission will take your feedback into account and come up with a proposal. It will send this to the European Parliament and the Council, who will adopt an EU legal initiative. Once implemented, each Member State will create a Spatial Data Infrastructure that will be integrated to become a European spatial data infrastructure providing you with data and related services from across the EU.

What does the Internet consultation involve?

The Internet consultation is in two phases. The first phase started with the posting of this information to allow you to start thinking about the key issues and about how to organise your feedback to this Internet consultation. During this first phase, expected to last until mid-April 2003, **you should not provide any feedback**. Just think about the issues presented and on how to co-ordinate your feedback with other persons or organisations for the second phase. Please try to group feedback as much as possible, and please reply in English. This will allow the Commission to process the replies from stakeholders all over Europe quickly and efficiently.

The second phase of the Internet consultation will start in mid-April 2003 (timetable subject to confirmation), when a consultation document with more detailed proposals will be available. You then have a month to provide your feedback via the special website.

Issues to consider

A. Scope of INSPIRE

The INSPIRE working groups have identified the 17 data themes - listed below - that should be covered by the spatial data infrastructure. They cover both cross-sector data and data on the environment.

Please consider the KEY ISSUES listed and prepare your feedback for Phase II.

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|--|--------------------------------------|
| 1. Geographical location | 10. Area regulation |
| 2. Administrative units | 11. Air and climate |
| 3. Properties, buildings and addresses | 12. Water |
| 4. Elevation | 13. Ocean and seas |
| 5. Geo-physical environment | 14. Biota/biodiversity |
| 6. Land surface | 15. Natural resources |
| 7. Transport | 16. Natural and technological risks |
| 8. Utilities and facilities | 17. Areas under anthropogenic stress |
| 9. Society and population | |

→ **KEY ISSUE**

Is spatial data on these themes needed to take account of the environmental dimension in EU policies, and do we cover all the necessary themes?

B. Key challenges for INSPIRE

To establish a spatial data infrastructure that can be used widely throughout Europe to support sustainable development. The challenges identified by the INSPIRE working group result from the following five main obstacles:

- **gaps in spatial data:** spatial data is often missing or incomplete
- **lack of documentation:** description of available spatial data is often incomplete
- **spatial data is not compatible:** spatial data from different sources can often not be combined
- **incompatible information systems:** systems to find, access and use spatial data often function in isolation only
- **barriers to sharing and re-use:** cultural, institutional, financial and legal barriers prevent, discourage or delay the use of existing spatial data.

→ **KEY ISSUE**

Are these the five main obstacles that prevent the widespread use of spatial data to support environmental governance? Should they be addressed by INSPIRE?

→ **KEY ISSUE**

Should INSPIRE include measures to ensure that important spatial data is made available to fully cover the EU territory?

→ **KEY ISSUE**

Should INSPIRE include measures that increase the exchange and re-use of spatial data between the different levels of government (local, regional, national, EU)?

→ **KEY ISSUE**

Should INSPIRE focus on spatial data for which the public sector bodies are responsible, without however excluding collaboration with the private sector where relevant?