Save the World with Maps: Visualizing SDG Indicators

Menno-Jan Kraak (Netherlands)

SUMMARY

The United Nations identified seventeen Sustainable Development Goals to collectively address the most pressing problems facing our world in relation to social, economic and environmental challenges. Each SDG has a set of targets and indicators to assess progress across countries.

To achieve the goals, we need to understand each challenge and be able to monitor progress towards alleviating it. Well-designed maps and diagrams can assist in this process because they effectively reveal spatio-temporal patterns, such as deforestation, and the environmental and social challenges resulting from it. Maps can support decision-making by local and national authorities as well as promote public awareness of global issues to encourage these authorities to act.

However, many of the maps and diagrams about the SDG indicators are produced without awareness of established cartographic design guidelines. Flawed and misleading designs often result. Problems also regularly originate from inappropriate data-handling, distracting base maps, inappropriate map elements, and the (mis)use of software defaults. The presentation will demonstrate these problems and discuss the challenges face to avoid them.