

Importance of GIS and related data in Rural Regional Development with reference to applications

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Summary: The dramatic shift from centrally-planned to market-oriented economies in Eastern and Central Europe and CIS countries has profound implications for the prevailing social and economic system and the development of democratic civil societies.

Despite regional disparities in terms of performance and adaptation, this is especially true in rural areas. The dismantling of the state and its institutions as exclusive providers of services left large sections of the population, mostly engaged in agriculture and related activities, deprived of their main source of income.

Alternative employment opportunities are scarce and, coming in conjunction with inadequate provision of social services, impoverishment seems to be the logical consequence. Uncertainty and despair about present well-being and future perspectives are widespread and in some countries have led to social unrest and violent conflicts.

In order to improve the situation, especially for disadvantaged people, which is in everyone's long term interest, efforts have to be undertaken to strengthen the sustainability of their livelihoods. Livelihood comprises the capabilities, assets and activities, which are required as a means of living and refers basically to the provision of assets in terms of natural, financial, social, human and physical capital.

Rural regional development aims to build sustainable rural livelihoods by assisting government and civil society in the design and development of policies, strategies programs and projects to improve peoples access to capital assets.

Geographic information systems are certainly a backbone within this process.

Reliable, accessible and affordable data and information concerning the rural space are crucial for all stakeholders and decision-makers regardless its social and political level. Moreover it concerns all sectors be it agriculture, industry or services and supports a wide range of subjects such as land administration, land use planning and management.

Rather than focusing on technical issues, this contribution aims to precise the role of GIS for comprehensive and sustainable regional development by addressing its usefulness and applicability for working areas and activities within the framework of RRD.

The first chapter provides a description of its rationale, key elements, scope, working areas and activities. Additionally it highlights different levels of decision making, describes stakeholders and potential clients.

The second chapter addresses the type and character of GI needed and to what extent beneficiaries and local actors might/or might not be involved in the process of information gathering, processing and transformation emphasising the issues of capacity and capability installed. The last chapter provides some conclusions and recommendation summarising the previous comments