Chapter 1

Significant Advances in Applied Geography from Combining Curiosity-Driven and Client-Driven Research Methodologies

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ABSTRACT

The central thesis of the 2005 Anderson Lecture is that significant achievements in applied geography occur when the principles and practices of curiosity-driven and client-driven research are combined in the statement of problem, the idealized and operational research design, and the procedures of evaluating results. A companion thesis extends the Anderson Lectures by Jack Dangermond, Brian Berry, and Tom Wilbanks by positing that the best of applied geography incorporates a commutative perspective when establishing the parameters of an inquiry. That is, using pairwise combinations for illustration, research study parameters such as epistemology-praxis, conceptual-empirical, spatial-aspatial, theory-hypothesis, method-technique, cause-effect, analysis-synthesis, and structure-function are necessary elements in applied research that validates geography as a science-based, societally-relevant discipline, and geographers as professional practitioners. The examples of remote sensing, optimization techniques, decision support systems, geographic information systems, and the Walking Security Index project are used to illustrate how significant advances in applied geography result from combining curiosity-driven and client-driven research methodologies.

INTRODUCTORY REMARKS

During the course of my career in academe, government, and business I was associated with two seemingly quite different sets of people and situations. First, there were those that put a high degree of emphasis on my capability as a researcher to be inventive or creative by discovering contributions to subject matter knowledge, and by adding to the ways and means of the scientific method. Those activities fall within the purview of curiosity-driven research. Second, I was frequently assigned to or retained for tasks in which
the research question, problem, issue, or other basis of engagement was specified by a third party; that is, a person or agency seeking answers, solutions, elaborations, etc. These activities fall within the purview of client-driven research (Wellar, 1998).

Very early in my career I perceived that while there was a tidiness or neatness to treating the sets of people and situations as distinct, the dichotomy was not only without substantive foundation, it was counter-productive. Several decades later I am of a similar persuasion, only more so, and hence the title for my 2005 Anderson Lecture, Significant Advances in Applied Geography from Combining Curiosity-Driven and Client-Driven Research Methodologies.

If time and resources had permitted, I would have contacted previous Anderson Medal recipients to obtain the evidence needed to establish my argument. Regrettably those conditions could not be met in full, so I am obliged to follow a different route. That is, I will base this presentation on my own work, and include additional references where I have the documentation in hand. I am optimistic that even this limited file will be sufficient to encourage researchers to relate the Lecture materials to curriculum development, training programs, and other venues where linking curiosity-driven and client-driven research methodologies is of importance.

In the materials that follow I use a series of exhibits to outline the significant advantages that accrue to applied geography and applied geographers as a result of combining curiosity-driven and client-driven research methodologies. The first group, Exhibits A-D (shown in Tables 1-4), provide a foundation for the Lecture by establishing some of the basic implications of the curiosity-client research combination.

PARAMETERS OF INQUIRY

Examination of Annual Meeting programs of the AAG, CAG, IBG, and conferences of other academically-inclined geographers reveals that a wide variety of topics are under consideration each year. In short, virtually any question, problem, issue, relationship, process, etc., involving any entity or entities that enter(s) anyone’s path of thought is seemingly a candidate for presentation. For all intents and purposes “the sky is without limit” when it comes to curiosity-driven research by geographers, and reference to parameters describing the eligible subject matter is almost irreverent.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table 1. Exhibit A: Relating client-driven and curiosity-driven research domains: some basic implications (1)</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Research Feature + Implication</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Curiosity-Driven</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>Source of Research Problem or Question + Implication</td>
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<td>Task of identifying significant, original problem or question invites encounter with unknowns and uncertainties in the search for truth; mind-expanding.</td>
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*Comment:* Researchers who can think up, create or imagine non-trivial research problems or questions have a healthy respect for like-minded researchers; similarly, researchers who can run with or carry out non-trivial tasks assigned to them by clients have high regard for other researchers who can do likewise. However, researchers who can both think up and run with non-trivial research problems or questions are the ones who are most comfortable and most effective in both domains.