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REPORTS ON ACHIEVEMENTS IN SURVEYING, MAPPING AND CHARTING IN ADDRESSING
NATIONAL, SUBREGIONAL, REGIONAL AND GLOBAL ISSUES, INCLUDING: NEW
NATIONAL SPATIAL DATA INFRASTRUCTURE (NSDI) AND ASIA AND THE
PACIFIC SPATIAL DATA INFRASTRUCTURE (APSDI)

Formation of the Permanent Committee on SDI for the Americas - CPIDEA:

(Submitted by Santiago Borrero)**

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FORMATION OF THE PERMANENT COMMITTEE ON SDI FOR THE AMERICAS -CPIDEA: A report.

Distinguish delegates:

In June 1997, at the end of the 6th UNRCC for the Americas, in spite of the fact that only eleven member states from the Region were present, I walked out of the conference room convinced about the need for a Permanent Committee on GIS/SDI for the Americas, as recommended in Resolution 3 of the conference.

When considering the main issues debated in that relevant regional forum, it was the obvious outcome: need for spatial data infrastructures at the national, regional and global levels, global mapping requirements, diversity of new technology available and regional project needs, arising from country reports and from delegate interventions, such as the Inter-American Biodiversity Information Network -IABIN, the Inter-American Geospatial Data Network - IGDN and SIRGAS for the establishment of a unique geodetic reference system for South America.

1. A three years process

Resolution 3 of the 6th UNRCC for the Americas recommended all member States of the region to establish such Permanent Committee on GIS/SDI "within one year". There, taking advantage of the Working group delegates an experts meeting held in February 1998 in Aguascalientes, Mexico to define the mission and focus of the 7th UNRCC for the Americas, the delegates representing member states from the region established the committee, in an *ad-hoc* manner, and I resulted elected *pro-tempore* Chair until full formalization of the Committee was achieved, within the following year.

However, this was not an easy goal to obtain. In 1998 at the GSDI 3 Conference organized in Canberra, Australia I presented a paper describing in detail the situation at that time observed in the Americas: (a) The idea of spatial data infrastructures for Latin America was difficult to digest at a time

when many national mapping and surveying organizations were in the level of "initial acceptances", just making "changes in old organizational structures"; (b) Agenda 21 was introducing the need for information related to sustainable development; (c) Specialists were in the process of redefining their own data in the digital format from a local perspective; (d) Ideas not yet clear and nationalistic attitudes behind previous failures concerning regional standards for mapping and geodesy; (e) Poorly documented, referenced and structured data, and lack of infrastructure affecting the possibility to access, consume and disseminate digital spatial information; (f) isolation, expressed in low levels of participation at the global level and (g) of course, the fact that most organizations were (still?) digitising old data.

Consequently, Latin America and the Caribbean were responding to this call at their own pace. That is why only until the 1999 US National Geodata Forum and the Cambridge Conference for NMA's, as a by-product of these events, initial agreement on the need for the Committee was clearly reached.

2. The recent past: a new situation

There are several reasons behind this change: (a) The Panamerican Institute for Geography and History –PAIGH, as well as the Directorate of Geographic organizations for South America –DIGSA are now interested parties in the promotion of enabling information technologies and spatial data infrastructures; (b) There is a wave of optimism derived from recent experiences, such as SIRGAS and the electronic Atlas; (c) Numerous ongoing national SDI initiatives; (d) Growing awareness about the direct relation between information, economic growth and development; (e) Increasing appetite for spatial data; (f) Need to improve spatial data availability to support better project formulation and decision-making; and, (g) The impact of regional and global initiatives like PCGIAP, GSDI and ISCGM.

3. How different is Latin America from other regions in the world? Results from a survey for PCIDEA

In 2000 a survey was conducted by Glenn Hyman and Kate Lane (CIAT), along the lines of that of Harlan Onsrud for FGDC. The results, among other aspects, picture the following situation in Latin America:

- GIS/SDI is still leaded by NMA's but challenged by other type of organizations (8 only NMA's out of 18 cases)
- There is absence of national policy concerning development of NSDI (yes 5 out of 18)

- 17 NSDI initiatives. In the average the responsibility of 5 national organizations
- The industry is not yet involved in the development of NSDI (2 out of 18)
- Basic layers considered fundamental data: Topographic mapping; roads; land cover and land use; administrative borders; hidrography.
- A clear tendency towards cost recovery as main factor for pricing data (12 out of 18)
- The major constraints for NSDI development: legal issues and funding (18/18). Standards (7/18), pricing and data access (6/18) also relevant.

Facing this new situation, the Americas was in shape to formally establish its own regional committee on GIS/SDI.

4. PC-IDEA, finally, a reality

The already mentioned Resolution 3, out of the 6th UNRCC for the Americas, in addition to invite the region to form the committee, also recommended to submit reports to the UNRCC's.

Consequently, in my condition of President, I am very pleased to inform the establishment of the "Permanent Committee on SDI for the Americas -PC-IDEA. This is the main result out of the Seminar on Spatial Data Infrastructures and the Workshop on Metadata, organized this past February 28 to 1 March, by the Colombian Spatial Data Infrastructure -ICDE and the Geographic Institute of Colombia "Agustin Codazzi". Relevant support was also provided by the World Bank ICSF, CIAT, US FGDC and the Pan American Institute for Geography and History -PAIGH.

It is also important to mention that there were 208 delegates representing 21 nations from North, Central and South America as well as the Caribbean Islands, including special attendees such as the Ministers of Environment from Colombia and El Salvador, the Presidents of EUROGI and PAIGH, and delegates from the USGS and the UNECA.

As well Ms. Guadalupe López from Mexico was elected Vice Chair. Provisional statutes were adopted and three working groups were initially organized: (a) Legal and economic affairs (Chair: Venezuela); (b) Communications and awareness (Chair: Argentina); (c) Technical aspects (Chair: Uruguay).

I would like to point out the way in which PC-Idea is being built on the experience observed in other regions, in particular, that of Asia-Pacific. On this regard the influence of the PCGIAP documents on statutes and rules of procedure, as well as those including the terms of reference for the working groups.

The Committee will soon formalize relations with all relevant international organizations. As of now, pending decisions concerning the forthcoming UNRCC for the Americas, the next PC-IDEA meeting will take place in Cartagena, Colombia, May 21-25, along with the GSDI 5 Conference and the 8th ISCGM Meeting.

Recalling content of Resolution 2 from the 1997 UNRCC for the Americas, it is important to take in special consideration the expressed desire of member states and other stakeholders to enhance the relevance of the Conference, including the need to review and re-engineer its structure and operation, allowing bench-marking and comparison of achievements and strategies concerning surveying, mapping, cadastral and GIS activities, and providing policy support to governments and UN system, focusing on how spatial data infrastructures can contribute to better decision-making on issues relevant to local, national, regional and global sustainable development.

5. The vision of PC-IDEA: "the end of information isolation in the Americas"

The role of the Committee seems essential for the Americas. No matter whether large or small amounts of digital data are produced, we all now understand that data must be accessible, documented, structured and reliable or, practically, non-existent. Spatial data production and infrastructure development are fundamental to avoid new forms of illiteracy and isolation. Developing nations must be aware of the need to expand their knowledge base.

It is in this context that the main drivers in the Region are appealing to the work of the Committee. In the Americas we are now (a) Increasing production of spatial data impacting R+D and sustainable development; (b) Migrating from local data to National Spatial Data Infrastructures, leading to regional spatial data sets; (c) Increasing knowledge capabilities for all members in the American hemisphere community, by incrementing access to data and information; (d) Contributing to the development of GSDI and Global Mapping capabilities; (e) Creating an Inter American forum for understanding national, regional and global GIS/SDI issues and (f) Placing geoinformation as one strategic sector for development.

Finally, this Conference and the recent UN Meeting for the development of a new spatial data base, takes the UN to a practical level of involvement and leading role concerning development and application of SDI. One of our main goals in this community " to make information benefits accessible to all nations" seems now a better possibility, especially for the poorest nations in the world.