Location Analytics in Business: A Position Statement

During an inspiring keynote at AMCIS 2016, Christopher Capelli of ESRI remarked that businesses which ignore location analytics cannot unlock the true potential of their organizational assets. This resonated strongly with me. I have always been excited by the potential for improving decision making using contextually aware and critically analyzed location data. During my professional life as a consultant and project manager, the value of GIS data was critical.

For instance, as a project manager responsible for planning the deployment of low-cost computing devices (the Intel Classmate PC) across 250 schools spread out across Nigeria, an understanding of the role of location was indispensable. At the time, the painstaking process of understanding the different terrains and road networks was done manually and using heuristics. Although the project plans were satisfactory, I couldn’t help wishing for a more data-driven approach. As a doctoral student at the Isenberg School of Management, while I did not have an opportunity to integrate GIS technology into my research, I consistently did so in my teaching using tools like Simplymap and BatchGeo. I exposed students to the principles of static and dynamic location analytics and developed exercises with which they could get hands-on practice with these basic GIS tools.

As an Assistant Professor at the College of Business at Florida International University, Miami, I hope to expand on my ability in this area and provide my students a more in-depth exposure to this area. FIU students are unique in the sense that many of them are first-generation college attendees, have strong and active roots internationally, and are very passionate about learning new and practical skills. Further, the unique geographical location of Miami and the city’s susceptibility to major
weather events translates to an above average interest in geography, location and the analysis of context-based information. Further, the College of Business at FIU considers programming and analytics to be a critical pillar of all business education. Given the critical importance of location-awareness in business today, and the support of my department for cutting-edge program directions, there is immense potential and support for me to develop both a research and teaching profile in this area.

It is also important to point out that FIU students are also passionate about social challenges. As one of only twelve institutions that are classified both as a Research One institution and an Ashoka U Changemaker Campus, there is also unique support for studying challenges faced by society, such as climate change and global humanitarian challenges. The role of location-awareness and location analytics technologies in addressing these challenges cannot be overemphasized. To equip my students to be the kind of changemakers that they want to be, teaching them about this area is essential. Ultimately, this knowledge will also increase their marketability to future employers.

Finally, this opportunity will be valuable for my research program also. Equipping myself to apply GIS will help me close the loop on one of my active research streams. I currently have projects that apply network analysis principles. Location is an important contextual variable that can be integrated as an additional dimension. I have some ideas for doing this based on the principle of brokerage (Gould & Fernandez, 1989) where both the presence of a tie and membership of a reference class can be a basis for understanding important patterns of influence in networks. I look forward to learning more at this workshop and also contributing insights from my current work in this area.

References