Martin Luther King, William Bunge, URI SA, and GIS for Equity and Social Justice

Greg Babinski, MA, GISP, Marketing & Business Development Manager, King County GIS Center, Seattle, WA
Mark Salling, Ph.D., GISP, Senior Fellow and Research Associate, Cleveland State University, Cleveland, OH
Veronica Velez, Associate Professor/Director, Western Washington University Bellingham, WA

ABSTRACT TEXT: This session will survey the use of geographic analysis and GIS for equity and social justice (ESJ). Beginning with the coincidence of Dr. Martin Luther King’s “I Have a Dream Speech and the first URISA Conference both on Wednesday, August 28, 1963 we will examine the pioneering work of Prof. William Bunge in the area of quantitative spatial analysis and applied geography for issues related to social change and justice in the United States and Canada. Bunge work related to theoretical geography anticipated the development of GIS. His work on the Detroit Geographical Expedition in 1968 and the Toronto Geographical Expedition in 1973 applied geography in the field for community based social issues.

In the early 1960 Bunge received his PhD in Geography from the University of Washington where by coincidence Edgar Horwood was first applying computer technology for urban planning at the same time. Horwood work, and the first conference on August 28, 1963 led to the formation of the Urban and Regional Information Systems Association. We will survey research and publications related to Equity of Social Justice as reported in URISA conference proceedings, workshops, and the URISA journal during the past 55 years. We will conclude the session by outlining how GIS is used for ESJ issues at King County (Washington) and other local agencies. King County was renamed in 2005 for Martin Luther King. King County is a leader in applying ESJ criteria in all of its priorities and programs. We will describe how King County GIS supports this work by creating a rich foundation of data and tools to put ESJ analysis into the hands of everyone within the county and communities that we serve. We will also present current work done both by other agencies and academic institutions.

Veronica Velez Presentation title: Ground-Truthing: GIS as a Community-Based and Anti-Racist Praxis

ABSTRACT: Critical race scholars in education have recently developed a methodological framework that employs GIS and spatial analysis from a critical race lens (Vélez & Solorzano, 2017). This approach, known as critical race spatial analysis (CRSA) extends GIS from its traditional use in geography and urban planning into new avenues and possibilities for examining educational interests concerned with the social, cultural, political, and historic role of space and place as it relates to schools and educational (in)opportunity. By re-imagining how socio-spatial relationships are explored, analyzed, and displayed, CRSA positions GIS as a critical research tool for addressing spatial inequities and furthering racial justice efforts within education and beyond. This presentation explores the potential of CRSA as critical community-based and anti-racist praxis, through a case study of Latina immigrant mothers who initiated a community-led GIS project to explore spatial indicators of educational (in) opportunity, drawing evidence from their own lives and the lives of their children. These mothers engaged GIS to tell counter-cartographic narratives about the racial divides, or “color lines,” defining uneven geographies of opportunity in their school district. Findings of this study suggest both methodological and pedagogical considerations for the use of GIS in education. Although exploratory spatial data analysis (ESDA) was initially used in the development of the maps, it was the mothers’ intimate knowledge of the community and collaborative analysis in the map-making process that was key. By (re)defining GIS mapping as a community-based praxis, the mothers “ground-truthed” the maps, making visible spaces and spatial relationships that otherwise would go unnoticed. They transformed the power of the maps to rest not in their “gee-whiz” displays of data, but in the weaving of a spatial narrative that linked their current efforts to historical struggles for educational equity.

Methodologically, their efforts reveal the potential of GIS and CRSA, specifically, to build spatial models of the world from the lived experiences of People of Color. Beyond the importance of GIS for critical race research, it also serves as an important pedagogical tool for teaching about race and racism. Through a CRSA framework, GIS maps function as visual literacy projects and teaching devices that highlight the importance of geographical and spatial features for maintaining racial divides in schools and society.
LEARNING OBJECTIVE 1: Learn the history and use of geography and GIS for ESJ issues

LEARNING OBJECTIVE 2: Learn about how GIS is being used today within local government agencies and academic institutions for ESJ analysis and reporting

CASE STUDIES: We will present the incremental development of GIS data resources, technology, and training within King County to support GIS-based ESJ work.

SKILLS: Attendees will learn some typical ESJ applications and how ESJ-based analysis can provide an additional filter for any agency decision making process.