



GIS EUROPE

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**Amsterdam embarks
on GIS projects**

**AGI awards GIS efforts
and achievements**

**Evolving quality
concepts fuel
standardisation efforts**




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**Newsletter
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Still a pressing need for GIS awareness

Comments have been made more than once, recently, that the volume of words written about GIS is increasing at an alarming rate. Most people have neither the time nor the inclination to spend hours reading and assimilating the vast array of literature on the subject. As "professional collectors" of textbooks, journals, magazines and newsletters, many academics would have to admit that, at worst, much remains unread and, at best, a fair percentage is briefly scanned for topics of current interest.

There is, of course, a growing GIS community hungry for more and better information. The range of publications is increasing to satisfy this demand and each, in its own way, has a valuable role to play. The problem is not that there is too much information being generated — those already on the path to GIS awareness find that a first step is developing the skills to sift out that which is of interest and value. The problem is where do the uninitiated start? Awareness and knowledge is needed before moving into GIS and, for the person who knows little, there is no recognizable starting point.

There is certainly no mythical pinnacle that, once conquered, marks us as having "achieved GIS awareness." We are learning all the time. GIS awareness is about attitudes towards information handling and the realisation that it can lead to a change in the information culture of an organisation. In detail, it will mean different things to

different people, but it is an important platform from which people go on to build GIS solutions.

In the pursuit of greater awareness, clearly, there is a role for the magazine with general, easy-to-read articles that are not overly technical or academic. It is, after all, where many will start their quest for GIS enlightenment. There are also complimentary publications — the newsletters — that target specific user communities. They also have a valuable role in providing well-sieved information at an appropriate level on issues of current concern. A good

example is *GIS News* from the Local Government Management Board, which supports and promotes the use of geographic information in local authorities. To these information sources, the beginner can add attendance at exhibitions, short courses and seminars, user groups and local networks.

For many, the problem is one of being swept along by the new technology. Those initially involved in the development of GIS leapt from their bath shouting "eureka," and many more carry on that cry today. The problem is that those newly introduced to the GIS phenomenon also are shouting "eureka," but often without even knowing why they got into the bath in the first place.

GIS is most certainly a Pandora's box of delights which can be ex-

remely powerful as a decision-making tool. But it is not the panacea for solving all of our information management problems. For GIS to become widely used in a more effective and permanent form, solid foundations of conceptual awareness about the basic issues, the potential solutions and the pitfalls have to be laid. There is, clearly, a duty on those involved in promoting GIS to ensure that this is done. But many GIS promoters either are not interested in or just not aware of the problems faced by the GIS novice.

Someone at a recent GIS awareness course said that having been "instructed to find out" about GIS for his local authority, most of the following six months had been spent in ever-decreasing circles in an attempt to raise his own awareness. The result was that the next six months would be spent inflicting the same on those around him. Only then could they really start to look at what GIS could offer!

Basic awareness has a long way to go, and is not something to be undervalued, especially if we are to take a longer-term view on the value of geographic information management. ☺



Seppe Cassettari,
GIS EUROPE associate editor, United

Kingdom, is principal lecturer at Kingston University, School of Geography, Penrhyn Road, Kingston upon Thames, Surrey KT1 2EE, England. David R. Green, GIS EUROPE associate editor, United Kingdom, is with the Centre for Remote Sensing and Mapping Science, Department of Geography, University of Aberdeen, Elphinstone Road, Aberdeen AB9 2UF, Scotland.

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