BOOK REVIEW

Exploring the Urban Community

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Exploring the Urban Community
By Richard P. Greene and James B. Pick
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Exploring the Urban Community is geared toward students who search for real-world insights about GIS while learning in the classroom. The book offers GIS instructors assistance in teaching the students to develop abilities to understand GIS concepts from a broader international standpoint. The mixture of traditional and contemporary topics is achieved through the discussion of post-modern era characteristics and effects on GIS studies.

Introductory GIS concepts and terms are detailed in the beginning of the book, followed by a complete coverage of urban spatial structures. The early chapters of the book educate the students on the more traditional GIS concepts that transcend all general GIS-related studies. During the latter chapters, the contemporary teachings are incorporated through topics like ethnicity, economic factors, poverty, and gender.

The text consists of 12 chapters carefully sequenced to guide and develop the students’ initial understandings of GIS. Pick uses the first few chapters like a floor plan — outlining the main GIS concepts and defining the changes that cities undergo in relationship to these concepts. Later chapters gradually fill this floor plan through more specialized discussions, focusing on the roles and effects that particular demographics, industries, and historical events have on urban areas.

Exercises placed throughout the book involve the use of ArcGIS Version 9.x software to gain a first-hand understanding of the power of GIS technology today. Step-by-step instructions are stated for the students to follow. Exercise sections conclude with short essay questions that enable students to apply the new concepts learned to open-ended, real-world circumstances.

The book concentrates on quantifying generalization effects and on analyzing how these effects influence the use of GIS. The text is comprised mainly of presenting and detailing well-defined, geographical objects such as physical landscapes, towns, and transport systems. This first edition contains contributions in research that discuss and explain the important issues and practices of geographical information systems.

Chapters on GIS data sources, data quality, and managing and maintaining a GIS database also have been added to educate those new to GIS about key aspects of implementing any GIS project. Chapters such as these can be used by both novices and experienced users to analyze and maintain integrity of census data and related information.
This book explains basic statistical techniques and demonstrates their application in quantitative geography, linking statistical analysis and the traditional topics of an undergraduate geography course. This approach is the main building block, or tool, for a student to build a baseline understanding of how GIS works.

The book brings spatial statistical analysis into GIS both from a theoretical standpoint and through practical exercises that the authors have implemented on the popular ArcGIS software. Although the book’s exercises and other quantitative discussions are quite comprehensive, it does not overwhelm with too many details, equations, or computer codes.

While the text strives to teach students real-world perspectives on GIS, students may perceive the given exercises and tasks assigned at the ends of the chapters as rather mundane. Some students may feel limited and not able to explore on their own when they follow the step-by-step instructions for basic ArcGIS software use.

Oftentimes, when the text uses particular cities as examples to illustrate a GIS concept, the text gives much background information on the city’s history but not as much information about the underlying GIS idea. This style, given the wide range of topics covered, makes it hard to find in-depth explanations of core GIS subjects.

Current events consistently are utilized to further illustrate GIS notions for the student, transforming this text as more updated and contemporary than other older GIS texts. These help students to relate the GIS concepts to today’s urban phenomenon, training them how to apply useful GIS skills throughout the student’s future career and learning path.

Overall, this book is a good addition to the library of GIS beginners, lecturers at the undergraduate level, and professionals involved in urban development who are interested in learning basic GIS tools for spatial analysis. Extensively illustrated, it proceeds in a very simple way with minimal text and profuse use of graphics and tables.

Although managers and practitioners likely will not find everything they need in here, the chapters show the enormous potential of GIS in different areas. Not only is the book easy to follow and well written, it successfully strives to motivate both students and professionals with proper learning methods and tools. This book serves as a basic information source for anyone interested in GIS.

David Gadish is a faculty member at California State University Los Angeles. He teaches technology management in the CIS, business, and MBA programs. Professor Gadish’s research spans geographic information systems, location-based services, and online marketing and public relations. Dr. Gadish has spent over 15 years in government and industry, and consults to organizations in a variety of business sectors in these areas.