North American Religion Atlas: Creating an Interactive Atlas Using Time-enabled Spatial Internet Technology

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The Electronic Cultural Atlas Initiative (ECAI) is an international collaborative project to create a web-based interactive atlas of cultural data using time-enabled GIS technology. It aims to spur new research by facilitating scholarly access to a wide variety of spatially and temporally referenced data through a common interface and metadata catalogue. It also promotes interdisciplinary research by providing new tools to combine, analyze, and display multi-dimensional data-quantitative, textual, and image-from a wide array of disciplines.

ECAI works through regional and thematic teams. The central mission of ECAI North America is to create unique and comprehensive web-based historical and contemporary North American cultural data for research and teaching purposes. To meet this aim, the North American team has developed a North American Religion Atlas (NARA) using federal and private censuses of religious adherence for the 20th century U.S. The project either currently or in its later phases involves several elements: creation of historically accurate boundary files; development of digital datasets coded to the smallest available geography; establishment of protocols and devices that permit appropriate interpolation of data across variable census units and across time; integration of visual and textual data and appropriate analytical tools; and construction of interpretive and curricular schemes.

The project embraces a full-range of pedagogical and research elements designed to demonstrate the usefulness of the data for innovative teaching, new interpretations, and the like. It also aims to advance the scholarly use of GIS and related technologies, including but not limited to dynamic mapping, data mining, and integration of other media. Finally, it addresses many issues surrounding e-publication and the use of TimeMapT.

The presentation will feature a project prototype and a discussion of the various issues and solutions-analytical, technical, and collaborative-involved in the NARA project.