New Challenges

Taking advantage of open data by entrepreneurs in geo-information has always been one of the side effects envisioned by the European Union when designing their Directives on opening up data, such as INSPIRE. The main goal of INSPIRE was to create a better environment for all European citizens. By making data freely available for all policymakers it would enable them to take sound evidence-based decisions and to create greater transparency and accountability and increase the standard of public services. In addition, it would enhance a country's competiveness in the global information business. The Directorate-General for Maritime Affairs and Fisheries (DG Mare) has been developing the European Marine Observation and Data Network (EMODnet) with the same effect in mind. EMODnet describes its overall objective as 'to migrate fragmented and inaccessible marine data into interoperable, continuous and publicly available data streams for complete maritime basins.'

The EMODnet-Bathymetry portal already includes bathymetric data and data products for the Greater North Sea, the English Channel, the Ionian, Adriatic, Aegean and Levantine Seas of the Mediterranean Sea and the Western Mediterranean and the Atlantic waters off the coasts of Portugal and France, including the Bay of Biscay. This June datasets on the Baltic Sea, the Black Sea, the Norwegian and Icelandic Seas and the waters around the Canaries will be added to the portal. In June of last year, the Open Data Charter was signed by Canada, France, Germany, Italy, Japan, Russia, the United Kingdom and the United States during the G8 meeting, later followed by the World Bank and the UN Economic Statistics Directorate. In the meantime, tens of thousands of datasets have been opened up and linked to each other in portals like INSPIRE, EMODnet and others. The policymakers in Brussels, Washington and other capitals have done their share. The challenge now lies with entrepreneurs taking the opportunity to take advantage of that most important side effect of all this open data: boosting business. By analysing, linking, and consulting parts or combinations of these bathymetric datasets, they will create the first success stories that will then serve as example for other SMEs looking for paths to growth. This has long been anticipated and envisioned by leaders in advocacy of the re-use of geo-information data by reintegrating it into new products and services to enter new markets which were previously closed. The road to open data has already been a long and winding one and the end is not yet in sight. Not least because of the enduring economic crisis in large parts of the world. However, the positive news of a fragile recovery of the world economy could bolster efforts of new and existing entrepreneurs — also in the field of hydrography — to take chances with open geospatial data and create new ways of doing business in the post-crisis years.