Using the Google Visualisation API with R: googleVis-0.2.8 Package Vignette

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Abstract

The googleVis package provides an interface between R and the Google Visualisation API. The Google Visualisation API offers interactive charts which can be embedded into web pages. The best known of these charts is probably the Motion Chart, popularised by Hans Rosling in his TED talks.

The functions of the googleVis package allow the user to visualise data stored in R data frames with the Google Visualisation API without uploading the data to Google. The output of a googleVis function is html code that contains the data and references to JavaScript functions hosted by Google.

googleVis makes use of the internal R HTTP server to display the output locally. A browser with Flash and Internet connection is required.

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1 Introduction

1.1 Motivation

More and more data is becoming available, and yet stories and insights are still often missed: we are lost in the data jungle and struggle to see the wood for the trees.

Hence new tools are required to bring data to life, to engage with users, to enable them to slice and dice the data, to view it from various angles and to find stories worth telling: outliers, trends or even the obvious.

In 2006 Hans Rosling gave an inspiring talk at TED [Ros06] about social and economic developments in the world over the past 50 years, which challenged the views and perceptions of many listeners. Rosling had used extensive data analysis to reach his conclusions. To visualise his talk, he and his team at Gapminder [Fou10b] had developed animated bubble charts, aka motion charts, see Figure 1.

Rosling's presentation popularised the idea and use of interactive charts, and as one result the software behind Gapminder was bought by Google and integrated as motion charts into their Visualisation API [Inc11] one year later.

We also notice that data journalism has grown over the recent years. The data blogs of the Guardian (UK), and taz.de (Die Tageszeitung, Germany) have brought data analysis and data visualisation to a wider audience.

In 2010 Sebastián Pérez Saaibi [Saa10] presented at the R/Rmetrics Workshop on Computational Finance and Financial Engineering, the idea to use Google motion charts to visualise R output with the R.rsp package [Ben11].

Inspired by those talks and the desire to use interactive data visualisation tools to foster the dialogue between data analysts and others the authors of this vignette started the development of the googleVis package [GdC11].

Of course there are many other alternative visualisation toolkits out there, e.g. Many Eyes [RtlCsg10], Open Flash Chart (Flash) [JG10], OpenLayers (JavaScript) [Fou10c], Processing (Java) [FR10], simile (AJAX) [DKM10] and FLARE (Action-Script) [Lab10].



Figure 1: Overview of a Google Motion Chart. Screenshot of the output of plot(gvisMotionChart(Fruits, idvar='Fruit', timevar='Year'))

1.2 Google Visualisation API

The Google Visualisation API [Inc11], [Inc] allows users to create interactive charts as part of Google documents, spreadsheets and web pages. In this text we will focus on the usage of the API as part of web pages.

The Google Public Data Explorer [Inc10b] provides a good example, demonstrating the use of interactive charts and how they can help to analyse data. Please note, that most of those charts are rendered within a browser.

The charting data can either be embedded into the html file or read dynamically. The key to the Google Visualisation API is that the data is structured in a DataTable [Inc10c], and this is where the googleVis package helps, as it uses the functionality of the RJSONIO package [Lan11] to transform R data frames into JSON [JSO06] objects as the basis for a DataTable.

As an example we shall look at the html-code of a motion chart from Google's visualisation gallery [Inc10a], which generates output similar to Figure 1:

```
1 <html>
 2
    <head>
     <script type="text/javascript"</pre>
 3
 4
       src="http://www.google.com/jsapi">
 5
     </script>
 6
     <script type="text/javascript">
 7
       google.load('visualization', '1',
        {'packages':['motionchart']});
 8
 9
      google.setOnLoadCallback(drawChart);
10
      function drawChart() {
11
      var data=new google.visualization.DataTable();
      data.addColumn('string', 'Fruit');
12
13
      data.addColumn('date', 'Date');
14
      data.addColumn('number', 'Sales');
      data.addColumn('number', 'Expenses');
15
      data.addColumn('string', 'Location');
16
17
      data.addRows([
18
      ['Apples',new Date(1988,0,1),1000,300,'East'],
19
      ['Oranges', new Date(1988, 0, 1), 1150, 200, 'West'],
20
      ['Bananas',new Date(1988,0,1),300,250,'West'],
21
      ['Apples',new Date(1989,6,1),1200,400,'East'],
22
      ['Oranges',new Date(1989,6,1),750,150,'West'],
23
      ['Bananas',new Date(1989,6,1),788,617,'West']
24
      ]);
25
      var chart=new google.visualization.MotionChart(
26
        document.getElementById('chart_div'));
27
      chart.draw(data, {width: 600, height:300});
28
     }
29
     </script>
30
    </head>
31
    <body>
```

The code and data are processed and rendered in the browser and is not submitted to any server¹.

You will notice that the above html code has five generic parts²:

- references to Google's AJAX (I. 4) and Visualisation API (II. 7 8),
- data to visualise as a DataTable (II. 11 24),
- an instance call to create the chart (II. 25 26),
- a method call to draw the chart including options, shown here as width and height (I. 27),
- an HTML <div> element to add the chart to the page (II. 32 34).

These principles hold true for most of the interactive charts of the Google Visualisation API, see the examples in Figure 2.

However, before you use the API you should read the Google Visualization API Terms of Service and the Google Maps/Google Earth APIs Terms of Service.

2 The googleVis package

The googleVis package provides an interface between R and the Google Visualisation API. The functions of the package allow the user to visualise data stored in R data frames with the Google Visualisation API.

Version (0.2.8) of the package provides interfaces to Motion Charts, Annotated Time Lines, Geo Maps, Maps, Geo Charts, Intensity Maps, Tables, Gauges, Tree Maps, further Line-, Bar-, Column-, Area-, Combo-, Scatter-, Candlestick-, Pie-and Org Charts; see Figure 2 for some examples for more see the project site³.

The output of a googleVis function is html code that contains the data and references to JavaScript functions hosted by Google. A browser with an Internet connection is required to view the output, and for Motion Charts, Geo Maps and Annotated Time Lines also Flash. The actual chart is rendered in the browser.

 $^{^{1} \ \, \}text{http://code.google.com/apis/visualization/documentation/gallery/motionchart.} \\ \text{html\#Data_Policy}$

 $^{^2} For \ more \ details \ see \ http://code.google.com/apis/chart/interactive/docs/adding_charts.html$

 $^{^3} http://code.google.com/p/google-motion-charts-with-r/wiki/GadgetExamples$

Please note that Flash charts may not not work when loaded as a local file due to security settings, and therefore require to be displayed via a web server. Fortunately, R comes with an internal HTTP server which allows the googleVis package to display pages locally.

2.1 Installation

We can install googleVis in the usual way from CRAN, e.g.:

```
R> install.packages('googleVis')
```

The installation was successful if the command library(googleVis) gives you the following message:

```
R> library(googleVis)
```

Welcome to googleVis version 0.2.8

Please read the Google Visualisation & Maps API Terms of Use before you use the package: http://code.google.com/apis/visualization/terms.html, http://code.google.com/apis/maps/terms.html.

Type ?googleVis to access the overall documentation and vignette('googleVis') for the package vignette.
You can execute the demo of the package via: demo(googleVis)

More information is available on the googleVis project web-site: http://code.google.com/p/google-motion-charts-with-r/

Feel free to send us an email <rvisualisation@gmail.com> if you would like to be keept informed of new versions, or if you have any feedback, ideas, suggestions or would like to collaborate.

To suppress the this message use: suppressPackageStartupMessages(library(googleVis))

2.2 Using the googleVis package

The individual functions of the googleVis package are documented in detail in the help pages. Here we will cover only the principles of the package.

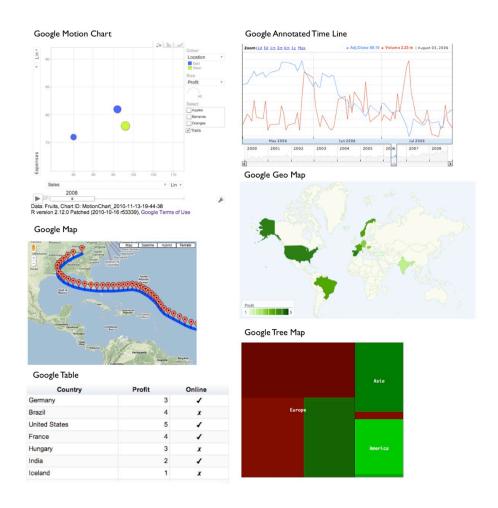


Figure 2: Screenshot of some of the outputs of demo(googleVis). Clockwise from top left: gvisMotionChart, gvisAnnotatedTimeLine, gvisGeoMap, gvisTreeMap, gvisTable, and gvisMap.

As an example we will show how to generate a motion chart as displayed in Figure 1. It works similarly for the other APIs. Further examples are covered in the demos of the googleVis package, see also Figure 2.

The design of the visualisation functions is fairly generic. The name of the visualisation function is 'gvis' + ChartType. So for the Motion Chart we have:

Here data is the input data.frame and idvar and timevar specify the column names of the id variable and time variable for the plot, while display options are set in an optional list. The options and data requirements follow those of the Google Visualisation API and are documented in the help pages, see

```
R> help('gvisMotionChart')
```

The argument chartid allows the user to set a chart id of the output chart manually. If the argument is missing a random id using tempfile(pattern='') will be generated. Unique chart ids are required to place more than one chart into a page.

The output of a googleVis function is a list of lists (a nested list) containing information about the chart type, chart id and the html code in a sub-list with header, chart, caption and footer.

The idea behind this concept is that users can get a complete web page while at the same time extracting specific parts, such as the chart. This is particular helpful if the package functions are used in solutions where the user wants to feed the visualisation output into other sites, or would like to embed them into rsp-pages (see page 18), or use *RApache* (see page 19) or Google Gadgets.

The output of a googleVis function will be of class 'gvis' and 'list'. Generic print (print.gvis) and plot (plot.gvis) functions exist to ease the handling of such objects.

To illustrate the concept we shall create a motion chart using the Fruits data set.

2.3 Motion Chart Example

Following the documentation of the Google Motion Chart API we need a data set which has at least four columns: one identifying the variable we would like to plot, one time variable and at least two numerical variables, further numerical and character columns are allowed.

As an example we use the Fruits data set:

```
R> data(Fruits)
R> Fruits
```

	Fruit	Year	${\tt Location}$	Sales	Expenses	${\tt Profit}$	Date
1	Apples	2008	West	98	78	20	2008-12-31
2	Apples	2009	West	111	79	32	2009-12-31
3	Apples	2010	West	89	76	13	2010-12-31
4	Oranges	2008	East	96	81	15	2008-12-31
5	Bananas	2008	East	85	76	9	2008-12-31
6	Oranges	2009	East	93	80	13	2009-12-31
7	Bananas	2009	East	94	78	16	2009-12-31
8	Oranges	2010	East	98	91	7	2010-12-31
9	Bananas	2010	East	81	71	10	2010-12-31

Here we will use the columns 'Fruit' and 'Year' as id and time variable respectively. However we could heave used 'Date' instead of 'Year' as well.

```
R> M <- gvisMotionChart(Fruits, idvar="Fruit", timevar="Year")</pre>
```

The structural output of gvisMotionChart is a list of lists as described above

```
R > str(M)
```

```
List of 3

$ type : chr "MotionChart"
$ chartid: chr "MotionChartID1db16710"

$ html :List of 4

..$ header : chr "<!DOCTYPE html PUBLIC \"-//W3C//DTD XHTML 1.0

..$ chart : Named chr [1:7] "<!-- MotionChart generated in R 2.

... - attr(*, "names")= chr [1:7] "jsHeader" "jsData" "jsDrawCh

..$ caption: chr "<div><span>Data: Fruits &#8226; Chart ID: <a h

..$ footer : chr "\n<!-- htmlFooter -->\n<span> \nR version 2.13

- attr(*, "class")= chr [1:2] "gvis" "list"
```

The first two items of the list contain information about the chart type used and the individual chart id:

R> M\$type

[1] "MotionChart"

R> M\$chartid

[1] "MotionChartID1db16710"

The html output is a list with header, chart, caption and footer. This allows the user to extract only certain parts of the page, or to create a complete html page.

The header part of the html page has only basic html and formatting tags:

```
R> print(M, tag='header')
<!DOCTYPE html PUBLIC "-//W3C//DTD XHTML 1.0 Strict//EN"</pre>
        "http://www.w3.org/TR/xhtml1/DTD/xhtml1-strict.dtd">
<html xmlns="http://www.w3.org/1999/xhtml">
<head>
  <title>MotionChartID1db16710</title>
  <meta http-equiv="content-type" content="text/html;charset=utf-8" />
  <style type="text/css">
    body {
          color: #444444;
          font-family: Arial, Helvetica, sans-serif;
          font-size: 75%;
    }
    a {
          color: #4D87C7;
          text-decoration: none;
    }
  </style>
</head>
<body>
```

Here we used the print statement with the tag 'header' instead of M\$html\$header to achieve a formatted screen output. This is the same output as cat(M\$html\$chart).

The actual Google visualisation code is stored with the data as a named character vector in the chart item of the html list. The chart is made up of several JavaScript and HTML statements. Please notice that the JavaScript functions are uniquely named with the information of the chart id. This concept allows the user get all the chart code directly or only specific parts; see the examples in the help page of print.gvis for more details.

```
R> names(M$html$chart)
```

```
[1] "jsHeader" "jsData" "jsDrawChart" "jsDisplayChart"
[5] "jsChart" "divChart"
```

The complete chart can be displayed via:

```
R> print(M, tag='chart') ## or cat(M$html$chart)
<!-- MotionChart generated in R 2.13.0 by googleVis 0.2.8 package -->
<!-- Sun Jul 31 13:17:04 2011 -->
```

```
<!-- jsHeader -->
<script type="text/javascript" src="http://www.google.com/jsapi">
</script>
<script type="text/javascript">
// jsData
function gvisDataMotionChartID1db16710 ()
  var data = new google.visualization.DataTable();
  var datajson =
"Apples",
  2008,
"West",
    98,
    78,
    20,
"2008-12-31"
],
[
 "Apples",
  2009,
"West",
   111,
   79,
    32,
"2009-12-31"
],
[
"Apples",
  2010,
"West",
    89,
    76,
    13,
"2010-12-31"
],
 "Oranges",
  2008,
"East",
    96,
    81,
    15,
"2008-12-31"
```

```
],
 "Bananas",
  2008,
"East",
    85,
    76,
    9,
"2008-12-31"
],
"Oranges",
  2009,
"East",
    93,
    80,
    13,
"2009-12-31"
],
[
 "Bananas",
  2009,
"East",
    94,
    78,
   16,
"2009-12-31"
],
[
 "Oranges",
  2010,
"East",
   98,
    91,
    7,
"2010-12-31"
],
[
 "Bananas",
  2010,
"East",
    81,
    71,
    10,
"2010-12-31"
]
```

```
];
data.addColumn('string','Fruit');
data.addColumn('number', 'Year');
data.addColumn('string','Location');
data.addColumn('number','Sales');
data.addColumn('number','Expenses');
data.addColumn('number', 'Profit');
data.addColumn('string','Date');
data.addRows(datajson);
return(data);
// jsDrawChart
function drawChartMotionChartID1db16710() {
 var data = gvisDataMotionChartID1db16710()
 var chart = new google.visualization.MotionChart(
   document.getElementById('MotionChartID1db16710')
 );
 var options ={};
options["width"] =
                      600;
options["height"] =
                       500;
  chart.draw(data,options);
}
// jsDisplayChart
function displayChartMotionChartID1db16710()
 google.load("visualization", "1", { packages:["motionchart"] });
 google.setOnLoadCallback(drawChartMotionChartID1db16710);
}
// jsChart
displayChartMotionChartID1db16710()
<!-- jsFooter -->
//-->
</script>
<!-- divChart -->
<div id="MotionChartID1db16710"</pre>
  style="width: 600px; height: 500px;">
</div>
```

Similarly you can also access specific components of the chart, e.g.

```
R> cat(M$html$chart['jsChart']) # or print(M, 'jsChart')

// jsChart
displayChartMotionChartID1db16710()

A basic chart caption and html footer are the final items of the html list (output is truncated):

R> print(M, tag='caption')

<div><span>Data: Fruits &#8226; Chart ID: <a href="Chart_MotionCha">a href="Chart_M
```

2.4 Displaying gvis objects locally

To display the page locally, type:

</html>

```
R> plot(M) # returns invisibly the file name
```

The plot method for <code>gvis-objects</code> creates html files in a temporary folder using the type and chart id information of the object and it will display the output using the R HTTP help web server locally.

Please note that the chart caption provides a link to the chart code via the chart id for easy copy and paste.

The R command tempdir() will show you the path of the per-session temporary directory, in which the files were written.

2.5 Combing charts with gvisMerge

The function <code>gvisMerge</code> takes two <code>gvis-objects</code> and merges the underlying components into one page. The charts are aligned either horizontally or vertically next to each other in an HTML table.

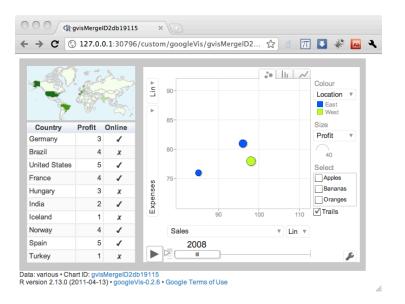


Figure 3: Three charts combined with gvisMerge.

The output of <code>gvisMerge</code> is a <code>gvis-object</code> again. This allows us to apply the same function iteratively to create more complex chart layouts. The following example, see Figure 3, aligns a geo chart and table below each other, and combines the output with a motion chart to the right:

3 Embedding googleVis in web sites

3.1 Integrating gvis objects in existing sites

Suppose you have an existing web page and would like to integrate the output of a googleVis function, such as gvisMotionChart. In this case you only need the chart output from gvisMotionChart. So you can either copy and paste the output from the R console

```
R> print(M, 'chart') ## or cat(M$html$chart)
into your existing html page, or write the content directly into a file
R> print(M, 'chart', file='myfilename')
and process it from there.
```

3.2 Using googleVis output with WordPress

WordPress is a popular web software for creating websites and blogs. Here we give some tips about the usage with googleVis output.

By default WordPress does not allow JavaScript code (and hence googleVis output) to be inserted into a page. However, additional plugins allow us to extend the functions of WordPress.

One option of embedding JavaScript code inside a WordPress post is to use the "custom fields shortcode" plugin⁴. The plugin allows you to create a custom field for the googleVis code, which can be referred to in your article.

Suppose you created a motion chart in R:

and paste it into the value text area of a custom field in WordPress, e.g. with instance name Fruits. To include the motion chart into your article add [cf]Fruits[/cf] into the post, see Figure 4 for an illustration.

⁴http://wordpress.org/extend/plugins/custom-fields-shortcode

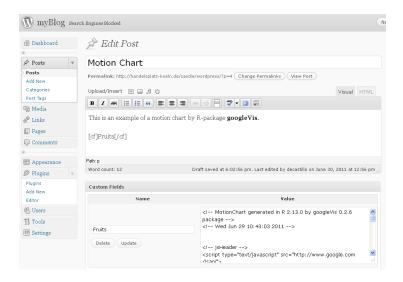


Figure 4: Including googleVis output in a WordPress blog entry.

3.3 Embedding googleVis in web sites dynamically

In this section we provide examples how the googleVis functions can be embedded into web sites dynamically. With the R packages R.rsp [Ben11] and brew [Hor11a] we have two options to integrate R snippets into html code. While the R.rsp package comes with its own internal web server, brew requires the Apache HTTP server [Fou10a] with the RApache [Hor11b] module installed. Please note that currently the RApache module only runs on UNIX/Linux and Mac OS X.

3.3.1 Using googleVis with R.rsp

The R.rsp package allows the user to integrate R code into html code. The R code is filtered by the R.rsp web server and executed at run time.

As an example, we can embed the above motion chart into a rsp-page:

```
<html>
<body>
<% library(googleVis)%>
<% M <- gvisMotionChart(Fruits, idvar="Fruit", timevar="Year") %>
<%= M$html$chart %>
</body>
</html>
```

The R code included in <%...%> is executed when read by the R.rsp HTTP server, but no R output will be displayed. To embed the R output into the html code we

have to add an equal sign, <%=...%>, which acts as a cat statement.

You find an example as part of the googleVis package. This example can be displayed via the following R command:

```
R> library(R.rsp)
R> browseRsp()
R> # Follow the link for googleVis in the opening browser window
```

The actual rsp-file is located within the googleVis package directory and again R allows you to find the file with the following command:

```
R> file.path(system.file("rsp", package = "googleVis"), "index.rsp")
```

For more information read the documentation of the R.rsp package.

3.3.2 Using googleVis with RApache and brew

RApache supports web application development using R and the Apache HTTP server. The RApache module embeds the R interpreter into the Apache web server. However, as we would like to mix R and html code we also need a parser and this is where the R package brew comes into place.

Files sitting in a dedicated brew folder of the HTTP repository are parsed by brew when opened in the browser. The R code is executed with RApache and the output is embedded into the site. Hence the approach is similar to R.rsp with the difference that the two tasks are split. This has the advantage that R does not have to run in a separate window.

Detailed installation instructions for RApache are available on the project site: http://rapache.net/manual.html, for specific comments on Mac OS X see: http://worldofrcraft.blogspot.com/2010/08/installing-rapache-on-mac-os-x-snow.html

Following the installation of *RApache* you will have to configure Apache. Most likely you have to add something along the following lines to your apache2.conf or httpd.conf file (often found in /etc/httpd or /private/etc/apache2/httpd.conf on Mac OS X):

```
LoadModule R_module /usr/lib/apache2/modules/mod_R.so ## On Mac OS X more likely to be: ## LoadModule R_module libexec/apache2/mod_R.so ROutputErrors RSourceOnStartup "/var/www/rapache/R/startup.R" ## On Mac OS X the www folder is often equivalent to: ## /Library/WebServer/Documents/
```

The first line loads the R module when the Apache web server is started, the second

line deals with error handling, while the startup.R file is suitable for initial set ups, e.g. libraries and global variables:

```
## Ensure the packages are installed so that mod_R
## has access to them, e.g. not in your home folder
library{googleVis}
library{lattice}
library{Cairo}
MyGlobalVar <- 42</pre>
```

To test that *RApache* is working open http://localhost/RApacheInfo and you should find details about your system, an example can be found on the *RApache* site: http://biostat.mc.vanderbilt.edu/rapache/files/RApacheInfo.html

The next step is to install the brew R package in the usual way:

```
R> install.packages('brew')
```

Following this we have to tell Apache that files in a specific folder should be parsed by brew. Again we edit the apache2.conf or httpd.conf and add the connection of the RHandler with the function brew:

That's all. Restart the HTTP daemon and you can start placing files in the brew directory and access them via http://localhost/rapache/brew/filename, e.g. a file containing:

```
<html>
<body>
<h1>Fruits</h1>
<% library(googleVis)%>
<% M <- gvisMotionChart(Fruits, idvar="Fruit", timevar="Year") %>
<%= M$html$chart %>
</body>
</html>
```

You will notice that the brew syntax is very similar to rsp. For more information read the documentation of the *RApache* module and brew package. You find two simple examples of brew files in the googleVis package. Again the following R command shows you the folder path:

```
R> system.file("brew", package = "googleVis")
```

4 Beyond R

In this section we present ideas which go beyond the usual coding in R and are somewhat experimental.

4.1 Registering to catch events

Google visualisations can fire and receive events ⁵. It exposes the following two JavaScript methods:

- google.visualization.events.trigger() fires an event,
- google.visualization.events.addListener() listens for events.

Here is an example of registering to receive the selection event from the Google documentation:

```
var table = new google.visualization.Table(document.getElementById('table_div'));
table.draw(data, options);
google.visualization.events.addListener(table, 'select', selectHandler);
function selectHandler() {
  alert('A table row was selected');
}
```

We will only deal with this special case of a 'select' event of the 'addListner' method. This event is available for most visualisations and acts on user interactions, e.g. user selection clicks.

The 'addListner' method expects JavaScript code, which can be embedded into a gvis-object via options as (undocumented) parameter gvis.listener.jscode.

Here are some examples:

Look up the selected item in Wikipedia:

In the same way we can use the code in other charts, e.g. org- or line chart:

⁵http://code.google.com/apis/chart/interactive/docs/reference.html#addlistener

```
R> plot(gvisOrgChart(Regions, options=list(gvis.listener.jscode=jscode)))
R> plot(gvisLineChart(Regions[,c(1,3)], options=list(gvis.listener.jscode=jscode)))
```

In the following more advanced example the selected value of a table is displayed in a message box:

```
R> jscode <- "
+     var sel = chart.getSelection();
+     var row = sel[0].row;
+     var text = data.getValue(row,1);
+     alert(text);
+ "
R> J2 <- gvisTable(Population, options=list(gvis.listener.jscode=jscode))
R> plot(J2)
```

For more details see the demo(EventListner) and Google Visualisation API Reference.

5 Contact

5.1 Collaboration

Obviously, the package is work in progress and there are many other functions of the Google Visualisation API which are still untouched.

Please feel free to send us an email if you would like to be kept informed of new versions, or if you have any feedback, ideas, suggestions or would like to collaborate, our address is rvisualisation@gmail.com.

5.2 Citation

Please cite R and/or googleVis if you use it in your work or publications. Use

```
R> citation()
or
R> citation("googleVis")
```

for information on how to cite the software.

5.3 Training and consultancy

Please contact us if you would like to discuss tailored training or consultancy: rvisualisation@gmail.com

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