Write-up Summary

This was an interesting project. The open nature of it was quite intimidating at first, but after we finally settled on a topic I think things came together for the most part. I don’t know about other groups, but once we realized we’re all interested in data, and that this isn’t some general education class that we need to take for graduation we really opened up about our interests.

That’s not to say we didn’t have issues. Once we had our dataset, we talked about our interests within that set. We also had our hypothesis and a null-hypothesis to try and disprove it. Unfortunately, our interests did not always mesh with trying to prove our null-hypothesis. Personally, I’ve always been susceptible to project creep. The timing was also a bit weird and we had some trouble getting together outside of class. The language barrier was also a bit of an issue.

Our Interests and the Null-Hypothesis:

This was by far the biggest flaw in our project, I think we all got tunnel vision about what we wanted to chart as opposed to what we should chart to try and prove our null-hypothesis. Comparing how much a given state utilizes personal solar power to how much they could is all well and good, as is looking at offsetting our carbon footprint, and how St. Louis compares to other cities. We never tied everything together to make solid conclusion about our hypothesis. The data supports our hypothesis, I just feel we could’ve done a better job representing that at the end of our presentation.

Project Creep:

One of the personal banes of my existence. I always look at a little more off the horizon that could be done. On reflection I’m still not sure what we should’ve done here. We looked at our dataset and realized that it was pushing a pro-solar plan. Most notably through the “Potential Energy Savings” and “Carbon Offsets” as well as a bit from where we currently get our power.

“Potential Energy Savings” is a number set we could easily have altered into “Expected Energy Savings” or “Average Energy Savings”. We had the latitude and longitude of our locations in the Project Solar data set, and we could’ve used an API to gather average cloud cover from the Open Weather Map dataset. This is all stuff we’ve done in class and should’ve been within our wheelhouse. The question is would it be worth it? I could go either way here, depending on the story we wanted to tell. If our story was based around Carbon Offsets, then calculating expected energy savings from potential energy savings is wasted effort; monetary savings would be the icing to the cake’s carbon offset. On the other hand, if we’re trying to push a narrative of people personally saving money, then we’d want expected energy savings for sure. A clearer picture of our narrative would’ve been a good idea, unfortunately I think got lost.

We also realized that not all power is generated by fossil fuels. Especially in St. Louis our power is fairly carbon neutral (primarily nuclear and hydro-electric). In this regard, I think we made the right call by eventually dropping the data and retrospection. While I still think it’s important to account for this information in the real world, for the class it added no value. The data here would’ve been hardcoded into our dataset to account for power sources. In conclusion it’d would’ve been a labor-intensive endeavor that would not have showcased our ability to work with large data-sets, and plot them.

Group Time

I don’t know if other groups had this issue, if it was just us, or if we didn’t really have a problem. As a group though, we didn’t get together in meat-space all that often. The cause here was too many online options. Our datasets were on our git-hub. We primarily communicated though Slack. The project was originally put together in Google Slides. While we didn’t use them, we could’ve talked via Google Hangouts or some other online video chat service. While those options are all fantastic, in retrospect they allowed us to put things off. “We don’t need to worry about ‘x’ right now, just Slack me if you have any questions about it.” was common. Sometimes we’d be able to help each other online, sometimes we’d say “I’ll help you in the next class.” and sometimes we’d forget all about it until it was too late. Social skills are not my forte, so I’m not sure how to address this issue, but I the loss of time here hurt the final project.

Language

Francy was wonderful to work with. She’s a hard, competent worker that cared deeply about the finished product. However, English is not her primary language, and while we had no difficulty talking with her about the basics, I was not familiar enough programming code languages to effectively communicate most of my thoughts.

Personal Issues

Personally, getting sick and needing a mental health break didn’t help my contributions to the project. No excuses here, just a personal revelation that I need to be aware of my body and mental health; that more than others I should avoid procrastination at all costs as I never know if I’ll get sick and need that extra time that I’d otherwise have wasted.

In Conclusion

All in all, I feel we did a fairly good job. We definitely had room for improvement, but we met most of the project goals. In the future I’ll need to start with a project design based off our hypothesis to prevent project creep and ensure that the group works more together in person. Those two fixes will be a good starting point to keep the rest of the project on track.