Cultural mapping, a new tool for community engagement and sustainability

Nancy Duxbury, PhD

“Strengthening the Creative Economy and Culture Sector: Repositioning the Culture Sector to Secure Sustainable Development”

THE EIGHTH MEETING OF MINISTERS OF CULTURE AND HIGHEST APPROPRIATE AUTHORITIES
Bridgetown, Barbados, 19-20 September 2019
Cultural mapping

An emerging field of interdisciplinary research and a methodological tool in participatory planning and community development

• Aims to make visible the ways that local cultural assets, stories, practices, relationships, memories, and rituals constitute places as meaningful locations

• Used to bring a diverse range of stakeholders into conversation about the cultural dimensions and potentials of place
Academic inquiry

‘spatial turn’ has influenced almost every area of academic work

from ‘the cultural nature or embeddedness of maps’ to ‘maps as agents of cultural inquiry’

Community empowerment/counter-mapping

• cultural mapping in Indigenous communities and territories
• collective action traditions: counter cartographies or ‘alternative maps’; citizen cartographies and people’s atlases; and mapping for change

Cultural policy

• the presence and development of cultural and creative sectors
• more holistic inquiries about local culture and place development

Cultural mapping and municipal governance

• to build a knowledge base
• to mobilize community collaboration
• to strategize or make decisions

Artistic approaches

• critical and creative interest in maps, mapping, relational aesthetics, issues of urbanization, and social engagement
• the role of artists and the arts as agents for enhancing community self-knowledge and sustainable community development

Adapted from: Duxbury, Garrett-Petts, and McLennan (2015)
Cultural mapping

From an operational perspective:

“a process of collecting, recording, analyzing and synthesizing information in order to describe the cultural resources, networks, links and patterns of usage of a given community or group”

(Stewart 2007: 8)

From an outcome-purpose perspective (e.g.):

Cultural mapping provides “an integrated picture of the cultural character, significance, and workings of a place” in order to help communities recognize, celebrate, and support cultural diversity for economic, social and regional development.

(Pillai 2013: 1)
• “Putting mapping and maps in the hands of people to allow for different points of views and ways of understanding and increasing agency in understanding, rights, and use of spaces”
  
  (Gieseking 2013: 723)

• A mechanism to foster democratic governance, citizen-led interventions, and “democratic responsibility in city management” based on processes that spearhead new modes of participatory interaction with citizens and use new technologies
  
  (Ortega Nuere and Bayón 2015: 9; also Nummi and Tzoulas 2015; Veronnezzi Pacheco and Carvalho 2015)
‘Ideal types’ of cultural mapping projects:

Instrumental, utilitarian approaches in line with “cultural industry intelligence”

Humanistic, integrated approaches

Valletta, Malta
Culture Map Portal (http://www.culturemapmalta.com) (screenshot, 15 September 2015)

Photo: Nummi and Tzoulas (2015)
1. ‘Cultural industry intelligence’

Inventory approach

→ Develop an **accounting** of tangible cultural assets, heritage resources, cultural venues, and arts and cultural organizations
→ Provide information from which to **identify relationships, clusters, and gaps**
→ **Plan and act** from this knowledge base

The process of mapping can

- **Reveal unexpected resources**, build **new knowledge**, articulate **alternative perspectives**, and foster **cross-sectoral connections**
- Serve as an **advocacy tool** that can bring together cultural professionals, civil society, and government
- Provide a **collaborative space** for culture professionals, planners, and researchers in the field of culture to work together
- Point to **themes and areas** requiring additional **policy attention**
Spaces for art/cultural activities
Cultural organizations
Multi-layered
Both tangible and intangible dimensions of culture help define communities (and help communities define themselves) in terms of cultural identity, vitality, sense of place, and quality of life. e.g., Mouraria, Lisbon
Belo Horizonte flavelas – Favela é Isso Aí (NGO) cultural mapping

Artists, creators, cultural organizations .... histories ... poetry ... radio broadcasts

→ Visibilizing cultural resources
Kā Huru Manu
A project dedicated to creating a Ngāi Tahu Atlas of place names and histories

Read the story of Kā Huru Manu
Welcome to the Ngāi Tahu Atlas.

Here you can see over 1,000 original Māori place names, kā ara tawhito (traditional travel routes), and the original Māori land allocations in the Ngāi Tahu takiwā.

- Use the search bar to search for any New Zealand postal address, Ngāi Tahu place name or land allocation.
- Click on any feature in the map to get detailed information about the location.
2. Humanistic, integrated approaches (Locally focused participative cultural mapping projects)

Foregrounding participatory, collective initiatives, cultural mapping forms a conversational platform and meeting place, enabled through various face-to-face workshops as well as online platforms.

The projects can:

- **Facilitate direct involvement** of residents and other site users in informational gathering, discussions, and decisions regarding the development of their locale

- **Create opportunities for dialogue** between a community and local authorities, offering “diverse sources of information [that] can overcome the limitations of expert opinions” (Bettencourt and Castro 2015: 28)

- **Provide information** that does not represent a ‘final answer’ or ‘end result’ but, instead, are “discussion openers” that open up new perspectives on mapping results and local development (Nummi and Tzoulas 2015; Pillai 2015)
Recovery of memories

Cherita Lebuh Chulia:
Living on Chulia Street 1945-1970
George Town, Malaysia
Recovery of memories
WHERE IS HERE?
SMALL CITIES,
DEEP MAPPING, AND
SUSTAINABLE FUTURES

Courtenay, Port Alberni
and Nanaimo,
British Columbia,
Canada,
2016
Cultural mapping for cultural planning (Ukraine)

For information about the Ukrainian cultural mapping initiatives, see: Knudsen McAusland and Kotska (2015)
The maps emerging from this work do not propose to make physical spaces static, to connote ownership, or to claim territory.

- **Articulate and make visible** the multi-layered cultural assets, aspects, and place meanings
- **Reflect and privilege pluralistic local knowledges**, perceptions of importance, and ways of understanding
  - Capture elders’ knowledge and inform younger generations
- Highlight the **dynamic lives of places** in their complexity, diversity, and richness
The maps emerging from this work do not propose to make physical spaces static, to connote ownership, or to claim territory

- **Articulate and make visible** the multi-layered cultural assets, aspects, and place meanings
- **Reflect and privilege pluralistic local knowledges**, perceptions of importance, and ways of understanding
  - Capture elders’ knowledge and inform younger generations
- Highlight the **dynamic lives of places** in their complexity, diversity, and richness

- Catalyze processes for **actively connecting to place** and **deepening knowledge** of a locality
- Provide a **platform** for collective **expression**, **discussion** among different groups, and **action**
- Guide **collective decision-making** and **strategies** for future development
Cultural mapping as platform for engagement and discussion
Cultural mapping as platform for engagement and discussion
→ Participatory processes central

- What to map and why and how
  - Artist-run community-engaged processes
- Processes to identify and document resources, knowledges
- Tell/share narratives, histories, stories
  - Share with others now (participants, wider community)
  - Document for future generations, preserve/sustain
- Analyze, assess findings (compilations, layers)
- Communicate/disseminate (reaching to multiple audiences)
- Take action(s), decisions, strategies
  - Policy/planning (challenges)
  - Local development strategies
  - Redevelopment/revitalization touchstones
  - Informing tourism – creative tourism development
Community engagement becomes more central to the creation of cultural maps + The nature of the knowledge collected through participatory cultural mapping projects deepens → Public questions and expectations about what will happen with the insights and knowledge created and how they will be used
1. A **methodological** concern:
   How to incorporate qualitative, complex, community-based inquiry and findings in policy and planning processes

2. A **more political** concern:
   How to ensure policy, planning, and political processes take up and consider the findings
Culture and sustainability

• **Culture is part of the empowerment, capacity, and identity of communities**
  Identifying and understanding cultural assets contributes to an holistic understanding of a place, its actors, and potential points of agency

• **Residents are experts of living in a place – What is important? How is culture defined and intertwined with place?**
  Cultural mapping can reveal how we attach ourselves, understand, use, and are inspired (or troubled) by the places we live – and identify issues within these storied landscapes

• **How is culture produced, expressed, made vibrant, and sustained?**
  Cultural mapping can provoke and support collective discussions of the cultural dimensions of communities – histories, memories, symbolic touchstones, other important aspects
  • To identify what is important, from plural perspectives
  • To think about heritage/cultural resources to preserve/sustain for the future + to activate

• **Maps are multidimensional and layered – e.g., Eco-cultural maps**
Eco-cultural mapping

Plural meanings of place

Islands in the Salish Sea
Cultural mapping

• Process + Knowledge-base developed + Artifact
• Siting tangible cultural assets → articulating and “placing” resources, meanings, stories
• Plurality; multiple perspectives, uses, and practices; connecting points
• To “visibilize” culture(s), possibly within wider integrated approaches
• Participatory approaches = necessity
• Artistic approaches can engage with felt sense of place
• Can contribute to interlinking domains
• What is done next?
"Maps like these express the interior of a place, rather than the exterior boundaries of territorially, surveillance, and control. They offer an outward portrait of a local intimacy, providing an opportunity to share, to empathize, to know and to care. They are a collective portrait of a community – a face – expressed beautifully and lovingly, with all the lines and marks of experience and age." (p. 19)

Thank you!

Nancy Duxbury, PhD
Centre for Social Studies, University of Coimbra
duxbury@ces.uc.pt