Mapping Culture – Communities, Sites and Stories Conference

Coimbra, Portugal

Panel - "Final Reflections" (30/05/2014)

Alys Longley, University of Auckland, New Zealand

"Arts-related stream"

paper birds story feathers

authored by presenters at mapping culture   2014
curated by alys longley

the water when you drop the stone it will have these circles
the great opportunit====== of our mind to imagine things

& in kurzon they teach their audiences to use their imaginations also
a new way to talk about what's happening in the city

they swept the whole street for people who wanted to tell stories
private stories compressed into paper birds with story feathers

a lottery played on the roadside
making things in a language the community would understand

who is included? Who is silenced? creating kinds of opening
you are where you live

a paradigm shift in the use of language
a non-heirarchical   mobile device for thinking

an array of methods in search of a field   a field of practices in search of a method
indirectly drifting   playful impacts

the water when you drop the stone   it will have these circles
a lottery of stories included or silenced

the light comes through through some kind of opening
popular culture meets digital imagining

a frozen lake as workshop   as gallery
a kit for a floating camera obscura immaculately cross hatched

what a nation state allows
the waves of a white canada policy ripple and ripple

rendering the substance and full-bodiedness of stories
articulating exclusionary models and legislation

the notion of the palimpsestic – layers can be read back in
fragment and layer   critical spelling mistakes

reversing the trend to silence
criminalized for acts of travel

do you have your own curation?
gut level scholarship

channelling return   mapping the missing
the kind of loss that haunts us urgently

the light comes through through some kind of opening
a frozen lake criminalized   a kit for reversing silence

we became of our own presences   we listened to the sea   unsure of how much was recorded and how
much was live

the feeling of sound
playful complicity

the active activity of dwelling
creating time between walking and stilling

connecting differently with the everyday
opening up possibilities and memory

a new virtual world linked to an old material world
digital objects integrated into real places

skeleton effigies   less than vapor   more visible than bone
an empire the size of the empire

a worldwide public square
a collective memory map

what have you lost?   equals   what do you value?
hidden moments become generative

writing from within   a moving position
a simple practice complex   contested

the many under theorised acts of the everyday   a meditteranean microclimate
in the soil of aberdeen   loosely choreographed moments   micro triggerings

we became aware of our own presences   we listened to the sea   unsure of how much is recorded and
how much is live   playful complicity with serious loss

small labels   memory signs   a device to collect meanings
the possibility of taking a table and perhaps two chairs and placing them in a useful

place and to ask them   how would you do this?
a little bit uncertain of what's going to happen

maybe you understand things in different ways
how the local authorities use our outcomes to get better places to live

the simple question first
if it's beautiful it will invite engagement

escape routes more important than sea walls
small road time

the worm's eye view
we have to go through these processes a lot of times

mash up maps
the relationship between resilience and imagination

bottom top middle   middle place dreams
perpetual adaption to change

small labels   memory signs   a device to collect meanings
a little bit uncertain   small road time

the water when you drop the stone it will have these circles
a lottery of stories included or silenced
the light comes through some kind of opening
a frozen lake criminalized   a kit for reversing silence
we become aware of our own presences we listen to the sea unsure of how much is recorded and how
much is live
playful complicity with serious loss
small labels   memory signs
a little bit uncertain   small road time

the water when you drop
the light
stories freezing & melting play & loss
a little bit uncertain
a kit for reversing silence

David MacLennan,

Department of Sociology and Anthropology, Thompson Rivers University, Canada

"Methodology/conceptual related stream"

Maps involve the exercise of power.

Maps are sources of aesthetic pleasure.

And maps, as Lev Vygotsky argued, are symbolic tools: they confer cognitive advantages on the user.

All of these dimensions of maps – the political, the aesthetic, and the cognitive – have been explored, exhibited and performed at this conference. It's been a great conference. Thank you again to Nancy and to all responsible.

I have two observations, and both are primarily concerned with the cognitive dimensions of maps.

My first observation concerns the status of cultural mapping as a form of inquiry and a social movement. Like environmentalism, cultural mapping is situated in two worlds: the world of research and the world of advocacy. Those engaged in cultural mapping enact different roles: the role of the researcher, and the role of the advocate. While research and advocacy overlap, they are not identical. People may be good at research, but not so good at advocacy. People may be good at advocacy, but not so good at research.

But beyond this basic concern, is there any reason to think of the worlds of research and advocacy as somehow separate? There are obvious reasons for bringing them closer together. Researchers need to be able to look beyond the academy, and to develop the abilities to communicate effectively with policy-makers and various non-specialist audiences.

Moreover, if we consider recent trends in the world of research – the practice of data visualization, for example – we find guiding principles like "clarity, honesty, [and] showing the data" (Healy and Moody, 2014) that belong equally to the worlds of research and advocacy. Yet some social scientists argue that the credibility of the knowledge they produce depends, in part, on the boundaries they maintain between the worlds of research and advocacy. Thus the issue of boundaries remains unsettled, and debates about the appropriate relation between research and advocacy continue. Opportunities to participate in debates of this kind will play an important role in the development of cultural mapping as a field of inquiry.

My second observation concerns the relation between cultural mapping and established academic disciplines. Sometimes cultural mapping seems to 'float free' of established disciplines. This can be an advantage, allowing cultural mapping to play to its strengths: interdisciplinarity, innovative map use, and a keen sense of the spatial dimensions of cultural phenomena.

But sometimes this approach can be disadvantage. Let me illustrate this point with one example. For several years I have been exploring different examples of gentrification with my students. Gentrification is a complex process that is transforming the city and the countryside in many parts of the world. It is deeply cultural: in cities, especially, gentrification is associated with the transformation of built space, the creation of a various cultural amenities, and the in-migration of the creative class.

Gentrification is cultural. But gentrification is political, economic, and sociological as well. One could use cultural mapping to study gentrification. In fact, with its tools of spatial and place-based analysis, cultural mapping is ideally suited to the task. But there is an established literature on gentrification consisting of the theories and findings of many academic disciplines.

My second observation is simply to assert the value of building on established bodies of knowledge. Cultural mappers who seek to understand the forces that produce cultural infrastructure will benefit from knowledge of the literature on gentrification, and cultural mapping will realize its full potential if it finds ways to balance innovative research practices, with practices that are grounded in established disciplines.

To summarize: cultural mapping has great potential, and this conference has confirmed that potential. As the field evolves, those involved will find themselves confronting basic questions concerning the relation between research and advocacy. Also central, will be the question of how to balance innovative research practices with practices that are grounded in the theories and findings of established disciplines.

Reference

Healy, K. and Moody, J. (2014). Data visualization in sociology. *Annual Review of Sociology* (forthcoming).

M. Sharon Jeannotte

University of Ottawa, Canada

"Planning and local development"

I should preface these remarks by noting that I am an advocate of the "slow thought movement". I would prefer to have had more time to digest and analyze the many presentations that were made at this conference before sharing my thoughts. However, as these comments were assembled at around midnight last night, after a long day of attending sessions, they are necessarily based on preliminary impressions. They are, in other words, "fast thoughts", which I fear may be the intellectual equivalent of a meal at McDonalds.

I would like to riff a bit on Will Garrett-Pett's question of yesterday morning: Is cultural mapping an emerging field in search of methodologies or is it a bunch of methodologies in search of a field? Taking a planning and local development perspective, I think that we first need to address issues of power and governance. What is the role of the public authority in the realm of cultural mapping and how does it carry it out?

Let's start with the concept of "public". What role should the local authority play in engaging the public in cultural mapping initiatives? As Graeme Evans stated, in some instances, the local authority can drive the process, but in the end, it is the *public* that needs to own it. The local authority should create the space where we can listen to each other and, as Sarah Giddens and Simon Jones suggested in the artistic panel yesterday, engage in dialogue without judgement. We should, however, be conscious, as John Craig Freeman, Abby Suckle, and Seetha Raghupathy have told us, that this space is no longer confined to the public square, but has moved to the non-physical, virtual realm as well.

Turning to the topic of methodologies, we were cautioned by Leonardo Chiesi and Paolo Costa that cultural mapping is only meaningful when attached to a larger project – in other words it must be strategic rather than tactical. Once you have a strategy, then you can choose appropriate tactics. Or as Kathleen Sherf said, effective cultural mapping is not just a question of technique, but also a question of choice. In this vein, Raquel Freitas, in the methodologies panel on the first day, urged the local authority to recognize that culture is the fourth pillar of sustainability for communities (along with the environment, the economy and the social sphere). By adopting the four-pillar model as the analytical framework for cultural mapping, local authorities will be adopting a balanced approach to issues of power that often determine what is mapped and who gets to contribute to mapping efforts. In regard to the thorny question of mapping intangible cultural resources, we were told by several speakers that cultural mappers can learn a lot from the environmental movement. For example, many environmental researchers are experimenting with techniques to measure the contribution of intangible culture (or what people value) to eco-system services. One of the primary tools they are using to do this is *narrative*, something at which the cultural and artistic sector excels.

In the planning and local development sphere, many speakers told us that public engagement is a vital part of the cultural mapping process. Janet Pillai showed that hands-on collaboration and negotiation builds trust between public authorities and citizens / stakeholders. Raquel Freitas went further to say that a bottom-up approach to cultural mapping can and should be integrated with strategic outcomes. Some techniques include co-working, co-authoring, and the integration of different forms of knowledge into the mapping process. Christine Hjorth gave us a number of examples of public consultation in the development of maps of tangible cultural resources, which in local planning and development tend to be undertaken for a host of instrumental reasons (for example branding or economic development). Such consultation is valid and useful, but when it comes to mapping intangible cultural resources (or "soft values", as she put it), the public is a local authority's primary resource.

Christine Hjorth also told us to acknowledge and address what she called "the black list", many examples of which are familiar to local authorities working on cultural mapping projects:

- Lack of resources (including adequate data) to maintain the cultural map or to follow through on it
- Planning fatigue or too many plans and too many consultations
- Competition for resources or lack of collaboration (which can occur between cultural disciplines, within cultural disciplines, between municipalities, and among the different social, economic, and cultural sectors located in a community)
- Political turbulence, which can include a change in administration that results in the delay or cancelling of mapping project, or a lack of engagement by planners
- "Old school" economic development thinking that does not see the value in gathering information about cultural resources.

Despite all these potential negatives, many speakers demonstrated the value in undertaking cultural mapping exercises. Caldon Merciera and George Cassar indicated that the concept of culture as a network of players was helpful and that local authorities should focus on the variety of cultural uses and practices that take place in public spaces, rather than on the spaces *per se*. They also cautioned that cultural space is sometimes contested and that local authorities need to take a balanced approach to ensure that these spaces accommodate all those who use them. As Claire McCaughey, Caroline Lussier, and Rodger Hunter said in their presentations, cultural mapping can provide a platform for deeper understanding and for building relationships, but sometimes, as Sabrina Pratt, pointed out, the process needs a dynamic leader who is able to "take you over the cliff". Sometimes one just must have faith that the local authority has "the public good" at the heart of its planning and development processes and that one of its priorities in support of the public good is the health and vitality of the community's cultural eco-system.

Lorena Sancho Querol

Cities, Cultures, and Architecture Research Group, CES, University of Coimbra

"Community engagement"

Last April, during the creation process of our Conference and, in between all our intensive correspondence among the organizing committee, I received a colorful e-mail from Nancy. She was asking me if I could take part in the last Plenary and contribute to the final reflections of the Conference. The challenge would consist in reflecting about "Community engagement".

Then, while feeling like a happy sheep in the middle of the prairie, I breathed deeply to deal with the emotion: this is a matter I am really fond of and a strategy I actively engage in, whenever possible, so… after a second breath, I wrote back honored to accept the challenge of sharing some reflections about this theme, defining, however, 3 "conditions" in order to do so:

First - I *would do it from the perspective of a person actually working with local culture, local museums and local heritage… to place them in an interdisciplinary framework, in the center of the process of integrate development;*

Second- *I´d focus on the southern part of this cracked Europe;*

Third - *I´d add some critical condiments resulting from my last experiences and researches.*

Here you have my reflection…

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In the countries of southern Europe, the economic adjustment policies being applied are causing a progressive weakening of the cultural activity in its various forms, and museums are a perfect example. Questioned within the transformation process involving a profound change of the management models, and of the prevailing values, cultural institutions, cultural associations and cultural initiatives in general, are seeking a sustainable model.

In this context, new formulas emerge associating sustainability to social creativity, valorization of diversity and contemporary (and balanced) uses of cultural and natural sources, from a local-global perspective.

At the same time, in the last decades, the concept of "culture" became strongly influenced by the critical debates coming from areas such Museology, Anthropology, Sociology or Heritage Studies, but also by the last generation of UNESCO declarations and recommendations, taking on new meanings.

So, at a certain point, we began to hear about the importance of dealing with this concept, that is culture, in a wider sense. This means to treat all cultural forms and their protagonists, including those that had so far been ignored or neglected, as legitimate.

From then on, words like "community" (and all the related concepts, like "community engagement") went through a metamorphosis that, with time, would turn it into an inclusive concept, valuing difference, and turning a keyword, due to its sociocultural and political effects, in the middle of the process of construction of our modern democracies (that is, during the 80s, 90s…)

So, "community" became a very useful word, very often linked to human collectives, their ways of life and their ways of adapting to a territory, conquering a flexible character.

At the same time, also step by step, new perverse uses were emerging, linking this word to a false inclusion, to a fluctuating presence and to political uses pretending a positive image… an image linked to colorful expressions like *social inclusion*, *democratization of culture* or *sustainable development*… In sum, to more or less camouflaged excluding practices!

Nowadays, we see mountains **of projects talking about what I usually call a "doubtful engagement"**, I mean:

an engagement where we might be able to feel the shadow of local communities and collectives, but not hear their voices;

an engagement where community (local inhabitants) can be compared to greenhouse mushrooms, because they appear only when conditions are favorable, for a short period of time, and they are consumed in any part of the world, in a question of seconds, without even realizing!

In fact, we know how complex it is to walk hand in hand with local inhabitants, since the beginning of a process: things go slower, must be plurally thought, plurally negotiated, decided and materialized… This is the reason why "co-methodologies" (co-presence, co-production, co-creation, co-authorship…) are essential.

So, let´s say that, working within these words and the constructive practices related to them, means:

- to adapt our minds, our laws, our methods and tools, our political structures or our schoolbooks to a dynamic notion of culture, heritage or identity;

- to learn how to work with different forms of knowledge (beyond scientific knowledge);

- to exercise otherness, day by day…

To end my reflection, and from a positive perspective on the expression "community engagement", I´d like to tell you that this couple of words, used together in contexts like Museology, Cultural Studies or Heritage Studies, place us before the challenges of…

- working with **CULTURE**: in the sense of **CULTIVATING** values and meanings

- dealing with **COMMUNITY…** to build a path of otherness, sharing **COMMONALITIES** and differences that enrich us

- building **ENGAGEMENT** processes… helping to build **ENGAGING** processes capable of hosting human and cultural diversity, by creating new formulas of "being inside", "feeling a part of", or having a word during the walk, but also in the final decision

- learning that word **MAP**, as a noun, can unfold in promising verbs like **MAPPING**, which, when happily married to the word culture, can have beautiful descendants, like the ones you have showed us during these 3 days of co-work.

Thank you for sharing with us all your inspiring experiences and go on with your challenging work, in company of our mapping echoes:

"A Map is always a political statement"

"Mapping intangibilities means to work with tangible people"

"as cultural agents or mapping artists (or whatever you consider yourself!)

we help to mediate,

we help to validate,

we help to recodify and reconfigure meanings,

we help to build consensus…"

Note: This reflexion is the result of countless talks with anthropologist and friend Catarina Barata, at the end of each day of Conference. I thank her for sharing ideas and for her wonderful Cambridge English!

Other reflections received from the participants:

WHY MAP? REFLECTIONS ON CULTURAL MAPPING FROM COIMBRA TO BRISTOL (Nate Eisenstad)