

The Role of Geographic Information for Good Governance

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Abstract: Several studies refer to the current worldwide trends of governance. We see that our governments become more open, accountable and focus more on the public performance in terms of policy making and service delivery. Many public authorities have to restructure themselves and to allow the introduction of market type mechanisms to be aligned with these trends. In other words, we consider good governance when public authorities perform strong policies and service deliveries, take their responsibilities and are accountable and transparent, but respect their administrative rights and duties. Geographic Information is a very important means that could contribute to achieve good governments being aware that 90% of all information used by governments has spatial characteristics and that most decisions made by any government refer to spatial issues. Another trend is that governments have less financial resources forcing them to allocate their tasks differently. Governments have generally three mechanisms to coordinate their tasks: Hierarchy, Market, and Network. Hierarchies are based on authority for the interaction between different organizations and on the dominance and authority as the basic control system by using laws, regulations or rules. The Market as a coordination mechanism is based on competition, bargaining and exchange between actors. The price mechanism, incentives and the self-interest of actors 'coordinate' the activities of the different actors by creating an 'invisible hand'. Coordination within a Network takes the form of cooperation between actors whose inter-organizational relations are ruled by the acknowledgement of mutual interdependencies, trust and the responsibilities of each actor. A Spatial Data Infrastructure can be generally considered as a shared Network of organizations with a few regulations to facilitate the access, use and sharing of geospatial data.

It is important to be aware that three conditions need to be fulfilled in order to achieve good governance. The first condition refer to the shift that public authorities have to make: a shift from organisations with databases including spatial databases to databases with organisations. The second condition refers to the need of more demand driven supply so that there is a good match between supply and demand. In the context of spatial data, such demand driven supply could contribute to the avoidance of zones of frustration and mismatch. The third condition refers to the need of multidisciplinary task forces following parallel and simultaneous logics instead of sequential logics (e.g. Technology (including Geo-ICT) → Legislation → Finance → Organisation → Service delivery). These conditions will be orally explained in depth during the presentation.

The presentation ends with a set of propositions related to the role of geographic information for good governance on which the participants have to vote upon. As a benchmark, the voting results of the 'General Assembly on Geographic Information Flanders' are used. During this event, decision makers of the public sector in Flanders (Belgium) were asked to vote on the same set of propositions.

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