

Zeitschrift: Vermessung, Photogrammetrie, Kulturtechnik : VPK = Mensuration, photogrammétrie, génie rural

Herausgeber: Schweizerischer Verein für Vermessung und Kulturtechnik (SVVK) = Société suisse des mensurations et améliorations foncières (SSMAF)

Band: 97 (1999)

Heft: 5

Werbung

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ten the technology is being used for technology's sake and not for the benefit of the public. Even in Western Europe there is a reluctance to treat land-related information as a corporate resource. The motive behind some IT investments has been to reduce the number of civil servants rather than to provide the public with better access to data that are held about them.

Yet the technology is merely a transitory thing with a shelf life not much longer than frozen food. Data, especially data for land administration, must stand the test of time. Discussions on IT tend to focus much more on the T than the I, just as in GIS it is the system more than the information that is the focus of attention; data are needed to feed the system rather than systems needed to exploit the data. There needs to be very much greater understanding of information and its role in society than heretofore.

The excitement about the new technologies was inevitable in the early days but now is the time to make a reappraisal. Y2K has already started this process for we are all being held ransom for the most trivial of reasons that anyone in the IT business with a gram of common sense should have foreseen. Systems are still insufficiently user friendly though progress on the hardware side has in general been excellent with market forces weeding out the inefficient. Software is an altogether different story and the market has killed off many tender shoots before they could

grow to maturity. Many packages are too clever for their own good so that in seeking to please all the people all the time they often end up collapsing or confusing. There are very few people who want to or can use the full functionality of many packages, or have the time available to learn the full system. Simplicity is what they want, together with their own control over what they are trying to do. If JAVA and the other developing technologies can achieve this as has been suggested at this conference then that truly will be a great step forward.

What people really want is a simple life with idiot-proof systems that are easy to operate. In the UK up until now most training in GIS, for example, has been at the post-graduate level. You have needed the intellectual capacity and maturity of a graduate before you can be a qualified operator of GIS. What nonsense it all was – and still is. If we are to create wealth through information – and that certainly is possible – then ordinary human mortals must be able to take advantage of what is being created. Already we have the data rich and the data poor and this distinction correlates with the financially rich and financially poor. A lot of effort has been put in by the IT industry to improve the quality of the «front end» but more needs to be done, especially in GIS or whatever technology replaces it.

People undoubtedly want access to data. Throughout the UK there are a number of local authorities that are providing train-

ing courses for rural communities. For instance a minibus equipped with 8 computers arrives once a week in the Scottish village where I live and 8 members of the local community (incidentally, all women) are learning word-processing, spreadsheets and Internet surfing. There is already a queue for places on further courses. The explosive demand for access to information on the Internet is all too evident. It is simply a matter of time before the market in land and property data begins to take off. Achieving long term sustainability depends on exploiting the tools that the technologists have created, and will continue to create, in ways that serve the needs of all people, not just the fortunate and the computer literate. We need stronger links between you, the IT industry, and us, the IT users. You need to understand us better, but we the users also need to define our problems more clearly and to take a more innovative approach to interpreting the data that are now at our disposal. The problem is that solutions are much easier to develop than problems are to define.

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