



Participatory GIS

Participatory GIS uses Geographic Information Systems (GIS) to involve people in planning and design decisions using their spatial knowledge and discussion of virtual or physical, two or three-dimensional maps and visualisation aides. Discussion, information exchange and joint analysis between stakeholders allows the consideration of different design options alongside negotiation, advocacy or awareness-raising in decision-making processes. The use of Participatory GIS often promotes better integration of social issues with the ecological and technical forestry issues. For example, using maps to indicate and discuss the social use of space by different sections of a community can suggest the best layout for planting plans and provision of additional features and facilities in a regeneration project. Participatory GIS has also been used as an effective tool to discover more about local heritage and cultural values and discuss integration in landscape planning. Participatory GIS can be conducted using digital materials and methods on a computer, but is just as effective using hard copies of maps and other printed materials to support spatially focused discussion. It supports a range of interactive approaches from face-to-face contact to web-based applications.

Resources and requirements

Skills

- Good facilitation skills.
- Knowledge of GIS techniques and packages is needed if using computer-based packages.

Equipment

- Printed materials.
- Maps.
- Computer stations and web access.

Time

- Preparation time needed can be quite high depending on activities and techniques used.

Costs

- Staff time.
- Venue(s).
- Costs may be quite high depending on the number of meetings and people involved, and on the use of computers and printed maps and aerial images.

Level of engagement

INFORMING:

CONSULTING: ★

INVOLVING: ★★

PARTNERSHIP: ★★★

Strengths

- Participatory GIS has the potential to include more marginal groups in society in decision-making processes.
- The visual language used by Participatory GIS is very accessible and understood by everybody.

Weaknesses

- Using some kinds of mapping tools can be complicated.
- Indiscriminate use of Participatory GIS without proper thought as to the objectives and reasons for engagement can be costly and counterproductive.

Useful sources of information

Web

- On-going annotated bibliography on Participatory GIS and participatory-mapping applications in natural resource management and rural contexts:
www.ppgis.net/pdf/PGIS_PSP_LSK_Biblio_may_2010.pdf
- PGIS, PPGIS and P-Mapping in the urban context: references:
www.ppgis.net/pdf/100514_Urban_PGIS_refs.pdf

This toolbox is designed to assist Forestry Commission staff when they are considering which tools they could use to involve the public in the forest and woodland planning process. For more information please visit the website at:
www.forestry.gov.uk/toolbox