

## CALL FOR PAPERS

Special Issue of

*The Information Society*

on

### **Geographies of the Information Society Revisited**

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The information society can be usefully characterized as a universe at the intersection of three distinct but interdependent spaces: the geographical space, the social space, and the informational space. Although there are obvious differences among these spaces, there are also interesting similarities. In each of them, we discover asymmetries, inequalities, and hierarchies. We also identify similar features and activities -- most notably, links, bridges, and associations being continuously assembled, disassembled, and reassembled; borders drawn, erased, and redrawn incessantly; and boundary objects shuttled along the links and across borders tirelessly. People, organizations, and communities find it increasingly difficult to negotiate their way through this convoluted universe. Individuals find it hard to balance between often contradicting demands of local and global norms, expectations, and institutions; governmental, non-governmental, and supra-governmental organizations have to manage an immense flow of people, information, and material and cultural goods; and communities need to flexibly accommodate an equally enormous flux of ideas, individuals, and objects. Making sense of this complex state of affairs is beyond the scope of any single discipline, the capacity of any one method, or the resources of any individual philosophy. Rather, it can emerge from the exchanges and interactions among multiple ideas, methods, models, and disciplines. This is a call for such a multidisciplinary endeavor.

In 1997 the National Science Foundation launched Project Varenus with the aim of advancing geographic information science (Goodchild et al. 1999). Varenus incorporated three components: computational, cognitive, and societal. In a review paper titled "Geographies of Information Society," Sheppard et al. (1999) explored the third (societal) component with the aim of introducing the key research initiatives and also to set "a benchmark by which to assess, a few years from now, the specific contributions of the Varenus project to that increasingly vital research area" (p. 798).

Judging by the diversity of topics and the scope of literature of the last few years, one could safely argue that research on the societal aspects of geographic information science and technology has maintained, and indeed increased, its vitality. Researchers from geography and neighboring disciplines have since tackled many key and critical issues, specifically around the three initiatives of the societal component of Varenus Project-- namely, (i) Place and identity in an age of technologically regulated movement, (ii) Measuring and representing accessibility in the information age, and (iii) Empowerment, marginalization, and public participation GIS. The growth in recent years of interest in critical GIS also contributes to this line of work, posing new questions and offering fresh insights. This has resulted in a healthy exchange of ideas between those who are concerned with the social, cultural, and political implications of modern technologies and practices and those who take more interest in the development and application of those technologies (see, for example, Schuurman and Kwan 2004, Harris and Harrower 2006).

These exchanges can be further extended by involving information scientists who also think about similar questions in regards to modern information and communication technologies (ICT) and the information society. There are many interesting parallels between the types of questions and issues that face these scholars, making a mutual conversation intellectually productive. The purpose of this special issue is to contribute to that conversation.

The range of possible topics is rather large. We take our lead from Sheppard et al.'s original review, revisiting its key themes and questions. As these authors had suggested, the title "geographies of the information society" is interpretively flexible, meaning different things to different people: the *actual* geographies that evolve on the surface of the earth in the information age, the *virtual* geographies that are the direct products of modern ICT, or the *conceptual* geographies gradually developed in individual and social consciousness through the representations of earth by these technologies.

Each of these meanings introduces its own set of themes, questions, and challenges. The themes include, but are not limited to: the socio-political relations inscribed in maps and in GIS use; limits of representation in GIS; a critical history of GIS; ethics, privacy, and GIS; alternative GIS; the use of GIS in debates about global change; and gender and GIS. The questions are similarly vast in number:

- How has the development of modern ICT and especially geographic technologies altered the regulation of flows of people, goods, and information?
- To what extent has the regulation of borders at various scales -- from neighborhood to nation state and beyond -- moved away from geographical borders, and been replaced by ubiquitous forms of control?
- How are these various regulatory regimes related to personal and group identity?
- How have alternative non-place-based identities been promoted and maintained? How have they been controlled, and how successful have these controls been?
- What lessons relevant to the world of the Internet can be learned from these experiences? And vice versa?
- What future is there for borders and boundaries in a world where 'there is no there'?
- What space-time topologies need to be developed to accommodate both the physical and virtual worlds?
- How do emerging conceptions of virtual space map onto traditional conceptions of geographic space and how do we handle their interface analytically?

Many of these questions were previously formulated in projects such as Initiative 19 (cf. Sheppard et al. 1999), and have been explored by geographers and non-geographers, but an adequate understanding is still far from available. Other questions have emerged as a result of intellectual developments in the last few years -- e.g., in social theory (Latour 2005, Pickles 1999). Of particular interest to information science is the question of flow, change, and movement. Traditionally, the focus in geography has been on places, shapes, and boundaries. In a similar fashion, geospatial technologies (including GIS) rely on practices that tend to fix boundaries. An alternative conception would arise if we put flow, circulation, and displacement first, and shapes and places second. What conceptualizations of geography would allow this shift of perspective? How can we develop a geography of networks rather than places? Are there ways that boundaries asserted through geospatial practices could be made less absolute and less stable?

The guest editors invite abstracts by September 1, 2007, which should be sent to [hekbia@indiana.edu](mailto:hekbia@indiana.edu). Authors with the most to offer to the dialogue will be invited to contribute

full papers, which will go through the normal review process of the journal. For more information on TIS guidelines, please refer to:

<http://www.indiana.edu/~tisj/contributors/guest%20editors.html>

### **References**

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