

The Issues Involved in Developing an Information Policy for Digital Spatial Data for Trinidad and Tobago

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Abstract

Several governmental and para-statal agencies in Trinidad and Tobago have embarked on the development of spatial databases for Geographic Information Systems (GIS) applications. These agencies are convinced that GIS technology will provide a useful tool to aid their decision-making processes. Most of these databases are being developed in-house and the resulting data generated by these various agencies represent significant investments in economic and human resources. It is therefore essential that these data are utilised in the most efficient way possible. To ensure effective use, an information policy for the sale and dissemination of spatial data is required. Several important issues need to be addressed in setting up this policy. These include an investigation into the merits and limitations of open access versus cost recovery policies, determining whether the laws allow for agencies to obtain copyright for spatial data and the implications of the Freedom of Information Act 2000 on the expected discretionary powers of agencies to sell spatial data. These issues have been widely debated in the United States, Canada and the European Community. Drawing from these experiences, this paper discusses the issues involved in developing a policy for spatial information dissemination by government agencies in Trinidad and Tobago.