

ASSOCIATION OF CANADIAN MAP LIBRARIES AND ARCHIVES  
**BULLETIN**

**GIS Trends**

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**Situating GIS Services: New Neighbours and Spaces**

Years ago I gave a paper at a joint conference of the Association of Canadian Map Libraries and Archives and the Canadian Association of Public Data Users arguing that “MaDGIC Units” could be an ideal way to organize specialized library units that would include maps, data, government publications and GIS technologies and services. At that time, Queen's and Trent had this form of organization, with Carleton soon following. The Ontario crowd were not alone in recognizing the merits of organizing services and collections in this way. In fact, I believe it was Sharon Neary of the University of Calgary who first coined the acronym “MaDGIC” that a number of us then adopted (not all units included government information, but the acronym also accommodated GIS centres and other variations). MaDGIC units are still found across Canadian university libraries, although some have broken up, and some are looking at new definitions of their roles within the context of evolving library technology needs and organization.

Is there a perfect organizational structure? Over the course of my career I've spent many hours in library management meetings devoted to this question (sometimes willingly, and sometimes wishing I could escape and get back to what I really enjoy – the immediate operations of my unit). But organization does matter: we work in a field where rapid changes in technology regularly require us to adapt and reorganize ourselves to better meet the needs of our students and researchers.

What trends, then, are apparent in the organization of GIS support services? Are MaDGIC units still our best bet?

The past two years have seen my library turned upside down – in a good way. The university received a major grant to renovate our main library building. This required “shovels in the ground” and a renovation project to be completed within 18 months. Together with our collections, we all moved out to a variety of rented warehouses and other vacant spaces. To put it plainly, we, along with our faculty and students, adapted to these new circumstances. But the move became an opportunity not just to adapt, but to rethink collection content and how our spaces are organized. Marie Kondo here we came: we purged many stacks, by and large keeping only what would make a 21<sup>st</sup> century academic library relevant, and, hopefully, a “joy” for future research and teaching efforts.

Our project architects asked tough questions about logical groupings and overall needs. I found my view confirmed that maps, spatial and statistical data, and government publications - and the

technologies related to the support of these collections – should be kept physically and administratively together. These collections often share corporate authors, they relate to each other, and, I have observed, are used together. Those who service these collections are in a better position to do so, I would argue, if their turf includes all of them. Fortunately, project architects and library administration and colleagues agreed with me.

The more interesting question soon became: who should be our neighbours? The renovations gave us an opportunity to make a “big ask,” and we went for it. We wanted access to new technology and a lab, in MaDGIC, where students and researchers could work with specialized software and peripherals. Like many other universities, we’re on the “data visualization” bandwagon. The MaDGIC Unit now oversees the Data Visualization Lab, various specialized software (spatial, statistical, visualization) and a range of hardware peripherals.



*Fig.1 Trent MaDGIC Data Visualization Lab promotional slide*

We also asked to be next to the library’s new Critical Making Studio – a Maker Space with extra features that take it beyond physical fabrication to support such activities as podcasting, textual digitization and video capture. We’ve rationalized our purchases with our new neighbor, so that now our budgets go further, making it possible to support more software, and peripherals such as 3D and laser printers, 3D object and wide format scanners, a range of cameras including 360 VR, microphones and other video and audio capture technologies. Not on our list was a drone – an oversight which I hope we can correct in the near future.

Already, MaDGIC and the Critical Making Studio are collaborating on projects, trading keys to our spaces, and learning from each other. Critical Making Studios make ideal neighbors for MaDGIC units.

Another interesting result of this transformation of space and associated organizational discussions was that the university's senior administration moved some research labs associated with the quantitative social and natural sciences next to us, with the hope that collaborative projects would naturally evolve. For example, the Trent Centre for Aging and Society, the Canadian Environmental Modelling Centre, and the Indigenous Environmental Institute are among MaDGIC's new neighbours. The jury's still out as to whether this will lead to greater involvement in collaborative research, but the infrastructure and interest are certainly pushing us in the right direction.

Finally, MaDGIC also gained a small room dedicated to Virtual Reality (VR) and digitization. In an upcoming research leave I plan to make this space my new "happy place" – exploring how VR and associated spatial technologies can be integrated and used to tell stories about local environmental history in new ways.

I look forward to more discussions at upcoming conferences regarding ideal organization structures for our services, and I welcome your thoughts and feedback on this article.

### ***About the Author***

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### ***GIS Trends: Note from the Editor***

Submissions and Feedback

GIS Trends is a place to share ideas, observations and discoveries in the area of GIS and other spatial technologies. If you have something you would like to share please write to me. We also welcome feedback on GIS Trends articles. Proposals for articles and feedback should be sent to: [bznamirovski@trentu.ca](mailto:bznamirovski@trentu.ca)

Thanks for reading and contributing!  
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