

## The Role of Virtual Geographic Environment (VGEs)

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**Abstract :** VGEs are a kind of typical web- and computer-based geographic environment, with aims of merging geographic knowledge, computer technology, virtual reality technology, network technology, and geographic information technology, to provide a digital mirror of physical geographic environments to allow users to 'feel it in person' by a means for augmenting the senses and to 'know it beyond reality' through geographic phenomena simulation and collaborative geographic experiments. Many achievements have appeared in this field, but further evolution should be explored. With the exploration of the conception of VGEs, and some examples, this article illustrated the role of VGEs and their contribution to currently GIScience. Based on the above analysis, questions are proposed for discussing about the future way of VGEs.

**Keywords :** virtual geographic environments (VGEs), GIScience, virtual reality, geographic information systems

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