

Georeferencing Workshop

-- Challenges of and solutions for assigning geographic location to digital information - a cross-disciplinary problem

Date: Friday, March 21, 2008

Time: 9:00am-6:00pm

Location: Tsai Auditorium, CGIS South Building, Concourse Level, 1730 Cambridge St., Cambridge, MA 02138

Introduction

Recognizing that the problems of assigning specific geographic locations to information in collections and data sets of all sorts is crucial to effective use of modern geo-spatial analysis tools, the Center for Geographic Analysis (CGA), the Museum of Comparative Zoology (MCZ), Harvard Herbarium and Sigma Xi Harvard Chapter will jointly host a workshop on georeferencing. Both MCZ and the Herbaria are involved in georeferencing their collections and applications have been developed to support that work. This is also of interest to the anthropological collections of the Peabody Museum. Recently efforts have gotten underway to georeference social science datasets. Systems for georeferencing place names in unstructured text are also appearing, which is potentially of great value to humanists.

It is apparent that the technology of georeferencing is not in principle discipline-specific, even if disciplines have been developing their own distinct (but perhaps technically rather similar) methods and applications. This workshop intends to bring together those people at Harvard who are actively involved in research requiring georeferencing, as well as a number of experts outside of Harvard who are offering proprietary and open source georeferencing solutions, to discuss the strengths and weaknesses of their various applications and their cross-over potential.

One of the key issues that cuts across many fields is assigning geographic locations to data and finding more automated (and cost-effective) ways of doing so, thus georeferencing. This is critical because we have over a century of invaluable data with spatial attributes that need to be made accessible for the kinds of sophisticated geospatial analysis that are currently possible. Researchers in many fields share both practical and theoretical questions:

- How to turn verbal descriptions of a vague location to latitude and longitude?
- How to match words that seem like a place name to an actual place?
- How do issues of scale, precision, and time affect georeferencing?
- What questions of information privacy are involved?

The workshop will explore these issues by asking academic leaders to give an overview, including a keynote address by a distinguished researcher and author, asking Harvard researchers to share their experience, and asking technology/ industry leaders to present their solutions.

Preliminary Program

From	To	Length	Topic	Speaker (s)
9:00 AM	9:15 AM	0:15	Welcome	James Hanken , Director, Museum of Comparative Zoology Peter Bol , Director, Center for Geographic Analysis
9:15 AM	10:15 AM	1:00	Keynote Address: an overview of georeferencing - its values, approaches, issues, and trends	Linda Hill , Geography Department, University of California, Santa Barbara (Emeritus)
10:15 AM	10:30 AM	0:15	Coffee Break	
10:30 AM	12:00 PM	1:30	Panel: challenges and potentials of georeferencing (10 minutes each)	Harvard and guest researchers in: Biology Archaeology History Medicine Public Health Design Social Science and Law
12:00 PM	1:00 PM	1:00	Lunch Break	
1:00 PM	2:30 PM	1:30	Panel: practices and solutions for georeferencing (I) (15 minutes each)	Representatives of: BioGeomancer Google MetaCarta Open Geospatial Consortium Perseus Digital Library
2:30 PM	2:45 PM	0:15	Coffee Break	
2:45 PM	4:15 PM	1:30	Panel: practices and solutions for georeferencing (II) (open discussion)	All panelists from the previous panels
4:15 PM	4:45 PM	0:30	Closure	Linda Hill
4:45 PM	6:00 PM	1:15	Poster/Reception	

Who shall attend

This free workshop is intended for Harvard faculty, student, staff and affiliates in all disciplines who are interested in assigning geographic location to digital information. No previous knowledge or experience in any geographic information system is required.