The use of GIS-based cognitive mapping to investigate social problems: some Australian applications

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A number of key researchers in the fields of Geographic Information Systems (GIS) and behavioural geography have outlined the enormous potential to investigate social issues from a spatial perspective. In general, the rapid development of geospatial products such as Google Earth and Microsoft’s Virtual Earth have helped to put mapping and spatial thinking on the public agenda. Similarly, many government departments now seek to become ‘spatially enabled’ and to explicitly incorporate geographic thinking into the development of policy. These trends have created many opportunities for innovative applications. This presentation outlines the meshing of classical techniques from behavioural geography with GIS-based analyses to investigate fear of crime and gambling accessibility. We have found this approach to be particularly useful in looking at “intractable” aspects of fear of crime and spatial behaviour in remote areas of Australia where standard survey techniques are of limited use. The techniques and findings from several research projects are discussed in terms of their contribution to strategic decision making and the potential to integrate spatial outputs with existing management and regulatory initiatives.