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Chapter I

Collaborative Geographic Information Systems: Origins, Boundaries, and Structures

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It is the theory that decides what can be observed.

Albert Einstein (1879-1955)

The scientists of today think deeply instead of clearly.

Nikola Tesla (1857-1943)

Abstract

This study describes the origins, boundaries, and structures of collaborative geographic information systems (CGIS). A working definition is proposed, together with a discussion about the subtle collaborative vs. cooperative distinction, and culminating in a philosophical description of the research area. The literatures on planning and policy analysis, decision support

systems, and geographic information systems (GIS) and science (GIScience) are used to construct a historical footprint. The conceptual linkages between GIScience, public participation GIS (PPGIS), participatory GIS (PGIS), and CGIS are also outlined. The conclusion is that collaborative GIS is centrally positioned on a participation spectrum that ranges from the individual to the general public, and that an important goal is to use argumentation, deliberation, and maps to clearly structure and reconcile differences between representative interest groups. Hence, collaborative GIS must give consideration to integrating experts with the general public in synchronous and asynchronous space-time interactions. Collaborative GIS provides a theoretical and application foundation to conceptualize a distributive turn to planning, problem solving, and decision making.

Introduction

Definitions within a community of practice have multiple benefits. Definitions reduce differences in semantics, and focus a community of practice towards goals that reinforce individual and collective efforts, make knowledge accessible to those at the edges of the community, and expand a study area by integrating related external concepts (Sager, 2000). Moreover, clearly defined concepts in a knowledge domain can better facilitate theory building. There are five types of definitions, and we have chosen to specify a *theoretical definition* for collaborative GIS since this type of definition aims to capture a commonality in the research area, and to relate that commonality to a broader intellectual framework (Sager, 2000). This chapter is organized as follows: firstly, a theoretical definition of collaborative GIS is presented; secondly, a historical footprint is established to reinforce the theoretical definition; and thirdly, the linkages between collaborative GIS and its broader conceptual framework are outlined.

What is Collaborative GIS?

There is a mutual influence between geographic information science and collaborative geographic information systems. GIScience is the rationale or science (axioms, theories, methods) that justifies the design and application of geographic information systems (Goodchild, 1992). Geographic information systems on the other hand are the physical designs and processes that integrate people and computer technology to manage, transform, and analyze spatially referenced data to solve ill-defined problems (Wright, Goodchild, & Proctor,

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