

Geovation Awards Day

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GeoVation is an Ordnance Survey (OS) initiative that's funded and managed by OS with input from "external champions". According to the GeoVation website (www.geovation.org), while GeoVation is founded and currently financially supported by OS, its mission is to: "encourage and support innovation for social, economic and environmental benefit through the use of all geography"; not just the products and services of Ordnance Survey." Apparently this decision was the subject of quite a lot of discussion in the OS boardroom. My view is that GeoVation is a more credible initiative if it is not exclusive to OS, so they made the right decision.

GeoVation's aims are to:

1. promote the use of geography in innovation
2. make innovating with geography easier
3. provide support to new innovations that use geography by connecting people with geographic expertise to those who require it in realizing their objectives.

Membership is open to all. There is a small management committee organizing GeoVation's activities right now.

In early October GeoVation announced "the GeoVation Awards Programme (GAP)": a competition to develop new ideas that use geography. Entries opened on the 6th of October 2009 and closed on 4 January 2010. The judges were looking for ideas that demonstrated their innovative potential, sustainability and how they use geography.

The Awards were supported by OS, Ideas in Transit, ESRI, and the Technology Strategy Board, and attracted 150 ideas for 60 ventures. The judges created a short list of 9 finalists, who were all asked to present to and answer questions from the judges and attendees at Tuesday's event, for the opportunity to win one of four cash prizes, with the money to be used to develop the winning ideas.

Full descriptions of the short-listed projects can be found on the GeoVation blog, here, <http://www.geovation.org.uk/blog/>. They were:

1. Mapland England & Wales: a massive (13m x 11m) walk-on map of England and Wales with full topographical detail.
2. Online Route cards for hill walkers: A site to provide walkers with tools to help plan appropriate routes, and the ability to have automatic messages sent to a designated emergency contact if the walker doesn't arrive on time.
3. Mission: Explore London: a project to engage young people with geography through playful and thought-provoking missions.
4. Mapping Britain on Horseback: a British Horse Society initiative that aims to collate all equestrian routes in the UK.
5. Goodfindr iPhone App: using geography to source soft commodities in season.
6. London Blue Plaque: a search facility showcasing the hundreds of Blue Plaques erected over the years to commemorate famous people and places that have helped shape London and the world.
7. MaxiMap: a large-format educational floor map.
8. The Open Climate Data Repository: a service to provide a set of web-based tools to allow the public to view, analyze and feed back on climate data.
9. Open.HistoryMap: A project to map historic features, events and maps against a background

of today's maps or aerial imagery.

The entries ranged from existing, profitable businesses to ideas and vague plans for the creation of sustainable services.

The original plan had been to award four cash prizes: one for £10,000, two for £5,000, and the community choice award, voted by the audience, of £1,000. In the end, the judges decided to split the money differently, awarding £3,000 to London Blue Plague; £7,000 to Mission:Explore; and £10,000 to MaxiMap. MaxiMap also won the community prize.

I was pleased to see MaxiMap take home first prize: it's run by two women, one of whom was a schoolteacher, who have created a simple and easy-to-use tool to help overcome some of the challenges of teaching children geography. Their presentation was clear and concise, their financials were sound, and they've already tested their idea and achieved some success. Well done, MaxiMap! And of course all of the other finalists.

The GeoVation champions also deserve congratulations, not only for creating an interesting event and encouraging innovation: for every person who attended the awards showcase (which was free), GeoVation donated £10 to MapAction. The day raised £750 for MapAction (www.mapaction.org), and chair Steven Feldman encouraged all of us to go home and match that contribution, to help the charity do more on its upcoming trip to Haiti. If you're not familiar with MapAction, I'd encourage you to take a look at their site, and also consider a donation.

GeoVation plans to put on these awards next year, with the expectation that they will be more independent from OS. It will also be interesting to see where all of the finalists are with their businesses and projects in a year. If you're interested in GeoVation, or the awards, check out the GeoVation site for information on the finalists' progress, and upcoming events.