

# Critical GIS perspectives on volunteered geographic information

Some potential contributions and research priorities



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## VGI – issues from the ‘grassroots’

- Community orgs, citizen associations, small NGOs, other locally-situated civil institutions
- VGI approaches as a way to expand access to “local knowledge”
- Local knowledge as key addressing (some) problems with government spatial data
- Citizens-as-data-producers: Another element of ‘collaborative governance’.

# VGI – two ‘layers’ of practices

1. Potential of VGI to expand/complete/improve existing databases, infrastructures, & archives; (*“patchwork practices”*)

And

2. Potential of VGI to enable us to gather/produce new forms of spatial information that use local knowledge to inform previously un-answerable questions, unknowable phenomenon, and new social and political practices. (*“new knowledge practices”*)



# Critical GIS

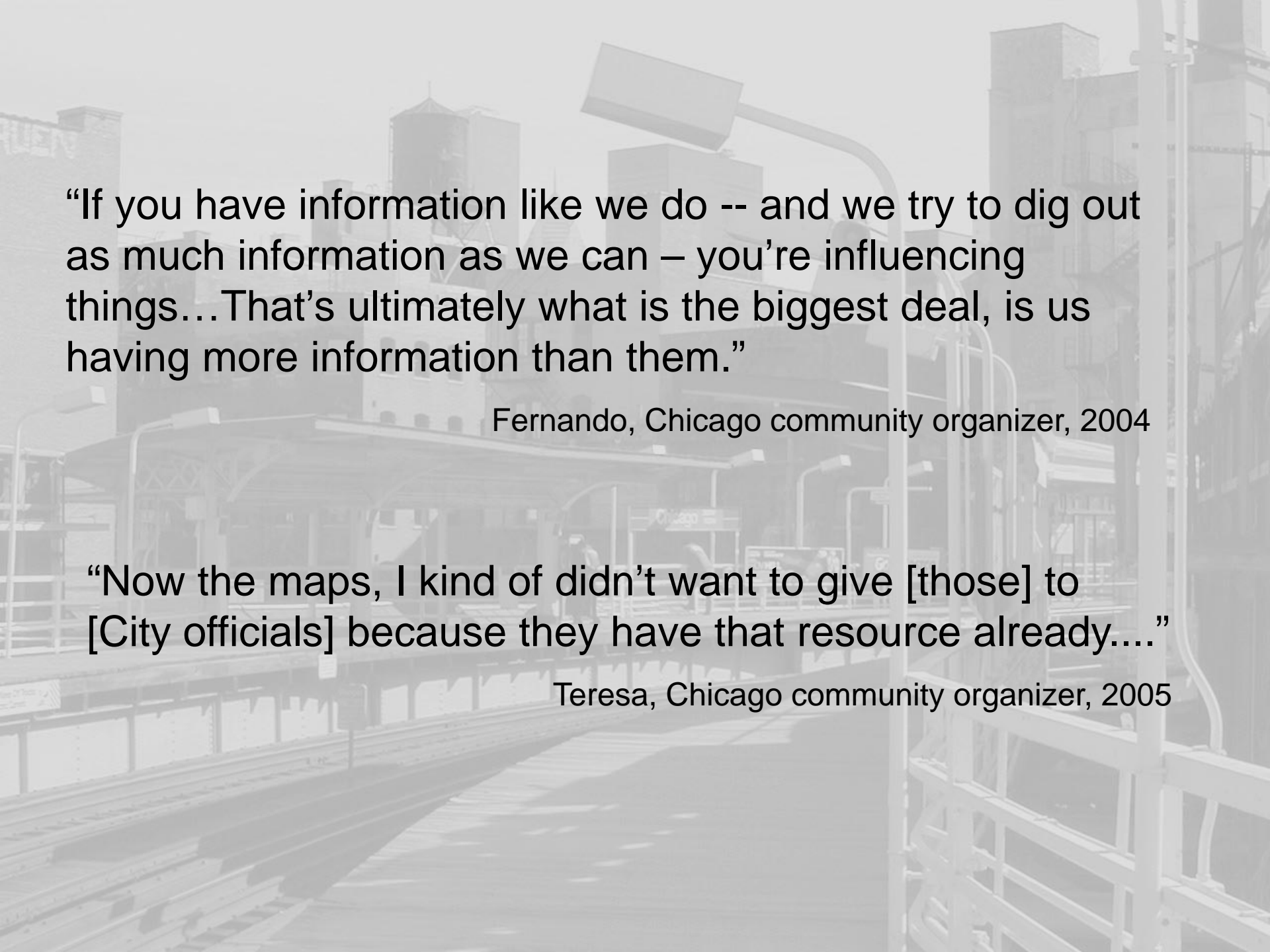
- Examining social *and* technological influences
  - Especially implications of how core challenges of GIScience are solved in a digital environment

[Schuurman, O'Sullivan]
- GIScience research and practice that focuses on empowerment, emancipation.

[Harvey, Kwan, Pavlovskaya; St. Martin & Wing]
- *Both arenas of critical GIS research contribute some relevant propositions for our efforts to understand and benefit from VGI.*

# Critical GIS links for VGI research/practice

1. Digital divides will have implications for access to VGI forums and ability to contribute information
2. To include diverse individuals and social groups, we must support inclusion of diverse knowledge
3. Spatial knowledge is shaped by identity and power
4. Data and spatial data handling are socially and politically mediated



“If you have information like we do -- and we try to dig out as much information as we can – you’re influencing things...That’s ultimately what is the biggest deal, is us having more information than them.”

Fernando, Chicago community organizer, 2004

“Now the maps, I kind of didn’t want to give [those] to [City officials] because they have that resource already....”

Teresa, Chicago community organizer, 2005

# Critical GIS links for VGI research/practice

1. Digital divides will have implications for access to VGI forums and ability to contribute information
2. To include diverse individuals and social groups, we must support inclusion of diverse knowledge
3. Spatial knowledge is shaped by identity and power
4. Data and spatial data handling are socially and politically mediated
5. Standards and other fixed protocols are likely to be unevenly adopted, and may exclude info



# Related questions for VGI research

- How are the social and technological processes of VGI development different in different kinds of application processes – i.e. government initiated processes vs. citizen initiated contexts?
- What kinds of interactions are supported/promoted by VGI processes? Why and how are these interactions socially, politically, and economically significant?
- How might we need to alter our planning paradigms and decision making practices in order to fully realize the potential of VGI?