

An Introduction To Scientific Reasoning In Geography

CHAPTER 1

Geographic Information Science: Defining the Field

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1 INTRODUCTION

In the last decade, Geographic Information Science has emerged as a focus of considerable academic attention. To some extent, it is the Earth's New Science, just as Cognitive Science was the Mind's New Science a decade or two earlier (Gardner, 1985). But it is not clear how deep or lasting the impact of GI Science will be, either on academia or on the GIS industry. Rather than following the success of Cognitive Science, GI Science could just as easily be the next Regional Science, a similar fusion of disciplines that peaked early and continues today mainly as an internally successful multidisciplinary field of relatively low influence on science, technology, or society. Worse yet, Geographic Information Science could largely be just a pretentious name for Geographic Information Systems, and not really a scientific or intellectual field at all. This paper seeks to explore these issues, and to lay out the intellectual scope of Geographic Information Science.

1.1 What is Geographic Information Science?

What is Geographic Information Science? In the article in which he introduced the term, Goodchild (1992) did not provide a definition, but rather outlined the scope of the field indirectly by listing the major components of the Geographic Information Science research agenda.

A written definition of the field followed when, in December 1994, a group of academics met in Boulder, Colorado, to establish a new organization to represent the GIS basic research committee. There was much debate over the name of the nascent organization, and votes over each word in the title; they settled on calling it the University Consortium for Geographic Information Science (UCGIS) (Mark and Bossler, 1995). Having chosen that name, the group was more or less compelled to provide a definition for the field. Again, though, the definition they provided was somewhat indirect:

"The University Consortium for Geographic Information Science is dedicated to the development and use of theories, methods, technology, and data

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