The State Service on Property Issues of the Republic of Azerbaijan (SSPI) together with the UNECE Working Party on Land Administration (WPLA), World Bank, Food and Agriculture Organization of the UN, UN-GGIM, and UN-GGIM Europe are organizing an international conference in Baku, Azerbaijan, from 2-4 April 2020. The theme of the conference is “National Spatial Data Infrastructure: Towards a Digital Society”.

Digital technologies are profoundly changing our societies. They act as a catalyst to development and, if harnessed, can help reverse negative trends in the UNECE region. Still, good practices are fragmented, and rooted to a particular often local context which does not permit the region to fully benefit from the multitude of opportunities. Considering those bounding conditions, the organizers of the workshop would like to bring together a variety of stakeholders, representing the public sector, civil society, academia and business, in order to (i) exchange good practices, (ii) establish partnerships, and ultimately (iii) learn from each other.

As known, geospatial information provides the integrative platform for all digital data that has a location dimension to it. All countries and all sectors need geospatial information for national development and decision-making. Thus, the Integrated Geospatial Information Framework (IGIF) is a United Nations adopted Framework that was developed in collaboration between the United Nations and the World Bank, originally to provide a basis and guide for lower to middle income countries to reference when developing and strengthening their national and sub-national arrangements in geospatial information management and related infrastructures.

The Framework aims to assist countries to move towards e-economies, e-service and e-commerce to improve services to citizens, build capacity for using geospatial technology, enhance informed government decision-making processes, facilitate private sector development, take practical actions to achieve a digital transformation, and to bridge the geospatial digital divide in the implementation of national strategic priorities and the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

Within the IGIF, particular emphasis would, considering their cross-cutting nature, be put on the following aspects: (i) technological enablers of digital transformation, (ii) digital data, (iii) good tenure governance, and (iv) innovative services and applications combining the above.

The phenomenon of digital transformation is very broad, and we would therefore like to focus our attention to the following domains: regional and spatial planning, next generation farming, smart cities and governance of land tenure.

As an overarching local to global development aspiration, the urgent demand to support the implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) through data, technology, innovation and digital transformation, is acknowledged. Some of these digital transformations include Blockchain, Artificial Intelligence, Big Data, smart cities and integrated land tenure. These rapid changes in technology bring new opportunities, but they also bring additional challenges, requiring integrated approaches to meet these new SDG demands.

Due to the disruptive nature of digital transformation, many governments still lack a clear understanding of their future data and technology requirements, especially when needed to address the SDGs and national to global development. In this regard, there is a need to take
the opportunity to leverage these new disruptive technologies to support better and smarter policy and decision-making – and the SDGs.

Part of the solution is aligning technological innovation and processes with the data and information that we are now able to leverage, doing so in an effective and timely manner, while recognizing that all countries in the region are at different stages of national geospatial development – including their INSPIRE and National Spatial Data Infrastructure (NSDI) development.

Another critical part is ensuring and sustaining national leadership and ‘champions’ in geospatial information management, and the continual requirement to raise awareness of the importance of geospatial information as a key strategic asset that leads to valuable and quantifiable knowledge and decisions. National geospatial champions are crucial to drive change, communicate the value proposition, and understand the challenges to be overcome, and to create and maintain momentum.

The countries recognize the need to support new and innovative approaches to national geospatial information management; implementing integrated, evidence-based decision-making solutions; and maximizing and leveraging national information systems tailored to each country’s national situation and circumstances.

During the conference, we are going to discuss the impacts of digital technologies from global, regional and national perspectives; and provide examples demonstrating digital transformation and good practices in the UNECE region, including Azerbaijan, with a focus on sustainable data sharing and utilization. These examples will be framed by progress on, and the linkages between, the emerging Integrated Geospatial Information Framework (IGIF), the INSPIRE Directive, and NSDIs being developed and managed by countries.

Please save the dates (2-4 April 2020) to participate in the “National Spatial Data Infrastructure: Towards a Digital Society” international conference, which will be held in English. The simultaneous translation in Russian and Azerbaijani and vice versa will be provided.

To register for the conference, please use the conference website link.

We look forward to welcoming you to Baku!