The French authorities support the evaluation of Directive 2007/2/EC establishing an Infrastructure for Spatial Information in the European Community (known as the INSPIRE Directive). They believe that the European legal framework must evolve to incorporate the results of implementation of the directive. They propose to reduce the scope of the directive to high-value data and environmental reporting data, keeping in mind that the interoperability of these data is ensured under a governance led by the European Environment Agency.

**Current situation**

The INSPIRE directive is a unique tool in terms of data infrastructure and provides exceptional material for preparing common, European and functional data spaces. **However, in the opinion of the French authorities, the implementation of the directive has not achieved the expected results in terms of interoperability and usability of metadata, and it should therefore be a warning for the future, especially regarding the lack of return on investment for producers. Answers must still be found to meet these two essential challenges to succeed fully in sharing data at European level.**

The French authorities believe that the recommendations resulting from the 2016 REFIT process have greatly contributed to improve INSPIRE implementation. **The setting up of a governance system including the Member States on both technical and political aspects, the growing attention paid to international Internet standards and the implication of the Commission's Joint Research Centre (JRC) to inject more pragmatism are all points to be welcomed.**

**Effectiveness**

*What progress has been made over time towards achieving the objectives and targets set out in INSPIRE in various Member States?*

*Which main factors have contributed to – respectively stood in the way of achieving these objectives?*

In France, the French authorities have combined the development of the French data infrastructure with the implementation of the directive since 2008. Its implementation has accompanied a strong movement to open up public data, especially territorial data, which the ministry in charge of the environment had initiated in the late 1990s. It enabled the coverage of the national territory by regional infrastructures, recognized in the first article of the law n° 2015-991 of 7 August 2015 on the new territorial organization of the Republic (NOTRe): the regions have the mission of coordinating "the acquisition and updating of the necessary geographical reference data". **Thus, the impact of INSPIRE in France has been favourable, and has allowed a broader mobilisation of public data in the service of the environment.**

However, since 2016, the open data policy, larger, less costly to implement as less restrictive and thus more visible, has taken priority over INSPIRE as regards the dynamics of data sharing.

*Is the progress made in line with the initial expectations and the INSPIRE implementation roadmap?*

It appears that the main objectives of the Directive, especially those described in its recital 3, "the exchange, sharing, access to and use of interoperable spatial data and spatial data services at various levels of government and in different sectors" have not been achieved in the Union. **Particularly, there is no European data coverage related to the implementation of the Directive.**

*What are the qualitative and quantitative effects of INSPIRE?*

*Is the geographical coverage of implementation consistent?*

Quantitatively, the amount of data available has continually increased. A large part of this growth can be attributed to INSPIRE. **The fact that most of the directive's themes do not have European coverage shows that, qualitatively, the balance is still limited.**

*To what extent is INSPIRE used for reporting under the environmental acquis?*

For many reasons, the use of INSPIRE for environmental reporting was limited despite the expectations of Member States expressed in the Committees. In some cases, such as air quality, it has introduced constraints that did not exist in the thematic directives, with limited knowledge of the subject and no known use of it.

Nevertheless, the decision of the European Environment Agency (EEA) to use it was taken after the 2016 REFIT and is under implementation. **The French authorities consider this is a positive step forward.**

*To what extent does the implementation of the INSPIRE Directive in the Member States build further on the obligations of Directive 2003/4/EC on public access to environmental information (specifically the provisions under Articles 7 and 8)?*

In France, INSPIRE's provisions have been transposed into the Environmental Code, especially in relation to the provisions on access to environmental information, which have also been integrated into the Environmental Code.

**Efficiency**

*To what extent has the intervention been cost-effective?*

The "Cost and Benefits of implementing the INSPIRE Directive Workshop, Joint research Centre, Ispra (Italy) 15-16 October 2012" showed that the economic benefits of INSPIRE could not be discerned from technical (smartphones), social (internet usage) and political (open data) evolutions in Europe.

*Can any specific provisions in INSPIRE be identified that make cost-efficient implementation more difficult?*

On a qualitative level, French authorities have established that the costs of setting up the spatial data infrastructure have not been a blocking point in relation to the benefits. However, they note the opposite with regard to the implementation of quality metadata and interoperable data.

*Can the INSPIRE Directive and implementing rules be made more cost-efficient? What is the simplification potential?*

INSPIRE's specification requirements are opposed to the principles of open data by imposing precise formatting and specifications, whereas open data has no standard format. **The potential for simplification is certainly on the two least advanced subjects, interoperability and metadata, by limiting the constraints, and therefore the costs, to the most needed data at EU level.**

*Are the results achieved so far commensurate with the resources put forward and in line with the ones expected from the ex-ante evaluation of INSPIRE?*

The lack of European or simply cross-border coverages for the projects in which France is involved shows the gap between the achievement and the expectations.

*How proportionate were the costs of the intervention for different stakeholder groups (enterprises including SMEs, private citizens ...)?*

*Have the resources needed to implement INSPIRE been available?*

In France, costs were borne entirely by public funding. The difficulties mentioned above do not stem from a lack of investment but rather from the public authorities' assessment of the lack of effectiveness of the measures requested.

*How has the use of INSPIRE for environmental reporting affected the reporting burden?*

*How would further streamlining of the provisions in Articles 7 and 8 of Directive 2003/4/EC on public access to environmental information with the active dissemination provisions of the INSPIRE Directive impact the administrative burden on the Member States.*

Most often, INSPIRE has been used as a tool upstream of the reporting itself. The directive has been a facilitator. The more the two will be integrated, the more the brakes will disappear.

**Relevance**

*To what extent does INSPIRE still match current needs and do they continue to require action at EU level?*

The Directive has led to four EU regulations (Metadata, Network Services, Data Sharing, Interoperability) and a European Commission Decision on monitoring and reporting. Only the latter was revised, in 2019. The remaining corpus was released between 2008 and 2015.

This corpus has largely fallen into disuse, to be replaced, in the very functioning of the European Commission, by non-binding recommendations produced under a governance setting up after the 2016 REFIT sequence. Thus:

-The Network Services Regulation of 2010 is not the actual system for assessing the compliance of the services in question by the European Commission;

-The call services foreseen in the Directive were not finally included in the regulations due to lack of consensus on concrete achievements;

-The regulation on data sharing was never activated by the European Commission;

The regulation on interoperability is so vague that it is unusable for cross-border activity. We have progressively observed OpenStreetMap used by cross-border research projects and then by cross-border partnerships.

Some of Annex III themes seem to be empty of data as they are treated elsewhere (especially Health and Safety of People, Demography).

**Finally, French authorities consider that the legal framework of the INSPIRE Directive was partly inadequate**. Articles 7 and 8 of the Directive have not been put into practice in the European Union to achieve the desired interoperability**. French authorities consider this framework as obsolete, especially when not taking into account European citizens and companies, which are essential elements today but are absent of the INSPIRE legal framework.**

The objectives of data exchange between Member States have not been achieved. The complexity of the solutions and their distance from Internet standards have hindered access for non-specialist users of geographic data, despite the large amount of free data in France. INSPIRE reporting has suffered from divergent national interpretations.

On the contrary, at the same time and largely outside the framework of INSPIRE, European coverage of environmental geographical data has been produced from data originating from the Member States. They are composed with the so-called priority datasets, whose specifications are based on specific governance and use cases**. This success should be studied and serve as a source of inspiration for possible evolutions of the European framework.**

*To what extent are the general and specific objectives of INSPIRE still relevant to the issues (obstacles) they address?*

The need for European coverage of spatial data remains unmet, especially for companies expected to deploy their services across the EU. The 2019 INSPIRE conference in Antwerp showed cases where companies could not find the reference data for national coverage, such as the administrative boundaries.

**In this picture, some positive elements emerge. French authorities consider governance as the key. At the French level, within the national coordination structure, the national Council for Spatial Information, as well as at the European level, within the Maintenance and Implementing Group, appropriate governance has produced major advances for the integration of the different levels of infrastructure between them as well as for more effective technical guides.**

**Similarly, networked services are working well and have proven their reliability over time.**

*To what extent is INSPIRE future-proof?*

INSPIRE, as a regulatory framework, has fallen into disuse due to lack of relevance. However, most of the needs expressed in the recitals of the Directive remain relevant. The governance put in place after the 2016 REFIT has allowed them to be better addressed.

**French authorities therefore consider relevant to focus on a more specific perimeter, the sharing and interoperability of which would be of high value for the Union. The high-value data of the Open Data Directive n°2019/1024 could be suitable candidates for this new perimeter.**

*Are the articles 7 and 8 of Directive 2003/4/EC on public access to environmental information still relevant in view of the current state of technology?*

Yes.

**Coherence**

*To what extent is INSPIRE coherent internally?*

*To what extent is INSPIRE coherent with other EU environmental policies and initiatives?*

*To what extent does EU environment legislation and initiatives already benefit from applying the INSPIRE Directive to promote active dissemination of environmental information to gather evidence to assess its implementation and to streamline the monitoring and reporting process?*

*To what extent is INSPIRE coherent with wider EU policies and other interventions that have similar objectives?*

The level of internal consistency of the implementation framework of the Directive is good.

**EU added value**

Recent years have shown the central role of the European Commission in achieving common technical solutions such as those related to international standards or the European validator. **French authorities believe that this strong implication at EU level must be maintained because, otherwise, it will be difficult for common solutions to emerge.**

However, the European Union's action must also include international rules, namely in the fields of air and maritime navigation. All data from all countries are in the same format and with the same specifications, production areas are allocated in the form of a partition (i.e. without overlap) between countries and "one-stop shop" portals exist (www.primar.org).

**French authorities conclude that a revision of the EU legal framework is relevant in order to focus EU action on high value data and environmental reporting data.**

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