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Book Review: *How Geography Changed the World and My Small Part in it* Martin C. Clarke Published by Sweet Design (UK) Limited, Henleaze, Bristol, 2020. 305 pages. ISBN: 978-0-9567541-1-0.

This is a fascinating book with an intriguing title. It documents the birth and evolution of a business (GMAP) from its roots in academe in the 1980s, through its growth and transition to independence in the private sector in the 1990s, and then its bifurcation, acquisition and re-emergence in the 2000s. But as well as documenting the endeavours and successes of GMAP together with the trials and tribulations that the enterprise encountered as it developed over time, the book is also semi-autobiographical, reporting the journey, both metaphorical and literal, taken by the author who travelled many thousands of miles criss-crossing the world between the late 1980s and the mid-2000s.

The story of GMAP needs to be told not only because it is unique and demonstrates the value of applied research in quantitative human geography, but also because the experience provides many valuable insights into the process involved, the lessons learnt and the pitfalls that arise along the route. I commend the author for his powers of recollection of past events (though less detailed than those of Keith Richards in *Life*) and, as someone from the same academic stable who witnessed the emergence and expansion of GMAP at first hand, I can vouch for the authenticity of the narrative. The author is also to be applauded for providing a series of humorous anecdotes which punctuate a text that might otherwise perhaps be less palatable. Those readers less inclined towards algebraic formulae and spatial modelling jargon will also be pleased to hear that the book contains not a single equation. This is a book about business and application, not about entropy maximisation theory and spatial interaction modelling, though guidance is usefully given to key sources of the latter in an annex at the end.

The GMAP story is a remarkable one and is told in chronological order from the embryonic discussions that the author had with the co-founder, Professor Sir Alan Wilson, during an unprofitable afternoon at Wetherby races in 1985 through to the day in January 2005 when he was informed by the CEO of the company that had taken over GMAP that his services were no longer required.

Despite its focus on understanding the structures and dynamic processes that constitute the human and physical worlds we live in, the academic discipline of Geography has rarely been the cradle for new businesses. Traditionally, potential entrepreneurs have undertaken their research in an academic environment and then moved onto establish their companies later in their careers. The creation of GMAP as an enterprise within a department of Geography, and thus partly owned by a university, was something entirely new and unprecedented both at Leeds and elsewhere in the UK (and beyond) in the mid-1980s. However, as the author explains, the contextual conditions were right at this time for a venture such as this: the explosion of data as the world entered the digital age; the inception of desktop computing; the emergence of geographical information systems (GIS) technologies providing mapping and spatial analysis facilities; and the absence of spatial analytical skills in large public and private corporations. In hindsight it is easy to see how these factors, matched with knowledge and expertise of simulating urban and regional systems and subsystems using spatial interaction modelling techniques that were a hallmark of Leeds Geography at the time, proved to be a winning formula. But one of the most surprising aspects was that clients came primarily from the private sector rather than the public sector. The author's initial pre-GMAP experience was in the health sector as a consultant for health care planning in Italy and although GMAP did undertake projects for the Department of Health and Regional Health Authorities in the UK, it was the private sector from which serious demand emerged. The majority of the book chapters are dedicated to tracing the origins, experiences and evaluation of projects undertaken

with private sector clients, amongst whom are some of the largest companies in the UK in sectors ranging from financial services to the water industry, from hospitality to high street retailing. However, perhaps of more importance, GMAP attracted clients from the automobile industry, most notably Toyota and Ford.

By the end of 1990, Ford of Europe had agreed to fund a project called RADAR (Retail Analysis of Dealer Areas of Responsibility) to support its market and network planning of dealerships across Europe and GMAP Ltd had been created as a spin-off company from the University. By 1992, as well as having a Board of Directors with a Chairman, GMAP Ltd was employing an Operations Manager, a Business Development Manager, a Commercial Manager, a Personnel and Resources Administrator, an Administrative Assistant, 5 Senior Project Managers, 3 Project Managers, 8 Senior Software Analysts, 17 Software Analysts, 3 Modelling Analysts and 6 Data Analysts. The company workforce, together with the services of academic consultants from the School of Geography, totalled over 50 in number at this time. By 1997, when the automobile section of GMAP was sold to the American company, Polk, the workforce has doubled in size. The reasons behind the sale, together with the process of its negotiation are described in some detail in later chapters of the book, together with the emergence of GMAP mark two, a company that was subsequently taken over by the Skipton Building Society in 2001. In 2019, almost 15 years after the author left the company, its senior managers succeeded in undertaking a management buy-out and the business now exists as GMAP Analytics with premises back on the University of Leeds campus and providing “world-leading location intelligence and customer targeting solutions” (<https://www.gmap.com/>).

One of the most useful features of this book is the record of lessons learnt and tips gained from the author’s GMAP experience. As outlined at the beginning of the book, the worlds of academic research and commercial enterprise are very different indeed; business culture means deadlines are short and profit maximisation is the priority, characteristics somewhat anathema to academics. My own experience in the field of planning support systems (PSS) confirms the difficulties associated with the adoption and operationalisation of systems designed and tested in the ‘laboratory’ to applications in the real world. The author’s recommendation “to nurture a good relationship with your contact in the organisation you work with” is particularly apposite – the need for a champion in the client organisation has always been a key component for successful uptake of PSS. I was less convinced by the authenticity of the author’s “don’t fudge the results” advice. I recall undertaking some consultancy work for GMAP for a high street client in the early days; having spent several years as a postgraduate modelling migration flows and attempting to interpret the meaning of calibrated model parameters, it was something of a revelation to discover that interpretation was relatively unimportant in a commercial context and that if the results of modelling store revenues were not close enough to those observed for a test period, then it was necessary to adjust the parameter with a ‘fudge factor’ to meet the required revenue targets.

In conclusion, the story of GMAP told in the 300 pages of this book from one of the co-founder’s own perspective is to be recommended to all those would-be entrepreneurs in different disciplines in higher education institutions across the world, to those administrators in universities wishing to cultivate entrepreneurship within their institutions, to boardroom executives seeking to work with fledgling enterprises based in universities, and to all human geographers wanting to understand how and why ‘geography matters’ in an applied context. It is unfortunate that this volume is unavailable to obtain from the publisher through the normal channels since only a limited number of copies were printed. For those wanting to get hold of this entertaining memoir, I suggest direct contact with the author at [martin.c.clarke@btinternet.com](mailto:martin.c.clarke@btinternet.com).