3D Mapping Infrastructure Changes

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Review

3D mapping is dependent on 3D basemaps, something that requires multiple data inputs to construct. These have been gradually building in complexity over time, with Esri relying on openly available distributions from other companies in the Silicon Valley realm. That availability is subject to many potential pitfalls, though, and it's worthwhile knowing that there are some other possibilities out there in the open source communities.

In March of 2020, Meta (then Facebook) launched a basemap distribution known as Daylight. It was built on OpenStreetMap data, with a number of edits claimed to deal with minor issues or "large-scale defacement" (Daylight, 2020). It was openly accessible and lasted just over 4 years until a May 2024 post, "Sunsetting Daylight," noted its end.

Esri made use of Daylight in its 3D Viewer, so a replacement was needed. Enter Overture, the new 3D basemap tool. This one, however, isn't solely from Meta, but brings in Meta's friends Amazon, Microsoft, and TomTom. Microsoft offered the Building Footprint dataset in 2020 (Freil, 2020), so that part of the partnership is unsurprising. TomTom, as a geospatial/location-focused company, also makes sense. And Amazon, of course, is the great lord of data centres upon which the netizens toil and plough. That Google and Apple are not involved (yet) is perhaps the main surprise, but there is plenty of time for Overture to Coda and Prologue (or perhaps Genesis) to rise in 2027 or 2028.

Until then, the Overture Foundation is running the show, and it remains openly available for use. The goal, according to the announcement from the Linux Foundation, is "reliable, easy-to-use, and interoperable open map data" (Linux Foundation, 2022). The announcement also discusses reliance on open data inputs such as OpenStreetMap, city planning, and various contributed datasets, and on "computer vision and AI/ML techniques to create a living digital record of the physical world".

It should be noted that Linux's involvement is at a staff level, and not at a Steering Committee/Leadership level (Overture Maps Foundation, n.d.). While Linux is predominantly known for promoting ideologies of openness, its lesser status in the Overture governance structure means Overture's openness is rather more subject to the larger players. Perhaps so long as Google's maps are open, Overture will be as well. Unless, of course, it proves profitable to change that.

In the meantime, there are other 3D distributions available. Not necessarily through Esri's products, but for those outside that warm glow, OpenStreetMap does have its own set of solutions, and a number of recommendations both free and proprietary. They can be perused at the OpenStreetMap Wiki:
https://wiki.openstreetmap.org/wiki/3D.

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