Neo-geography and Geography Education in the Japanese Universities

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Abstract

The author would like to discuss the state of the geographic education and the neo-geographical practices in Japan. Most of the geography education in universities are still old-fashioned and aimed for educating professionals, the new type of mapping practices like neo-geography are dissociated from it (Dodge and Perkins, 2008).

In recent years, such neo-geographical practices also became popular in Japanese society. People come to recognize the importance of geospatial data especially when they facing at the several heavy disaster situations in Japan. For example, Japanese registered users of OpenStreetMap are over 3,700 in September 2013 (http://wiki.openstreetmap.org/wiki/User:Techstrom/JapanData) and the users still increasing now. Open data/government policies also interested Japanese ordinary people in the neo-geographical practices, because they need the geographic viewpoints and analysis using such open data/government for solving the local issues. Such neo-geographical practices could be related to Japanese Neo-liberalism. Recent Japanese ‘New Public Commons’ could be associated with these practices. The openness, transparency and participatory natures of these practices attract attention by the Japanese local/national government.

On the other hand, geography education in most of Japanese universities remains conservative style. The GIS education is biased toward the methods of using desktop, proprietary software like ArcGIS desktop. Although Japanese GIScience BoK (Body of Knowledge) has small mention about neo-geography, public participatory GIS (PPGIS) and internet GIS in the chapter of GIS and society, there is no mention related to these words in the chapter of GIS education (http://curricula.csis.u-tokyo.ac.jp).

However, such situation is now changing. The student have new chance to using various different open source softwares, web based platforms, and data collection initiatives (Cowan and Hinton 2014). The several universities in Japan now hire the new curriculum for learning GIS by neo-geographical tools. The students also learn the possibility and the limitation of neo-geographical mapping. Some university students now doing crisis mapping by OpenStreetMap and making the disaster map by FOSS4G software.

There are some issues for excersize the new type of curriculum. The first problem is about keeping student's motivation at neo-geographical practices. Some times the data conflict caused by collaborative mapping would lose the motivation of student. At longer time scale, Sustainable neo-geographical practices will face difficulty because most of students did neo-geographical practices when only they take the class. The new type of geography education needs the collaborative process with local neo-geographers for materialize sustainable practices.

Academic Discipline and Sub-Disciplines : geography; GIS; education

Keywords : neo-geography; Geography Education; Japanese Universities; critical GIS

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