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Foresight 2020

Diane Sandeman introduces the AGI's latest report into the coming challenges and opportunities for the geoinformation sector

By the time this edition of GeoConnexion UK is distributed, the Association for Geographic Information will have launched the Foresight Report 2020 at its flagship annual conference GeoCom: Resilient Futures.

The document offers insight into key issues the AGI considers will have a significant impact on the economy, environment and society – providing both challenges and opportunities – over the next five years to 2020. The purpose of the report (five years on from the last foresight study 'The UK Geospatial Industry in 2015' published in 2010) is to act as a reference document. It both observes – and as necessary - challenges the current role of GI in relation to these key issues. It promotes the future role the GI sector should play in these areas and what needs to be done to realise it.

Foresight 2020 offers a glimpse into the near future
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Coming together

Over the past two years the highly successful AGI 'Geo: The Big 5' series of events have centred on industry issues of intrigue and interest. They have brought the GI community together with wider industry and stakeholders to discuss current and emerging practices, challenges and opportunities.

The events were the catalyst for attracting white papers from a wide range of contributors (too numerous to mention here) and these are published as part of the Foresight Report 2020. Although viewed from a UK perspective, the Report looks globally at trends, threats and opportunities. And by involving partners and other professional bodies, the process fosters new collaborations and partnerships to show how geography can be used to solve real-world problems.

Paradigm shift

The collation of these considered contributions has been an interesting and insightful journey. It is clear that there has never been a more urgent need for a paradigm shift in how we inhabit our planet. Whether we look at the current crisis through the lens of climate change, population growth and migration, socio-political unrest, or mind change – it is clear that our current trajectory is unsustainable and unpalatable.

The report illustrates the mismatch between the rate of change of technology and the ability for the world's leaders and policy makers to keep up and understand the implications of the technology. In the past, technological shifts have allowed humanity to advance its resilience, adaptability and influence – with the benefit of hindsight, we are able to see that this has not always been for the better.

For the moment it seems that much of the industry is unsure which question to address to leverage the best outcome. The geospatial industry has reached an existential moment, with the past belief in its central role and importance being eroded by the realisation that geo-technology and its use is now so ubiquitous as to be almost invisible, or so integrated as to be taken for granted.

Opportunity

A key ambition of this report is to stimulate fresh thinking and new opportunities, and to help realise valuable and sustained revenue streams for the industry – quite likely with some unexpected collaborations.

As we enter 2016, it's important that, as a collective, we not only reflect on the messages that are evident in the report, but also come together to build on these opportunities. We are keen to gather reactions to the report, details of which can be found at: www.agi.org.uk/news/foresight-report