

Free our maps

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We propose a session dedicated to the importance of releasing public geodata over the Internet, under an open license and in a reusable format.

Geodata is a broad term that refers to data that has a spatial component, defined through various methods, such as pairs of coordinates, name of location, address identifiers and so on. Its usage is wide spread over various domains, such as: natural resources (water, soil resources, environmental management, forestry, conservation, agriculture, mining etc.), government (land administration, public works, urban and regional planning, surveying, economic development etc.), mapping (cartography, topography, aeronautical/nautical navigation charts), health services (managed care, hospitals and health systems), transportation (logistics, aviation, public transit, transportation infrastructure management etc), communications and utilities (infrastructure management - pipelines, electrical lines, telecommunications etc.), military (geospatial intelligence), public safety (emergency-disaster management, homeland security, wildland fire management, law enforcement, computer-aided dispatch etc.) and the list may continue. The power that resides in geoinformation through analysis of geodata is well known in the scientific community. Numerous research domains, from archeology to hydrogeology, from engineering sciences to environmental sciences, from history to climatology use geodata in the process of research, validation and presentation of conclusions. In the last decades, given the considerable technological and informational progress, the geoinformation private sector has flourished as well. Companies that offer services and products based on geodata have seen an increase in number and profit. World leading companies, such as Google, Yahoo, Nokia, Apple and more, have turned a deep focus towards GI (Geospatial Information), developing services and products that have ultimately and permanently changed the way in which geodata is perceived by the wider community. Furthermore, the community itself stepped up, building an international network that, in a collaborative, volunteer and open manner, works to build an open map of the world. The success of OpenStreetMap and its ever-growing community is no longer a surprise. Notable is the forked humanitarian initiative that has strongly developed in recent years, with impressive results.

Nonetheless, we consider that, that there is an immense untapped resource of geospatial information, and that is represented by the databases of national agencies and institutions that have produced and collected

data within national monitoring networks and research projects for an extensive period of time. In 2013, in Romania, we have initiated a research project developed in collaboration with the Institute of Cartography and Geoinformation from ETH Zurich, GEodata Openness Initiative for Development and Economic Advancement in ROmania (GEOIDEA.RO) with the main objective to improve the scientific basis for open geodata model adoption in Romania. In one of the GEOIDEA.RO reports, it has been highlighted that a distinction between data and geodata does not exist in the Romanian legislation, as a practical implementation of a principle of the neutrality of the law (with the exception of the implementation of the INSPIRE directive). In fact, due to the same principle, the term data is most of the times not even included in the definition of documents (as regulated by the PSI legislation) or of information (as is the case of legislation about the access to information). Thus, the obvious conclusion is that the open public data movement has a strong impact on governmental geodata access and availability. The sheer volume and wealth of this data makes apparent the potential benefits of reusing, combining, and processing governmental data. Even though metadata (information about the data) is sometimes published, administrations typically express reluctance to making their data available, for various reasons, cultural, political, legal, institutional and technical. It is our belief that publishing open governmental geodata can strengthen citizen engagement and yield new innovative businesses, bringing substantial social and economic gains. In the two years of research and implementation of GEOIDEA.RO, we have identified different directions where discussions between different parties of the community are strongly needed. We propose a list of topics that we consider should be addressed over the dedicated session of discussions:

- Open geodata : Quality and relevance. Where to draw the line?

The main perspective in open (geo)data was for the public agencies to just release their existing datasets and the community and private sector will take it from there. After significant efforts lead by various countries , a need has been identified, both by the community and by the public administration. Although, governmental agencies have significant databases, it is possible that not all of them have a significant high value that will balance the ratio of costs needed to release the datasets and the possible added value. Through this topic we aim to bring to light from experienced participants ideas and perspective on how to tackle the issue of prioritizing the release of datasets.

The quality of public geodata is a complex matter, as it can easily turn into a barrier for releasing it as open due to fear of community disapproval. Nonetheless, there are numerous cases where the release of public data has lead to its significant improvement.

Regarding the community driven data, the relevance is high by its definition, whereas the quality is an ongoing campaign lead through means of technology (building more complex editor tools) or means of social awareness.

We want to discuss of:

- On what grounds should relevance be build, economic, social, research grounds ?
- Imagining a geodata relevance classification.
- Quality matters, but enough to discourage potential public data owners?
- Quality in community driven data. How to build trust in the quality and sustainability of community driven data projects? Are quality markers a solution?

- Different angles of open geodata understanding: public sector, private sector and academia

In this part of the session, we envision a few lightning talks regarding perspectives and important highlights upon geodata from people in the three sector enumerated. We are specifically interested in points of view regarding what opportunities, development are foreseen within each sector.

- Power to the people: bridging community driven data with public data

The community driven data projects were born out of need of data, data that even though might have existed, was not available at reasonable costs. Nowadays, the open (geo)data initiative has brought to light an immense poll of data. To best use these 2 congruent movements, it is important to bind them together.

We want to talk of:

- Advantages and disadvantages of involving the community in correction processes of public data
- Examples of tools build to bind together community driven data to public open databases
- Will the open data movement kill the community driven data projects?
- Legislation matters - the impact of INSPIRE Directive to open geodata movement, geodata licenses interoperability

Even if the topic through it's complexity requires extended discussions, we aim to highlight, based on our own experience and that of the participants, main legal aspects that influence the release of public geodata , extract advantages and disadvantages.

- Technical issues on releasing public geodata as open data: platforms, formats, tools development

This part of the section we reserve for stirring discussions on advantages and disadvantages for using different methods and technologies for releasing public data. API or bulk files? Socrata or CKAN?