

WorldMap: A Strategy to Allow Researchers to Scratch Their Itches Online Thereby Improving Data Access for All

Benjamin G. Lewis
Center for Geographic Analysis, Harvard
1737 Cambridge Street
Cambridge, MA 02138
(617) 496-3089
blewis@cga.harvard.edu

ABSTRACT

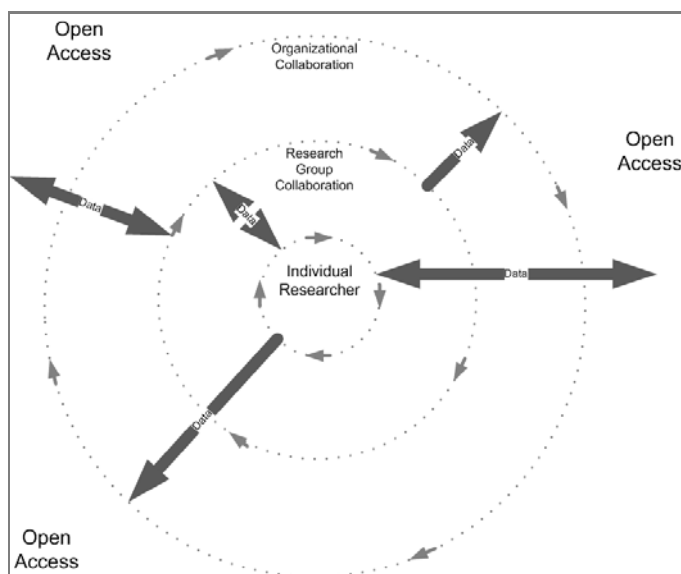
The Center for Geographic Analysis is building WorldMap, an open source, cloud-based platform to promote collaboration around geospatial information (<http://worldmap.harvard.edu/alpha>). Despite the plethora of ways in which research materials can now be shared on the web, geospatial information lags despite enormous potential for creating new knowledge.

The reasons for the lag are many and interconnected: 1) lack of a platform which supports even basic real time geospatial collaboration, 2) lack of a platform that is easy to obtain and install, 3) the sparse implementation of standards for geospatial interoperability, 4) the size and complexity of geospatial datasets, 5) the lack of an incentive for researchers to upload geospatial datasets to a system that supports eventual sharing.

Taken together these factors are recipe for stagnation despite the arrival 6 years ago of the Google Maps API and KML. Where is the Apache of the spatial world to spur a grassroots geoweb and bring it to the broad range of public, private and non-profit organizations that need it, and to non-GIS trained researchers wherever they may be?

WorldMap is an attempt to nudge the ball forward in theory and practice. The idea behind WorldMap is to allow anyone to upload and publish data to the web, control how data is represented, and to control access to one's data. Users will also have a range of data exploration tools and eventually online annotation, editing, and analysis. By letting researchers use the system to "scratch their own itch" we hope to take a page from successful attempts to crowdsource the development of other complex public goods.

This talk will demonstrate the functionality of the current version of WorldMap as a potential collaboration platform, then will talk about ideas for future enhancements, and solicit feedback on the platform and how it could be improved.



WorldMap as Permeable Membrane for Spatial Data which Supports the Research Lifecycle