Leveraging a Living Atlas of the World

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Abstract:

In 2014 Esri's ArcGIS Living Atlas of the World (LAW) debuted as a community GIS that allowed for sharing across the world, a new kind of "living atlas" of geographic information. The LAW was designed to provide easy, efficient, and meaningful access to enormous amounts of GIS content openly shared on the web and to be an online catalog of curated authoritative and best available geographic information from individual organizations, partners, and the global GIS community.

Today the LAW now includes millions of items in thematic categories such as satellite and aerial imagery, basemaps, demographics, landscapes, boundaries, transportation, urban systems, oceans, infrastructure, and historical maps. It continuously hosts updated datasets, map layers, maps, apps, storytelling maps, and analytical models from governments, academia, nonprofits, businesses, other organizations, and individuals worldwide (Dangermond 2024).
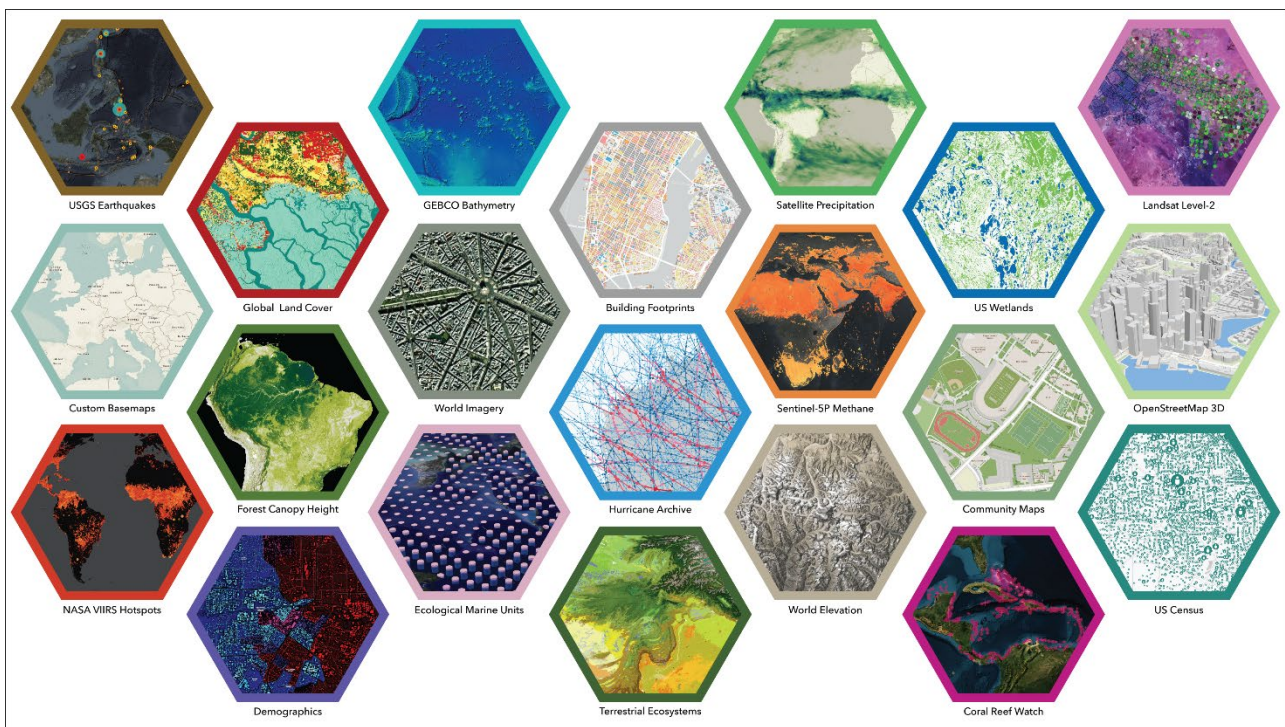
Figure 1: A selection of layers from ArcGIS Living Atlas of the World which contains terabytes of geographic information shared by the GIS community and Esri partners on every subject and geography imaginable.

In one sense, LAW can be seen as presenting the highest expression of data in a modern GIS. It reflects a synthesis of information that reveals far more than what single information layers can show on their own and today, it remains the largest repository of digital geographic datasets in the world (Dangermond 2024).

Since its inception, the LAW community has grown by collaborating organizations that author, host, share, and use data layers from the collection and as more organizations provide their information into LAW, GIS users increasingly experiment with and apply new patterns for their maps (Dangermond 2024). LAW does not own each layer in the library, instead the content is managed, maintained, and retained by those that nominate it.

In this presentation you will learn how to discover and use this vast collection of global geospatial information for cartographic purposes. The map examples shown will be from Esri's founder Jack Dangermond's first authored book called *The Power of Where* and will demonstrate how LAW content was used to support dozens of maps found throughout the book.
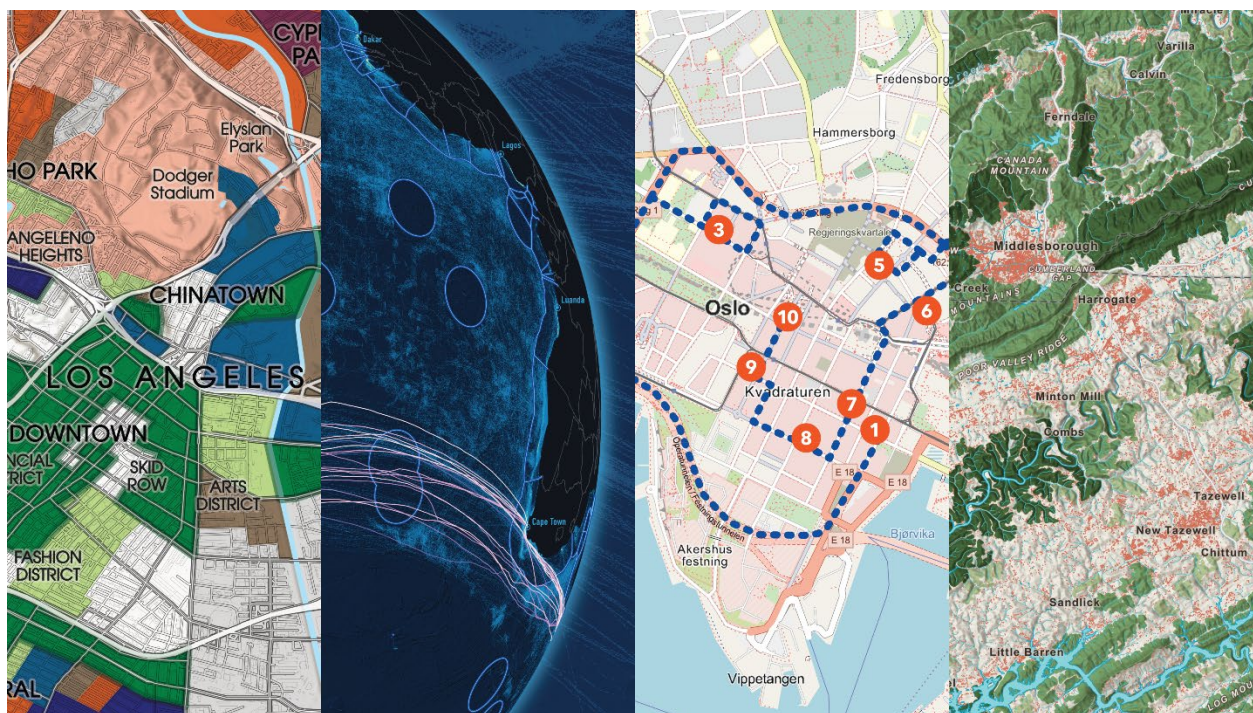

Figure II: Four maps from The Power of Where. The presentation will show how to leverage LAW content to cartographically supplement your projects.

The presentation will show workflows for how to use web-based ArcGIS Online, a customizable basemap editor, as well desktop software ArcGIS Pro. Special emphasis will be placed on leveraging LAW for cartographic purposes to supplement individual projects across a wide variety of disciplines.

References

Dangermond, Jack. 2024. The Living Atlas. In: *The Power of Where. Chapter 6: What is Geocollaboration?*. June 2024, Redlands, California, USA. *(Note: This abstract author was Cartographic Editor for this publication and was part of the core production team for the book)*

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