Lab 10: Map Assessments

The first two maps given are highway maps, seemingly made by the same processes with the same data, but one for the state of New York and one for Texas. While these maps are very similar, and contain much of the same data, just their design and the way they are shaped can make a difference. For instance, both have looming lists of county, city and state park information, which is good for tourists, most likely the target audience of these maps. However, New York’s unusual shape creates a confusing cut off, due to the decision by the creator to zoom into NY State so much, the island must be placed in a box below. This does help with readability of road data however, as it is more difficult to read the individual, small road information on the large Texas Map; the square footage is much bigger, and therefore more information must be squeezed more tightly than in the blown-up New York map. In the end, although this may be slightly biased, the Texas map is more pleasing to look at and less cluttered, which can be attributed to its larger area, less dense areas, and stylistic choice of the creator to cut off part of New York for sizing purposes, versus Texas being shown in it’s entirety, to scale.

In the second question, a pair of Ocean Floor maps are compared in how well they convey geography at the bottom of the ocean. Both maps are slightly confusing with their attempt at textured representations of the ocean floor that is also intensely labeled for information. Unfortunately in the National Geographic map, the words and texture run together, and the symbols do not adequately stand out from features either, highlighting a need for greater color gradient or switching colors completely to highlight and convey the data needed. This being said, the Bruce Heezen map also has trouble providing a textured relief while also maintaining readability of underwater labels, and has no clear legend to discern meaning of symbols or data. Overall I would think the Bruce Heezen map better displays the ocean floor data, however certain elements such as color changes or adding a clear legend could be added or combined from the National Geographic map to improve it.

These maps are especially interesting examples because the audience is expected to have a certain degree of expertise when viewing. All legends are given in both maps, however they go into depth and require non-standard symbols, things that are not on the maps we use every day. The Ipswitch map contains many symbols requiring explanation and possibly outside reading depending upon education, which can be useful for conveying a complex point that cannot be displayed more simply, however in this map I think it only adds to confusion. On top of this the symbology is not necessarily distinctly defined and in some places on the map you are left with a mess of points and polygons and a difficult time trying to unravel the meaning behind it. The Topographic map, however, is much more intuitive and easy to read in it’s key. In my opinion the readability and clear labelling of this map allows it to beat the other.

The population maps in Texas are interesting cases for map design. While the first concisely displays population growth data after peak by county, the second simply shows person/sq. mile. In my opinion, the second map is better because it allows the reader to draw their own conclusions from raw, person/sq. mile data that is easy to conceptualize and understand, but can be applied to many fields/actions and is a widely used map for many purposes. However, the Population Trends map only shows trends AFTER PEAK. While this is totally fine if someone is trying to find said specific dataset for a niche project, however the gradient color and “population trends” written at the top make it worrisome that it could be misinterpreted as total population trends, or used to make the reader thing population is decreasing in areas where it is not. Overall, the Population Density map is much more clear and well made, in my opinion, and allows the audience of the map to draw their own conclusions, and allows the map to be used for many different arguments/conclusions.