NGOs and the Use of GIS/SDI in their Current Operation

Martin Trajchev, Center for Environmental Democracy - Florozon

NGOs in South-eastern Europe, and particularly the Balkans, are witnessing a very unstable phase given the sharp change of the financial environment and the abrupt withdrawal of the major funds and donors due to the "centralization" of funding through the Instrument for Pre-accession Assistance (IPA) of the European Union which has inadvertently caused the cessation of activities of many organizations given the great administrative and bureaucratic burdens posed by the IPA requirements for funding. Thus, very few organizations have continued to function in this environment, and only the ones equipped with adequate human resources can plan operations in the future. While this trend of "the best survive" can also be positively viewed, civil society in general has lost a major say in creating policy and advocating democratic change. Furthermore, the NGO form of organization has also been kidnapped by political parties in an attempt to demonstrate that civil society is supporting their political standpoints, which is a very serious obstacle and creates a distorted picture of public opinion. A number of NGOs have been created and are currently acting as political action committees (PACs), advancing political platforms and receiving funding from sources that aren't necessarily checked and/or declared. All of the above can be seen as a pretty grim state of affairs, with few exceptions. Except focus on the field of interest with NGO's strongest capability to contribute to, main field of NGO's operating tends to coincide with main issues within the society. Generally seen, the operational domain of NGO's ranges from advancing human rights, democracy and the rule of law, advocating the protection and improvement of social conditions of marginalized groups, environmental protection etc. There is a notable increase of NGOs dealing with environment, legislation and public politics and the protection of national minorities (Civic Initiatives, 2009). Concerning public support to the NGO's activities it is interesting that individually NGOs have wider public recognition and approval for their work. At the same time civil organizations as sector still do not enjoy desirable level of trust. Although significant progress over years has been made, there is still important need for motivating and educating society about NGO's engagement. NGOs that are working with predominantly spatial information like the environment sector should be particularly involved in matters that involve GIS and SDI as this type of data can greatly aid their operations. The major problem lies in the fact that very few NGOs recognize the paramount importance of spatial data and greater visibility must be created, both for specific information systems as well as in general - GIS and SDI.

Ključne riječi: NGOs/SDI, non-governmental organizations' characteristics, public support, spatial needs, South-East Europe

Sažetak u PDF-u.

Prezentacija u PDF-u.

Go back

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Abstract in PDF.

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Go back