

Work Session on Geographical Information Systems  
(Ottawa, Canada, 5-7 October 1998)

Item 6 of the provisional agenda

## **GUIDELINES FOR STATISTICAL THEMATIC MAPPING**

**(Information about the work on the joint ONS/Statistics Finland mapping website)**

Submitted by Statistics Finland and the Office for National Statistics, United Kingdom<sup>1</sup>

Outline of the invited paper

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<sup>1</sup> Prepared by Alistair Calder

## INTRODUCTION

The paper gives information about the progress of work in developing the Website on statistical thematic mapping, to be prepared jointly by the Office for National Statistics (ONS), United Kingdom, and Statistics Finland. The Website corresponds to the methodological material "Guidelines for statistical thematic mapping", planned to be presented at the Work Session on GIS in Ottawa.

Making use of the interactive possibilities of the Internet, the Website will be the main source for the guidelines on how to use thematic mapping. However, the main principles presented will be also available as a methodological paper.

The outline for the Website and the intended timetable for preparation is presented. Given the short time before the GIS Work Session in Ottawa, the participants are encouraged to provide their comments and suggestions to Alistair Calder, ONS, United Kingdom (*e-mail: Alistair.Calder@ons.gov.uk*).

## PROGRESS AND TIMETABLE

The work on the Website was started by Alistair Calder (Office for National Statistics, U.K.) and Ulla-Maarit Saarinen (Statistics Finland) in July. The plan is to have the **contents finished by the end of August** and to have **the website available by the middle of September**. It could be tested, to some extent, before the GIS Work Session.

## PURPOSE

Since this is an ongoing project, things are changing all the time. However, here is a bit of text from the introductory pages (not quite the final version but it will give some idea) :

During the last few years GIS (Geographical Information Systems) have become widely used to analyze and visualize statistics. Maps are a great way of displaying statistical information and new desktop mapping software offers a simple and easy method to put statistical data on maps. However, simple and easy doesn't always mean good and correct. Desktop mapping software and other applications don't necessarily tell the users how to display statistical data. New users don't always realize that maps can be misleading instead of giving the right information.

This web site is the result of a joint project started in spring 1998 between Statistics Finland and The Office for National Statistics, United Kingdom . The project aims to promote the use of maps for visualising statistics but also to provide non-experts with some basic guidelines on the designing statistical maps and how to avoid the most common errors.

The project aims at a web site with guidelines, examples and exercises to be distributed within organizations. The idea and some of the material of the web site will be demonstrated at the Work Session on GIS of the UNECE Conference of European Statisticians in Ottawa in October 1998

The key deliverable is to be the website. There will be no set way round the information available on the site - different people will want different things. However there will be guides to help user to navigate about the place. By working through the site it will be possible to work through a whole series of text files and examples which will teach the principle of statistical map design.

It will be possible to download a paper (word and PDF format) which will contain much of the information contained on the website. This will be useful for distribution within organisations but the website is the main product. Other downloadable files will include a powerpoint demonstration for use for teaching in organisations, example files and exercises and a number of tools to help in mapping statistics.

## **CONTENTS**

The structure is changing as we develop the site but at present is as follows :

**Introduction** - purpose and history of the website  
(including contribution of UNECE worksession)

### **Pros and Cons of using statistical maps**

Value of mapping statistics  
Dangers

### **Design of statistical maps**

Choosing map types  
Data and data classification  
Choosing colours  
Problems and errors in map design

### **Methods of producing maps**

Brief introduction to GIS and mapping tools

### **Downloading Resources**

Papers  
Presentations  
Exercises  
Mapping Tools

### **Links and Literature**

Links to other sites  
Lists of literature

## **FUTURE DEVELOPMENT OF THE SITE**

This is not meant to be a finished product - it is the start of something which we will add to over the next few years. This is meant to be central point which (we hope) lots of other people will make contributions to. I hope we will get lots of feedback and suggestions for improvements at (and after) the Ottawa session. Necessarily the site is aimed at people dealing with statistics and so will be of interest to attendees - however the site will be open for whoever wants to use it.

In the first case this will not be a full discussion site (although it might make sense to extend some of the site to being an open forum). It will be up to those who want to make contributions to email the site. Until we decide otherwise I propose that ONS and Statistics

Finland will continue to exert editorial control and to add to and develop the website after the Ottawa session.

I think this work is a useful contribution to the worksession process for several reasons :

- 1) Because it is clear output from the worksessions
- 2) Because it is the type of work that can go on between sessions - if this project works OK, this project might form the template for other such initiatives.
- 3) Because I am sure we are going to end up with a product that is really useful - this is already proving a very useful way of delivering this type of information. The flexibility of using a website far surpasses just giving people a paper every 18 months.