

Geographic Information Panel, 16 March 2005

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Work to date on GI strategies in the United Kingdom - Background Paper

Introduction

Over the last 4 years, there has been significant work undertaken in the creation of Geographic Information Strategies for different parts of the United Kingdom. What has been lacking so far has been any co-ordinated work on a similar strategy for the United Kingdom as a whole. To be successful, such a strategy will require Ministerial endorsement.

Need for a Geographic Information Strategy

Government and the private sector collect, maintain and distribute geographic information. Even within government there are examples of duplication of these processes to produce similar data. An effective Geographic Information Strategy for the United Kingdom will reduce duplication and as a result cost, thus ensuring the effective and consistent provision, management and utilisation of geographic information to support and sustain the needs of the citizen, business and government.

Geographic Information (GI) includes textual information that utilises addresses and postcodes, numeric grid references, settlement names, administrative areas (political, governmental, statistical reporting etc.), as well as agricultural information, census statistics, social deprivation data and topographic mapping. Thus geographic information is fundamentally important to the daily lives of every person and organisation, and underpins most of the daily transactions of society. A much quoted statistic is that 80% of all information has a geographic component to it.

Northern Ireland

Northern Ireland was the first part of the United Kingdom to make progress on developing a GI Strategy with a review and discussion process that started in 2001, and continued with a participative workshop in February 2002. Since that time, Northern Ireland has moved to the implementation phase under the title of MOSAIC. The MOSAIC Programme is the brand name for the implementation of the GI Strategy for Northern Ireland, and is being progressed by the Department of Culture, Arts & Leisure, through Ordnance Survey of Northern Ireland. The Implementation Project Board for MOSAIC first met in November 2003.

The vision for the geographic information strategy for Northern Ireland is;

"To provide the strategic leadership required for a practical, co-ordinated and inclusive approach to improving the collection, funding, dissemination and use of geographic information, in order to maximize the social, economic and educational potential of this crucial component of the national information infrastructure resource."

The Northern Ireland Programme for Government recognises the contribution that geographic information can make to improved service delivery, by:

- Enhancing the role which mapping and GI plays in developing the infrastructure to support a relatively cheap and efficient land registration system and in the provision of electricity, gas, water and transport;
- Targeting disadvantaged areas, geographically identified as deprived;

- Identifying geographic differentials in unemployment and poverty; and
- Examining the geographical barriers that can discourage people from taking up opportunities for education and training.

The identification of the connections between GI and broader government policy has been a clear contributor to the Northern Ireland Executive's commitment to developing a GI strategy.

Wales

AGI Cymru (Association of Geographic Information Wales) was instrumental in raising the issue of GI with the Minister for Economic Development at the National Assembly in November 2001. This led to a strategy for consultation which was launched in November 2002. This in turn led to the successful publication of the *GI Strategy - Action Plan for Wales* in July 2003.

During 2004, AGI Cymru conducted the first annual review process of the Action Plan. This review was driven by feedback, and survey of a sample of individuals in the GI industry within Wales.

The guiding principles for the Welsh Strategy were:

- The strategy should seek to be aspirational and provide leadership to the GI community across Wales - rather than be about technical detail;
- The strategy should be developed by the GI community in Wales for the GI community in Wales - it was based on a survey of users across Wales;
- The strategy should receive Ministerial endorsement;
- The strategy should provide comparable evidence of successful projects to provide real examples of what people should aspire toward;
- The strategy is owned and implemented by AGI Cymru.

Scotland

Following a successful seminar on the subject in November 2002, the AGI Scotland Executive Committee developed a proposal for a GI Strategy for Scotland. This proposal was presented to the Scottish Executive in the summer of 2003, and simultaneously put out for public consultation.

The developing interest in a GI Strategy was one of the factors that led to the Scottish Executive forming a Geography Steering Group in late 2003, comprising representatives from central government bodies in Scotland. The results of the AGI consultation were fed back to the Scottish Executive, who after extended discussions among their Geography Steering Group, published their own GI Strategy for Scotland consultation document entitled *One Scotland, One Geography* in September 2004. The Executive plans to publish a revised document incorporating the responses to *One Scotland, One Geography* in Spring 2005. Importantly, it is also making progress on implementing some elements of the required infrastructure within the Scottish Executive.

England

In late 2003, the Association for Geographic Information convened a working group to consider how best to co-ordinate and implement a GI Strategy for England. After a series of meetings, the group issued a consultation in April 2004 on the development and implementation of a strategy. The consultation attracted 130 responses with the largest group of responses being from local government.

The conclusion of the consultation was that there was an agreed need for a GI Strategy for England, which was particularly felt by local government organisations.

However, it was agreed that the AGI as an organisation did not have the resources needed to implement a strategy, and therefore the working group recommended that ODPM as the government department responsible for England and for geographic information should provide leadership and ownership for developing and implementing a GI strategy for England.

Conclusion

There has been a good deal of valuable work completed in creating regional GI strategies within the United Kingdom. These strategies have each addressed common issues for their region, but have done so in the absence of an overarching United Kingdom Strategy. The different degrees of devolution of responsibility to England, Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland has meant that the scope of those strategies differs.

The fragmented nature of the current strategies and the lack of strong vision and leadership at the United Kingdom level is counter-productive to the creation and implementation of an effective strategy. A successful strategy will allow the correct planning to occur in activities including data collection, data maintenance, data access and data usage in the United Kingdom, order to realise the full potential of GI in an achievable and properly funded manner.

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