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**Definition and pricing of GEOSTAT products – towards a more
market-oriented dissemination policy for Swiss statistical data**

by

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Abstract

Both in Switzerland and on the international level it is observed that the two basic antagonistic data dissemination principles, the open versus the restricted-access policy, are more and more often discussed and debated. Statistical data traditionally has been, almost anywhere, disseminated following basically an open-access policy. With increasing user requests, data turnover and market and efficiency awareness, a number of weaknesses and problems inherent in the previous dissemination strategy and the way prices were determined became obvious and increasingly intolerable. Therefore, GEOSTAT defined its products and services in a more logical and unambiguous way. A limited range of desktop products are sold under a license agreement at low costs to end users, directly through GEOSTAT as well as through resellers and value-added distributors. The prices for the larger variety of customer-specific and still frequently unique professional products are now determined based on the desired data's information content, accuracy and actuality. With this new dissemination policy adopted since late 1996, public acceptance is expected to rise and a first step towards a better coordination and harmonization both among the different sections of the statistical office as well as within the entire federal administration is made.

Keywords

Geographic information system, spatial and statistical data, data distribution and dissemination, GEOSTAT, pricing and licensing, desktop and professional products

1 Data dissemination principles

The subject of data dissemination, of data availability and access, and of pricing of data is being increasingly discussed and debated within the statistical as well as the GIS community in the recent years, internationally as well as within Switzerland. Awareness of the importance and consequences of certain types or practices of data dissemination, especially concerning publicly financed and owned data, among data users as well as the public as a whole continues to rise. This importance of the subject, specially related to GIS data, is portrayed convincingly by ONSRUD [1]:

“Dissemination policy affects the extent to which data sharing is promoted among GIS agencies and the availability of spatial data for the private sector and citizens. Dissemination policy may influence GIS implementations in local governments. Dissemination policy determines the extent of benefits that the public gains from a government-housed GIS and may stifle or promote economic activity in the community. Problems with dissemination policy may adversely affect the operations of a GIS agency by requiring administrative, political or legal activities that reduce the focus on the primary agency objectives. Because of these important effects, dissemination policy is an important issue worthy of further research.”

The major two, antagonistic principles of data dissemination are the **open-access policy** on the one, and the **restricted-access policy**, similar to the more frequently quoted **revenue generation policy**, on the other side. The advantages and disadvantages of these two policies have been discussed and examined intensively in literature (many such instances are listed in ONSRUD [1]). As to our knowledge, this issue is still heavily debated and opinions vary widely. Different perceptions about the issue seem to prevail on either side of the Atlantic ocean: While the majority of North American authors stress the global economic as well as the social and political benefits of open data access, many European economists and, particularly, policy makers advocate the need and justification of charging a “just and fair” price for a quality (data) product, irrespective whether this product has been financed by public or private investment.

While a more in-depth discussion of the pro and contra arguments of these two positions goes clearly beyond the scope of this paper, we will try to define the elements, or aspects, which are important in order to classify a certain dissemination policy as either open-access, revenue generation, or, as encountered frequently, a mixture between the two antagonists. Besides the most obvious (and most heavily debated) issue, the **pricing** or **costs of data**, there are a couple of other aspects worth considering, among them:

- marketing, information, metadata access etc.
- range of products and data specifications (such as different, non-proprietary data formats) offered
- restrictions regarding the utilization of the data (limitation of data access to certain user groups or for certain applications or application purposes, copyright restrictions etc.)
- restrictions on secondary uses (may the data or products derived from them be redistributed freely or not?)
- liability issues.

A **data pricing policy** may be characterized by taking into account the following cost factors, which may individually contribute to the total price charged to the public or to the customers for a given data product:

- costs of disks, tape, CD-ROM or other medium
- costs of individual data preparation (staff time, ev. computer processing time)
- costs of data dissemination (staff time, packing, insurance, mailing)
- costs of data administration and maintenance (updates, operating costs)
- share of investment costs for hard- and software
- share of investment costs for data generation (survey and database development costs).

Analyzing all these factors, the two basic data dissemination principles could therefore be characterized as follows:

Table 1 Characteristics of the open-access versus the revenue generation data dissemination policy

	Open-access policy	Restricted-access policy
Data pricing, costs of data	In the maximum, media, data preparation and data dissemination costs are charged	Besides media, data preparation and data dissemination costs, an additional overhead is charged in order to cover data administration and maintenance and/or contribute to cover the investments costs
Marketing, information	Open information, data and product descriptions and meta-informations easily and freely available; data producer actively searches to approach the market, the customers, the public	Product descriptions and meta-informations lacking or difficult and/or costly to obtain; data producer frequently not interested in increasing his sales volumes
Range of products offered	Large and frequently updated range of products; many data formats and media supported; customer-driven definition of the available data	Limited range of products, formats and media, defined by data supplier alone with little consideration of the demands and wishes of the market
Usage restrictions	No restrictions on primary and secondary uses whatsoever	Various usage restrictions may apply, secondary usage prohibited or additionally charged for
Liability issues	Minimal liability regarding data quality and completeness	Depending on price, sales conditions and local laws, liability may include certain guarantees about the “fitness” of the data or product

2 Traditional dissemination of statistical data – the emoluments ordinance of 1993

Traditionally, statistical data, in Switzerland as well as elsewhere, has been disseminated widely according to the principles of an open-access data distribution policy. Data—most data, at least—as such did not have a price—although the surveys and data compilation activities and computations necessary to establish the basic databases have always been costly and necessitated substantial investments by the institutions commissioned to do the job. In the case of national statistical offices, these investments were (and are) financed by public funds or tax money. Since statistical information is an essential prerequisite in order not only to administer efficiently a country, but to the basic functioning of a pluralistic and democratic society as a whole, these investments could, most of the time, easily be justified and were rarely challenged. The resulting data collections, the information derived from them, were and still are widely considered to be public property which should equally and easily be accessible to all citizens and sections of the society.

Within the framework of the modern law on the Swiss federal statistics, these principles were basically confirmed and defined in article 20 as binding for all national institutions compiling statistical data:

<p>Swiss Law on Federal Statistics, Article 20</p> <p>¹ Published, publicly accessible or data derived from federal statistics may be used and reproduced without special permission or copyright obligations as long as the source is indicated.</p> <p>² The Federal Council may define exceptions for commercial usage.</p>
<p>Swiss Law on Federal Statistics, Article 21</p> <p>¹ The Federal Council issues directions on the fees for publications, services and permissions.</p>

According to this last article, the details on the fees, commissions or emoluments are laid down in a separate ordinance whose first version dates from June 1993. Not expressly but implicitly, the ordinance keeps on with the tradition that data as such is not priced and charged for. However, data is made accessible to the public through so-called **services**. Article 4 requires that anybody asking for or enjoying such a service has to pay a fee in addition to reimburse the material or actual costs for media and data dissemination. Article 3 defines the services as follows:

- Publications, i.e. publicly accessible statistical results on paper, on microfilm, on media readable by machines (computers etc.) as well as derived through the telephone or through electronic data connections (on-line data exchange).
- Delivery of available statistical results which are not published or not published in the desired form (i.e. digital copies of published books).
- Special analyses or data exploitations resulting in previously not available statistical results adapted to special user needs.
- Permissions to use statistical results for commercial purposes.

Article 5 and article 14 finally define that services without expressly fixed fees are charged according to the staff-time required to deliver the service.

3 Reasons for change – digital statistical data dissemination until 1996

For the dissemination of digital statistical data in general and of GIS data in particular, the basic regulations of the federal statistics law and of its associated emoluments ordinance have founded a practice of calculating costs and prices which remained unchanged since its inception in 1993 until the end of 1996. In relation to the nominal fees for mailing as well as for the media the data was delivered on, the staff-time necessary to perform data analyses, database operations, format conversions, to prepare plots and visual, graphic output, to provide advice, support and additional information to the customers contributed by far the major share of the final amount charged.

While these rules and this practice may seem, at the first glance, simple to understand and to apply, the five years of experience revealed that they also lead to a number of significant problems. Increasing public (and administrative) demand for GIS data and consequently sales volumes on one side, coupled with an equally increasing awareness of the necessity and benefits of market orientation, market forces and efficiency criteria for the public administration, both within our organization as well as within the Swiss society as a whole, contributed that some of these shortcomings became increasingly noticed and criticized. In many instances, in 1996 a point was reached where some of the disadvantages and illogical consequences of strict adherence to these rules was more and more felt intolerable.

Among these, we just list some of the most disturbing and most obvious ones:

- The final price a customer had to pay bore no relationship at all neither to the usefulness of the data for the purpose intended nor to the “implicit data value” related to the total investment necessary to generate it. Therefore, a subset of data of the whole country (e.g. for a canton, or just a number of variables instead of all available), for example, used to be more expensive than the entire data set. Obviously, additional staff-time is required to perform additional GIS or database selections, and, obviously as well, the public and the customers find it difficult to understand and accept such a pricing policy.
- In an open economy, the price a customer is willing to pay for a product and the combined revenue from all sales constitutes a major indicator of the necessity and real usefulness of the product. In this context, marketing and dissemination policy should utilize this mechanism so that increasing income and profits can contribute to the continuous optimization of the production and product definition process. Furthermore, the general trend in the Swiss federal administration advocates a stronger market-orientation coupled with higher autonomy of the different offices, necessitating them as well to improve their cost-effectiveness and the share of generated financial returns by expanding the range of products offered and maximizing their sales.

- Rigid price calculation according to above mentioned principles is hardly objective and reproducible. Firstly, it depends on the experience, the seriousness and the day's performance or even mood of the person the customer request is entrusted to. Secondly, it depends on the preparation steps already performed earlier and on the interim products which may be found coincidentally as left over from earlier orders or internal work (i.e. the first customer of a particular result always pays the highest price—which may sometimes be several times the amount of any subsequent order). However, in practice, various organizational measures were taken to avoid unacceptable disparities and to minimize the contingency of our price calculations.
- Worse yet, if no precautions are taken, the revenue generated respectively the end user prices are the higher the less efficient the data distributor works! If one does not intend to give away data for free (or practically free), certain measures and efforts resulting in less internal work, more rational job completion and higher efficiency, must be avoided (such as pre-preparation and packaging of standard products).
- The internal administrative overhead for tracking orders, calculating prices and billing customers was quite high and remained high irrespective of the increasing number of many similar orders/requests. Nevertheless, it still did neither allow us to advance-quote a reliable price for a demand of a potential customer, nor provided it a reasonable degree of transparency to the customer about the calculation of his bill.

These and a series of additional reflections and observations proofed clearly the necessity to reformulate and improve the existing data dissemination practice for digital and especially for GIS data at the SFSO.

It must be stressed, however, that the new dissemination and pricing policy applied since the beginning of this year still fully complies with the legal framework set by the statistics law and the emoluments ordinance. The latter's article 13, section 3, states that at least the generation/preparation costs are charged for data published in forms readable by machines (i.e. digital data). Considering the increased usefulness and application potential compared to analogue, basically paper publications, consequently higher fees may be charged. This article allows, according to legal expert opinions, that our office decides on all-inclusive sales prices for standardized products and/or product classes, as long as these prices are in a reasonable relation compared to the usefulness or application potential of the product, and/or to the actual costs the generation of the base data and the preparation of the product incurred.

4 Definition of GEOSTAT products

4.1 GEOSTAT

Within the Swiss Federal Statistical Office, GEOSTAT, an acronym formed by adding **g**eography and **s**tatistics, and a part of the office's Spatial Economics Division and Spatial Data Section, is the service for spatial data. Simply said, GEOSTAT's the place where the SFSO GIS is located and all its GIS data is managed, analyzed and disseminated.

The first SFSO dissemination service for GIS data was founded in 1976 by transferring a grid planning database from the Department of Planning of the Federal Institute of Technology of Zurich to the SFSO. This changed the formerly task-specific concept of the database to an open system, whose spatial data were, stage by stage, expanded. In connection with the Swiss land use statistics 1979/85, the integration of a modern geographic information system was evaluated. In 1987 the decision was taken to procure such a system and to set up a specialized unit at the Statistical Office—the GEOSTAT user service—to manage the new system and above all to counsel the data users.

Since then, there has been a vast growth in the amount of data and in the requested evaluations, analyses and digital products. GEOSTAT has matured into an operational system and service facility held in high esteem by numerous specialists. GEOSTAT mainly collects spatial data of public interest from the federal administration available for the whole of Switzerland. Data is homogenized as necessary and added in a compatible manner to existing data layers in the GIS. The standard scale for data compatibility is 1:25,000 or the basic unit area of 1 hectare. Such data from GEOSTAT can be linked, intersected and combined and therefore analyzed for a wide variety of purposes.

The presently available data cover multi-purpose needs of a majority of data users and can serve to most of them as sufficient input for compiling reasonably detailed and diversified base maps, upon which they can easily assemble their own, specific, specialized thematic data layers. They are all described in detail in GEOSTAT's comprehensive user manual. The manual is periodically updated and is available in German or French, as well as a free, synoptic color brochure in four languages (German, French, Italian, English) through the Federal Statistical Office [2, 3]. The structure, the services and the data of GEOSTAT have repeatedly also been described in earlier papers [4–7], some of which have been presented in the framework of a UN/ECE Work Session on Geographical Information Systems [5, 6].

4.2 What is a product?

Under the term **product** we understand, for the discussion in this paper as well as in the context of the GEOSTAT data dissemination policy, a package consisting of (statistical) data (or, synonymously used, information, results), the physical container of the data (usually called the media, such as a diskette or a CD-ROM), a certain amount of metadata, usually on paper as well as in a digital form, including a technical and attributive data description as well as a license or a contract informing about and defining all the relevant legal issues such as usage restrictions, liabilities, guarantees etc. Such a product is usually accompanied by a shipping form, a personally addressed delivery letter and/or a bill.

4.3 Desktop versus professional products

Since late 1996 GEOSTAT has launched a special series of pre-defined, standardized, comparably inexpensive products destined for the “mass market”, for desktop mapping and similar applications, for the common user who does not necessarily need to be technically specialized or a GIS expert. These products are a subset of the complete GEOSTAT data catalogue, encompassing data in most heavy demand, generalized or simplified data derived from more complex (and more processing resources requiring) original data sets, and georeferenced images useful to combine with other data sets and/or other spatially related (statistical) information. To easily distinguish them, we call these product line **desktop products**, whereas the other, as some would say “real” GIS data sets are now termed **professional products**.

While this distinction may appear arbitrary for some—as some of our more experienced and professional older customers warned us—its not intended to be an obvious and data or content driven classification. Its purpose is rather to become a marketing label, therefore it primarily depends on a subjective decision based on marketing and sales strategies and priorities set by the actual data dissemination policy. The distinction has, on the other side, clear and significant implications on the pricing of the products (see below) and the possibilities or options for customer-specific product adaptations.

Desktop products are almost completely predefined. Each of them is available in one or, at most, very few, common data formats, and on one type of media, the DOS-formatted HD computer diskette. With one exception all desktop products cover the entire country and other, smaller geographic extents cannot be obtained (whether at higher or at lower cost). As a matter of fact, the obligation that desktop products are delivered on a computer diskette constitutes also one of the technically based criteria whether a certain data set qualifies as a desktop product or not (or at which level of generalization).

Professional products, at the other hand, are hardly anything else than what has been disseminated in all the years until the definition of desktop products. All the data described in the comprehensive GEOSTAT users manual [2] is disseminated as professional products. Professional products are only thematically defined, but offered in a wide range of data formats, on various media (in addition to diskettes CD-ROM, Exabyte, DAT, Syquest and Bernoulli systems, and others) and may geographically include the entire data set available (i.e. usually entire Switzerland) or any user-specified geographic subset thereof. Even thematically, partial information may be supplied and paid for as desired by the customer, such as a subset of all available attributes instead of all of them. Thematical, attributive as well as geographic subsets have always been available from GEOSTAT—the only new thing about this is that such partial data is now offered at substantially reduced rates more or less proportional to the actual content of data or information compared to the price for the complete data. We feel, and the response of the market confirms this opinion, that in fact this flexible price calculation is a major reason to let partial data orders become attractive.

Acceptance of this WYPIWYG (What you pay for is what you get) principle seems to be very good, not surprisingly maybe, since we are facing it frequently in other commercial transactions as well.

4.4 Other GEOSTAT services

Besides of collecting and disseminating geo-statistical data produced within as well as outside the Federal Statistical Office, the activities and services of GEOSTAT include various other offers available to customers. Already in the official performance targets for GEOSTAT, dating from 1987, we find:

- Processing and analysis of available data according to the specific requirements of users, as well as advice and support of users for their own analyses and projects.
- Cooperation with researchers and interested institutions to develop and test analysis methods and processing algorithms.
- Coordination, guidance and help for data collection, digitization and utilization as well as for the establishment of individual GIS infrastructure, in regard to data formats, methodical aspects and later analysis, especially for federal government institutions.

Obviously, such services must be highly customer-specific and cannot reasonably be represented with the concept of standardized products. According to the articles 5 and 14 of the emoluments ordinance, they are therefore still priced at the basis of the invested staff-time. Although this does not avoid the problems and disadvantages sketched in 3, we do not see a clearly superior solution in the near future.

5 Calculation of product prices

The first objective in defining a pricing policy was to design a pricing scheme which is at the same time easy to apply, to understand and to communicate to customers as well as providing transparency and to allow exact quotations on the costs a certain demand or a certain product would incur for a customer. Another important target was to take a step towards a more harmonized data dissemination policy and especially price determination within the entire office and with our major partners in the federal administration. Our ideas and proposals, therefore, have been and still are periodically discussed and debated with partner offices such as the Federal Office of Topography, Federal Office of Environment, Forests and Landscape, Federal Office of Water Resources, Federal Office of Spatial Planning and others. We now feel that most of the national, geo-statistical data will be distributed on more similar terms and will cost very similar amounts irrespective of who is distributing and offering them.

All products are sold under license, and the accompanying license contract reproduced as an appendix to this paper defines the legal obligations of GEOSTAT and the licensee (i.e. the customer), the usage restrictions (especially prohibits secondary uses) and liabilities that apply for both sides. While packing, billing and mailing is included in all product prices, the media costs are added to the calculated prices for professional products. As customary with computer software, the prices quoted are per single user license. If several users within a customer's company (or a school, research institution etc.) require parallel access to the product, multi-user licenses (respectively several concurrent single-user licenses at a discounted rate) are available and grant up to 70% discount against a single-user license.

Table 2 presents an overview over the presently available and soon to be released GEOSTAT desktop products and their prices.

To provide an optimal degree of price transparency for the professional products which are, most frequently, unique and customer-specific, we decided to base the prices on the actual geometric and attributive information content of the desired data. For point or raster data, each point or raster cell with an information content is billed at sFr. 0.0002 per information attribute it contains. For vector data, a rounded all-inclusive price for the territory of the entire country was calculated using the number of arc segments of the data set as well as a quality factor which takes into account the digitalization scale, accuracy and actuality of the data. Since the number of attributes available presently for vector data is rather small and the information mostly administrative/categorical rather than statistical (names, definitions of e.g. classes of soil or geologic formation, reference numbers), they are not taken into consideration for the price definition. Prices for vector data professional products can therefore presently neither be increased or rebated by adding or subtracting

thematical attributes to them. Table 3 presents an overview over the presently available GEOSTAT professional products and their prices.

Table 2 GEOSTAT desktop products

Product designation	Data structure	Spatial resolution or approximate application scale	Price per (single-user) license
Vector format data			
Generalized administrative boundaries of Switzerland (cantons, districts, communes) 1	Polygons	1 : 350,000	sFr. 490.–
Generalized administrative boundaries of Switzerland (cantons, districts, communes) 2	Polygons	1 : 500,000	sFr. 350.–
Generalized administrative boundaries of Switzerland (cantons, districts, communes) 3	Polygons	1 : 1,000,000	sFr. 210.–
Generalized administrative boundaries of Switzerland (cantons, districts, communes) 4	Polygons	1 : 2,000,000	sFr. 140.–
Internal boundaries of 14 larger cities of Switzerland (city quarters / districts)	Polygons	1 : 25,000	sFr. 140.–
Picture data			
Simplified land use of Switzerland, 1979/85	Image, pixels	Hectare	sFr. 70.–
Elevation classes of Switzerland	Image, pixels	Hectare	sFr. 70.–
Relief map of Switzerland	Image, pixels	Hectare	sFr. 70.–
Relief map of Switzerland with six super-imposed land use classes	Image, pixels	Hectare	sFr. 70.–
Inhabitants per hectare (classified), 1990	Image, pixels	Hectare	sFr. 70.–

6 Special dissemination types

6.1 Reseller contracts for GEOSTAT desktop products

In addition to the Article 20 of the statistics law, the 1993 emoluments ordinance pinpoints in article 15, section 2: Any commercial usage of statistical results of federal administrative institutions requires a specific permission by these institutions. Special compensations are to be agreed upon in a contract. These can consist e.g. in an all-inclusive lump sum, in license fees, or in a profit-sharing agreement.

Within the past few months, GEOSTAT has received quite a number of requests from prospective resellers of its products, and very recently, the first couple of contracts were signed between some of these and our office. So far and until further notice, resale contracts are limited to desktop products even though some commercial interests go beyond these. The generalized administrative boundaries being the first physically available desktop products, experience has shown that they are met with special interest. While “plain reselling” of products exactly the way they are being offered through GEOSTAT itself hardly seems to be attractive neither for GEOSTAT nor for resellers who both would just compete with each other on that way (but probably not on an equal basis), the major interests of resellers is bundling administrative boundaries of Switzerland with other administrative boundaries and/or statistical data for the respective administrative regions. They are then becoming part of **data packages** frequently bundled with software for desktop mapping and desktop GIS or sold as accessories to them. For this purpose, the limited number of formats supported by GEOSTAT for its desktop products may be converted into proprietary, software-specific formats and the supplied data enhanced to make full use of any supported features of these formats and software.

Another purpose for which we notice growing interest is to include such GIS and related statistical data into integrated, self-standing, usually **CD-ROM-based products** such as electronic atlases, touristic and encyclopedic CDs etc. In relation to the part GEOSTAT and statistical data possesses within the entire resale product and within the complete functionality provided and the product’s prospective sales prices and production costs, the statistical office’s price share is estimated and negotiated with the licensee of the contract, either per copy sold (necessitating an accounting and reporting system on the side of the reseller) or

per edition of a certain amount of produced CDs or resale packages. This share may be as little as something like sFr. 0.10 per CD, but may reach a more substantial portion of the sales price in other, more statistically oriented cases.

Table 3 GEOSTAT professional products

Product designation	Data structure	Spatial resolution or approximate application scale	Price per (single-user) license ¹
Point or raster format			
DTM, height, slope, exposition; absolute and classified	Point, raster	Hectare	sFr. 826.–
Legal construction zones (residential and industrial zones; approximately 1980)	Raster	Hectare	sFr. 50.–
Swiss land use statistics 1972	Polygons or raster	Hectare	sFr. 826.–
Swiss land use statistics 1979/85, 15 or 24 aggregated categories	Point, raster	Hectare	sFr. 826.–
Swiss land use statistics 1979/85, generalized thematic background, 17 aggregated categories	Raster	Hectare	sFr. 826.–
Swiss land use statistics 1992/97, 15 or 24 aggregated categories	Point, raster	Hectare	sFr. 826.–
National population and housing census 1970 (3 variables, classified results, 750 communes)	Point, raster	Hectare	sFr. 22.–
National population and housing census 1980 (54 variables, 620 communes)	Point, raster	Hectare	sFr. 20.–
National population and housing census 1990 (≈ 400 variables, entire country covered)	Point, raster	Hectare	sFr. 70.–
Vector format			
Administrative boundaries of Switzerland (cantons, districts, communes)	Polygons	1 : 25,000	sFr. 832.– / year ²
Simplified geotectonic map of Switzerland	Polygons	1 : 200,000	sFr. 2990.–
Soil suitability map of Switzerland	Polygons	1 : 200,000	sFr. 3285.–
Swiss lakes	Polygons	1 : 25,000	sFr. 605.–
Swiss rivers and streams	Lines	1 : 200,000	sFr. 1350.–
Federal inventory of landscapes and natural features of national importance	Polygons	1 : 25,000	sFr. 820.–
Federal inventory of bird reserves of international and national importance	Polygons	1 : 25,000	sFr. 100.–
Federal inventory of prohibited hunting areas	Polygons	1 : 25,000	sFr. 810.–
Federal inventory of upland and transitory moors of national importance	Polygons	1 : 25,000	sFr. 2275.–
Federal inventory of lowland moors of national importance	Polygons	1 : 25,000	sFr. 2930.–
Federal inventory of river meadows of national importance	Polygons	1 : 25,000	sFr. 945.–

¹ for one single thematic attribute in the case of raster data, for the entire data set covering the complete territory of Switzerland and for all available attribute or thematic information in the case of vector data

² special pricing and dissemination principles according to contract with the Swiss Federal Office of Topography

6.2 Subdistribution contracts for local authorities and research institutions

Traditionally, cantonal and a few local authorities on one and university (geography) departments and other research institutions on the other side are among GEOSTAT's most active and most loyal partners. In recent years, many cantons have established their own GIS coordination centers taking the technological and intellectual lead in regard to the utilization of GIS hard- and software as well as GIS and related statistical data for their entire administration. In universities or university departments, similar centers have evolved. All these are destined to function as central data repositories for the multitude of side and sub-organizations and individual users associated and in one way or another related to them.

They are interested and willing to function as data distributors for this user communities, data distributors not only for data generated internally by them and by members of their sphere of influence, but also for data purchased and received from external sources.

Such a subdistribution service may also be attractive for GEOSTAT since it would tend to relieve us from a certain amount of administrative, dissemination-oriented workload which is neither intellectually nor commercially particularly attractive. On the other side, allowing redistribution of data which is often neither completely commercial nor completely non-commercial or internal, poses a series of legal and administrative problems which must be solved in the near future. It is envisaged to draft model subdistribution contracts and to take up negotiations about a reasonable initial data prices (and price determination model) with some of the most active GIS centers. Another aspect important for us is to mutually set up a kind of **reporting or feedback system** informing GEOSTAT and its data owners (who are frequently other federal offices) about the intensities and purposes their data are used, about data deficiencies and about lacking data required with a certain priority.

7 Conclusions and outlook

The previously sketched new data dissemination policy of GEOSTAT has just began to start and to be operationalized and applied regularly. It is now necessary to collect and evaluate the current and coming experiences related to it in order to decide on eventual changes and refinements. Another aspect that needs further study and eventual follow-up are any consequences in regard to the general data dissemination practices applied in the Federal Statistical Office, especially related to the production and dissemination of digital products. The details of our new dissemination policy have been discussed and determined under periodic and close contacts with the Information and Documentation Section in charge of marketing, pricing, dissemination policy and definition of pricing guidelines and commercial usage contracts for the entire office, but nevertheless, such rather principle changes in the dissemination practice and its underlying philosophy need time to be taken up and become effective everywhere in a large organization.

We hope to finalize the remaining procedure and model papers such as various types of contracts (e.g. 6.2) by the end of this year and to subsequently compile a comprehensive documentation to be used internally as well as an equally comprehensive but rather brief paper to serve as information to the public and our customers. In the medium term, the various ongoing actions within the federal government (such as new public management initiatives granting more autonomy to offices and requesting a stronger market orientation and—probably—a higher rate of investment cost recovery) and within some of our partner offices (such as the Office of Topography) need to be attentively observed and continuously evaluated. For the long-term future, the formulation of performance targets for GEOSTAT, including sales volumes and revenue amounts, may be one of the consequences of such developments and may constitute a new element of administration policy, necessitating once again reviewing the dissemination and pricing policy for geo-statistical data.

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Appendix: License Agreement

1 Subject of the license contract

The Federal Statistical Office (SFSO) grants the customer (licensee) a non-transferable and non-exclusive usage right for the GEOSTAT products attached to this license agreement, subsequently called the license material.

2 Coverage of the usage granted

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