

Census Web Services Working Group

Meeting 5 GROS, Edinburgh 19 March 2010

Attendees:

Chris Ashford (Chair) (ONS, Census)
Richard M Smith (ONS) (Audolink)
Justin Hayes (CDU)
Rob Dymond (CDU)
Alan Lewis (SASPAC)
Brendan Davis (ONS, Census)
Paul Richards (ONS IM)
Sinclair Sutherland (NOMIS)
James Reid (EDINA)
Ed Turnball (GROS)
Rob Collins (GROS)
Bill Oates (WAG)
Joe Fuchs (GROS)
Sandy Taylor (GROS)
Gee-Mei Cheung (ONS, Geography)
Susan Walker (GROS)
Dominic Moth (ONS, Census)
Penni Martin (GROS)
Richard Elliot (NISRA) (Audolink)

Apologies:

Vincent Moynihan (ONS)
Dave Blythe (ONS - NeSS)
Oliver Duke-Williams (DFN)
Mark Ireland (NOMIS)
Callum Foster (SESAG)
Pablo Mateos (UCL)
Oliver O'Brien (UCL)
Muki Haklay (UCL)
Cathryn Mcburney (NISRA)
Rachel Moreton (DCLG)

Apologies for the audio connection difficulties that inconvenienced or prevented participation.

1. Minutes of last meeting and actions arising

Paul Richards reported on the Sunningdale event which brought together experts in fields of SDMX/RDF/linked data, and, together with the subsequent Google Group established for ongoing communication and dialogue effectively supersedes the action to establish a technical focused sub group.

Paul summarized the event – giving information about the background and impetus, and the topics covered. The event aimed to address a direction to progress in which SDMX and RDF can operate in a complimentary manner, developing an RDF representation of the SDMX data model, and associated API features.

'Rendering the SDMX model in RDF' is available in .pdf to download from the Google Group established to continue interaction and development. Members wishing to view the SDMXRDF specification, Notes on the mapping, and view or join the conversation, should join the 'Publishing Statistical Data' Google Group at

<http://groups.google.co.uk/group/publishing-statistical-data>

2. Terms of Reference – 1st annual review

Members were asked to review the Terms of Reference and supply comments and suggested amendments either by email or via the website. A brief discussion initiated by Justin Hayes covered the potential to add aspects to the Terms that define how the remit of the group should explicitly include the development of data cube specifications and standards. Members who agree or have other amendments should provide details by 01 April.

Action: All members to review Terms of Reference and provide amendments by 01 April.

3. Reports from web services

Brief verbal updates were provided by the web service groups represented (NeSS, ONS Web Development Programme (WDP), NOMIS, EDINA, SASPAC, GROS).

Each update reviewed the recent activities and current development progress of each service, and highlighted a number of useful topics and issues covered in discussions throughout the meeting.

NeSS

NDE 2 launched successfully in February. Reported use of the service has been good, but, because registration is not mandatory exact user tracking is not possible.

This prompted some general discussion of service registration - the benefits provided by associated usage logging, and the adverse potential affects of registration on the depth and breadth of user participation in such services.

ONS Web Development Programme (WDP)

The FR1 release (first functional release) of the WDP API is due in late March and will demonstrate the API as detailed in the current draft specification (available to view to those concerned). The FR3 release planned for the end of the year will be a much more definitive and mature release. January 2011 is the planned date for the API to be live and open to all, and will feature some limited Census data.

NOMIS

The public demonstration version of the NOMIS API was launched successfully and is now available for testing. Now fully RESTful, the API can deliver a range of data, including past Census data, in the form it which it already exists in the NOMIS database – a non-dimensionalised form.

User consumption of the data has been good so far, although users seem either to be confused by, or not concerned with receiving data in SDMX. The service therefore also provides a JSON or CSV output.

GROS confirmed that they have encountered a similar disinterest in SMDX output from users, and this prompted a short discussion covered the prospect for serving the needs of SMDX shy users by developing a common representation of the SDMX model in JSON and other formats, similar to the efforts to represent in SDMX in RDF.

EDINA

Progress with work using the OGC WFS and Table Joining Service specifications to integrate OA geography and statistics in a distributed demonstrator. A suite of OGC WFS and WMS is serving 1971-2001 geography outputs to academic users as GML and Shape, MapInfo and KML outputs. Work is underway to explore Linked Data in relation to NSPD.

SASPAC

SASPAC have been testing application developments using NDE2, and are looking to extend this to include consuming data from the NOMIS API. Future considerations will include transitioning the SASPAC service from a desktop to web based access and interface.

GROS

GROS demonstrated a prototype example of an 'off the shelf' product approach to delivering data for Scotland. The example is based on products from SpaceTime Research, and applications of SuperVIEW were demonstrated. Though not demonstrated, the approach will be extended to incorporate an API provided by an out of the box, but customisable solution. A statement of requirements for service provision has been developed for the procurement process, in which SpaceTime Research are anticipated to be a participant.

Action: All participants to access the wiki and update with descriptions and details of the latest developments of their respective projects

<http://cswg.wikidot.com/wiki:member-projects>

Action: Meeting to discuss the technical benefits and an approach to developing standardised classifications across the three Census Offices, extensibility of standardisation beyond Census data, and harmonisation with other statistical sources – meeting to include NOMIS, MIMAS, Paul Richards, and three Census offices representatives.

4. Discussions

Update on activities of ONS Geography, and discussion of the role of Geography in Data Dissemination

INSPIRE and Eurostat

ONS-G have submitted maps to Eurostat for 2006 and 2007 (based on mid-year population estimates) as part of the Geostat 1A project - a proof of concept for European countries to produce population 1km grid maps. Production for future years is intended as the information becomes available.

It was stressed that Output Areas remain the dissemination geography for the Census, but discussions also covered other approaches with some countries using a bottom up approach and others a top down approach. The Geostat 1B project will be aimed at the countries producing maps based on the 2010/2011 Census data with harmonised standards and methods.

Following discussion of INSPIRE and metadata provisions it was affirmed that ONS-G metadata is Gemini 2 and ISO 19115 compliant, and in XML format.

Making Public Data Public

An outline of the OS consultation was provided, and discussions covered the impacts that this would have on ONS-G, especially in light of IPR issues. These include use of both Boundary-Line and CodePoint. ONS-G are also working to produce the National Statistics Postcode Directory (NSPD) online, and the potential impact on this was also covered.

Naming and coding policy

A discussion on old codes and inconsistent standards was prompted by a summary of the ONS Naming and Coding policy and the Change History Database (now known as Code History Database (CHD)). It was proposed that a group be established to include key users in the development of consistent standards and codes that can be agreed and applied for historical geographies. Suggestions were also put forward for including additional information in the CHD such as a "date of introduction" field, and including "old" geographies (those prior to 2001). It was explained that the CHD is a new product, and ONSG are looking at ways to improve the product for users.

The group supported the view that successful development of API solutions for exchanging statistical data is highly dependent on consistent code lists, in particular geographic lists and look ups, and their delivery by data feeds. Although this is very much understood by ONS Geography it is still thought worthwhile to reiterate at the forthcoming Geographic User Services Forum at ONS Titchfield.

5. Next meeting

The next CWSWG meeting will be held in June, with the proposed location at ONS Titchfield. Details will be added to the website and forwarded to group members during May.