Dev Report #5

This covers a comparative overview of three mapping tools. To make the experience of each fair, I did the same for each – documented location and data about three local parks. I highlight the experience, basic features, and ease of data visualization within them all. Ultimately, I argue that StoryMap JS is the most user-friendly but only for large-scale data visualizations while Geo JSON is exceedingly less intuitive, but more useful for customized small-scale data visualizations. Pen and paper gives users the most control in creating data visualizations but lacks in technological and accessible ease.

StoryMap JS allows users to create interactive “story maps” through a series of images, texts, and other interactive pieces. The users tag specific locations, add their preferred data, and then add other locations. This process was very intuitive, with clear and precise inputs. While it was good at locating cities, it struggled with smaller locations (for instance, city parks). To create a map of smaller locations, users need to manually drag the tag across the map. After this, StoryMap JS creates a full map of this information, documenting a storied path through the location tags. Viewers can click on the individual tags and view/read all the data entered by the creator. As far as data visualization goes, it creates a compelling visual story, mapping the story in both a large overview, and the smaller overviews of each individual location, quite literally visualizing the data inserted for you. Overall, this is StoryMap JS’s biggest advantage, that is does the data visualization work for you, with intuitive design that allows users to build maps with ease. However, it is limited in that it lacks in smaller locations and users are limited to around 20 location inputs. This makes it idea for larger-scale story maps, but not so much for small-scale projects.

Geo JSON allows users create a variety of different visual maps, while also demonstrating the back-end coding that goes into creating that map. Like StoryMap JS, users can tag and drag to specific locations and input specific data, though this data relies more on code – i.e. marker-size, symbols, and colors. Geo JSON appears to be capable of entering a large variety of coding data to affect the map, but unless a user understands the meanings of that language (and unfortunately, I did not), it makes it difficult to understand the specific outcome of entering certain code. For users who are more familiar with code, this makes Geo JSON a more capable tool of data visualization because of the ample customization possibilities. Additionally, Geo JSON seems much more equipped to locate and input small-scale locations, making is useful for concentrated narratives of data visualizations. Overall, Geo JSON can create compelling visuals at both small and large-scale levels but lacks in intuitive inputs for the average non-code-orientated user.

Unlike the two web-based tools, pen and paper allows users the most control, quite literally. Rather than being limited by specific inputs, data entry, and other design of web-based mapping, pen and paper allows users to be limited only by their imagination. This makes it fairly easy to create maps and locations. However, it lacks in to make geographic story maps. One must either write on or have the ability to recreate the map. And while text data can be easily written down, pictures and other visual are harder to incorporate, unless a user is artistically talented or is willing to print and paste visuals. This does not mean that pen and paper aren’t suitable for a story-map like project, only that its freedom is limited by the user’s ability and/or skill to create.