

Digital Gazetteer Research and Practice

Expression of interest

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Thomas Connelly
Researcher
Sistema Integrado de Información Territorial
Biblioteca del Congreso Nacional
Chile
tconnelly@bcn.cl

Chilean context

The benefits of georeferencing information have become increasingly evident over the last five or six years. Indeed, the team tasked with coordinating government agencies in this regard (SNIT: Sistema Nacional de Información Territorial) has recently been given a new, more specific action brief. This growing awareness of the importance of the adequate management of georeferenced data has created the opportunity to promote the adoption of the best criteria and practices of the international community. Thus, we face challenges on two fronts: how to learn those criteria and practices and how to best further their adaptation to Chilean reality.

The Library of the National Congress has pioneered the promotion of the design and implementation of national policy for the management of spatial information, focussing on gazetteers as key components in the creation of metadata records and offering a gazetteer-cum-thesaurus for use and comment via Internet.¹ In fact, the Library Web site offers the only place-name-based search tool available for Chile (apart from GoogleEarth, of course).² Although we do make maps for the specific purposes of Congress persons and our Web site allows user interaction with our data bases to create cartographic visualizations of statistical data, the Library is chiefly a consumer of georeferenced data and, thus, a manager of territorial information.

We have come to realize that gazetteers are a powerful instrument to this end and participate in the Chilean inter-agency discussion on what their creation and maintenance imply and how to use them adequately.

Creating metadata records

¹ See: <http://geoinfo.bcn.cl/> (in Spanish).

² See: http://www.bcn.cl/portada_siit.html (in Spanish).

Our interest in the Workshop revolves around the difficulties frequently encountered in the creation of metadata records that are only partially (or potentially) solved by the adequate creation of gazetteers, that is, how should the person creating the metadata record enter the Place Name and Theme Key words?

To best resolve this problem, we need to learn, understand and know how to implement the principles and frameworks geared toward the appropriate management of georeferenced data.

Specifically, what is the relationship between the place name layer of data used to construct the map in question and the Place Name Keyword entries in the metadata record? Can the entire layer be inserted by machine into the appropriate fields of the metadata record? And, from the point of view of eventual queries (user searches), how can the feature type, as defined by the appropriate thesaurus, be related to the Theme Key word field? In other words, we feel that the creation of metadata records needs to be customizable and/or automated so that the ease with which they can be created will make them easy to handle with both geodata managers and consumers.

Within the context of gazetteer support for geographic information retrieval systems, we are interested in the creation and sharing of category schemes for gazetteers, as related to the management of and access to georeferenced data objects.

With regard to georeferencing as a process, we wish to avoid beginners' mistakes and take advantage of accumulated knowledge to promote the adoption of current best practices for the naming and typing of places.

A central concern of ours is addressed in the area on interoperable gazetteer services: embedding gazetteer lookup capability in operational systems, especially insofar as this issue is related to problems of management and access to georeferenced information, specifically as regards the creation of metadata records and Internet user access to that information.