National Divisions in Internet Mapping

The internet is simultaneously an ever-expanding map library and a testing ground for new forms of map delivery. The technology crosses international boundaries so easily that there is naturally a great deal of interaction and development among internet cartog-raphers in different parts of the world. New techniques are quickly embraced and the spread of innovation is almost instantaneous. One interesting aspect of the new internet cartography is the increasingly divergent application of internet mapping between countries. Differences in the level of internet mapping is partly a function of misguided laws that prohibit either the distribution of larger-scale maps or the display of certain types of information. This, combined with differing agency and governmentalsupport for internet maps, has led to wide disparity between the number and type of maps that are available in different countries, and the internet makes such variation very obvious to users.

Wikimapia

The most noticeable difference between countries is in the data made publicly available. Some countries allow only small-scale maps to be distributed, while others not only freely provide large-scale street maps to Google and other sites but also 3D information for buildings in cities. Three-dimensional data enables users to interact with 3D maps of cities. The Wiki collaborative method is beginning to influence the availability and quality of online maps. The Wikimapia site, for example, allows users to upload their GPS acquired data. Groups of volunteers are working together to map entire cities, thereby circumventing whatever government restrictions are in place regarding spatial data.

Cadastral Info

Another difference between countries is the online cadastre. In some countries internet maps provide land ownership, along with information about taxable property. Many cities, for example, provide detailed information on every house, including its size, number of rooms, bedrooms, bathrooms, whether it has a garage or fireplace, and so on. All items that influence the amount of tax paid by the owner; a value that is also provided with the maps. Availability of this information allows citizens to compare their housing valuation to others, so that everyone can determine whether there is fairness and equity in property taxation. Such sites are seen as an important component of e-government and a cornerstone of the democratic system. In many countries, however, it is forbidden to produce online maps carrying property information.

Maps and Internet

The ICA Maps and the Internet Commission held its annual meeting in Warsaw, Poland, in August 2007, and we are already looking forward to our next meeting with the theme "Internet Maps without Boundaries." A new book from the commission entitled International Perspectives in Maps and the Internet will be available from Springer Verlag in early 2008. The website for the commission is http://maps.unomaha.edu/ica/ and we are keen to welcome more corresponding members: the commission is open to all.