

# **Publius and Technocratus On The Tragicomedy of Geographic Information**

**or**

## **How the GI Professionals Blew It**

“Good morrow to thee, Publius! All’s well with you, I trust?”

“And a good day to thee as well, Technocratus. I shan’t complain, but why the sorrowful countenance on such a fine day?”

“Ah, a small matter...but one of growing concern among the company of those who practice Geographic Information, I fear.”

“But Technocratus, what are friends for if not to comfort and advice? Pray thee, unburden thyself and let me see if I can help. Now, tell me....what is it that concerns thee so?”

“Ah, Publius...would that all my fellow technocrats had thy trust and lack of guile. Someday thou must tell me how thee does so.”

“I shall, good friend Technocratus..but for now...to the moment of the concern.”

“It is, Publius, the conviction of my fellow Geographic Information friends that what they do is “mainstream” and accepted and understood by all.”

“How so, Technocratus? I do not follow thee.”

“Oh, Publius, if you but saw half of the conference brochures that litter my mailbox, each claiming more grandly than the one before that the day of Geographic Information has arrived! I tell you, it’s enough to drive even the most even-tempered of fellows off-center!”

“Surely, Technocratus, you exaggerate. Why, I myself do not know overmuch of this Geographic Information, and yet count myself among those who follow innovations and many things technical.”

“Would thee were right, good friend Publius! I sometimes feel I am alone in my apostasy, yet still my friends’ voices rise as a Chorus when acclaiming the latest version of Magellan’s GPS receiver or the update “9.6 c” so that I can scarce hear myself think.”

“But Technocratus...are not such GPS receivers and updates good and valuable tools? I myself have a friend who uses his GPS receiver for finding his favorite fishing holes.”

“Agreed, Publius, they have a certain utility...perhaps your friend can take me fishing sometime?”

“Assuredly, good Technocratus, assuredly. But if the utility of the GPS receivers, software updates, and other Geographic Information apparatus are unquestionable, why dost thou despair of thy friends’ conviction that the public is accepting of them and all the good they can do?”

“Oh, Publius, if you but could hear the gnashing of teeth among my fellow technocrats as they talk endlessly of such things as scalability, projections, enterprise this and that...why it’s enough to drive one to distraction!

“Surely, surely, Technocratus...but are not such items at the foundation of the discipline and craft of Geographic Information? Are not these concepts important for the advancement of understanding of Geographic Information?”

“No, Publius, I fear I have misled thee. Such basics are essential. But they need not be imparted to such as your friend the fisherman who uses his Magellan GPS unit to fill his boat with fish. Surely, his fish taste as good without him knowing that the data on his receiver was at this scale and not that one, or that it was gathered with four, not three, satellites, no?”

“Agreed, Technocratus. But why then dost thou rail at thy colleagues? Can it hurt my fisherman friend to be conversant with datums, scales, and the like?”

“Hurt them? No, of course not. But let me ask thee, good Publius, when thou asks me for the time of day, do I tell thee how the

cogs and wheels and springs work together to let me know what to tell thee?"

"No, of course not, friend Technocratus...but surely the matter of the time of day is less involved than correctly locating my friend's fishing hole, is it not?"

"Alas, Publius, I must say "no." The principle remains the same. It is not needful to know a thing in detail to be able to use it appropriately."

"But, surely, my friend, there is a chance for mischief absent such complete knowledge, is there not?"

"Assuredly, Publius, assuredly. But the mischief resulting from such ignorance certainly cannot be laid at the feet of my colleagues?"

"No...of course not, my friend. But...what have thee and thy colleagues done to allay such ill outcomes? I cannot say that I have seen much evidence of public education and awareness that can be traced to thy colleagues."

"But, Publius...surely education is the job of others! We have overmuch to do in designing systems, collecting data, ensuring the quality of metadata...why, the list is endless! We have no time for educating the public!"

"Ah, Technocratus...thou listens overmuch to thy colleagues, and, I fear, to the detriment of the good work done by thy friends and thee. I have benefitted from thy patience and count myself fortunate to know something about GI, and thank thee for it. Surely you will agree that even my limited understanding has made me a better consumer of GI, and has kept me from making the more egregious mistakes, right?"

"Of course, Publius...of course!"

"And, by knowing something of scale, polygons, metadata and the like...even just a little...has precluded me from making many of the errors that you rightly say are increasing daily?"

"Yes, yes..but....."

"And that your time in educating me has been a good investment...that my being able to do the basics has allowed you to accomplish other important work?"

"Yes, indeed. But see here, Publius, we simply CAN NOT be trainers or teachers. We've got more important things to be about!"

"But good Technocratus...if more unknowing people continue to make more and more mistakes because of their ignorance of the basic concepts of GI, will you not have less and less time to do the important technical tasks that give you so much pleasure?"

"Yes, and yes again!"

"And you would agree that professionals make the best teachers, am I right?"

"Yes, but...."

"And that people are too busy to learn on their own?"

"Yes, of course!"

"Then, Technocratus, the conclusion seems clear. If people are to avoid misuse of GI, and if the GI professionals are both the best qualified to teach AND face no competition in so doing, it is up to the professionals to undertake the needful instruction. Otherwise, chaos will be our fate."

"Dost thou really think so, Publius? Is there no other alternative?"

"None that I can see, good Technocratus. And, while such a transformation from technocrats, if you'll allow me to so say, to teachers is not an easy one, necessity is the mother of invention. I doubt not that your colleagues will be able to do with others as thee have been kind and patient enough with me. The imparting of geographic literacy is a noble calling, good Technocratus. And, once accomplished, will doubtless allow the return to improving the technologies to which your colleagues so tenaciously cling."

"Would that it proves so, good Publius! But I am encouraged and will share you arguments with my colleagues this very

afternoon! Fare thee well, and come see me soon, good friend!”

“Go with grace, long-suffering Technocratus. And remember...’An informed consumer is our best customer.’ ”

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