

Central Statistics Office

Revealing fresh insight into population health, community services and the ecology of Ireland



Challenge

Ireland's Central Statistics Office (CSO) had a longstanding relationship with Ordnance Survey Ireland (OSi), formed during the administration of Ireland's national census. There was, however, a growing recognition that the two organisations could collaborate more frequently and support each other on a wider range of initiatives. "We kept bumping into each other on projects," says Paul Morrin, Assistant Director General at CSO. "Both public sector bodies worked with geospatial data, so it made sense for us to start working together more closely."

CSO already used OSi data through the National Mapping Agreement but wanted to make greater use of geospatial data to help it gain new insight into issues such as healthcare and the environment. As Morrin puts it, there was a real desire within CSO to "explore new ways of working with OSi."

Solution

In 2017, CSO and OSi signed a formal Memorandum of Understanding which paved the way for them to collaborate in a more formal way on diverse initiatives, ranging from Ireland's Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) to ecology reports and studies on the accessibility of medical facilities. Working together, the two organisations have been able to address a number of key public sector challenges, including the challenge that no-one anticipated: the coronavirus pandemic.

Across numerous projects, CSO now makes extensive use of OSi's object-oriented geospatial database (Prime2), in which all objects, such as buildings, land parcels and road sections have a unique identification code. CSO also works with OSi to deliver new data services based on the GeoHive data sharing platform.

Benefits

The close collaboration between CSO and OSi has delivered many benefits – for both organisations. Highlights for CSO include:

Improved understanding of citizens' needs

CSO has successfully used OSi's Prime2 mapping to undertake proximity analysis and better understand where new public services are most needed. In one project, CSO revealed the disparity in access to maternity hospitals in Ireland. In another, CSO assessed distances to services like post offices, ATMs, crèches and remote working hubs as part of a remote working study for the Department of Business. "We could only do this with OSi support," Morrin says. "OSi and CSO have complementary skills."

Rapid dissemination of information

When the COVID-19 pandemic emerged, CSO was able to leverage its partnership with OSi and work with other partners to quickly produce data hubs for sharing information about the fast-changing healthcare crisis. Based on the GeoHive platform, the COVID-19 data hubs provide accurate, up-to-date information for the public and government decision makers. "CSO and OSi worked incredibly closely together from the outset of the pandemic to provide the secure, up-to-date information that everyone needed, as quickly as possible," explains Morrin.

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Paul Morrin, Assistant Director General, CSO

New insight into Ireland's ecosystems

In one of its latest projects, CSO is using Prime2, along with data captured by OSi with remote sensing technology, to gain new insight into ecosystems on a national level. CSO is analysing and interpreting OSi data to accurately classify different ecosystem types, such as heathland and peat bogs, assess their condition and create Ireland's first definitive ecosystem map. It aims to create a single version of the truth about Ireland's ecosystems, which will then help landowners, public sector bodies and policy makers to improve the management of the environment.

Mutual support for Eircodes

CSO particularly values OSi's support in encouraging other public sector bodies to use Eircodes, the new national postcode system that will ultimately enable CSO to collect better quality statistics in the future. The two organisations are united in publicising the benefits of Eircodes and providing leadership in this area. "Both the United Nations and the EU encourage national statistical organisations and national mapping agencies to work closely together," Morrin says. "Our collaboration on Eircodes sets a good example for the public sector and presents a good face internationally as well."

