

What would a complete connection to place include?

—by Matt Ball

The convergence of geospatial location into all of the information that the Internet collects could yield a whole new understanding and awareness of place. The ultimate promise is the unlocking of rich data and details about our environment, our designed spaces, our interactions, and our collective histories. With this inevitable trajectory of much richer data about place, what can we assume that we'll see?

We need to think beyond measurement and display software and devices, and delve into the information itself and the insight that this collected information will enable. Despite the limitations of our data and visualization capabilities, we might be able to look both backward and forward through time and access assisted insights that will harness the knowledge of experts to inform our queries.

RHYTHMS OF THE EARTH

At the most fundamental level, we would benefit from greater insights into the daily, seasonal, and millennial rhythms of our planet. We could relate these changes to our built environment to better attune our buildings and infrastructure to nature, so that the built and natural environment may act in concert rather than impacting each other adversely. We would also learn more about how the world's flora and fauna behave and interact in order to preserve and enhance biodiversity and healthy ecosystems.

We'll be able to query a richer weather interface to learn how the day's weather will unfold, and what the implications will be on our mobility and outdoor enjoyment. We might choose to get outside earlier or later in the day and plan our work and trips without having to endure costly weather-related delays and tie-ups.

This collection and display of the deep knowledge of the workings of our planet on the Internet would also relate relevant information from our solar system. Details on solar storms would be available to understand their impacts on communications. The cycle of the moon and tides would provide greater insight into our relationship with our natural satellite. Expeditions and the knowledge that we've collected about our celestial neighbours and deep space will become much more readily accessible and relatable to our activities.

REFLECTIVE ASSOCIATIONS

The collected human history on the planet would extend knowledge of the condition of prior settlement in each area. The insight into the lay of the land and its alteration over time will key us into the natural infrastructure that spurred human development to begin with, and will provide richer insight into our alteration and adaptation in order to inform further development decisions.

Our connection to the land could be explored from the perspective of our ancestry, to relate their movements and actions and occupations in order to get a better sense of our personal stake in the landscape. A richer understanding of

place from the perspective of our ancestry will help foster greater interest in stewardship, and will also form deeper societal bonds. Instead of people of local and regional affiliations, we'll have a broadened global perspective of our origins and movements, even down to our genome level.

Our knowledge of the Earth will include a sense of how human actions, industries, and development have shaped our landscape. We'll be able to relate better to neighbourhoods and urban structures that work well and decipher and fix faster the elements that make other neighbourhoods deficient and less livable. The greater collective understanding of our places will empower changes that have the least cost and cause minimum disruption, while affording the greatest rewards.

ENHANCED AWARENESS

The Internet's ability to enhance our search and knowledge gathering has largely been a static rather than an active experience. We often set about with deeper queries that lead us to delve into the purpose and cause of our current realities. These queries at present merely scratch the surface of what is possible.

In the future, we can expect that our large volumes of collected information will include a cadre of expert analysts and arbiters of information who will assist us in our understanding either formally or informally, so that we may build our intelligence more rapidly and more clearly. The idea of intelligent agents goes back to the early days of the Internet, and the idea of semantic intelligence with machine learning factors into this vision. The fallibility of human cognition begs for a more active means of eliminating faulty intuition and so derive insights that can be more trusted. The intelligence of place is an important part in enhancing our knowledge about the conditions and realities of life on Earth.

An enhanced awareness of our mobility, economy, and health and wellness are all in some measure related to place and can each be improved upon through greater spatial awareness. Our desire to drive down the cost of transportation, for instance, will win the most where we can become the most efficient in transporting people to where they want and need to be, without delays. Our cities and countries will become more vibrant and more efficient if their development is shaped by location-informed, efficient economy. Our health will improve greatly when we start paying attention to the impacts of substances and conditions in our local environment that could be adversely affecting us.

A complete connection to place means much more than the navigation of the amenities and services of an area into all aspects of how we live and interact. Through greater details into the underpinnings of places, and more shared knowledge about them, we'll form greater bonds and will be empowered to change what doesn't work. ■