

The logo for FOSS4G 2006, featuring a stylized red and white graphic that resembles a ribbon or a stylized letter 'G'.

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Architecting Participation for GeoSpatial Data

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While the open source geospatial community has made large strides to write software that competes with with the major vendors, we as a community have yet to do anything truly new or innovative. The most exciting potential area for me is bringing the open source process to geospatial data, creating 'architectures of participation' around the creation and maintenance of geo-information.

We as a community are ideally suited to tackle such problems, since it is not simply a technical issue, but also a social one of getting a group of diverse volunteers to contribute to a shared resource that benefits all. The social problems will likely be similar to the ones we already tackle in our own communities, and the technical solutions are best built on top of the existing software we are already working on.

While OpenStreetMap has taken a great early lead, especially in the social aspect, I believe that a diverse ecosystem of open geodata projects will have a greater chance for success in the long run. This will allow for experimentation and innovation with both the social (licenses of data, commit rights, value propositions) and technical (standards, user interfaces, scalability, interoperability, ect.) aspects of creating a successful environment around furthering the creation of open geodata. A technical architecture allowing maximum re-use of existing open source software in collaboration will be proposed, along with conjecture on different forms of social organizing around architectures of participation for geospatial data. I hope to make the session an interactive discussion, to get ideas flowing on how the Open Source GeoSpatial community can take a lead role in bringing the open source process to geodata.

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