

What if ... we wanted to more actively involve users in the evolution of INSPIRE?

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The (main) aim of the INSPIRE Directive is to establish a European SDI "for the purposes of Community environmental policies and policies or activities which may have an impact on the environment" (Art. 1(1)). In addition, the data made available through INSPIRE, in particular the "reference data" under Annex I and II, can be used also for a number of other purposes. Hence, INSPIRE has always been understood as a cross-cutting and multi-sector/purpose infrastructure.

With this, however, come the problems that the potential user base for INSPIRE is very broad and has never been very precisely defined. Furthermore, while INSPIRE stakeholders have been actively involved in drafting the Implementing Rules (IRs) and Technical Guidelines (TGs) and in testing their fitness for purpose, user requirements were often captured mainly based on desk research (e.g. studies of existing legislation and national practices).

Only now that more and more INSPIRE implementations become available are we beginning to receive "real" feedback from users, e.g. from the environmental community (mainly related to using INSPIRE for the spatial data aspects of environmental reporting) or EU-funded projects (e.g. for developing cross-border or pan-European applications based on INSPIRE reference data, such as gazetteers or pan-European data layers). But even now such feedback or change proposals are still rare and ad-hoc, even though, with the MIG and platforms such as the *Thematic Clusters* or *INSPIRE in Practice*, both a governance structure and tools are in place to channel such proposals and discussions about them.

So what could we do to involve user communities more closely and actively in the discussion about how INSPIRE should develop and evolve in the future?

1. There are different types of users that have different requirements and speak different languages (than INSPIRE experts, but also than each other). These include (at least) *end users*, i.e. users of INSPIRE-based products or applications in public administrations in the MS, thematic units in the European Commission or EU agencies, or in the private sector; and *solution providers*, i.e. application developers or analysts using INSPIRE data or services to build "value-added solutions" that will be used by other solution providers or end users.
 - How to better understand who the INSPIRE users really are and characterise them?
 - Do we need to keep track of our users? If so, how can this be achieved (e.g. some INSPIRE services require authentication in order to keep track of users, but such information is not available at the level of the infrastructure)?
 - What are the appropriate communication channels and language to reach out and engage with these groups of users?
2. Users (of all kinds) often are not (and should not be) deeply involved in INSPIRE and do not know where to turn to have their issue fixed. While there already are platforms for this purpose, they still seem to be too difficult to use and/or too much oriented towards INSPIRE implementation and hence "awe-inspiring" that many "lay persons" do not dare to use them for fear of exposing themselves as "ignorant" or "saying something stupid". Also, the process from change proposal to actual change in the technical or legal framework is long and not clear to even many INSPIRE experts.

- How to improve and simplify the feedback channels for users and reducing the fear of using them? Ideally, users should be able to provide feedback on issues, missing features, etc. directly in the tool(s) they use to access the infrastructure. One could even imagine soliciting feedback from them actively, in the way that e-Commerce platforms such as Amazon or booking.com do.
 - What would need to change in the INSPIRE maintenance and implementation process to make it more flexible to react to proposed changes?
 - What sort of intermediaries can help to collect, interpret and channel user needs to the EU level? What roles could European umbrella organisations, EU-funded projects and private companies play in this context?
3. While in many countries, INSPIRE has triggered better national coordination or even the creation of national data sets, we often hear from national representatives that their national services and data are well accepted and used, while their INSPIRE implementations are not. The harmonised access to data and services through INSPIRE is particularly useful for creating pan-European or cross-border analyses, applications or data layers.
- But what other features could INSPIRE offer that national solutions cannot? Possible added value features could include pan-European data analytics of data sets and their usage, e.g. which data sets are similar or complementary, which data sets have been used for similar application areas, which tools have been used, ...
 - What can we learn from other platforms? What features attract users to platforms such as booking.com, Amazon, Google Maps or OpenStreetMap?
 - How could such additional features be implemented in INSPIRE? Would they work in the current architecture or would they require changes?
4. Many INSPIRE implementations and cross-border usage of INSPIRE is happening only in EU-funded projects, because these provide the necessary funds to do the "extra work".
- Are users actually willing to pay for the extra benefits they can get out of INSPIRE data and services, or should these costs be covered in some other ways (e.g. through "tax payer's money")?
 - Should the infrastructure provide standardized ways or re-usable tools for charging for and licencing data access and use (or value-added services)?
5. It is still difficult to showcase the benefits of INSPIRE in a simple application that can be understood by many different user communities.
- What could such a simple showcase application(s) look like? What areas should they address (environment, job market, migration, ...)? There could be different ones for showing the benefits of different levels of INSPIRE implementation (data inventory, data sharing, metadata, network services, data interoperability).
 - What are barriers that we still need to overcome? What could be quick wins?
 - How to best make the key users of a showcase the drivers of its implementation?