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Going Global: Places & Spaces: Mapping Science exhibit debuts 20th iteration of “macroscope” interactive data visualization

By: Pete DiPrimio

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It's an international, innovative labor of love, a passion project, this Places & Spaces: Mapping Science Exhibit <<https://cns.iu.edu/exhibit.html>> that, for 20 years, has demonstrated the power of science maps to make sense of physical places and abstract topic spaces. It reflects the determination of Katy Börner, <https://luddy.indiana.edu/contact/profile/index.html?Katy_B%C3%B6rner> Victor H. Yngve Distinguished Professor of Engineering & Information Science at the Luddy School of Informatics, Computing and Engineering <<https://luddy.indiana.edu/>> , to stimulate scientists, encourage students and teachers, and fascinate the public in ways they've never experienced.

What started as 10 two-dimensional framed maps hanging on walls has evolved into a full interactive traveling exhibit of more than 100 maps with unique graphic data visualizations, 40 interactive visualizations, a variety of bonus materials including an award-winning short film, and a hands-on virtual reality experience. It's been to six continents and more than 400 venues.

The exhibit's 20th anniversary celebration -- *Places & Spaces: Mapping Science Opening Reception* <<https://events.iu.edu/mccalla/event/1428029-places-spaces-mapping-science-opening>> -- is set for June 6 at the McCalla Building University Collections <<https://collections.iu.edu/mccalla/visit.html>> .

The exhibit is part of Luddy's Cyberinfrastructure for Network Science Center <<https://cns.iu.edu/mission.html>> , which aims to advance datasets, tools and services for the study of biomedical, social and behavioral science physical and other networks.

Each year, the exhibit has a different theme. This year focuses on a global perspective.

"Data visualizations help us make better global and long-term decisions that ensure we live desirable lives," Börner says.

Lisel Record, <https://luddy.indiana.edu/contact/profile/index.html?Lisel_Record> associate director for CNS and co-curator of the exhibit, says Börner, CNS director, remains the catalyst.

"This is something she developed," Record says. "She's seen it flourish for the last two decades. She brought together the combination of people who have made it happen. It's a good alchemy of bringing together a variety of folks who work in information visualization."

Science maps are powerful tools that help people navigate and understand vast amounts of complex information.

Forty maps and macroscopes -- interactive visualization tools for studying complex processes -- will be displayed during the June 6 event. Organizers, including Todd Theriault <https://luddy.indiana.edu/contact/profile/index.html?Todd_Theriault> , CNS technical writer, also hope to have a 3D sculpture by artist and Indiana University East Art Gallery Director Carrie Longley <<https://east.iu.edu/gallery/people.php>> that represents the evolution of science.

Record says an advisory board of data visualization experts from around the world select new pieces to add to the exhibit each year. Organizers target researchers who work in data visualization and information visualization.

"It brings together people who don't work in the same department and don't realize they're working in similar ways," she says.

“It sparks new collaborations. That’s one of the things that’s unique about the exhibit. We try to build that in as much as we can. We find people who say, ‘Oh, I didn’t know you were working on this. Here’s what I’m doing. Maybe we should work together.’

“It’s a common meeting ground for folks who are working across disciplines.”

While the full exhibit requires 2,000 square feet of exhibit space, smaller versions are on display for workshops and conferences around the world.

It’s recently been on display at the University of Michigan, Notre Dame University and Atlanta’s Centers for Disease Control and Prevention <<https://www.cdc.gov/index.htm>> , the nation’s leading science-based, data-driven service organization focused on protecting public health.

“That was a wonderful installation,” Record says. “They added information about how they use visualization for public health.”

The exhibit also has been to South Korea and on a science train in Germany as well as to Duke University and Vanderbilt University.

Record says interactive visualization is well suited for the global perspective theme.

“They can bring together large datasets and use a global perspective on them so you can look at big problems from many different perspectives, using many different types of data sets.”

Organizers plan to have additional global satellite events in September. Record says they want to bring in exhibit ambassadors and others who have contributed to the success over the years.

“We can touch base and hear from folks who are doing data visualizations from around the world.”

All are welcome to attend the exhibit debut on June 6. Maps and macroscopes are also available at <https://scimaps.org> <<https://scimaps.org/>> .

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