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# Cultural Mapping as Cultural Inquiry

*Review of the book: Cultural Mapping as Cultural Inquiry*

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*Cultural Mapping as Cultural Inquiry*

Edited by Nancy Duxbury, W.F. Garrett-Petts, David MacLennan

Published by Routledge, 2015

In the Routledge Advances in Research Methods Series, Duxbury, Garrett-Petts and MacLennan have edited a volume on the method of cultural mapping which can be regarded as a central book for cultural policy research. First, it is rare that methodology books are published in the area of cultural policy research. Second, it is a method that is not just used as an academic method for inquiry, but also (and perhaps even more so) as a practical planning tool for communities as well as local authorities. I'll get back to this dual usage since I think it is important in the discussion of the method. The volume contains contributions from a wide range of scholars, both those working directly with geography and those representing a broad range of disciplines. Remarkably enough, none are from the Nordic countries, which means that it might be relevant to use this publication as an occasion to reflect upon cultural mapping's potential and uses in the Nordic countries as well.

But what is cultural mapping then? Based on the book, it covers quite a variety of methods and practices, but with some commonalities. In the introduction to the volume, the editors define it as: 'new ways of describing, accounting for, and coming to terms with the cultural resources of communities and places.' The development of mapping as method is linked to two important more general theoretical developments within the last 10–20 years: The so-called spatial turn in social sciences and humanities and the increased focus on participation and participatory research and policy practices.

The two are linked together not just because both of them have been fueled by technological development but also in their link to a discussion of power, wherein the power of defining the values of culture is central.

Cultural mapping is thus not just linked to the tradition of cartography and thereby to a visual presentation of the spatial structures of a certain area and its resources, but also to the discussion of the power to define this. Based on these

discussions (linked with new technological possibilities for user-generated data) the volume sees the method of cultural mapping as a collaborative practice.

The book is divided into different sections, reflecting the variety of contributions. In the first section, focus is on a more systematic assessment of cultural mapping as a practice in cultural analysis and as a part of political planning processes. The most systematic methodological reflections over cultural mappings are found in this section. From the Canadian *Cultural Planning Toolkit*, Evans stresses that cultural mapping ‘does not draw on a single model (i.e. one size does not fit all) but that it is both socially (and politically) produced (Gray, 2006) and reflects national/regional planning and cultural policy systems and priorities (Guppy, 1997).’ (p. 48)

One of the ambitions of cultural mapping is to link culture more clearly to the general development of society via the planning approach: By providing analysis based on some of the same approaches as other policy areas, culture might be able to position itself more centrally in policy and planning discussions. This ambition of lifting culture out from its marginalization seems to be a shared ambition of the authors. In this way (as it is explicitly stated in many of the articles) the discussion of cultural mapping is directly linked to discussions of sustainability and the ways in which culture should be incorporated in sustainable developments (see e.g. Dessein, Soini, Fairclough and Horlings 2015).

Another ambition, directly linked to the participatory approach, is to use mapping as an empowering tool for communities that, through participatory mapping processes, are given the opportunity to define culture and values of culture and make this visible, also on a policy level. This is especially an area of focus in the second part of the book, *Platforms for Engagement and Knowledge Through Mapping*. The challenges here – and how they might be tackled – are demonstrated in Pillai’s article on the mapping of historic George Town in Malaysia, a highly segregated society in which the process of mapping included a process of seeing cultural values not linked to one’s own culture.

In the third section, the concept of mapping and the notion of knowledge created through mapping is challenged, discussed and broadened. Giddens and Jones link cultural mapping directly to artistic research in an attempt to try and change a situation in which ‘the roles played by artists and art practices in cultural mapping have not been critically examined’ (p. 304). This leads to an investigation of the mapping of the intangible, an ambition shared with, for example, Scherf in her mapping of a Canadian Ski Resort. Narratives, perspectives, the sensory and the emotional are key words in these approaches.

This widening of the methods of mapping is strongly linked to an ongoing area of interest in many of the contributions: That of the relationship between map-

ping as a process and the map as a result. Roberts and Cohen link mapping as a process leading directly to spatial anthropology and thus to a process of not just mapping official statistical data but also to mapping meanings, memories, myths and narratives. In their article they demonstrate the way in which such an approach can open up for many more stories about the cinematographic history of Liverpool than the ones given in present official tourists guides to Liverpool as a film city.

The book includes: 1) very practical descriptions of how the process of mapping can be planned and executed (e.g. Scherf), 2) more traditional cultural policy analysis of how it has been used as a tool for different political objectives (e.g. Redaelli), 3) theoretical reflections on maps and mapping (e.g. Roberts and Cohen) and 4) more methodological discussions also linked to technological possibilities (e.g. Sullivan and Wendrich). As such it is a rich book consisting of contributions from a wide range of academics, all of them engaged (in quite different ways) in mapping processes around the world. Consequently, the book is not just – and perhaps not even mostly – a publication on the methods of cultural mapping, but on the ways in which the methods underneath the umbrella concept of cultural mapping are, and can be, used for different purposes. If the intention of the reader is to develop an understanding of how to use cultural mapping as *a* research method, this might be slightly disappointing, but as an introduction to a rich area of cultural inquiry with clear implications for cultural policy and cultural policy research, the book is worthwhile exploring.

Seen from a Nordic research perspective, it is worth taking note of the level of engagement and intervention in the different mapping processes used by the academics. This research tradition seems less strong in the Nordic countries, at least within the field of cultural policy. Another aspect worth taking note of is the interdisciplinarity of the contributors: Architecture, heritage management, urban studies and social anthropology are among the disciplines that can benefit from cultural mapping. This demonstrates a strong link between culture and areas such as urban planning, community building, destination branding etc., a link that should be reflected in research methods, designs and processes as well.