

# Measuring and Mitigating Biases in Location-based Recommender Systems

Pablo Sánchez<sup>1</sup> Alejandro Bellogín<sup>2</sup> Ludovico Boratto<sup>3</sup>

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June 20, 2024

\*Summary of a work Published in **Data Mining and Knowledge Discovery** journal on February 2023 [Sánchez et al., 2023].

- 1 Point-Of-Interest recommendation
- 2 Analyze biases in Point-Of-Interest recommendation
- 3 Conclusions and future work

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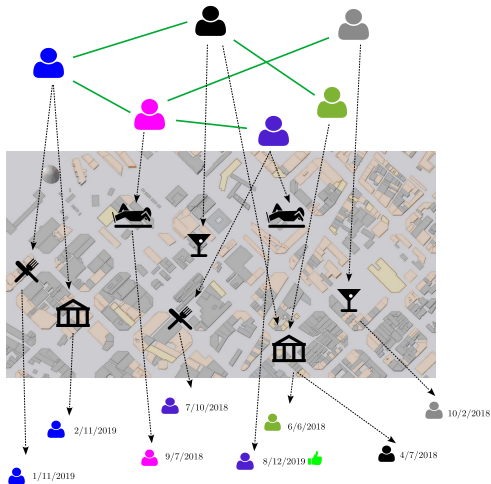
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  - **Implicit and repeated interactions**: users visit the same places more than once.
  - **External influences**: **geographical**, temporal, social, and sequential influences.

*Everything is related to everything else, but near things are more related than distant things* —[Miller, 2004]



## POI recommendation

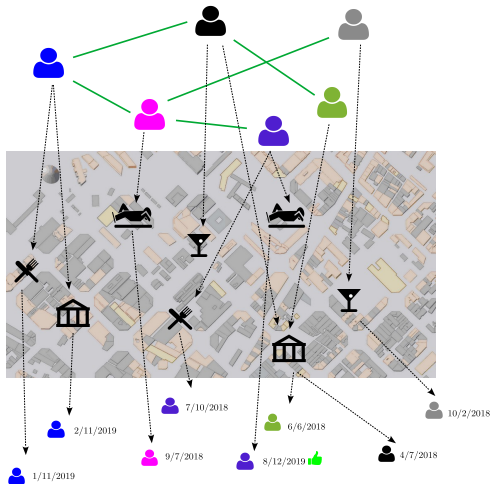
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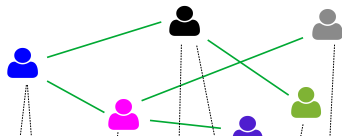
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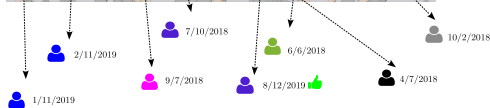
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Geographical

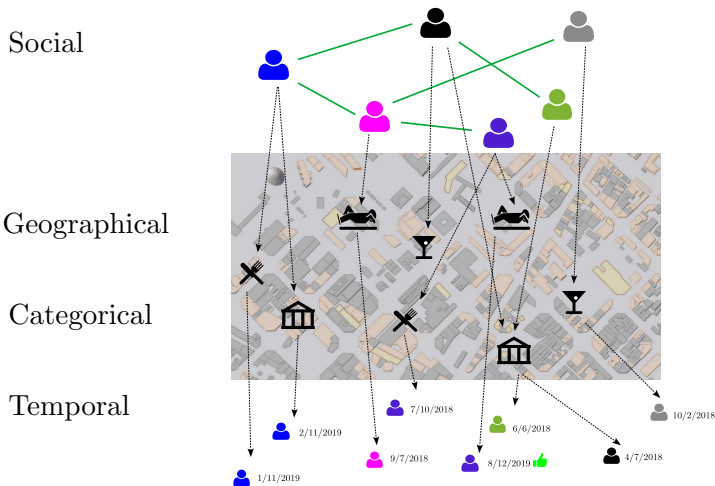


Categorical



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## Bias

**Bias** normally refers to the **phenomenon** of **unfairly favoring** a group of people or an **opinion**. —[Färber et al., 2023]

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- Recommender Systems are **multi-stakeholder environments**, as they **affect** the users **receiving** the **recommendations**, and those behind the **recommended items** (providers).
- In Point-Of-Interest recommendation, the **business** of **venue owners** **strongly depends** on the **venue recommendations**.

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- In Point-Of-Interest recommendation, the **business** of **venue owners** **strongly depends** on the **venue recommendations**.
- Hence, it is important to consider **possible biases** that can be produced using **Artificial Intelligence (AI) tools**.



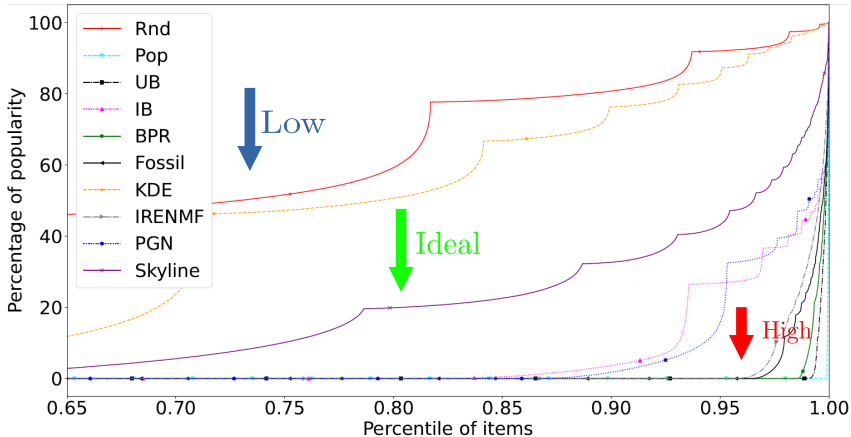
- **Popularity bias:** bias produced when a **more popular** venue is **ranked higher** than a **less popular one**, when **considering** the **top-n items** recommended to a user.

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## Popularity bias

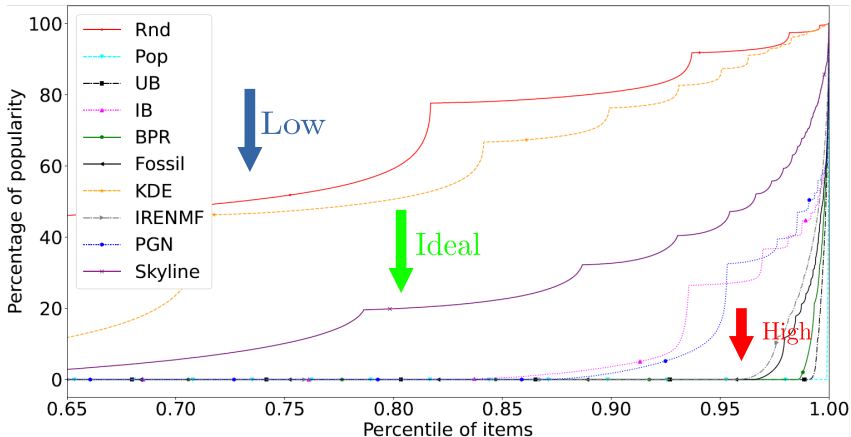
- We measure the **area under the curve** generated by the **cumulative distribution** of the recommended items by each recommender.
- **Higher values** means that **more items with different popularity values are being recommended**.

# Popularity bias analysis (in the city of Tokyo).



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- Personalized recommenders (except PGN and IB) tend to suffer from popularity bias.
- It is difficult to approach the reduced popularity bias of the test set (Skyline).

- **Item exposure**: ability of the model to **recommend items proportionally** to the **number of times** the users will consider that **item in the future**.

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## Item exposure bias

- We compare the number of times an item has been recommended (Recommender Exposure, RE) against its actual exposure (Actual Exposure, AE).
- The **lower** the value, the **better** (the less difference between the recommended exposure and the actual exposure).

- **Geographical bias:** bias produced by a **recommender** when **suggesting venues far** from the **current position** of the user (or with respect to the rest of the recommended venues).

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## Geographic distance bias

- First metric: **sums the distance of the recommended POIs** as if the user accepted those recommendations and visited those venues in order.
- Second metric: computes the **total distance** between each **recommended POI** and the **user historical midpoint**.
- We need to **compare** these results with the ones **exhibited** by the users in test.



# Performance of the recommenders. Tokyo. @5

Rec	Accuracy		Popularity Bias	Exposure		Distance		Coverage
	P	nDCG	PopI	ExpP	ExpR	DistT	DistU	UC
Rnd	0.000	0.000	<b>0.303</b>	<b>0.000</b>	<b>0.001</b>	37.2	34.7	<b>7,253</b>
Pop	<b>0.071</b>	<i>0.087</i>	0.000	0.131	0.121	<i>24.9</i>	<i>26.4</i>	<b>7,253</b>
UB	<i>0.070</i>	<i>0.087</i>	0.002	0.103	0.093	26.0	25.8	<i>6,931</i>
IB	0.063	0.080	<i>0.026</i>	0.064	0.057	23.2	25.0	<i>6,931</i>
HKV	0.064	0.078	0.003	<i>0.038</i>	<i>0.031</i>	<i>22.0</i>	<i>21.7</i>	<i>6,931</i>
BPR	0.066	0.081	0.003	0.123	0.112	25.6	27.7	<i>6,931</i>
FMFMGM	0.063	0.079	0.002	0.105	0.095	23.7	22.7	6,931
GEOBPR	0.065	0.081	0.001	0.120	0.110	23.7	24.2	6,931
IRENMF	<i>0.069</i>	0.083	0.008	<i>0.072</i>	<i>0.063</i>	23.9	23.8	6,931
PopGeoNN	0.068	<i>0.086</i>	<i>0.023</i>	0.110	0.100	<i>23.6</i>	<i>20.9</i>	<b>7,253</b>
Skyline	0.784	0.996	0.087	0.000	0.000	17.5	18.8	7,241

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- Skyline represents the results obtained by a **perfect recommender** (test set).

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- The performance of Pop and Rnd are **inverse**. **Pop** is among the **best** in terms of **accuracy** (but the worst in terms of bias, novelty and diversity), as **opposed** to Rnd.

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- **PopGeoNN** (an hybrid recommender) and **IB** obtain a good balance between accuracy and novelty/diversity and biases.

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- 3 Conclusions and future work

- **Different biases** are present in classical **POI recommenders** (specially, popularity bias).

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- There is a difficult **trade-off** between the dimensions of **accuracy, item exposure, and geographical distance**.
- Simple techniques like creating **hybrid recommenders** and **reranking** might be useful to increase the **performance** across different **dimensions**.



- We plan to continue this **analysis** by **using different** groups of users (international **travelers**, **local travelers**, or **pure local** inhabitants in the city).

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- We are **studying** how to apply **imputation techniques** to **reduce** the **data sparsity** in POI recommendation and **improve** the **performance** of the **recommenders**.

# Measuring and Mitigating Biases in Location-based Recommender Systems

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Thank you

-  Färber, M., Coutinho, M., and Yuan, S. (2023). Biases in scholarly recommender systems: impact, prevalence, and mitigation. *Scientometrics*, 128(5):2703–2736.
-  Miller, H. J. (2004). Tobler's first law and spatial analysis. *Annals of the Association of American Geographers*, 94(2):284–289.
-  Sánchez, P., Bellogín, A., and Boratto, L. (2023). Bias characterization, assessment, and mitigation in location-based recommender systems. *Data Min. Knowl. Discov.*, 37(5):1885–1929.

# Proposed Bias Measurements: Popularity bias

- **Popularity bias:** bias produced when a **more popular** venue is **ranked higher** than a **less popular one**, when **considering** the **top-n items** recommended to a user.

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## Popularity bias

$$PopI@n(rec) = \frac{1}{2|m|} \sum_{k=2}^{|m|} \left( F_{pop}^{R(rec,n)}(x_{k-1}) + F_{pop}^{R(rec,n)}(x_k) \right) \quad (2)$$

- where  $m$  are the items in the training set (ordering them by the number of times they have been recommended by  $rec$ ).  $F_{pop}^{R(rec,n)}$  is the **cummulative popularity distribution** of item  $x$  (only if they belong to the recommendation list  $R$ ).
- **Higher values** means that **more items with different popularity values are being recommended**.

- **Item exposure:** ability of the model to **recommend items proportionally** to the **number of times** the users will consider that **item in the future**.

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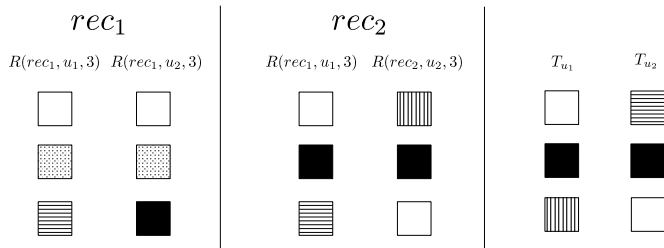
## Item exposure bias

$$IE@n(rec; \pi) = \sum_{i \in I} (RE@n(i, rec) - AE(i; \pi))^2 \quad (3)$$

- where  $RE@n(i, rec)$  is the **recommender exposure** of item  $i$ , and  $AE(i; \pi)$  is the **actual exposure** (number of times that item should be recommended).
- The **lower** the value, the **better** (the less difference between the recommended exposure and the actual exposure).



# Proposed Bias Measurements: Exposure bias



- $rec_2$  would obtain a lower value because it is recommending the black item 2 times, as in the test set, and it is not recommending the dotted item, which does not appear in the test set. Hence, as the recommended items from  $rec_2$  are more similar to the ground truth of the user than the ones recommended by  $rec_1$ , the venue exposure polarization of  $rec_2$  would be lower.

# Proposed Bias Measurements: Geographical bias

- **Geographical bias:** bias produced by a **recommender** when **suggesting venues far** from the **current position** of the user (or with respect to the rest of the recommended venues).

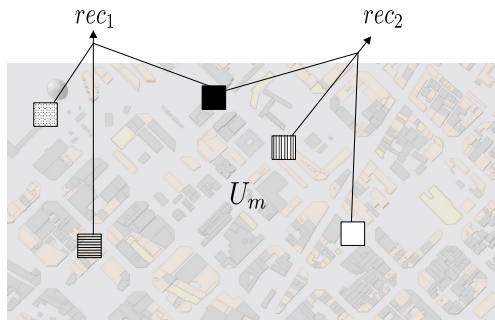
- **Geographical bias**: bias produced by a **recommender** when **suggesting venues far from the current position** of the user (or with respect to the rest of the recommended venues).

## Geographic distance bias

$$\text{DistT@}n(R_u) = \sum_{i=2}^{\min(n, |R_u|)} \text{Hav}(R_{u,i-1}, R_{u,i}) \quad (4)$$

$$\text{DistU@}n(R_u) = \sum_{i=1}^{\min(n, |R_u|)} \text{Hav}(\vec{u}_m, R_{u,i}) \quad (5)$$

- where  $\vec{u}_m$  is the user **midpoint** and Hav is the **haversine distance** between the coordinates.
- We need to **compare** these results with the ones **exhibited** by the users in test.



- the second recommender will be preferred as the recommended venues are more geographically related between them and with respect to the user midpoint (represented by  $U_m$ ).

## Hybrid recommenders

$$s(i, u; \mathcal{R}, W) = \sum_{j=1}^{|\mathcal{R}|} w^j \frac{s(i, R_u^j) - \min(R_u^j)}{\max(R_u^j) - \min(R_u^j)} \quad (6)$$

- where  $\mathcal{R}$  is a set of recommenders and  $W$  is a weight vector. We apply min-max normalization for every recommender.

## Rerankers

$$f_{obj}(u, i; \lambda, R^j, R^k) = \lambda \cdot f_{R^j}(u, i) + (1 - \lambda) \cdot f_{R^k}(u, i) \quad (7)$$

- where  $R^j$  is the original recommender and  $R^k$  is the recommender to rerank.
- We use the parameter  $\lambda$  to balance the contribution of the original recommender and the reranked one.

# Performance of hybrid and rerankers. Tokyo @5.

Rec	Accuracy		Novelty	Diversity	Pop. Bias		Exp.		Distance		Coverage
	P	nDCG	EPC	Gini	PopI	PopC	ExpP	ExpR	DistT	DistU	UC
Popularity	0.071	0.087	0.746	0.000	0.000	0.960	0.131	0.121	24.9	26.4	<b>7,253</b>
H(0.2 Pop + 0.8 IB)	0.071	0.088	<i>0.801</i>	<i>0.019</i>	<i>0.022</i>	<i>0.921</i>	<i>0.078</i>	<i>0.069</i>	24.0	24.4	<b>7,253</b>
H(0.8 Pop + 0.2 IB)	0.072	0.089	0.746	0.000	0.000	0.962	0.131	0.120	24.9	26.3	<b>7,253</b>
H(0.5 Pop + 0.5 IB)	0.073	0.089	0.765	0.005	0.007	0.946	0.110	0.100	25.2	25.2	<b>7,253</b>
RR(Pop, IB)	<i>0.074</i>	<i>0.093</i>	0.758	0.000	0.000	0.968	0.111	0.101	<i>23.7</i>	<i>24.2</i>	<b>7,253</b>
UB	0.070	0.087	0.769	0.001	0.002	0.968	0.103	0.093	26.0	25.8	<i>6,931</i>
H(0.2 UB + 0.8 IB)	0.065	0.081	<i>0.811</i>	<i>0.020</i>	<i>0.022</i>	<b>0.918</b>	<i>0.069</i>	<i>0.061</i>	24.1	25.2	<i>6,931</i>
H(0.8 UB + 0.2 IB)	<i>0.070</i>	<i>0.087</i>	0.768	0.001	0.002	0.966	0.104	0.094	26.0	25.6	<i>6,931</i>
H(0.5 UB + 0.5 IB)	0.068	0.085	0.786	0.008	0.010	0.943	0.089	0.080	25.6	25.2	<i>6,931</i>
RR(UB, IB)	0.068	0.086	0.778	0.001	0.006	0.954	0.092	0.083	<i>23.5</i>	<i>24.6</i>	<i>6,931</i>
RR(IRENMF, IB)	0.070	0.087	0.784	0.003	0.007	0.951	0.087	0.078	<b>23.5</b>	24.2	<i>6,931</i>
PopGeoNN	0.068	0.086	0.777	0.014	<b>0.023</b>	0.932	0.110	0.100	<i>23.6</i>	<b>20.9</b>	<b>7,253</b>
H(0.2 PopGeoNN + 0.8 IB)	0.072	0.089	<i>0.803</i>	<i>0.019</i>	0.021	<i>0.922</i>	<i>0.076</i>	<i>0.067</i>	24.2	24.2	<b>7,253</b>
H(0.8 PopGeoNN + 0.2 IB)	0.073	0.091	0.760	0.003	0.006	0.956	0.117	0.107	25.3	23.9	<b>7,253</b>
H(0.5 PopGeoNN + 0.5 IB)	0.074	0.092	0.772	0.006	0.009	0.947	0.102	0.093	25.5	24.6	<b>7,253</b>
RR(PopGeoNN, IB)	<b>0.075</b>	<b>0.093</b>	0.766	0.001	0.003	0.961	0.103	0.093	23.7	23.5	<b>7,253</b>

# Performance of hybrid and rerankers. Tokyo @5.

Rec	Accuracy		Novelty	Diversity	Pop. Bias		Exp.		Distance		Coverage
	P	nDCG	EPC	Gini	PopI	PopC	ExpP	ExpR	DistT	DistU	UC
Popularity	0.071	0.087	0.746	0.000	0.000	0.960	0.131	0.121	24.9	26.4	<b>7,253</b>
H(0.2 Pop + 0.8 IB)	0.071	0.088	<i>0.801</i>	<i>0.019</i>	<i>0.022</i>	<i>0.921</i>	<i>0.078</i>	<i>0.069</i>	24.0	24.4	<b>7,253</b>
H(0.8 Pop + 0.2 IB)	0.072	0.089	0.746	0.000	0.000	0.962	0.131	0.120	24.9	26.3	<b>7,253</b>
H(0.5 Pop + 0.5 IB)	0.073	0.089	0.765	0.005	0.007	0.946	0.110	0.100	25.2	25.2	<b>7,253</b>
RR(Pop, IB)	<i>0.074</i>	<i>0.093</i>	0.758	0.000	0.000	0.968	0.111	0.101	<i>23.7</i>	<i>24.2</i>	<b>7,253</b>
UB	0.070	0.087	0.769	0.001	0.002	0.968	0.103	0.093	26.0	25.8	<i>6,931</i>
H(0.2 UB + 0.8 IB)	0.065	0.081	<i>0.811</i>	<i>0.020</i>	<i>0.022</i>	<b>0.918</b>	<i>0.069</i>	<i>0.061</i>	24.1	25.2	<i>6,931</i>
H(0.8 UB + 0.2 IB)	<i>0.070</i>	<i>0.087</i>	0.768	0.001	0.002	0.966	0.104	0.094	26.0	25.6	<i>6,931</i>
H(0.5 UB + 0.5 IB)	0.068	0.085	0.786	0.008	0.010	0.943	0.089	0.080	25.6	25.2	<i>6,931</i>
RR(UB, IB)	0.068	0.086	0.778	0.001	0.006	0.954	0.092	0.083	<i>23.5</i>	<i>24.6</i>	<i>6,931</i>
RR(IRENMF, IB)	0.070	0.087	0.784	0.003	0.007	0.951	0.087	0.078	<b>23.5</b>	24.2	<i>6,931</i>
PopGeoNN	0.068	0.086	0.777	0.014	<b>0.023</b>	0.932	0.110	0.100	<i>23.6</i>	<b>20.9</b>	<b>7,253</b>
H(0.2 PopGeoNN + 0.8 IB)	0.072	0.089	<i>0.803</i>	<i>0.019</i>	0.021	<i>0.922</i>	<i>0.076</i>	<i>0.067</i>	24.2	24.2	<b>7,253</b>
H(0.8 PopGeoNN + 0.2 IB)	0.073	0.091	0.760	0.003	0.006	0.956	0.117	0.107	25.3	23.9	<b>7,253</b>
H(0.5 PopGeoNN + 0.5 IB)	0.074	0.092	0.772	0.006	0.009	0.947	0.102	0.093	25.5	24.6	<b>7,253</b>
RR(PopGeoNN, IB)	<b>0.075</b>	<b>0.093</b>	0.766	0.001	0.003	0.961	0.103	0.093	23.7	23.5	<b>7,253</b>

- The H(0.2 PopGeoNN + 0.8 IB) configuration improves the performance in terms of accuracy and novelty and diversity while reducing the biases of the recommendations.

# Performance of hybrid and rerankers. Tokyo @5.

Rec	Accuracy		Novelty	Diversity	Pop. Bias		Exp.		Distance		Coverage
	P	nDCG	EPC	Gini	PopI	PopC	ExpP	ExpR	DistT	DistU	UC
Popularity	0.071	0.087	0.746	0.000	0.000	0.960	0.131	0.121	24.9	26.4	<b>7,253</b>
H(0.2 Pop + 0.8 IB)	0.071	0.088	<i>0.801</i>	<i>0.019</i>	<i>0.022</i>	<i>0.921</i>	<i>0.078</i>	<i>0.069</i>	24.0	24.4	<b>7,253</b>
H(0.8 Pop + 0.2 IB)	0.072	0.089	0.746	0.000	0.000	0.962	0.131	0.120	24.9	26.3	<b>7,253</b>
H(0.5 Pop + 0.5 IB)	0.073	0.089	0.765	0.005	0.007	0.946	0.110	0.100	25.2	25.2	<b>7,253</b>
RR(Pop, IB)	<i>0.074</i>	<i>0.093</i>	0.758	0.000	0.000	0.968	0.111	0.101	<i>23.7</i>	<i>24.2</i>	<b>7,253</b>
UB	0.070	0.087	0.769	0.001	0.002	0.968	0.103	0.093	26.0	25.8	<i>6,931</i>
H(0.2 UB + 0.8 IB)	0.065	0.081	<i>0.811</i>	<i>0.020</i>	<i>0.022</i>	<b>0.918</b>	<i>0.069</i>	<i>0.061</i>	24.1	25.2	<i>6,931</i>
H(0.8 UB + 0.2 IB)	<i>0.070</i>	<i>0.087</i>	0.768	0.001	0.002	0.966	0.104	0.094	26.0	25.6	<i>6,931</i>
H(0.5 UB + 0.5 IB)	0.068	0.085	0.786	0.008	0.010	0.943	0.089	0.080	25.6	25.2	<i>6,931</i>
RR(UB, IB)	0.068	0.086	0.778	0.001	0.006	0.954	0.092	0.083	<i>23.5</i>	<i>24.6</i>	<i>6,931</i>
RR(IRENMF, IB)	0.070	0.087	0.784	0.003	0.007	0.951	0.087	0.078	<b>23.5</b>	24.2	<i>6,931</i>
PopGeoNN	0.068	0.086	0.777	0.014	<b>0.023</b>	0.932	0.110	0.100	<i>23.6</i>	<b>20.9</b>	<b>7,253</b>
H(0.2 PopGeoNN + 0.8 IB)	0.072	0.089	<i>0.803</i>	<i>0.019</i>	0.021	<i>0.922</i>	<i>0.076</i>	<i>0.067</i>	24.2	24.2	<b>7,253</b>
H(0.8 PopGeoNN + 0.2 IB)	0.073	0.091	0.760	0.003	0.006	0.956	0.117	0.107	25.3	23.9	<b>7,253</b>
H(0.5 PopGeoNN + 0.5 IB)	0.074	0.092	0.772	0.006	0.009	0.947	0.102	0.093	25.5	24.6	<b>7,253</b>
RR(PopGeoNN, IB)	<b>0.075</b>	<b>0.093</b>	0.766	0.001	0.003	0.961	0.103	0.093	23.7	23.5	<b>7,253</b>

- Similar behavior is observed in H(0.2 Pop + 0.8 IB) .