

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, the report on Contradictory, Overlapping or Inefficient Geodata Related Legislation 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). Although, we do not have substantial knowledge on other European countries' legislation related to data and geodata, from our preliminary search we have identified that the legal situation is relatively the same. 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?
- Different angles of open geodata understanding: public sector, private sector and academia
- Power to the people: bridging community driven data with public data
- Legislation matters - the impact of INSPIRE Directive to open geodata movement, geodata licenses interoperability
- Technical issues on releasing public geodata as open data: platforms, formats, tools development