

INSPIRE: An Innovative Approach to the Development of Spatial Data Infrastructures in Europe

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Abstract

The analysis of the development of spatial data infrastructures across the world indicates a shift from a first generation that was product-oriented and focused on the development or completion of spatial data bases, towards a second generation that is more process-oriented and emphasizes partnerships and stakeholder involvement. Nevertheless most spatial data infrastructures to date are led by public sector organizations with a limited involvement by the private sector or society at large. Moreover the involvement of user groups is often sporadic and poorly organized. With this in mind, the paper discusses the approach taken in developing INSPIRE, a spatial data infrastructure for Europe, which is innovative in two respects: firstly because from the outset it seeks to build the infrastructure based on existing developments at the national and sub-national levels, and secondly, because it tries to engage in a more structured way the user communities and geographic information stakeholders by organizing them through spatial data interest communities. This approach poses a number of challenges at both technical and organizational levels but also offers a number of important opportunities in terms of sustainability and future use of the infrastructure.