

PRESS CONFERENCE: Wednesday, 19 October – 4:00 pm - 5.00 pm, press conference room

For immediate release

Visualizing Cities – A global platform for visual urban knowledge production

From visualizing conflict-driven urbanisation in Colombia to Zika risk maps in the U.S, the Habitat III Visualizing Cities competition attracted over 100 submissions from around the world. The five entries selected as CityVis winners were just announced in Quito at the Habitat III summit on urbanisation. All entries are available at cityvis.io.

Quito, 19 October 2016 – Understanding our cities is a more complex task than ever before. From the expanding physical structures that form our cities, to the growing number of human beings filling those structures with life and meaning, to the almost invisible layer of digital technologies and data streams increasingly connecting all those elements. Many of the processes steering our cities today are not visible to the human eye. How can we make these underlying currents visible and understandable? The CityVis data visualization competition aggregates the latest and best projects aiming to answer that question.

The competition attracted some of the world’s leading data visualisation talent. Submissions from researchers, journalists, students and designers captured major trends related to sustainable urban futures - migration, climate, transport, food and energy. The entries underline the creativity and innovation of an emerging community of city visualizers.

“Habitat III is all about participatory city-making. We can’t get these participatory processes right if we don’t give the citizens and policy-makers the tools to bridge the gap between information and action. For us, Habitat III was the obvious platform to launch this competition and platform.” said Marian Dörk from the Urban Complexity Lab at the University of Applied Sciences Potsdam, Germany.

“The competition has created a global platform for visual urban knowledge production. I’ve been amazed by the way the winning entries took on tough ecological and social challenges, something we’ve seen across developed and developing countries” added Dörk, who announced the winning entries on Monday in Ecuador.

Sebastian Meier, visualization researcher at the Interaction Design Lab, University of Applied Sciences in Potsdam, Germany, said: “The complexity of cities calls for new methods and tools to improve our understanding of the urban realm and the underlying mechanisms. Visualization is becoming an instrumental tool for analysis, exploration and communication to make our cities understandable and find the best ways to manage and plan their future.”

“Each visualization showed me something new about urban living, from the lives of the one million people who live underground in Beijing, to visualizing Paris as a vast urban metabolism,” said Owen Gaffney, co-founder of the Future Earth Media Lab and co-sponsor of the competition.

The five winning entries by sector:

Academic research

"Conflict Urbanism: Colombia" by Laura Kurgan, Juan Francisco Saldarriaga, Dare Brawley and Anjali Singhvi (Center for Spatial Research, Columbia University)

<http://cityvis.io/detail.php?id=98>

This work explores the migration patterns caused by the Colombian conflict between guerrillas, military and paramilitaries. The map shows an overview of the routes of internally displaced people in Colombia from 1985 to 2015, which were mostly from rural to urban areas. This project illustrates in a stirring way how urbanization is also forcefully driven by armed conflict.

Contract (Private consultants)

"London Data Streams" by Jacopo Hirschstein & Amanda Taylor (Tekja Data Visualisation)

<http://cityvis.io/detail.php?id=88>

"Can the data we produce tell us what London is thinking, seeing and feeling?" Pursuing this question London Data Streams is aimed to visualize the rhythms of London's live data ranging from Twitter posts and Instagram photos to Transport for London updates. As part of an exhibition, the datasets were represented in various levels of transformation and aggregation. This project is a particularly strong submission with high aesthetic quality and conceptual depth.

Journalistic

"Visualizing The Racial Divide" by Jim Vallandingham (Bocoup)

<http://cityvis.io/detail.php?id=44>

"Visualizing The Racial Divide" offers a visual and visceral representation of racial separation in fourteen U.S. cities. Shapes representing urban districts are gradually pushed away from each other based on differing proportions of white and black populations. Where there is a significant change in the racial makeup between neighborhoods, wider gaps are emerging. The form chosen here is novel and intriguing, with a startling and provoking effect on the viewer.

Civic

"Chennai Flood Map" by Arun Ganesh, Sajjad Anwar, Sanjay Bhangar, Prasanna Loganathar (OpenStreetMap India / Mapbox)

<http://cityvis.io/detail.php?id=105>

In the wake of unprecedented rainfall affecting the south Indian city of Chennai open source technology activists quickly created a reporting tool to crowdsource the location of flooded roads on an interactive mobile friendly map. The map had over 1 million views and collected over 15,000 reports of inundated street segments, and was widely used for research and relief work. This effort illustrates the great utility that visualization can have in grave situations.

Student

"Inclusive Maps" by Ute Benz, Sylvia Kautz and Sebastian Rauer (Students of Interface Design at University of Applied Sciences Potsdam)

<http://cityvis.io/detail.php?id=1>

The core concept of this project is to illustrate that every map is specific and no map can be universally useful for everyone. Instead the special needs of its users need to be considered. The student team behind Inclusive Maps proposes novel map concepts especially for persons with impairments. The idea is not just novel, but also significant and applicable to any city across cultural differences.

All submissions are available on the newly launched CityVis platform: <http://cityvis.io/>

BACKGROUND

Future Earth is a major international research initiative providing the knowledge and support to accelerate transformations to a sustainable world. Launched in 2015, Future Earth is a 10-year program to advance Global Sustainability Science, build capacity in this rapidly expanding area of research and provide an international research agenda to guide natural and social scientists working around the world. The new CityVis platform is a contribution to the Future Earth Urban Knowledge Action Network, which was just launched in Quito.

The University of Applied Sciences Potsdam has developed a research focus on urban transformation and information visualization. The university's Urban Futures Institute for Applied Research is developing solutions for the sustainable transformation of cities and communities. The Interaction Design Lab and Urban Complexity Lab are research groups at the university dedicated to user experience and visualization research. The CityVis platform will be further developed and updated by visualization researchers at the university as a growing and open resource for visual urban knowledge production.

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