Advances in Geographic Information Science

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Geogames and Geoplay

Game-based Approaches to the Analysis of Geo-Information

Springer

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Foreword

Many people around the world were taken by surprise in July 2016 by the release of Pokémon Go, a virtual-reality-based mobile game. The mainstream press felt the need to expose every possible angle to the story: privacy, safety, physical exercise, add-on complementary products, and of course business models.

But this mobile game did not appear from a vacuum. It was a re-skinning (rebranding) of a far less popular game called Ingress, which served for a couple of years as the user-generated data collector that fed the current version. The people behind the game at the company Niantic had not only top pedigree (the CEO John Hanke was a co-founder of Keyhole, which became Google Earth) but also the backing of the technology giant Google/Alphabet from which it spun-off. And the partnership with Pokémon's creator, Nintendo, did not hurt either.

This is one of the relatively few success stories in the world of thousands of game launches every year. The editors and authors of this book have been studying similar games—geogames—and related game mechanics for years now. Successful geogames are born of successful planning, narrative design, technical implementation, marketing, as well as other factors. These can and are being studied in much greater depth at universities around the world.

When I contacted the editors to ask their opinion on the new Pokémon Go, they took some time to study it deeply and came back with some interesting, detailed criticism (and praise). Just as a best-selling novel might not be the best-written, this hugely popular game had its flaws. Some—excessive personal data collection for example—were picked up by others, and Niantic was forced to make immediate fixes. But the point is that geogames—mobile games in which geographic location of the players is a foundational characteristic—are easier than ever to create; however, creating a *successful* geogame remains as much an art as a science.

This book covers many of the key aspects of geogame and geoplay design, implementation, and testing. Of special interest to me are two concepts: geogame patterns and relocation from one context (city) to another. Identifying patterns allows us to more easily abstract and to imagine how new game ideas can fit into an overall structure and therefore borrow or inherit well-tested ideas from nearby fields or communities. Relocation of a geogame from city to city involves interesting

geographic information system (GIS) tasks such as identifying similar places by their geometrical or descriptive characteristics.

It has been a pleasure to have worked with the editors and with some of the authors over the last few years, in the ideation, testing, and creation of geogames. This book also is the fruit of several workshops on geogames and geoplay, held in locations such as California, Spain, Austria, and Finland, during which very useful feedback was received from a wide range of participants, from programmers to educational psychologists.

I hope that the reader of this book also provides feedback and actively participates in this nascent community of geogame and geoplay researchers and practitioners. This community will surely grow and prosper in the coming decades and will be able to point to this book as an early anchor or flag planted in the sand. Imagine, create, explore, learn, enjoy.

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