

Learning Every Day

Developer thrives on fast pace

Leslie Roundy, Esri Writer

A technology-related career was a natural choice for Elitsa Baklova, a software development programmer at Esri. Her whole family comes from a GIS background.

Baklova, who has been at Esri for about two years, was introduced to technology and GIS at a young age. Her father, mother, and brother have postgraduate degrees in geodesy and civil engineering. While Baklova was a young girl growing up in Bulgaria, her mother was an infrastructure engineer designing roads and bridges, and her father worked as an urban surveyor. He took both children on field projects in different cities throughout Bulgaria. That's how Baklova first became interested in surveying and GIS in general.

Math was her strongest academic area, so when it came time to choose a career, her brother convinced her that computing would be interesting and she would

never get bored. That led her to pursue a career in software development.

She had been using Esri products while obtaining her master's degree in computer science from the University of Oxford. After working as a developer at a media distribution company in the United Kingdom for about a year, she joined the .NET team at Esri.

Since coming to Esri, Baklova has been involved in a variety of projects: working on functionality enhancements to the Web ADF Manager for .NET and implementing the ArcGIS Map Web Part and ArcGIS Geocode Workflow as components of Esri's ArcGIS for SharePoint product, used to integrate maps and GIS content into SharePoint.

Currently, she is working on the ArcGIS Viewer/Builder for Microsoft Silverlight. Unlike her previous job, where a single product's release cycle took up to two years, at Esri she works on many different products and research projects. "We try to release software updates more frequently so that we can take into account functionality requests we get from our users during beta programs and software previews," said Baklova. "And we are encouraged to come up with interesting ideas that can be converted into a product. All this keeps it exciting."

"Software quality is of extreme importance to Esri," she continued. "As a software development programmer, I work closely with the product engineers in



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product development to make sure the bar is set high. Every day we have scrums to review the status of what we've been working on. The product engineer will propose user interface workflows as well as ensure that our code changes meet the quality requirements. There are frequent discussions between developers and product engineers to discuss new features. Each brings different things to the table. Sometimes it's amazing how many diverse opinions there can be when discussing functionality, but at the end of the day, it's through different eyes that we get best practices, so that's important."

The technology is always changing, so a developer's job is to learn every day.

Baklova observed that "once you stop learning, it means you're not a good programmer anymore. Development changes so fast that if you don't keep up with the pace, you're kind of out-of-date." She and other developers go to conferences to stay current on technology, attend on-campus technology courses, and are encouraged to learn on their own. At the Esri Developer Summit and Esri International User Conference, developers interact with customers to see how products are being used. Development teams from Esri partner organizations also present their latest technologies.

When asked why she chose GIS, Baklova said, "Unlike developers at a

lot of companies that often work on systems for internal use only or websites that serve a specific need, here at Esri we're not simply providing a solution for a limited number of users. We have the privilege of working on products that enable others." Many Esri users will take the web APIs or out-of-the-box solutions and use them to create something that serves their needs, whether that is a complex proprietary system for tracking marketing trends; a fast-response emergency application; or just a simple, beautiful map. "There is a sort of pride and satisfaction of seeing so many different industries utilizing the products each of us works on. GIS is everywhere. That's what makes it so powerful."