



GIS Europe

Volume 3 number 5
JUNE 1994

Europe's Geographic Information Systems magazine



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Monitoring the impact of a rural Fiat plant



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Spreading the word about GIS

BY SEPPE CASSETTARI

There is a quote of unknown—at least to me—origin which I like to use when evangelizing about the potential of GIS. It goes something like this: 'Word processing was the technology of the '70s and the tool of the '80s; GIS is the technology of the '80s and the tool of the '90s.'

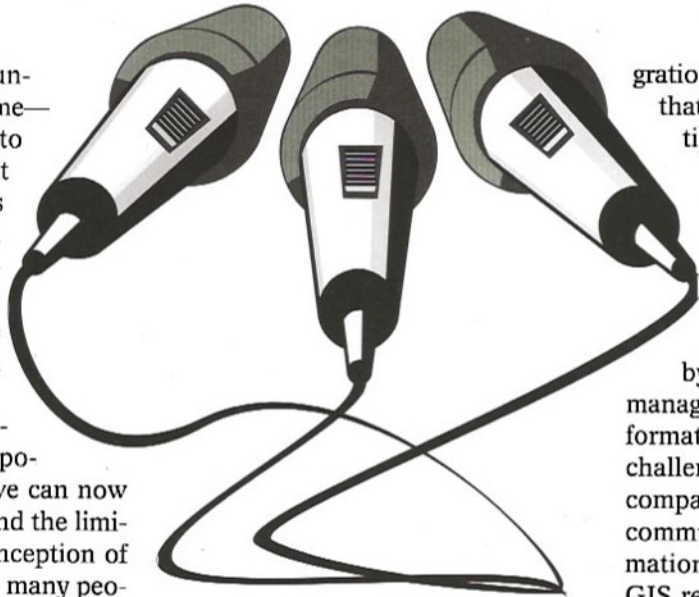
This seems to me to summarize both the enormous potential of the technology we can now all have on our desktops and the limitations of the common conception of what GIS is all about. Too many people still perceive GIS as a tool and nothing more. We have a growing industry that in many ways is still hampered by an image of being technology-driven.

Information-driven

This is not to say that computer hardware and software are not important. Far from it. But the future of GIS is now firmly established in an information-driven world. GIS is about information and how we make the most of this precious commodity. It is also about awareness of how we tackle and solve problems in a spatial context. The flaw in the quote with which I began is that the great majority of us can read and write, so we could—with a minimum of instruction—use a word processor. But we are not all spatially aware. We need to increase the general understanding and appreciation of the importance of geography in our day-to-day lives and its influences on problem solving.

Prophets

To achieve the potential of GIS we have to spread the word. We have to become prophets of spatial information. We have to increase awareness and un-



gration across the broad swathe of data that is becoming available from multiple sources.

A personal challenge

These issues offer a personal challenge to all those involved in the GIS community. For me, the challenge is accompanied by a change of job. As the new managing director of Longman GeoInformation (LGI), Cambridge, UK, the challenge is to continue building the company into a cornerstone of the GIS community by providing both information for and understanding of the GIS revolution. The goal is to place GIS at the heart of the decision-making process alongside every word processor, spreadsheet and database. There is no doubt that excellent foundations have been laid, and there is now a promising future which will set us all new challenges for the next few years. (See page 9 for more about the new appointment at LGI.)

derstanding through magazines, multimedia, conferences, education and training. We have to reach into new areas of business, commerce and government and show how the GIS revolution can have a profound influence on decision-making processes—and results. There are clear signs that GIS is about to take another leap forward as it becomes more widely accepted in the business community—from retail to insurance, banking to marketing, communication to transportation.

Too many people still perceive GIS as a tool and nothing more.

Awareness must go hand-in-hand with the availability of data, the creation of appropriate information and the generation of value-added resources. This is the challenge for the GIS community in the latter half of the 1990s. Issues such as accuracy, availability and ownership need to be resolved. GIS needs to achieve greater levels of inte-



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