2. National Geographic Information Strategies

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In 1998, Ian Masser published a comparative study of the national geographic information strategies of four developed countries: Britain (England and Wales), the Netherlands, Australia, and the United States. Masser built upon earlier work which found that countries with relatively low levels of digital data availability and GIS diffusion also tended to be countries where there had been a fragmentation of data sources in the absence of central or local government coordination" (p. ix). Comparing his four case studies in relation to the seven framework themes identified for the U.S. NSDI, Masser found considerable differences in data availability, pricing, and intellectual property protections. Differences in availability of core data, he found, are explained by the ways in which responsibilities for mapping and for land titles registration are distributed among national, state, and local governments in each country. The following table summarizes those distributions of responsibilities.

Distribution of responsibilities among different levels of government (Masser, 1998).

Government Level	Britain (England & Wales)	Netherlands	Australia	United States
Central government	Land titles registration, small- and large-scale mapping, statistical data	Land titles registration, small- and large-scale mapping, statistical data	Some small-scale mapping, statistical data	Small-scale mapping, statistical data
State/Territorial government	Not applicable	Not applicable	Land titles registration, small- and large-scale mapping	Some land titles registration and small- and large-scale mapping
Local government	None	large-scale mapping, population registers	Some large-scale mapping	Land titles registration, large-scale mapping

Masser's analysis helps to explain what geospatial professionals in the U.S. have known all along -- that the coverage of f**ramework data in the U.S. is incomplete or fragmented because thousands of local governments are responsible for large-scale mapping and land titles registration, and because these activities tend to be poorly coordinated**. In contrast, core data coverage is more or less complete in Australia, the Netherlands, and Britain, where central and state governments have authority over large-scale mapping and land-titles registration.

Other differences among the four countries relate to fees charged by governments to use the geographic and statistical data they produce, as well as

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the copyright protections they assert over the data. **U.S. federal government agencies, Masser notes, differ from their counterparts by charging no more than the cost of reproducing their data in forms suitable for delivery to customers**. State and local government policies in the U.S. vary considerably, however. Longstanding debates persist in the U.S. about the viability and ethics of recouping costs associated with public data.

The U.S. also differs starkly from Britain and Australia in regards to copyright protection. Most data published by the U.S. Geological Survey or U.S. Census Bureau resides in the public domain and may be used without restriction. U.K. Ordnance Survey data, by contrast, is protected by Crown copyright, and is available for use by others for fees and under the terms of restrictive licensing agreements. **One consequence of the federal government's decision to release its geospatial data to the public domain, some have argued, was the early emergence of a vigorous geospatial industry in the U.S.**

Try This!

To learn more about the Crown copyright policy of the Great Britain's Ordnance Survey, search the Internet for "ordnance survey crown copyright."

The USGS policy is explained here (or search on "acknowledging usgs as information source")

This textbook is used as a resource in Penn State's Online Geospatial Education online degree and certificate programs. If this topic is interesting to you and you want to learn more about online GIS and GEOINT education at Penn State, check out our Geospatial Education Program Office.

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