

## Building a national GSGF model – experiences in Finland

Title: Building a national GSGF model – experiences in Finland

Project: The GSGF in Finland – Integration of geospatial and statistical information in Finland (GSFI)

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## 1. Introduction

The document provides an example of a national adaption of the GSGF Europe. To provide European added value, the production process and analysis of the results together with lessons learned are provided and thereby, it is possible for other European countries to benefit from the results as well.

The global GSGF model and the European version of it bring benefits to the statistical process or integration only when the models are implemented as part of concrete work. The focus of this project and the value of its results is to understand the theoretical models in practice and connected to the national policy and operating environment. Also, the project result serves as a valuable example for other countries in parallel development.

From the beginning, it was understood that statistical production according to the GSGF model requires an understanding of a complex national operating environment. A joint project is needed as it is not possible to implement the content of the project separately in different organisations.

The aim of this document is to provide one practical example for national implementation of the GSGF. It describes the progress of the work and experiences and lessons learned during the work, as well as required decisions.

The national adaptation of the GSGF, GSGF Finland (GSFI) was built based on the GSGF and GSGF Europe. In addition, the adaptation was supplemented with studies on integrating the newly launched national data quality framework and developing privacy policies. A key part of the work was the analysis and comparison of the GSGF Europe requirements and recommendations with Finland's current implementation status and further identification of development needs, target status and measures. This laid the groundwork for building the GSFI vision and road map to achieve it. Furthermore, GSFI principles of implementation based on the four key elements of the GSGF were identified. The work also involved enterprise architecture including architecture descriptions and core concepts analysed in a new Statistical Geospatial Glossary for the first time in Finland.

One of the key tools available in GSFI is the proposal for a new small area division model to enhance the national interoperability of geospatial statistics. This includes a nationally agreed method for producing hierarchical small areas for various thematic needs.

The successful implementation of GSFI relies heavily on national capability building, cooperation, and motivation among statistical, geospatial, administrative, and other data communities. GSFI aims to provide immediate insights into the development of Finland's shared operational environment. It enables organisations to share the vision and objectives and thereby responsibilities and tasks, identify mutual processes, and recognise benefits for the joint development.

## 2. The work structure

GSGF Finland was produced as part of the GSFI project. Simultaneously with the production of the GSFI, a small area division model was created for Finland, and target state-related questions were tested in a case study related to the statistical production process of business data. In addition to the project team, the national steering group and the Network for the Integration of Statistics and Geospatial Information also made significant contributions to the work.

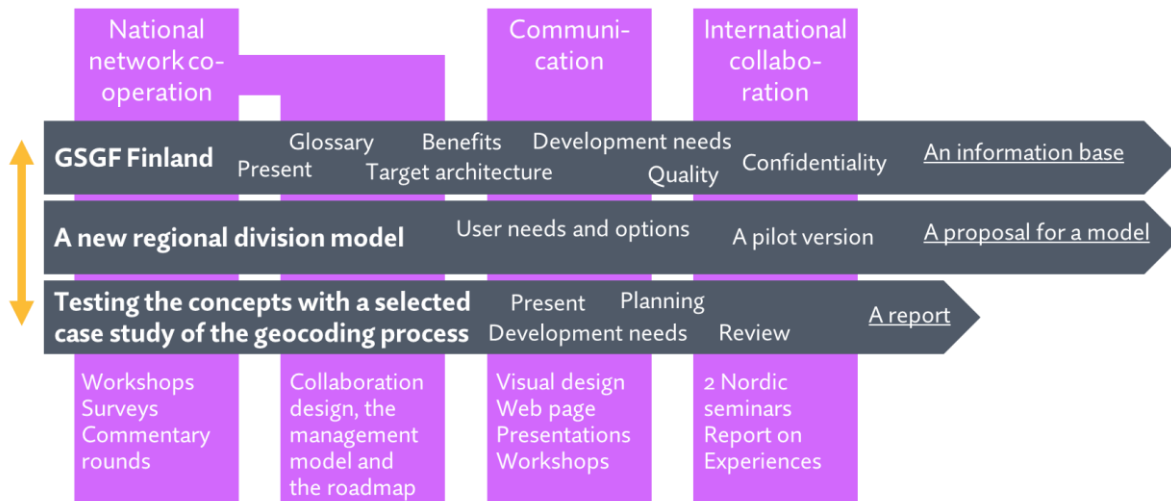


Figure 1. The work structure of the GSFI project.

The implementation of GSGF is a cross-sectoral activity considering both strategic and operational conditions. In Finland, Statistics Finland, the Finnish Environment Institute, and the National Land Survey of Finland, representing three ministries (Finance, Environment, and Agriculture and Forestry), participated in the project. However, there is no established governing body for GSFI work. The project was guided by a national strategic steering group of the three organisations. Finding funding for such a cross-sectoral project would have been extremely difficult, especially in this economic situation. External funding from a high administrative level was ideal. The mentioned organisations were central as they also coordinate the national Network on Integration of Statistics and Geospatial Information.

The planned content of the project was successful. There were no sidetracks that would have taken too much time away from the core tasks. Understanding the GSGF model in Finland was mainly done through the materials of GSGF Europe. The stages of producing GSGF Finland are described in Chapter 3.

In Finland, two activities effectively initiated the implementation of GSGF. The statistical production case supported the creation of GSGF Finland and tested the setting of objectives. The business statistics production system was well-suited for this, as data is collected from many sources, processed, and shared as geospatial information. Including a practical example alongside abstract goal setting helps test and refine objectives. For example, streamlining the Business Information System, abandoning surveys, and improving quality would be possible if the long-planned address register were put into production and enterprises' digital information moved smoothly between organisations.

Another practical measure was producing a unified small area division for Finland. Experiences of this are described in Chapter 5. Chapter 4 covers working with and through the network. The small area division was a major attraction at network events, and its development was based on criteria from network members.

### 3. Fundamental element I: Building of the GSGF Finland

As a result of the work, the Geospatial Statistics in Finland (GSFI) framework was created (Figure 2). This framework is described detailed in the GSGF in Finland document.

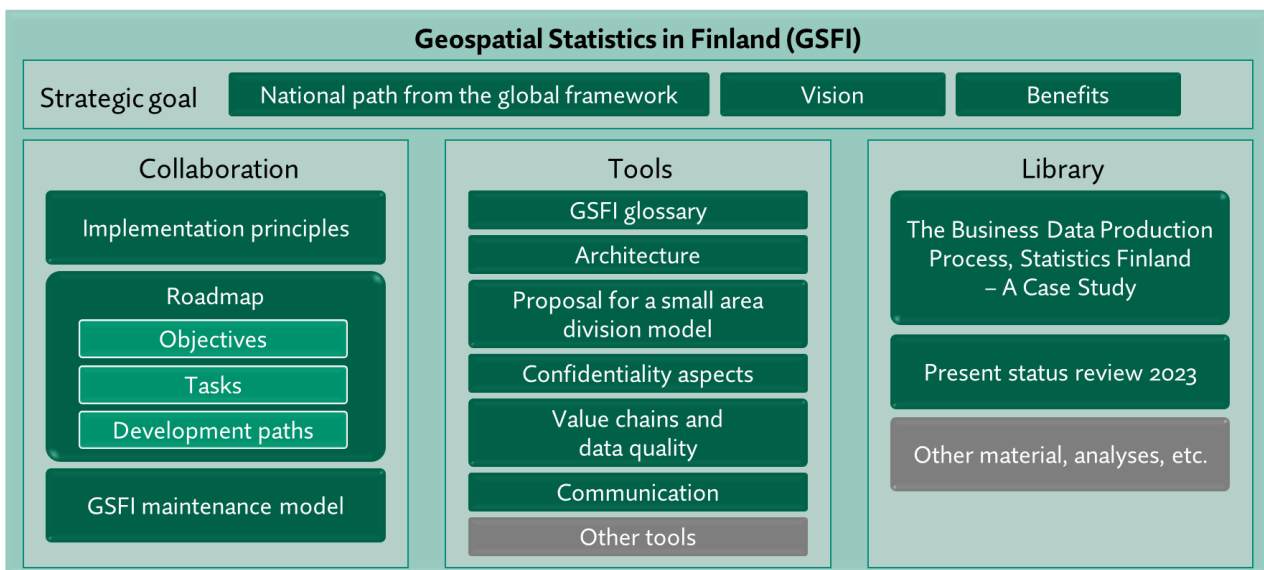


Figure 2. The structure of GSFI.

The construction of the GSFI framework can be divided into seven main phases:

1. Analysis of the present state
2. Setting objectives
3. Defining the vision and benefits – and resetting the objectives
4. Creating supporting materials (tools and cases)
5. Defining action proposals
6. Building development paths
7. Creating a management model

#### 3.1. Analysis of the present state

The work started with a study of the present status of integrating statistics and geospatial information in Finland. This study drew upon the work carried out in GEOSTAT 4, with a primary focus on the Requirements and Recommendations (R&R) in GSGF Europe. The R&R dissects the GSGF into smaller components, providing a systematic lens to assess the national landscape from a GSGF perspective. The current state analysis was carried by a group of experts and was informed by insights from the national network, as well as the architectural efforts undertaken by the national network. In this work, there were extensive discussions about what it is understood by each principle, requirement, and recommendation. An important part of this was that the results of the discussions were articulated in

Finnish. Thus, the discussions also provided input for the terminology work and vice versa. Through this analysis, existing strengths and critical development areas were identified.

### 3.2. Setting objectives

Based on the results of the present state review, a large number of development ideas and needs for change were produced. Next, development ideas and change needs were analysed and grouped, and as a result, the first set of development needs was identified.

During this work, a number of recurring needs for change were identified, which spanned from one GSGF principle to another and concerned more the way of operating than individual development cases. These needs were separated from the development needs into their own group as implementation principles.

### 3.3. Defining the vision and benefits – and resetting the objectives

Once the goals were clarified, it became possible to look towards the future. What will the operating environment be like when the goals are achieved? Visioning the future is often easily constrained by the identified limitations of the current state. However, it is worth looking beyond these and trying to envision the operating environment of the target state despite them. The obstacle might be a very complex process that we currently see as leading to the target state or even an impossible process from the perspective of resources. During the work, however, it was noted that initial reactions and views can be so strongly rooted in the present that they do not take into account various other developments around that facilitate the achievement of the goal. When considering change, one can paint big steps of change and try to see the weaknesses of the current state in a completely different light in the future.

As the target state begins to take shape, it's time to consider the benefits. What will the new operating model or the development of the operating environment bring? What activities can be eliminated? Will time be saved? Are there any financial savings? Reflecting on the benefits may also refine the goal-setting process even further.

This is also an ideal moment to break down the goals into more specific sub-goals and consider their prioritisation. What needs to be implemented first to ensure overall progress in the desired manner? This process works both ways. When goals are broken down into sub-goals, the higher-level goal may need to be refined. In the case of GSFI, higher-level goals often had to be expanded to logically fit the sub-goals under one main goal. The process must always be iterative – there is such a wide range of different factors that it is likely impossible to get everything right in one go.

### 3.4. Creating supporting materials (tools and cases)

In the context of GSFI, tools were developed to enhance mutual understanding. The tools and cases were involved throughout the entire process, but by stage 4, they were particularly needed to test the set objectives.

*Architectural descriptions* were used to depict the current state and model the target state. Describing abstract matters with the simplest yet comprehensive standard description methods helps various stakeholders from different backgrounds understand each other consistently. In the context of GSFI, actors, the national process and services, data flows, and the structure of regional divisions were described.

In addition, the first version of a shared *term vocabulary* for statistics and geospatial information was created. Under the guidance of a professional terminologist, explanations and models for 31 selected terms were produced using terminological methods. This work complements the national Geoinformatics vocabulary. Creating a common vocabulary was quite challenging but also very rewarding. The prevailing organisation-specific ways of using terms are deeply ingrained, and even by agreement, we cannot change even incorrect ways of expressing concepts. However, in terminological review, these can be highlighted, and better ways of expressing can be recommended. Cultural change is then needed later to take these recommendations into account, especially when developing new initiatives together.

In the GSFI project, the *data flows and value chains* were examined. An innovation in examining the data flows was to include the criteria of the national *quality* framework. In other words, the value of information does not always increase linearly as the process progresses; there may be degradations in the value of information. When we want to examine more closely what causes these declines in value, the quality assessment criteria of the quality framework can serve as explanatory factors. This method was tested in GSFI, and the results were promising. Not only did we gain insights into the gaps in the flow of information, but we also received very concrete development ideas. Thus, it supported the setting of GSFI's objectives and provided concrete suggestions for actions on how to support the flow of information and the increase in value.

There is a need for good practices and practical examples of how the theoretical models, GSGF and GSGF Europe, are implemented nationally to benefit the statistical production process. Especially in the early stages of the project, thinking through concrete examples made the work easier. Considering the GSGF's objectives through the case study provided the necessary concreteness to truly understand what is involved when we aim for a specific goal.

*The case study* helped identify process-related development needs and provided concrete development proposals. Findings were presented in various contexts, both at Statistics Finland and to the national Network for Integration of Statistics and Geospatial Information in Finland (NISGIF). The case study demonstrated that processes do not operate in isolation but are influenced by their organisational context. For example, the business information system case study highlighted the importance of better data flow and suggested the use of standardised address data to improve data connectivity. The individual case concretely showed how national management of address data would streamline processes, not only in statistical production but also in other contexts.

The examination of *confidentiality*, specifically data protection in the integration of statistical and geospatial information, concentrated on the findings of the GEOSTAT 4 project deliverable 'GSGF Europe' and international publications, while also emphasising national viewpoints. This work was conducted by data protection and statistics dissemination experts at Statistics Finland. Given that data protection practices vary among different actors, it is important to strive for unified national guidelines for publishing small-area statistics. In Finland, this work will continue.

### 3.5. Defining action proposals

The next step, designing the actual development roadmap was challenging. Implementing the identified development needs required, among other things, co-development by several actors, new resources, and cooperation across administrative boundaries. The project had no ability to prioritise or mandate progress. In the first design round, it was decided to describe the objectives based on the development needs and the tasks to achieve these objectives principle by principle. At the same time,

it was noticed that the recurring needs for change grouped well under the GSGF key elements and the *principles of implementation* were formed.

The results achieved so far were presented to the network, and a workshop was organised with the aim of identifying individual sub-tasks that would in some way advance the already identified tasks. The sub-tasks were also put on a timeline.

### 3.6. Building development paths

The question of how to allocate tasks to different organisations or groups initially seemed difficult to solve. However, the realisation of the overall structure of goals, sub-goals, tasks, and sub-tasks helped to understand the solution possibility. Actor-specific development paths that look towards high-level goals and implement them in their own part were the solution to our problem. The project discovered an OKR method, the method was tested with the network's results and presented at the network's general meeting. The roadmap has received positive feedback from the strategic steering group and the national network. We could say that after discovering the OKR method, everything fell into place.

Each actor in the ecosystem must take responsibility for the tasks that benefit them. The system does not function effectively if one organisation ends up bearing the costs while another reaps the benefits. Therefore, it is crucial to ensure that each organisation understands the high-level goals and tasks and aligns their activities and objectives accordingly, where beneficial. We may find that we are already implementing this development item, or we can begin to integrate it as part of other ongoing development efforts. It is essential to comprehend the overall context in which we operate and the connection and impact of our development on the whole system. Additionally, it is particularly important to continuously update information about development and to coordinate the entire process consistently.

Long-term goals and actions to achieve these goals have been defined. We cannot reach them all at once, so we are now focusing on a shorter period, the first three years. Actions are broken down into concrete tasks. In a large and complex ecosystem, it is easiest to start with our own activities. Step by step towards the goals. We need to think, what contributions can we bring to the common effort?

### 3.7. Creating management model

Thoughts and understanding accumulated during the work were compiled into the national maintenance model, providing insights into what maintaining the implementation of cross-sectoral GSFI could mean in practice. At the same time, a few key processes to be adopted in the initial phase were identified and preliminarily described. The architecture work, in turn, highlighted roles where critical national actors for implementation were still missing. The maintenance model is still a draft, and in the next phase, the document needs to be addressed at both strategic and expert levels. It needs to find a responsible party, and its content should start being implemented. The participating organisations must commit not only by providing human resources but also by taking responsibility for any potentially needed outsourced human resources.

A common understanding of the governance of GSFI must be approved at a sufficiently high level of operational management to have an impact beyond merely guiding expert-level activities. It is important to get the leadership of key organisations behind the work done and to obtain a mandate from the bodies directing the organisations to act as planned. Otherwise, there is a significant risk that the model will not be embraced and will remain merely a well-intentioned proposal.

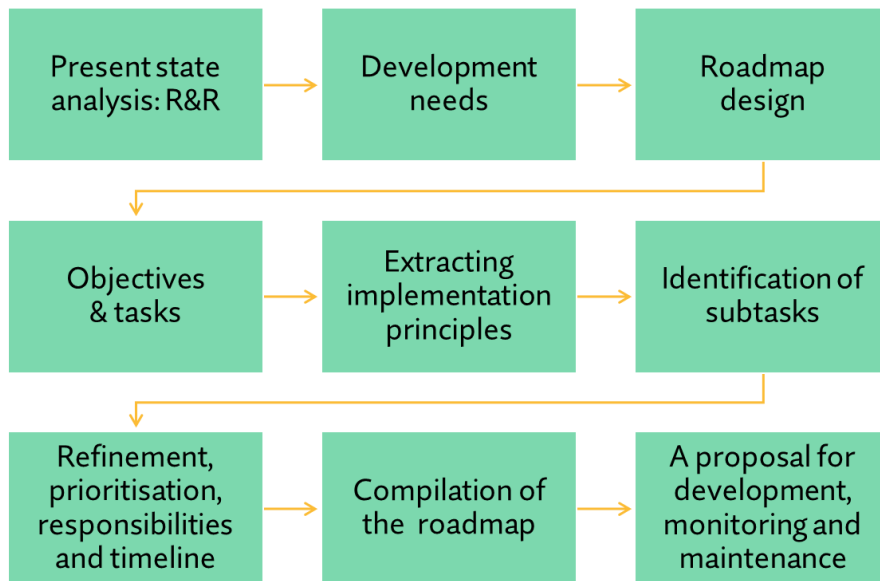


Figure 3. Developing the GSFI roadmap.

### 3.8. Summary: From current state to future vision

- Understanding of the current situation. → Describe the current state.
- Vision of what the overall situation will look like in the future. → Describe the target state.
- Understanding of what needs to be done to move from the current state to the target state. → Identify actions/tasks.
- Method to progress towards the target state. → Select tasks to be implemented in the coming year from the action pool.
- Outline what the overall situation will look like in a year and ideally, the prioritisation of development paths will also be influenced by the action pools of other target states and the available resources. → Situation overview maintained by coordination.

#### 4. Fundamental element II: Network collaboration

The national Network on Integration of Statistics and Geospatial Information in Finland encompasses nearly 100 individuals representing about 30 organisations from public government agencies, universities and research organisations, ministries, municipalities, and private sector. The network has the potential to constitute the backbone for the implementation of the GSGF Finland roadmap if the organisations represented in the network commit to ecosystemic thinking and common goals.

The network, established in 2021, set its objectives and priority areas using a systematic enterprise architecture approach. As a result, the goal setting of the network aligned very well with the GSGF principles and a good number of requirements and recommendations stemming from GSGF Europe. This result provided a straightforward basis and starting point for the GSFI project to collaborate with the network and draft the national roadmap of GSGF implementation with the network.

The principal method of work with the network consisted of interactive workshops with all interested network members. This method proved out to be effective for collecting ideas and feedback on the development of the enhanced network collaboration model and the roadmap drafted in the project. Furthermore, the regular network-wide general meetings provided a channel for regular status updates which helped to further commit the members to the GSFI goals.

Furthermore, the GSFI work helped to spark new enthusiasm in the network activities beyond the project scope. New topics such as GeoAI and historical geospatial data emerged as new working groups. This happened because the GSFI project was focused on fundamental geo-statistical and networking development issues giving the network members more space for innovative actions. In addition, topics such as GeoAI generated interest beyond the geo-statistical community extending the sphere of impact of our work to other stakeholders interested in utilising geospatial information.

The network is a very diverse community with nearly 100 members having a wide range of professional backgrounds. This versatility could have been addressed and utilised in a more efficient way even earlier during the project. For instance, dedicated questionnaires and cross-disciplinary “task forces” of network members with a clearly specified, dedicated topic and limited time frame of e.g. a few months could have been even more effective methods of working in addition to interactive workshops with the entire network.

Commitment of the network members and the organisations they represent was found to be a challenge. The network is based on voluntary participation and usually network members have no dedicated resources for participation. Furthermore, the members are mostly expert-level persons that do not have a mandate to make decisions on resource allocations or strategic positions in their organisations. In most cases the members have their own professional interest in participation in the network activities. This fact implies that decision-makers need to be reached out and committed in separate efforts to consolidate the impact of ecosystemic collaboration.

#### **Ecosystem as a foundational model of collaborative working**

All stakeholders within the national and international statistical-geospatial communities are effectively part of an information ecosystem, which is a dynamic and complex network where various actors, technologies, and processes produce, share, and utilise information. The ecosystemic way of working emphasizes the importance of proficient collaboration between different actors. The primary goal is to

achieve comprehensive and efficient use of information and value creation among the actors, rather than sub-optimisation.

Ecosystemic development holds significant potential for savings in public administration. However, the challenge lies in the complexity of the information ecosystem, which can make management of the network and its interaction difficult. To tackle the complexity multidisciplinary cooperation across traditional government domain silos and systemic thinking is required to solve complex problems and challenges. Development as an ecosystem emphasizes co-creation, networking, the ability to continuously adapt to changing conditions and needs, long-term thinking, and broadly considering the impacts of actions across different domains.

Clear operating models and governance mechanisms are essential for an effective ecosystem. Examples of proposed solutions and findings produced in the GSFI project include the following:

A clear, preferably tested, common vision and high-level roadmap to which stakeholders align their development paths using the OKR model. This model requires solid coordination and maintenance of a common situational picture.

Combining the information quality framework and value stream thinking suggests that a minor internal change can have a significant impact elsewhere. This stresses the importance of a good understanding of the structure and interaction of the ecosystem.

The ecosystem model enables innovative and sustainable development that creates value for all stakeholders. Ecosystemic collaboration is dynamic and continuously evolving, actors learn from each other and iteratively adapt their activities and processes based on feedback.

The foundational element is a society of trust, where actors engage in goal-oriented cooperation.

Finally, the effect of ecosystemic thinking emerges in the project outcomes e.g. as follows:

Ecosystem Coordination as a Service entails perspectives of the governance model and identification of centralized resource needs.

Systematic network cooperation requires a common playbook and dedicated resources for network management.

Structure and design of the GSFI roadmap must include stable, more permanent elements which are aligned with more flexible development paths. In general, the roadmap should be implemented flexibly piece by piece in an “on demand” manner, so that the cost of guidance, coordination, and iterative experimentation is relatively small compared to separate massive projects.

## 5. GSFI in action: The proposal for a new small area division model

We developed a proposal for a new Finnish small area division model. An approach prioritising the user perspective was chosen as the guiding principle for implementation. We found that involving stakeholders and data users was an essential part of this process, which proved to be successful. In the first task, we collected user requirements and evaluated various options for the small area division model through a survey. The survey helped gather stakeholders' perspectives and input, receiving 53 responses from 40 organisations. The survey was a success, yielding valuable insights from diverse viewpoints with highly positive feedback from participants. This positive outcome can be attributed, in part, to the active dissemination of work-in-progress presentations during various national network seminars and workshops. In general, stakeholder perspective is a very important aspect when developing new area units for statistical purposes.

The development of small area divisions was generally regarded as necessary and useful. As a result of the first project phase, the objectives and criteria for the development process were clarified. However, the survey did reveal some challenges and uncertainties, including how municipalities react to proposed area divisions, which they already have their own sub-divisions for operational practices.

The second phase of the project involved carrying out data preparations, testing methods, and coding a model for defining the spatial dataset that could be utilized for small-area divisions. The ambition level also increased as we chose, based on the user survey, to approach small area divisions as a system for creating various small areas. The initial objective of producing one small area division was modified to a more holistic approach, which would provide a more flexible solution for different user needs. However, more ambitious scope also meant more laborious process. This also meant that we relied more on a methodological base of census-based geographies used and developed e.g. in Australia, UK and New Zealand.

The actual data processing was divided into two phases: first, the definition and production of basic areas; secondly, using the basic areas to form small areas. As Finland has a large land area, it soon became apparent how many individual problematic cases were found when testing the data. Most of these problems were source-data specific.

While Finland has very good national datasets, they are not always uniform and may contain features that hinder their direct use for small-area definitions. As a result, we aimed for a solution that would rely on road and street network data, but would utilize also other data to supplement shortcomings of using only one dataset. A significant amount of time was spent investigating the data's possibilities and limitations. The method itself would have been much easier to develop if it had only been applied to one municipality. However, considering the whole country made the method development more complex and required several iterations. In general, developing a new system for small area divisions is laborious. However, by devoting more time for considering different aspects and solutions, we gained experience of potential problems that may arise when maintaining and updating the small areas using the proposed model. The procedures for updating the basic areas and small areas will be examined in the follow-up project (2024-FI-GEOS-GSFIBU).

Based on the gained experience in Finland, it can be recommended that the process be divided into different tasks, starting from stakeholder involvement. This leads to the specification of goals, followed by the actual development of criteria and the GIS-based delineation procedure. Next, considerations should focus on the implementation of the new model into processes for statistics production systems and maintaining procedures.

## Practical notions from the process:

### Meetings with stakeholders are important

The survey for stakeholders and potential users was important, but additional value was gained when the results of the survey were presented at the network meeting with an opportunity for comments and discussion. This revealed different aspects to everybody.

### It is easier to justify choices and compromises when user approach is surveyed and discussed

In the process of defining the objectives and approach for the small area division model, we were able to align parts of the user needs, but there were cases where choices had to be made. For example, there is a need for making compromises between compatibility with existing small area divisions in municipalities versus comparability at national level. Also, sufficient population base in small areas for data protection needs has to be taken into account.

### There is a need for diverse data products, as one solution cannot meet the requirements of all users

In Finland, statistical grids have been used as a basic unit for spatial analysis in regional and urban planning, as well as for tools that take detailed level spatial structure into account. It became clear that grids are needed despite of small area divisions, because they are more flexible and can reveal spatial development at the level that is needed for example in planning. Therefore, the system of area divisions should enable various ways to use and analyze small-grained statistical data.

## 6. From interpretation to implementation

GSGF and GSGF Europe provided a clear structure that facilitated the understanding of objectives and the purpose of the work. However, the influence of national contexts on interpretation and implementation was a significant challenge. It was essential to clearly distinguish between principles and avoid overlaps. Ensuring that components and aspects appeared only once and maintaining the hierarchy was crucial.

Using the GSGF Europe Requirements & Recommendations document helped us comprehensively adopt and interpret the GSGF model, especially after translating relevant parts into our own language and adapting it to the Finnish operational environment. Notably, the GSGF Self-Assessment tool was not yet available when the GSFI project started.

A Finnish addition to the GSGF implementation was the adaptation of the OKR method. This method helped clarify objectives and actions and was particularly useful in bridging the gap between high-level national GSGF roadmaps and concrete actions. It ensured that the practical measures were beneficial and manageable for the responsible parties to implement.

Interestingly, the greatest innovations in connection with the GSFI were made when the generic idea was tested with a very concrete case in statistical production. The challenge was to find the appropriate level of interpretation for the results. Highly detailed results are useful only in similar situations. However, when the results were generalised, broader applications could be identified. Additionally, when communicating with management, the results needed to be further generalised to be useful. This generalisation process helped identify key practices that can be applied across different domains.

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Next, it is important to ensure that these findings are integrated into the strategies and action plans of organisations. This requires close collaboration with various stakeholders and continuous monitoring and evaluation to ensure that the development work progresses as planned and produces the desired outcomes.

The existence of a strategic steering group was crucial as it helped guide the project and make necessary decisions to build a common understanding. Additionally, having a strategic vision of the work's significance and its establishment during the construction phase was important.

The national steering group noted that the roadmap proposal contains a lot of substance, and the plan looks good. Implementation is unlikely to be straightforward, but the foundation is already in place. Activities in society are fragmented, and this work could set an example for other sectors. A systemic approach to complex issues is important, and understanding broad entities and connections is crucial. It is also important to remember that implementation requires decision-making, and the decision-making processes in ecosystem-based operations differ from those in organisation-centric operations. In ecosystem-based operations, it is essential to ensure that all parties who commit their resources to joint development also benefit from the collective efforts.

In Finland, the next steps are to monitor and evaluate progress, update and supplement the roadmap, and ensure that the development of the common roadmap truly becomes part of the development efforts of various organisations, or that joint development projects are prepared for this purpose. It is important to continuously manage the overall picture, ensure the implementation of the governance model, and secure resources. As the work has progressed, the need for a dedicated resource for coordination has become evident.

Nowadays, statistics are less often based on surveys, so collecting data from different sources requires a broader national perspective. The field of statistics may be a pioneer in managing data collection and processing. For example, the Generic Statistical Business Process Model (GSBPM) is well-suited as a process model for handling data in other fields. The Global Statistical Geospatial Framework (GSGF) model also supports a broad national perspective on operating within the data ecosystem, while providing support for organisations to develop their own operations to utilise geospatial data.

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