

Positioning Cultural Mapping in Local Planning and Development Contexts: An Introduction

Nancy Duxbury

Centre for Social Studies, University of Coimbra, Portugal

Cultural mapping projects often begin with an identification of tangible cultural assets, engaging community members to identify and classify local cultural spaces, activities, and resources, complemented by attempts to capture more symbolic and intangible aspects of place. Standard definitions of cultural mapping refer to it as a process through which the cultural information of a community is collected, analyzed, and synthesized. In this context, it can produce a multi-layered picture to help identify strengths, gaps, characteristics, and special features in the cultural and creative dimensions of communities.

As the articles in this volume demonstrate, however, cultural mapping projects are increasingly adopting a wider and deeper scope in the service of a variety of objectives: recognizing, articulating, and valorizing the cultural aspects of a communities' collective quality of life and well-being; defining the spaces and dynamics linked to environments of conviviality and vibrancy or to those of unpleasantness, fear, or conflict; identifying locations of creative activity and inspiration; interpreting the tangible and intangible effects of the reorganization and repurposing of urban space; or exploring the multilayered meaningfulness of shared urban spaces. In short, the articles demonstrate how mapping can serve as a tool to define and structure, to interrogate and probe, to challenge, and to imagine possibilities and alternatives.

The articles selected for this special issue originated as papers presented at the "Mapping Culture: Communities, Sites and Stories" international conference, which was organized by the Centre for Social Studies at the University of Coimbra, Coimbra, Portugal, in May 28-30, 2014. They have been reviewed and revised for this special issue, co-edited by M. Sharon Jeannotte and myself (bios below). The articles encompass a range of settings – from a very large metropolis, to medium-sized cities and regional urban centres, to smaller cities in a regional context and a village in a broader urban region. They address the use of cultural mapping in situations ranging from historic core neighbourhood rehabilitation and renewal processes, to ethnographic research in an urban periphery area, to mitigating marginalization in aging suburbs, to more generalized cultural planning processes. Geographically, the articles investigate cases located in La Plata (Buenos Aires

Nancy Duxbury is a Senior Researcher and Co-coordinator of the Cities, Cultures and Architecture Research Group at the Centre for Social Studies, University of Coimbra, Portugal. She is also an Adjunct Professor of the School of Communication, Simon Fraser University, Canada. Her research focuses on the link between culture and local sustainable development and on cultural mapping methodologies and applications. E-mail: duxbury@ces.uc.pt. M. Sharon Jeannotte is Senior Fellow at the Centre on Governance, University of Ottawa, Canada. Her research has explored links between culture and sustainable development, social cohesion, and citizenship from a multilevel governance perspective. E-mail: Sharon.Jeannotte@uottawa.ca.

province), Argentina; São Paulo, Brazil; Ottawa and the Waterloo Region, Canada; Sipoo and Pori, Finland; Lisbon, Porto, and the Centro region, Portugal; and Bilbao, in the Basque Country, Spain.

Reconciling tangible and intangible cultural dimensions

A renewed emphasis on the tangible *and* intangible dimensions of culture represents an important moment in the development of cultural mapping as a method and field of interdisciplinary inquiry (Duxbury, Garrett-Petts & MacLennan 2015). As Cristina Ortega Nuere and Fernando Bayón highlight, cultural mapping is “an unbeatable tactic to make the intangible visible and valuable” (p. 11) – cultural mapping can register the invisible, what is not there, what is absent, lacking, and what is proven and asserted. Soledad Balerdi sets her research in the context of contemporary attempts to reverse historic patterns of ‘invisibilizing’ indigenous populations, drawing attention to “the historicity of the processes of visibility and invisibility of the various social groups in national identity formation” (p. 158) – an important perspective to consider with regard to the ways in which city and neighbourhood identities are shaped and promoted. Ortega Nuere and Bayón point out how cultural mapping can reveal the indirect and intangible effects of processes on citizens, can suggest “the blind points in awareness of ordinary life that mark urban transformations” (p. 20), and can highlight “how urban transformation has very diverse effects and meanings that are silenced” (p. 18).¹

Cultural mapping is a methodology that can also support an *interpretation* of space. At both individual and collective levels, it is a means to locate yourself in the world “physically, culturally, and psychologically” as well as politically (Veronnezzi Pacheco & Carvalho, p. 119). It provides a means to consider day-to-day realities and provides a possibility to question this reality and generate an improved understanding of the cultural context (Veronnezzi Pacheco & Carvalho). Mapping processes provide ways to interact creatively with urban reality, to uncover and articulate diverse perspectives, and to generate unique meanings and value that can be shared (Ortega Nuere & Bayón, see also Saper & Duxbury 2015).

Politics and power in cultural mapping

As a practice that is taken up within planning systems as well as independently by activist-residents or researchers (in support or in opposition to the official planning systems), cultural mapping is infused with political dimensions. In this special issue, cultural mapping is linked to *social justice*, in that it can acknowledge the whole range of cultural expression within a local community and can convey an interpretation of this local culture in a way that links ‘grassroots’ activity with strategic decision-making (Häyrynen). It can create opportunities for dialogue between a community and local authorities, offering “diverse sources of information [that] can overcome the limitations of expert opinions” (Bettencourt & Castro, p. 28), information that does not represent a ‘final answer’ or ‘end result’ but must be seen, instead, as “discussion openers” that open up new perspectives on mapping results and local development (Nummi & Tzoulas, p. 172).

¹ For further research about mapping cultural intangibles, see *City, Culture and Society*, 7(1), a special issue on “Cultural Mapping: Making the Intangible Visible” (N. Duxbury & A. Longley, eds.), forthcoming in March 2016.

Cultural mapping is viewed as a mechanism to foster democratic governance and citizen-led interventions as well as “democratic responsibility in city management” based on processes that spearhead new modes of participatory interaction with citizens and use new technologies (Ortega Nuere & Bayón, p. 9; Nummi & Tzoulas; Veronnezzi Pacheco & Carvalho). As Bettencourt and Castro note, in recent decades participatory cartographic practices have been developed and implemented in order to “pressure the ‘official’ institutions that define the ‘official’ maps to acknowledge local perspectives about a place” (p. 26), with Ortega Nuere and Bayón suggesting that mapping has “gained social force and political relevance as citizens have become increasingly frustrated with urban planning that ... does not take their daily lives into account” (p. 10).

Both the process and the results of cultural mapping projects have political importance. Leonor Bettencourt and Paula Castro discuss the importance of community-based identity mapping in understanding the “battle of ideas” surrounding urban rehabilitation processes and the impacts that different perspectives can have (p. 24) – a subject that is also discussed by Stevens. Ortega Nuere and Bayón note that cultural mapping has a dual role: as a *witness*, providing an account of what is there, checking and recording existing practices and infrastructure, and as a tool to *detect the gaps* and to highlight and share the *décalage* (mismatch) between citizens’ wishes and the institutional planning.

The discourses that create cultural maps – and those that result from cultural maps – have real consequences for interventions in a locale. As Bettencourt and Castro highlight, from an external perspective, discursive patterns and public ‘stereotypes’ of a place, over time, can result in a ‘naturalization’ of the perceptions and the maintenance of a social situation of social inequality (Mcguiness 2005, see also Pilav 2013, Sandbach 2013). From an internal perspective, Balerdi points out how perceived boundaries “at the *limit* of community” are where senses of belonging are configured and where the discursive work of *identification*, involving the “binding and marking of symbolic boundaries [and] the reproduction of ‘frontier-effects’” (Hall 1996, p. 3), take on particular agency. In a similar vein, Ben Dick points out that while city officials found very few formal and tangible cultural resources in the immigrant-dominated neighbourhood of Bayshore, from the point of view of the residents a rich cultural diversity exists, combined with a strong sense of community. The interventions of these authors in cultural mapping places not usually highlighted on ‘official’ cultural maps – such as suburban areas or marginal neighbourhoods – reveal the limitations of traditional cultural mapping approaches.

Techniques and technologies

Cultural mapping, while engaging with qualitative questions of identity, culture(s), and place-based meanings, also includes cartographic processes of quantifying, labeling, categorizing, and organizing. Danielle J. Deveau and Abby Goodrum usefully outline a range of issues they faced related to this, including oversimplified definitions derived from categorizations which do not adequately capture complex activities, events, and spaces; the applicability of ‘big city’ categories, which may misrepresent ‘cultural vitality’ in smaller places; the invisibility of some cultural activities; and the dilemma that some cultural activities are not conducive to mapping, such as festivals or events that move locations, or ‘virtual’ work.

The challenge also entails identifying local cultural resources that are not limited to “institutionally defined culture” (Häyrynen, p. 104), which requires a broad focus in mapping to grasp culture as “a locally anchored way of life” (p. 114). Ben Dick recounts that the limitations of a ‘traditional’ tangible assets cultural mapping approach became particularly evident in a pilot approach to more closely map the cultural features of a neighbourhood not labeled as containing (pre-defined) cultural assets:

It showed that cultural mapping projects – particularly those that are framed by a pre-defined template for categorizing cultural resources with heavy emphasis on tangible cultural resources – can grossly understate the level of cultural activity in a neighbourhood. The project forced the City’s cultural mapping team to rethink the way culture is defined and categorized. (pp. 86-87)

In particular, he concludes, this experience places a greater emphasis on “community-driven approaches to neighbourhood cultural mapping that recognize the importance of intangible cultural resources” (p. 95).

The importance of adding a temporal perspective to cultural mapping initiatives is another theme that links many of the articles in this volume. Many cultural mapping initiatives are designed as a ‘one-time’ project. While a cultural mapping project may gather together an information base or may bring attention to overlooked perspectives and knowledge at a timely moment, the efficacy of that knowledge for planning and development processes is contingent on its relevancy over time. This may relate to, for example, better understanding locational and intensity changes in local artistic and cultural activity, or monitoring the quality of life of residents in changing neighborhoods, or tracking the diverse effects of significant urban renewal initiatives. Nummi and Tzoulas therefore advocate for cultural mapping to be “a continuous process that permits the assessment of the development of cultural resources over time as a result of planning actions” (p. 172). As Ortega Nuere and Bayón illustrate, cultural mapping can also give us “a new understanding of the historical processes that have transformed public spaces in cities whose productive models and social relationships have undergone critical changes, affecting how they project their identity inside and outside their boundaries” (p. 9).

If culture is truly to be an integrated part of urban and community planning and development processes, the advancement of cultural mapping projects into more regularized systems is required, with direct links between mapping and planning/decision-making processes (Häyrynen, see also Allegretti et al. 2014). This will require, as Nummi and Tzoulas point out, further work on how to integrate the tools of cultural mapping and of bottom-up thinking into administratively driven planning systems.

Participation, inclusion, and the building of relationships

Cultural mapping provides processes through which resident-citizens can participate in research, share their experiences and knowledge, and co-design their city in partnership with local authorities. Idealistic images of collaboration may clash, however, with the reality of multiple and conflicting perspectives, the cohabitation of fragile cultural ecosystems and more powerful forces, and socio-

political contexts that ‘invisibilize’ some parts of the population. And, of course, the adoption of participatory cultural mapping processes requires changing top-down administrative and governance approaches to more open and flexible ones.

Jeroen Stevens looks to applications of cultural mapping as tools for more inclusive forms of urbanism, a process that seeks to apply “collaborative imagination” to urban design and planning through engaging in “close collaboration with local cultures instead of merely illuminating cultural characteristics” (p. 57). He describes how urban space can literally become a ‘stage’ upon which the city as theatre produces and reproduces its social and cultural realities. Cultural mapping, he suggests, may be one of the major tools for translating social and cultural knowledge into spatial design. In the case of São Paulo’s Bixiga neighbourhood, the avant-garde Teatro Oficina has become an important mobilizer of public participation in the mapping of alternative spatial designs for the neighbourhood.

Working from within a municipality and placing an accent on citizen participation – from survey design to interpretation of findings – Pilvi Nummi and Tuija Tzoulas view cultural mapping as an avenue to introduce citizen-driven processes within top-down dominated administrative planning processes. The use of participatory technologies to support these aims is explored from this perspective (see Nummi & Tzoulas; Veronnezzi Pacheco & Carvalho). Maunu Häyrynen notes that participatory projects raise expectations in the local community about future development, and if participation has no concrete effect, “a disillusionment concerning participation and collaborative planning may follow..., undermining rather than serving the goal of active citizenship and ultimately failing to mitigate marginalization” (p. 113).

In her article, Patrícia Romeiro focuses on the essence of operationalizing participation in a complex cultural mapping project. She points out that participation involves “a large and complex set of motivations and abilities” and suggests that cultural mapping projects be understood as “exercises of negotiation between the agents involved” (p. 137). Romeiro outlines how bringing participation into the core of a cultural mapping project requires the creation of ‘spaces’ or ‘contexts’ where participants can “experience new forms of legitimacy and build trust relationships” (p. 148). Those managing cultural mapping projects also need to develop good mediation skills and design activities with different levels of involvement, depending on individual participants’ motivation and ability.

This begins to address a deeper conceptual issue with regard to inclusion. As Balerdi argues, in the study of cultures and communities, concepts like ethnicity come into play *situationally*, as a resource rather than as a distinct and immutable feature. She critiques and argues against tendencies to essentialize the notion of ethnic identity, to reify culture, and to assume the existence of groups, and emphasizes the need to restore the multiple and heterogeneous senses of identification processes. For concepts like *culture* and *ethnicity*, Balerdi recommends that researchers “deconstruct them, comprehend them, and historicize them in the specific contexts in which they are brought into play” (p. 151), and “ethnographically rebuild relational frames, connections, and flows” (p. 159) – an approach in contrast with static mappings which may intrinsically emphasize ‘essential’ pre-defined features. She argues for an approach to cultural mapping that accounts for “the situatedness, the partiality, and the contingency” of ethnic identities and groups, an approach

that enables us to envisage “the contexts and interaction frameworks in which they occur” and thus allow us to account for “power relations and operative inequalities” (p. 159).

This emphasis on relationships, connections, and contingent categories and frameworks finds a parallel in Deveau and Goodrum’s issues with mapping ‘cultural scenes’, which, together with ‘cultural vibrancy’, is frequently used as “rhetorical shorthand” (p. 65) to promote art and culture-led place-making processes. Cultural scenes are defined as “overproductive signifying communities” in which cultural consumption is strongly linked to a specific social space and a linked common identity (Shank 1994; Straw 2004). Yet as social clusters of vibrant cultural/creative activity, they fluctuate over time and are not part of the ongoing cultural spaces infrastructure (Deveau & Goodrum), which renders them variable and movable items on any ‘map’.



As the authors in this special issue remind us, city space is both a stage (Stevens) and a text (Ortega Nuere & Bayón), and public space is a site of convergence, contestation, and imagination. Public spaces are important for place attachment, place identity, to build connections between past and present, to indicate ‘change’ as well as to help maintain a sense of continuity (see Bettencourt & Castro; Ortega Nuere & Bayón). They are also highly mutable and can be the sites of both evanescent ‘scenes’ (Deveau & Goodrum) and multi-layered, dynamic resources with deep roots in a neighbourhood or community (Romeiro). Cultural mapping offers a means to articulate, debate and interact with, and activate these dimensions, providing a platform through which residents are enabled to collaborate, build relationships of trust, co-construct the urban stage, and contribute passages to the shared public text(s).

The articles demonstrate how cultural mapping projects within local planning and development contexts are increasingly adopting a wider and deeper scope in the service of a variety of objectives. In the process, they are grappling with issues around the limitations of traditional cultural mapping approaches, including the conceptualization of culture, not only as a factor of economic dynamism, local identity promotion, and cultural policy, but more deeply, revealing the multifaceted ways that culture is embedded in, shaped, and produced out of relationships among people, place, and meaning. The importance of creating spaces and contexts in which trust relationships can be built, adding a temporal perspective, and establishing clear links between participatory cultural mapping processes and planning/decision-making processes are emphasized. Addressing these issues and others brought forth in the individual articles will advance the field of cultural mapping, both in theory and in practice, and can create more inclusive and culture-sensitive planning and city/community development processes.

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