

**MRS Census and Geodemographics Group**  
**Submission to Geographic Information Panel (GI Panel)**

**A UK STRATEGY FOR GEOGRAPHICAL INFORMATION**

---

**Introduction**

With members in more than 70 countries, The Market Research Society (MRS) is the world's largest association representing providers and users of market, social, and opinion research, and business intelligence. All individual MRS members and MRS Company Partners agree to self-regulatory compliance with the MRS Code of Conduct. Full details regarding MRS and its activities may be found on its web site [www.mrs.org.uk](http://www.mrs.org.uk).

This submission has been prepared by members of the MRS Census and Geodemographics Group (CGG). The CGG is an advisory committee of MRS containing around twenty individual members with experience in the creation and use of population statistics (in their widest sense), census data and geographic information. The Group was formed in 1989 and since then the CGG has worked with the UK Census Offices, via the Office for National Statistics (ONS), representing the needs of the research industry in consultations on the 1991, 2001 and 2011 censuses.

The CGG actively promotes the use of census data and geographic information (GI) via seminars, publications (e.g. see Note 1) and its geodemographics knowledge base web site [www.geodemographics.org.uk](http://www.geodemographics.org.uk).

The CGG welcomes the opportunity provided by the GI Panel to make the following submission on the development of a GI strategy for the UK.

### **Maximizing the use of GI**

The core of the strategy should be a government commitment to enable maximum use of GI for the benefit of the society and the economy of the UK as a whole. It should set out key priorities and processes to achieve this objective, with clear commitment to do whatever necessary to remove barriers which currently inhibit the use of GI.

This is in line with government policy on public sector information introduced after the Treasury cross cutting review of the knowledge economy, now regulated through OPSI.

The strategy should be succinct, aiming simply to provide the focus, drive and conditions, manifestly lacking at the moment and urgently needed, in order to realise a full range of benefits from GI through more specialized work.

If the GI Panel does not have the remit to recommend such a strategy, it should advise Ministers to give the Panel or another body the appropriate remit without delay.

### **Priority**

#### **Public use GI**

The dominant priority for the users of GI represented by the MRS CGG, and we believe for many other users, is for the strategy to include the creation of a set of basic and widely needed geographical information which would be available for reasonable use by all without further restriction, particularly where costs and

disbenefits to the economy as a whole under current arrangements would be significantly greater than the costs of a common, open source.

It is important to take the initiative to retain the ownership, content and quality of the basic GI for public use in the UK at a time when global sources increasingly offer unregulated alternatives, but also to take opportunities to work together with these new channels for GI.

### **A public use address base**

The primary need is a national address base fit for the purposes of administration, survey, data analysis and presentation. This should be a very straightforward gazetteer. It should have complete coverage and be up to date, but, to help avoid the conflicting interests that have arisen for many years over more complex proposals, it should contain a minimum number of essential attributes, whilst being structured and available for linkage to other GI or for further attributes to be added in linked versions. The 2011 Census, with methods predicated on a gazetteer, is a timely opportunity which should be taken to drive forward the development.

### **Governance and conditions for public use GI**

The strategy should outline the principles for the governance, funding and use of public use GI on the lines of

- public use GI should be 'owned' and administered by a governmental or other organisation with no direct interest in the supply of GI
- advised by representatives of suppliers and users in the public and private sectors
- financed by the Exchequer or by funding partners as appropriate, but with further recovery of marginal additional costs alone

- produced by suppliers under coordinated contracts designed to avoid the costly waste of duplicated effort
- supplied under terms to prevent misuse, but with no constraint on re-use either directly or in derived forms or on further dissemination.

### **Further Consultation**

We would be pleased to provide further input to the GI Panel as the UK GI Strategy evolves.

**Dr Barry Leventhal**

**Chair, MRS Census and Geodemographics Group**

**9<sup>th</sup> August 2006**

Email: [Barry.Leventhal@uk2.net](mailto:Barry.Leventhal@uk2.net)

### **Notes**

1. "A Guide to the 2001 Census: Essential Information for Gaining Business Advantage", edited by Keith Dugmore and Corrine Moy, The Stationery Office 2004.