

## **Demographics User Group Conference 2009**

### **Panel Session: More and better for less – how we can improve insight and its impact during the recession**

#### **Views from Professor Mike Batty (University College London)**

Times of recession are not all bad. We get a chance to introduce a little perspective on what we have been doing and in the case of geographic data and related techniques and technologies, then there are still as many insights to be gleaned as there ever were. There is even a mild correlation between recessions or economic downturns and innovations with innovations in technology particularly being spurred by harder times. I think that the current period is spurring us to develop new data products through value added and to really optimise the delivery of informed scientific advice about retailing and commerce and its geographical impacts by using the power of web-based services, new methods of getting data through crowd sourcing and making available new forms of open source software.

In fact I believe that the times in which we are living is not just another economic downturn but a time of great change when we come once again to evaluate the way we organise society and government, which critically involves the private and public sectors. In short it is a time when the profit motive is under intense scrutiny and we are likely to see many new forms of regulation out in place that will determine the mid and long term future. I also think that the key questions of our time – climate change, ageing, security, migration, energy depletion and related large questions – will combine to produce dramatic changes in spatial behaviour. I think we will see a lot of change in the way we move and interact due to the changing balance of costs and this will have a major impact on the spatial form of the future.

The fact that we cannot easily articulate this is symptomatic of the fact that this kind of complexity is unpredictable and this is leading to new ideas about prediction and forecasting that are bound to change the way we evaluate new locational plans and initiatives. To me we are just at the beginning of a time when there will be radical shifts in behaviour due to coalescence of all these forces and this in itself will constitute a great challenge in which demographics plays an essential part.