

The GSDI Needs OGC Standards

The Global Spatial Data Infrastructure (GSDI) Association (www.gsdi.org) is an inclusive organisation of organisations, agencies and individuals from around the world. The GSDI Association promotes international co-operation and collaboration in support of local, national and international Spatial Data Infrastructure (SDI) developments that enable nations to better address social, economic and environmental issues of pressing importance.

Data sharing is a key purpose of spatial data infrastructures, and thus compatibility between SDIs is necessary. Compatibility requires standards, and this is the basis for the GSDI Association's longstanding relationship with the Open Geospatial Consortium, Inc. (OGC).

Members of the OGC, an international geoprocessing standards body, have developed and continue to develop Open Geographic Information Systems (OpenGIS) specifications for interfaces and encodings that enable interoperability between geoprocessing systems. These specifications, developed by both users and providers of the technology, are an essential part of the GSDI. Most vendors of geoprocessing software have implemented OpenGIS specifications in their products, and most major purchases of GIS and remote sensing software now require that products comply with OpenGIS specifications. Open source geoprocessing software developers are providing implementations of the specifications that are useful for commercial vendors and also for solution providers. Network access to legacy systems and legacy data is important and therefore most vendors offer upgrades that provide their customers with OpenGIS specification-compliant open interfaces.

Widespread market adoption of OGC standards helps all nations. E-mail and the World Wide Web – both based on standards – have revolutionised communications in both developed and developing nations. In exactly the same way, OGC standards are revolutionising communication involving geospatial information. Exchanging GIS data between systems has become much easier. In addition, it is becoming much easier and less expensive to integrate all kinds of spatial data, including GIS, remote sensing, database records, AEC and facilities mapping, navigation and location services, and to integrate this spatial information into applications of all kinds. The standards platform also provides a level playing field that encourages competition among software providers and among commercial data providers, which benefits users.

There is important overlap between the core missions and goals of all GSDI Association members, and others who share these goals are welcome to join. OGC focuses on technology, but the technology has important ramifications for policy and economic issues. In areas such as intellectual property rights management and information interoperability (semantic translation between data models), the OGC, with participation from non-technical GSDI stakeholders, can continue to provide new GSDI-enhancing standards.

The GSDI Association organises its conferences and training sessions in countries around the world and has special initiatives in developing countries. OGC presentations are on the programme for the 8th International Conference on the Global Spatial Data Infrastructure (GSDI-8), to be held together with FIG Working Week in Cairo, Egypt 2005 from 16 to 21 April 2005.