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SAFE

Sustainable Accessible Future Environments

T 3.5

Set up a digital toolkit for Online Community

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SAFE

SUSTAINABLE, ACCESSIBLE FUTURE ENVIRONMENTS

The course is a collaboration between five European Universities

UNIVERSITY OF LJUBLJANA (UL)
LAUREA-AMMATTIKORKEAKOULU OY (LAUREA)
FACHHOCHSCHULE KIEL (Kiel UAS)
UNIVERSIDAD DE GRANADA (UGR) and
WYZSZA SZKOLA GOSPODARKI Z SIEDZIBA W BYDGOSZCZ UCZELNIA NIEPANSTWOWA (WSG)

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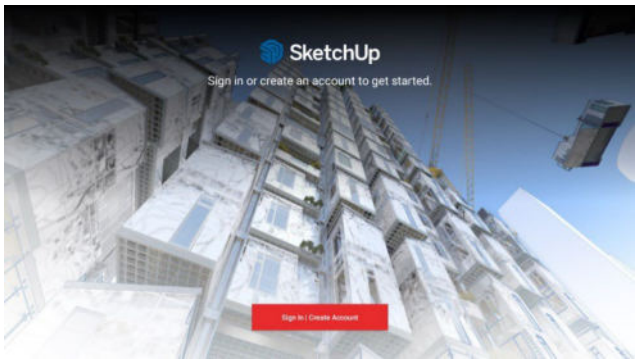
T3.5 Set up a digital toolkit for Online Community

Introduction

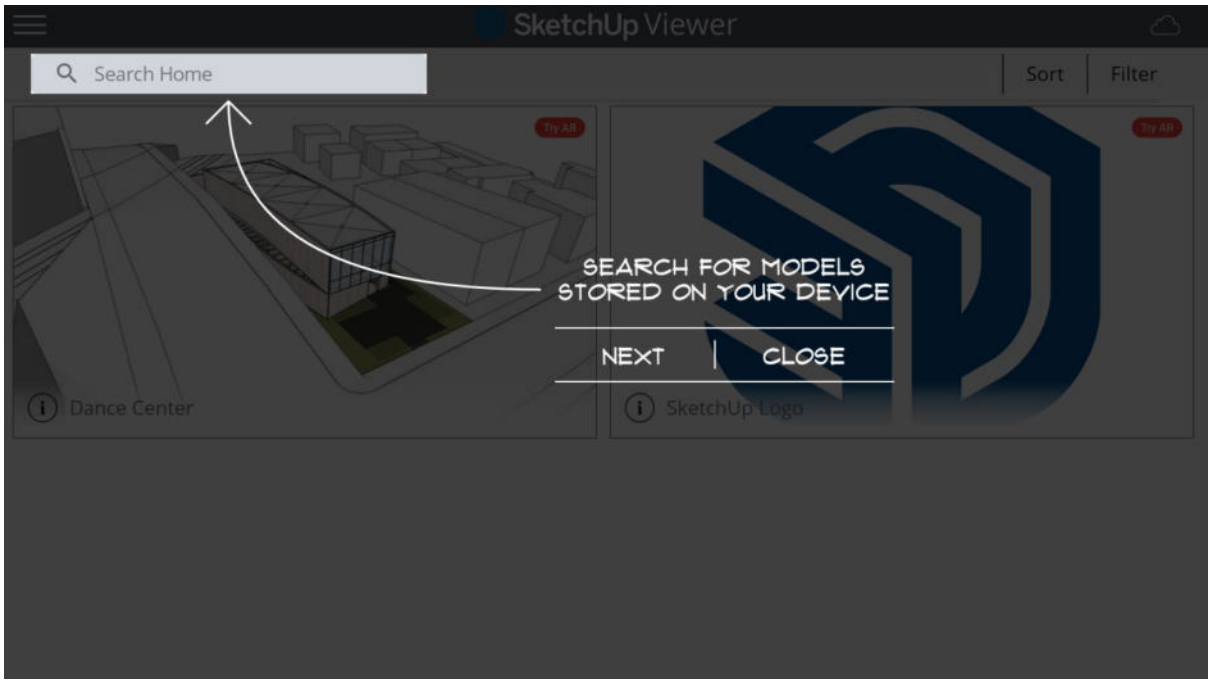
This short report examines test results of the 12 different Urban Design related applications featured in the following article: https://urbandesignlab.in/12-best-mobile-apps-for-urban-designers-and-planners/

The following test results are from the perspective of a Laurea student, with access to an android smartphone as well as computers that are available to students of Laurea.

SketchUp Viewer



SketchUp viewer is available for free on the Google Play Store. The app offers an extensive and detailed tutorial for new users of the app.



The tutorial functionality showcases all the relevant features of the app for the user, and I personally found this feature extremely helpful. From a student's perspective the lack of a hand-holding tutorial might be overwhelming, assuming that many of the students don't have much prior experience with other similar apps.

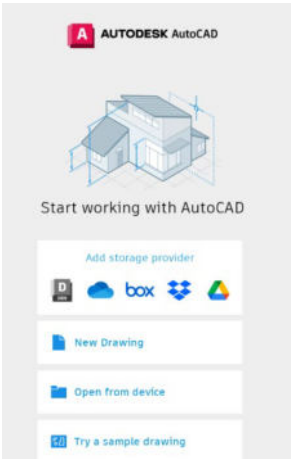
From a student's perspective the model viewer of Sketchup also deserves praise as it has very detailed descriptions of all of its different buttons and other functionality, as pictured above. I personally found this very helpful and user-friendly.

ArcGIS Collector

ArcGIS Collector seems to not be available in Google Play Store for android phones. Or perhaps it is region locked and not available in Finland? For an unknown reason, urbandesignlab.in website describes it as a smartphone application, but only provides link for the PC version of the application from Microsoft store for Windows apps. I was not able to download this app for my android smartphone.

AutoCAD 360

AutoCAD 360 can be found from Google Play Store under the name AutoCAD – DWG Viewer & Editor.



AutoCAD doesn't come with a tutorial for new users. However, the app does have a feature for testing the app and all of its functionalities with sample designs that come with the app.

The testing feature can be used for getting familiar with using the app, before trying it with real drawings.

AutoCAD comes with a 30-day free trial for all new users. After the trial period some functionality is restricted. Using the trial does not require any credit card or other payment info. If the app is intended to be used for more than 30 days, it might be a good idea to further investigate whether the post-trial free version has sufficient features for the purposes of this project.

iScape

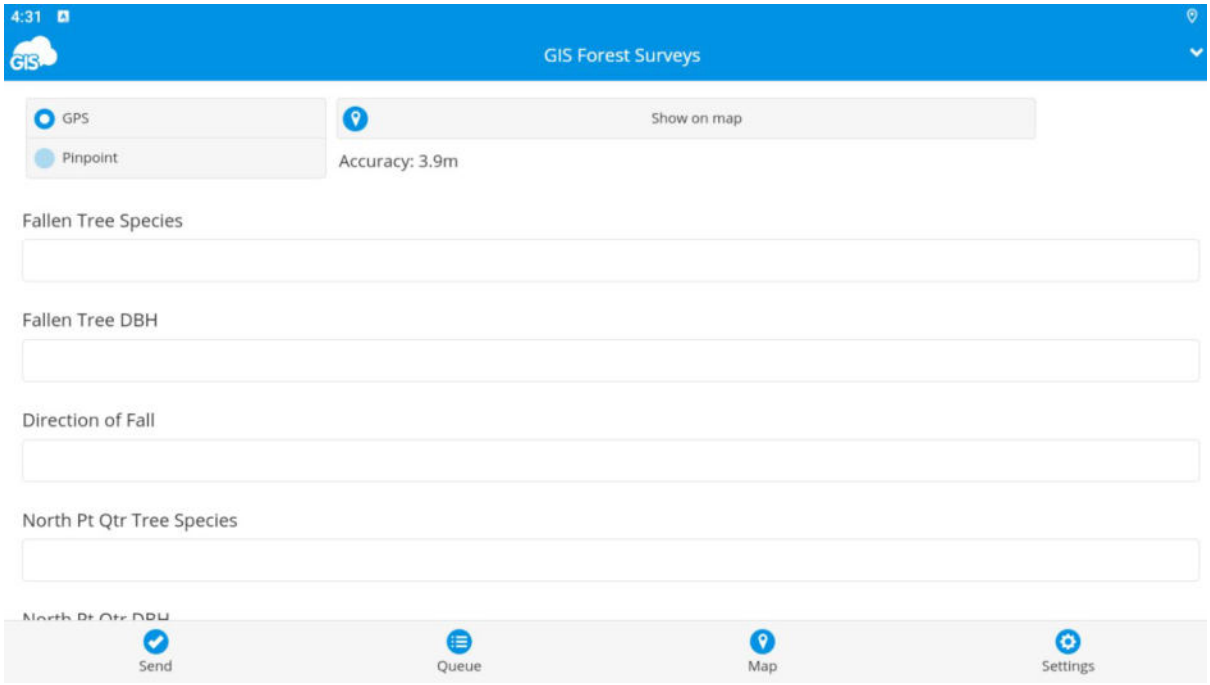
From a user's perspective, iScape sticks out as an anomality in one way – it doesn't require any registration at all. Skipping the lengthy registration process altogether saves some time for the students to focus on getting themselves acquainted with the app.

Unfortunately, iScape doesn't come with a guided tutorial for new users or very informative descriptions of any of its functionality. The app also doesn't include a feature for testing it with sample designs like AutoCAD, which would be helpful in getting familiar with using the app.

iScape does come with in-app customer support through chat, which is definitely not a given for a free mobile app.

GIS Cloud Mobile Data Collection

GIS Cloud Mobile Data Collection is not an app for creating virtual designs or drawings. Instead, it's used for collecting and updating data in the urban design field as well as creating customized forms and surveys for these purposes.

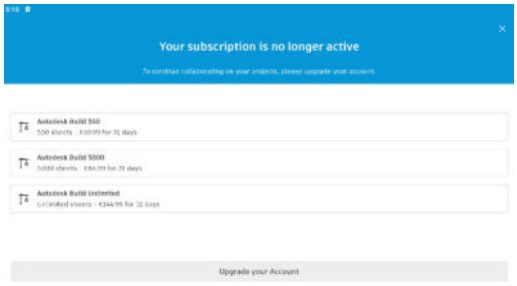


The app comes with a free 14-day trial period for trying it out. No payment details or credit card are required for using it. The registration process for the app requires a phone number, which could raise some concerns from the users as some mobile apps are prone to sending spam messages if given access to the user's phone number.

The app doesn't come with any tutorial or other guidance really, seems like its clear target user audience are professionals who are working in the field. Overall, the functionality of GIS Cloud Mobile Data Collection is very different from all the other apps included in this report as it's meant to be used for collecting data, instead of creating designs or drawings or anything of that sort.

PlanGrid

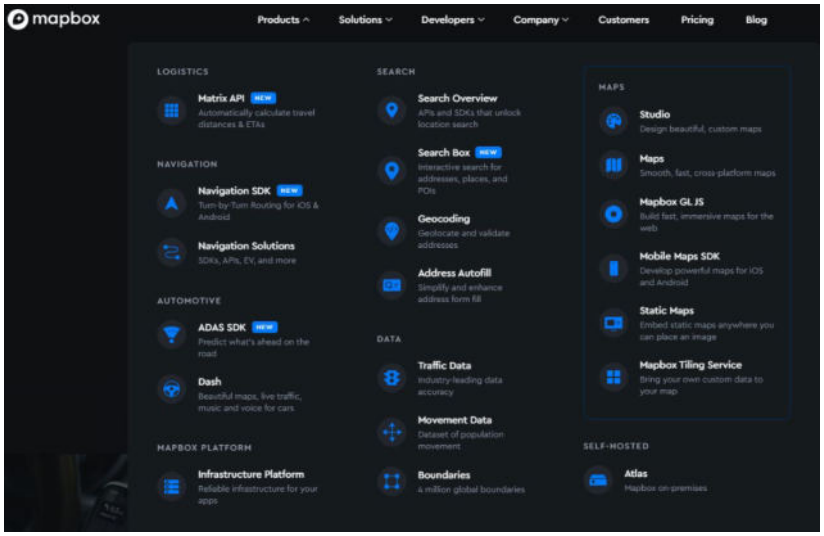
PlanGrid can be found from Google Play Store under the name Autodesk Construction Cloud. It comes with a 30-day free trial. However, immediately after registration the app informed me that my subscription had already expired.



The app doesn't have any kind of functionality for free users, I was completely unable to do anything. As to why my trial period had already expired, I can only assume that it's either a bug or perhaps another school course in Laurea has required us to use another app from the same developer in the past and they have a shared trial period.

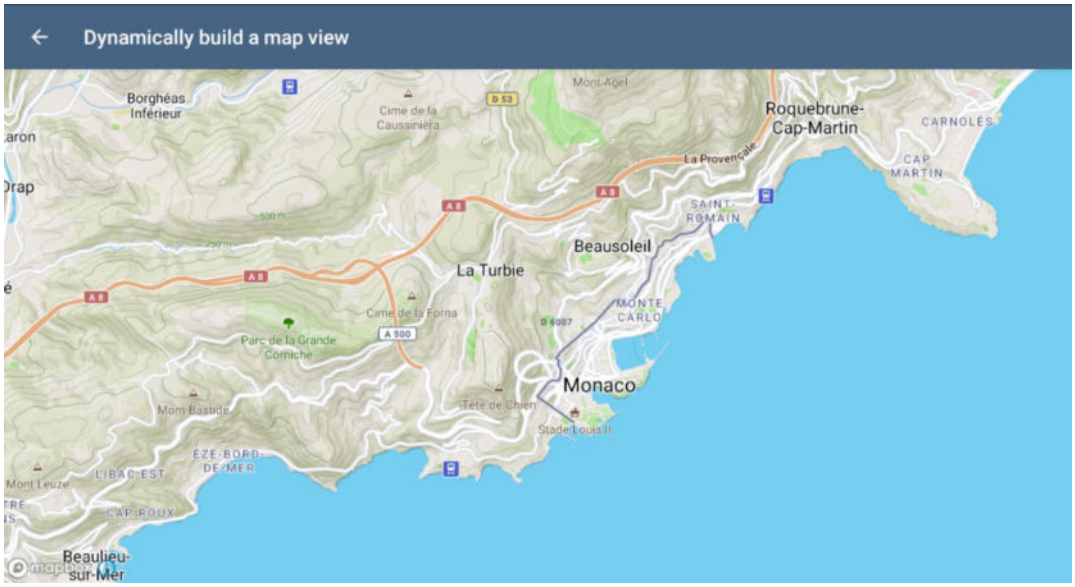
Mapbox

Installing Mapbox is a bit confusing and might require detailed instructions for the students. In the Google Play Store for android phones, Mapbox only has a demo app available. Based on my research, if I understood the process correctly, the full functionality of the Mapbox app is inside the SDK downloads on their website, pictured below.



Overall, for someone who has little experience in the field, the installation process seems a bit overwhelming, as it's unclear what needs to be downloaded and how does the installation process work for a smartphone.

The demo app doesn't come with any instructions really or other guidance. The demo app features functionality building a map view, viewing maps and placing a map fragment inside a container.



From my perspective, the demo app is lacking in help, tips or guidance in using it. They do have a website, mapbox.com which seems to feature a lot of information for learning how to use their apps.

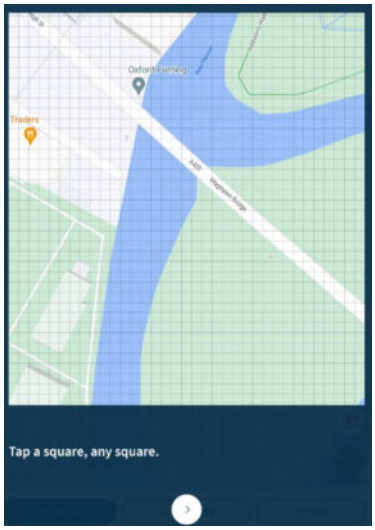
Streetmix

Streetmix can be used on a browser, without downloading anything at all. Here is the view from a browser:

From a student's perspective, this is great as it can be used for example on a public computer in a school or a library. Using Streetmix for designing and visualizing street layouts is very intuitive and easy to get a hang of. Streetmix is possibly the least confusing and easiest to understand of all of the apps included in this report, I personally found it very straightforward to use.

What3Words

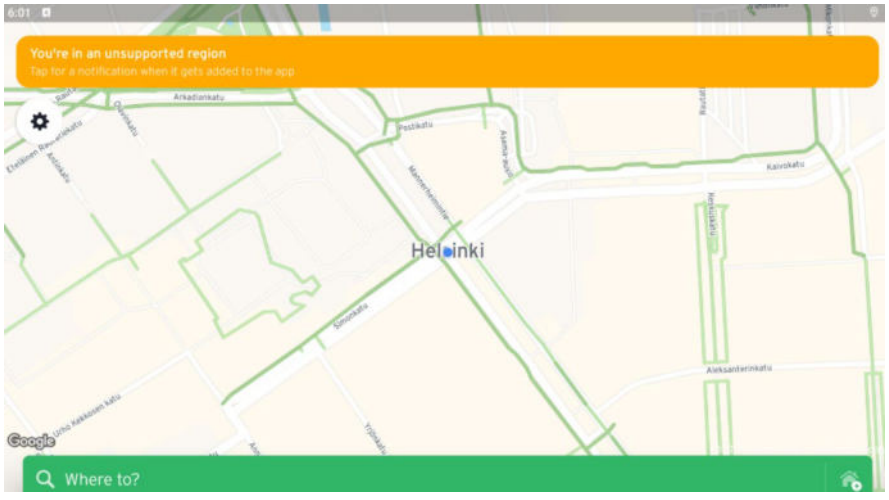
The registration process for What3Words was a bit difficult as the app didn't accept my registration until after I had already tried many times and uninstalled + re-installed the app once. But overall, the process took less than 15 minutes until I was able to login.



What3Words features a very thorough step-by-step tutorial process for new users, which I found extremely helpful for learning how to use the app. Thanks to the detailed instructions featured in the app, I personally found it simple to understand the app's square and address systems, which are among its core functionalities. In the urbandesignlab.in website What3Words is praised for its simplicity and ease of use, which I 100% agree with.

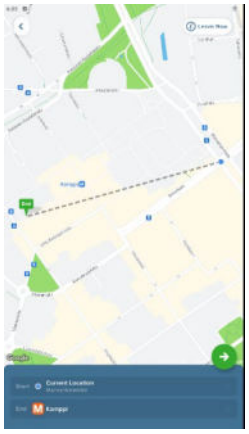
Transit

Transit provides departure times as well as other schedules and routes for nearby public transportation systems. But according to my testing, Finland is an unsupported region for the app, so it's 100% unusable for students of Laurea. We can't do anything with the app.



Citymapper

Citymapper is a similar app to transit, as both of them are public transit apps with live timings for public transportation systems. The obvious difference here is that Citymapper supports Finland as a region.



If a public transportation app is required for the project, from a Laurea students perspective Citymapper is usable and seems to work completely fine, but Transit is unusable as Finland is not supported for Transit.

Conclusions and summary

Based on the test result, from a student's perspective, I found Sketchup Viewer, AutoCAD 360, Streetmix, What3Words and Citymapper the simplest and easiest to use. All the students should have no problems with using any of them.

Mapbox was by far the most confusing one, detailed instructions would likely be required for working with it. One of the most useful programs is ArcGIS Collector but is more specific for use which means more time to learn.

Transit is unusable for Laurea students, as it doesn't support Finland as a region.

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