

Institutions Matter

The impact of institutional choices relative to access policy and data quality on the development of geographic information infrastructures

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Abstract

Access to geographic information is critical for the development of geographic information infrastructures. Two access policy options have dominated and still dominate the discussions: open access and cost recovery. Cost recovery policies are generally associated with high-quality datasets, while open access policies are associated with poor quality data. Despite these statements, this paper shows that the way the data collection in a specific jurisdiction has been organized is more critical for the quality and the use of the dataset than the policies being adhered to. The input for these findings is a PhD research project (Van Loenen 2006) comparing parcel and large-scale topographic datasets in five jurisdictions with comparable size, population density and socio-economic development. This insight nuances the current debate on the preferred access policy for developing GIIs. The authors argue that choices in institutional settings many years (or even centuries) ago often have been decisive for the current stage of GII development in the cases as well as for their future prospect.