As the GIS & Map Librarian in the Earth Sciences & Map Library at the University of California, Berkeley, Susan Powell manages the geography and geospatial library collections, teaches workshops, and provides reference and research support. Before coming to Berkeley she was a GIS Specialist at the Yale University Library where she worked on spatial discovery projects. She has M.A. degrees in both Geography and Library Science from Indiana University, and is interested in data accessibility, digital humanities, and Mongolia, among other things.

Perspective

Everything seems to come back to appropriate metadata, and to scale. The geospatial community has been wrestling with metadata for years, and libraries have long-held standards for cataloging physical maps, which are excellent places to start. I think, though, that we have not yet sufficiently tackled the problems of creating spatial metadata that answer the questions that library discovery systems need in order to best make data discoverable. We also do not have the human resources available to catalog each dataset created. By focusing on collections of data, we can sidestep this issue in part, but this too becomes a decision of metadata and scale: at what level in space/time/topic granularity do you define your collection? The recurring questions for me as a collector, describer, finder, and user of spatial data are: what criteria do I use to select data to preserve, and what are the minimum and ideal metadata fields needed to describe this data?