

Chapter 66

Review and Implications of the AutoCarto Six Retrospective Project

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ABSTRACT

A previous IJAGR paper, using the Retrospective Approach to Commemorate AutoCarto Six (Wellar, 2014), presented the reasons for using a retrospective approach to re-visit papers that were published 30 years ago (1983) in the proceedings of the Sixth International Symposium on Automated Cartography. This paper addresses four important topics that arise from producing AutoCarto Six Retrospective. First, in response to requests for more information about the “retro experience”, the research design of the retrospective project is reviewed in terms of lessons learned. Second, the contribution that the retrospective approach makes to “the literature” on the evolution of automated cartography, geographic information systems, computational geography, and related fields is explored. Third, several implications of the retrospective approach for the literature search and review component of theses, dissertations, academic productions, and research proposals, as well as plan, program, and policy evaluation processes in both the private and public sectors are outlined. And fourth, comments are made about applying the AutoCarto Six Retrospective experience to other commemorative events.

PAPERS IN AUTOCARTO SIX RETROSPECTIVE

Shortly after its production, *AutoCarto Six Retrospective* was posted online (http://wellar.ca/wellarconsulting/AutoCarto_Six_Retrospective.pdf). As a result, and in recognition of the constraints of space, emphasis in this report is on lessons learned about the retrospective approach and experience, rather than on the contents of individual papers. I therefore use the Contents page from the book, and the key-words from the papers, to provide a general context for the review and implications discussion. Then, at a future date, as summarized in endnote 1, individual papers and the overall book production will be examined in detail.

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Table 1 presents the book's Contents page, including titles of papers and names of authors, and corresponds in structure to that of the original proceedings.

And, as a second means of establishing context, the keywords cited in *Retrospective* papers are presented in Table 2. A critical feature of the keywords in terms of connecting 1983 to the present is that although many of the terms and phrases in Table 2 currently enjoy popular usage in automated cartography, geographic information systems, remote sensing, and related fields, the vast majority of the keywords refer to the content of the original papers, dated 1983.

This feature of the keywords and, hence, the papers, may be particularly instructive for readers who are under the impression that the core language words and phrases in Table 2 are of recent vintage, that is, products of the past decade or so. However, the fact of the matter is seriously otherwise, a point to which I return in section 4.

Given the variety of important and complex topics illustrated by the titles of papers in Table 1 and the keywords in Table 2, it is appropriate to consider the following brief review of lessons learned as preliminary, and indicative¹.

Further, the retrospective project was perceived by a number of participants to be breaking new methodological ground. As a result, the papers themselves could be considered a "first kick at the can", which is a second reason to consider this review of lessons learned as a preliminary and indicative statement.

Moreover, since the intent of the review paper includes inviting further retrospective research, a selection of design questions, issues, concerns, and so on are presented. I believe that they warrant studious consideration by institutions and organizations planning commemorative events, as well as by researchers and evaluators of client-driven, curiosity-driven, confirmatory, exploratory, or any other kind of non-trivial research production.

LESSONS LEARNED ABOUT THE RETROSPECTIVE DESIGN

The design of the project centered around six terms of reference that were suggested to authors as guidelines for the papers:

- Thoughts shaping the design of the 1983 papers.
- Derivative attributions.
- Original contributions.
- Impacts.
- What was new in the papers?, and
- What was different in the papers?

Before discussing lessons learned from using the terms of reference, it is appropriate to briefly return to three publications in 1971 and 1972 that figured prominently in designing the AutoCarto Six program in 1983, and selecting the terms of reference for the *Retrospective* project in 2013.

During the period 1969-1972 (while at the University of Kansas), I was involved in the Wichita Falls, Texas component of the Urban Information Systems Inter-Agency Consortium (USAC) project, directed by the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development. During my participation in the USAC project, my publications included two of the first bibliographies on the topic of geographic aspects of information systems (Wellar and Graff, 1971, 1972).

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