



Geospatial Analysis for Policymaking: Towards a Collaborative Laboratory

9 December 2020, Virtual meeting

On the 9 December 2020, the OECD Centre for Entrepreneurship, SMEs, Regions, and Cities (OECD CFE) held a first brainstorming meeting to discuss about future activities of the newly proposed “OECD Laboratory for Geospatial Analysis” (the ‘Lab’ henceforth). The meeting showcased relevant research and brainstormed with potential partners on activities and organisation of the Lab. The meeting gathered more than 100 stakeholders from public, private, and non-profit sectors, as well as from other OECD directorates. Notable external institutions represented included the European Commission JRC, Lincoln Institute of Land Policy, Microsoft, and Open Street Map Foundation, as well as representatives of numerous national statistical offices and academics from a variety of universities. The agenda, list of participants, and presentations from the meeting are accessible [online](#), and Nikolina Jonsson (Nikolina.JONSSON@oecd.org) can be contacted for additional information regarding these files.

Summary and key outcomes

- The meeting was kicked off by Nadim Ahmad, Deputy Director of the OECD Centre for Entrepreneurship, SMEs, Regions, and Cities, and Paul Schreyer, Chief Statistician and Director of the OECD Statistics and Data Directorate. The opening remarks emphasised the importance of developing and utilising geospatial data and analysis in providing more granular and timely evidence on a number of policy domains. It was explained how the meeting was geared as a brainstorming event to better shape the laboratory for the dual benefit of the OECD and potential Lab partners.
- A poll conducted among all stakeholders participating in the event highlighted that participants use geospatial data and analysis primarily on thematic areas related to economic development, housing and land-use, as well as sustainable development, but also confirmed a very large and diverse scope of utilisation
- The first session of the meeting brought together researchers and experts from academia, the private sector and international organisations who showcased cutting-edge work utilising geospatial analyses. The range of topics covered included the findings and success factors of mapping initiatives – notably building footprints – from the private sector (Microsoft and Open StreetMap), analysis of public service delivery in rural areas (OECD CFE), and considerations on geographic data science to make data policy relevant, including through useful, accessible and open data (University of Liverpool).
- A second poll was conducted, asking participants to identify fields where geospatial analysis has the most potential to be utilised in the future. The most commonly mentioned fields included environment, urban planning, regional development, logistics, and land-use.
- The second session of the meeting offered a panel discussion led by speakers from academia, national statistics offices, the European Commission, and the Lincoln Institute of Land Policy. The discussion touched upon current priorities for the stakeholders of the geospatial community and how the Lab can position itself within the community. The panel was followed by a short brainstorming session in six parallel breakout sessions where participants shared their views on how the geospatial lab should operate in the future.

- The panel discussion and breakout sessions highlighted some common recurring themes for possible roles of the Lab in the future. Most discussed was how the Lab could support and contribute in harmonising geospatial datasets, developing common geospatial databases and definitions, and building consensus on standards that the geospatial community could adopt. Relatedly, the Lab's potential role as a reliable and ongoing "official" repository of geospatial data was highlighted, with the hope of encouraging more widespread usage of geospatial data in policymaking. Another common theme emphasised the "networking" aspect of the Lab, whereby bringing together institutions and people with similar interests could foster partnerships that share data, find common solutions, and conduct common research or training. Issues regarding data privacy and the importance of data replicability also emerged as possible areas of work of the Lab.
- Nadim Ahmad, OECD CFE Deputy Director and Alessandro Alasia, Chair of the Working Party on Territorial Indicators of the OECD Regional Development Policy Committee, provided closing remarks. A concise document providing a first vision of the Lab in terms of its mission, scope of activities, and possible governance structure will be shared with participants in early 2021. A second meeting for the Lab is planned for early Spring of 2021, where further details will be discussed with the broader geospatial community.