Dear Many Eyes Team,

I was recently introduced to Many Eyes as part of my coursework in Ben Shneiderman’s Information Visualization course at the University of Maryland. I was quite impressed with its capabilities, and want to impart to you which features I found most useful. However, there are some things I believe it could do better and I would like to share some of those with you.

Two visualizations I am especially fond of are the Matrix Chart and World Map diagrams, both of which were able to do exceptional jobs illustrating differences within my data sets. The ability of the Matrix Chart visualization to display bubbles not only of different sizes but also as pie charts makes for a significantly more useful diagram than looking at size or color alone. This proportional coloring scheme is one I would love to see in some of the other visualizations as well. The World Map visualization could also be colored in this fashion, although it would be somewhat more challenging to fill in the country borders appropriately than a circle is.

Although the Matrix Chart visualization seems quite adept at showing relatively small datasets, those with many entries are challenging to interpret with the Matrix Chart. The lowest values are relegated to circles little more than a few pixels across, while the highest ones are only allotted 10 pixels or so. I’m not sure how I would improve it, but perhaps the observation alone will be helpful.

Additionally, the ability of the World Map visualization to compensate for countries labeled in a way inconsistent with your design by giving the user options is quite useful when importing outside data sets from many different sources. It seems no two groups utilize the exact same scheme for country names. However, every time a visualization is created even from the same data set it would ask for you to match up the entries in the data set with countries on the map. Perhaps there is some way to store the user’s choices so that when they try to visualize a data set a couple of times they only have to make the choices the first time and are given the option later of using the same ones. I can even see allowing those choices to be used for multiple data sets the user uploads, as long as they have the same entries in the country column as the initial data set.

The ability to input data sets by copying and pasting is incredibly useful, and it is wonderful to see how Many Eyes interprets the pasted data on the fly. However, it would be nice to have an additional option of uploading an Excel or CSV file for larger data sets. Furthermore, I would have appreciated some online data set editing feature to convert entries like “10 million” into a numeric value, as I ended up having to do the replacements by hand. One problem I had while uploading data that looks like more of a bug than a design choice is the inability to input particular URLs for the data set source successfully. The following, for example, originally caused an error message of some kind and prevented the uploading of the data set, but I have been unable to repeat the problem while writing this letter.
http://www.intute.ac.uk/sciences/cgi-bin/worldguidecompare.pl?all=yes&country1=%23&country2=%23&country3=%23&country4=%23&submit=Compare%21&compare=GDP&compare=GDPcapita&compare=TelephoneLines&compare=MobilePhones&compare=TVStations&compare=InternetUsers

Overall, I found that Many Eyes is incredibly useful as an easy and free visualization tool, and can help bring Information Visualization to the masses. It is great that you’ve developed such a wonderful web community for it, as well. I hope that my suggestions are useful, and I am eager to see the continued development of Many Eyes.

Sincerely,

Cody Dunne