



Herding Cats: The Challenges of Collaboratively Defining the Geology of Europe

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The EC INSPIRE Directive which came into force in May 2007 set out how the Member States of the European Union would describe, discover and provide access to spatial environmental data in a harmonised way. Amongst the data sets specified in INSPIRE is geology. A fundamental question is just what is meant by 'geology'? The question must be answered, and in some detail, if the intentions of the INSPIRE Directive to provide consistency of access are to be realised

The Directive itself provides very little constraint on this definition. In it geology is described as "Geology characterised according to composition and structure. Includes bedrock, aquifers and geomorphology". The challenge for the EC and its Member States – more specifically for the geological survey community – is to convert this single line into a precise and practical specification that will deliver the outcomes intended by INSPIRE. The geological survey community is attempting to develop this specification through two complementary routes. Theme Working Groups – a generic procedure adopted by the EC that will start in May 2009 - and a new EC eContentplus project, OneGeology-Europe.

Within OneGeology-Europe is a Work Package whose task is to deliver a specification of "geology" at 1:1 million scale. While the initial reaction of some would be to question whether defining geology at this scale poses any significant challenges the reality is somewhat different and raises fundamental issues in describing the geology of Europe that only can be solved in cooperation across political boundaries. Not only scientific questions are to be considered but also political, diplomatic and logistical ones. In addition, in the absence of accepted international standards, almost every national geological survey has adopted different standards; standards which they are reluctant to concede. This needs to be tackled.

This presentation will outline the issues and challenges facing the geological community in taking forward collaboratively the development of the OneGeology-Europe's geological specifications, taking into account the requirements of the EC INSPIRE Directive and also considering global developments and provides an update on the progress in meeting those challenges.