



Research Cluster: Enable – Design & Art Competences, Material Culture, and Human Development | Timespan: 2017 – ongoing

In praise of noise

Expressing doubt and subjectivity in data visualization

Team

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The main objective of the project is to question information design practice today, pushing designers into a self-criticizing mood and highlighting the traces of their research process in their artefact, expressed through visual means.

The research project focuses on the way designers express uncertainty about the data they visualize, for whatever reason: lack of data, errors in the data retrieval process; not reliability of the sources; not meaningful correlations.

In particular, predictive sciences such as meteorology or branches of physics, geology, economics and climate sciences are often accused of being imprecise and inaccurate because of the possible failure of their predictions. In facts, since estimates for the future are based on probabilistic information, their statements can often go wrong.

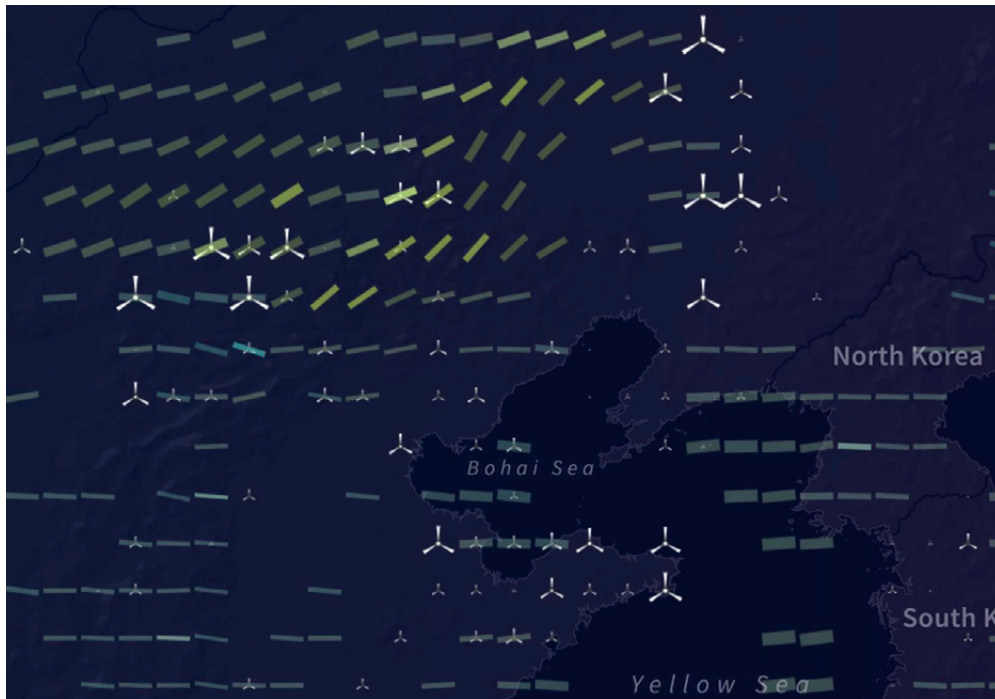


Figure 1. In Project-Ukko, by Maurice Stefaner, 2016, the data map does not only express the expected strength of the wind draughts, but also the level of certainty of these previsions based on past performance, that is how many times before the forecasts had guessed right.

Uncertainty is part of their mission. Anyhow, the degree of this uncertainty has to be communicated to construct a relationship of trust and reliability with the viewer. How does science communicate the status of uncertainty of its findings and its commitment towards its reduction? A discourse analysis will highlight the highly debated presence of words such as “likely”, “probable”, the couple “risk”/“danger” or “opportunity”/“possibility” in the discourse of predictive science.

What is more interesting for us is the translation of this statement of uncertainty into visual forms of expression or, on the contrary, the transformation of a doubtful result into an assertive visual discourse.

The final outcome of the project will be a catalogue raisonné of infographics *failing* with data information. A particular attention will be given to the use of images and figures of the world to implement the semantic value of the representation.

Publications:

V. Burgio and M. Moretti, "Infographics as Images: Meaningfulness beyond Information" in Proceedings of the International and Interdisciplinary Conference IMMAGINI? Image and Imagination between Representation, Communication, Education and Psychology, Proceeding MDPI (ISSN 2504 3900), 2017, 1(9), 891. DOI: 10.3390/proceedings1090891.

V. Burgio, "Uncertain infographics: how to visualize doubtful and unreliable data" in Semiotica, Journal of the International Association for Semiotic Studies (de Gruyter, Berlin, ISSN: 1613-3692), special issue Meaningful data, D. Compagno e M. Treleani eds. (in press)

Rivista Classe A per il SSD 11-C4 according to Anvur.