



# GIS EUROPE

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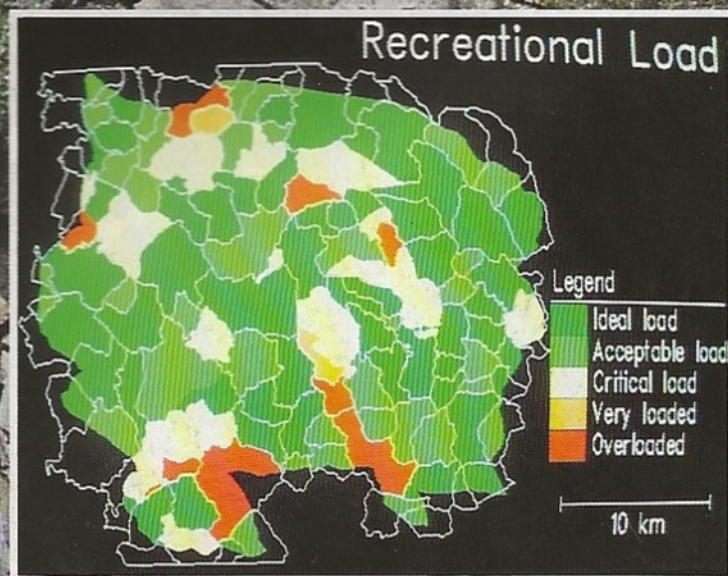
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# GIS for the Home?

The advent of the motion picture presaged an enormous revolution in the entertainment industry. First the cinema, and subsequently television, changed the way we conduct our daily lives, and added a new dimension to the power of communication, which hitherto had been limited to the wireless. Television sets are now a staple requirement of western living.

Motion pictures are no longer the domain of the professional creating programmes with huge budgets, supporting casts and technical resources. Using a camcorder, we can record every event of our daily lives, the memorable and the not so memorable. Enthusiasm for this is reflected in the current popularity of television programmes showing home video clips of unfortunates doing things that they would rather forget, but which instead are preserved on cellulose to be shared with millions.

The other revolution occurred in communications. The television is not only an entertainment medium, but also a primary source of news. First hand reports, photographs and film clips enter the home, only hours after they have happened, from locations across the globe. Witness how the recent Gulf War was conducted, and the results analysed by the public the very next day. Pictures of death and destruction, conflict and political turmoil were as commonplace as cornflakes in the morning.

Those with limited geographical knowledge will hear of Slovenia and the Maldives, Mogadishu and Swaziland. The world is shrinking and we want to know more about the planet on which we live. The widespread use of maps to support television and newspaper reports enables the viewer, or the reader, to place world events in a global context.

There is yet another revolution on its way, potentially as powerful as those of the motion picture and live video link. Many families are already members of a home computer club and have increasingly sophisticated PCs that are used for games, education and the home office. The power

of the average home computer today is a hundred times that of just 10 years ago, and with that increasing power comes the scope for even greater possibilities.

Linking the home computer to the television, video and stereo, together with high-volume digital storage devices will bring vast amounts of information to our fingertips. Remote control and lap keypads will give access to all our information needs.

Most televisions already have teletext. While they are not the most interactive data retrieval systems, we can check on European weather before going to the airport or review the progress of the local football team minutes after the match ends, by calling up the revised league tables.

Not only is there a revolution in technology, there is also a major revolution in information dissemination that will effect every home. Kodak launched its compact disc (CD) -based home photography and Sony recently announced a CD library of nearly 250 titles for the home. Compact disc television (CDTV) was one of the "every home must have one" pieces of technology advertised as a definite "must" for the successful 1991 Christmas.

Most likely, the home is about to be deluged with information. There will need to be a further revolution which enables the "armchair" viewer to sift through this wealth of fact, fiction and advertising, and comprehend its implications. Tools which are easy to use and yet powerful enough to sift through the data will have to be provided.

So what of GIS and geographical information in the home? Clearly spatial context will have an important role to play, be it on a global or local scale. The Digital Chart of the World maps the planet on CD. Home atlases now are available, and U.S. Census Bureau data can be purchased on disc. It will not be too long before there is access to local street gazetteers and live links to a wide range of

civic information systems. Soon we will be able to review our neighbour's planning application and see how it fits in with the local authority's strategic development plan!

With simple interactive hypermedia tools, everyone will be able to have quantities of georeferenced data integrated with sound and motion pictures from their own back garden or the other side of the globe, but will people know how to use such information? What is the potential for information overkill? Will it improve our understanding of the world or just distort our mental image of the environment?

GIS in the home could be a powerful part of this revolution because it provides the spatial context for much of the way in which we conduct our lives. However, we have neither established the underlying concepts of using GIS in the home, nor considered how we are to use the data. Most people are not spatially aware. Using maps is more difficult than using text. Greater emphasis must be

placed on spatial awareness if simple GIS tools are to become part of the home computing revolution.

Potentially "home GIS" and hyper-

media would enable us to plan our holidays using local maps, videos of the countryside and beach, computer models of hotels, and images of menus and flight timetables. If you understand how to make the best use of these tools, you could be enjoying the Caribbean sun. If not, who knows where you could be next summer! ☺

*Seppe Cassettari, GIS EUROPE associate editor, United Kingdom, is a senior lecturer at Kingston Polytechnic, School of Geography, Penrhyn Road, Kingston upon Thames, Surrey KT1 2EE, England. David R. Green, GIS EUROPE associate editor, United Kingdom, is with the Centre for Remote Sensing and Mapping Science, Department of Geography, University of Aberdeen, Elphinstone Road, Aberdeen AB9 2UF, Scotland.*

