Re-situating participatory cultural mapping as community-centred work

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Abstract:
Participatory cultural mapping is rooted in practices of community engagement and collaboration, working to make visible and co-produce knowledge that is of value for community identity formation, reflection, decision-making and development. Meaningful collaboration requires fierce listening, sharing control and sensitive attention to processes and perspectives. In contemporary academe, aspirations to 'co-create' knowledge with communities are heightening and becoming more visible, but we also observe resistances to fully embrace the challenges and implications embodied in meaningful community-academe collaboration. These doubts and hesitations raise questions about the broader implications of democratising knowledge through meaningful community-engaged processes. In this context, this chapter will examine community-centred work through the lens of participatory cultural mapping, aiming to highlight characteristics of meaningful citizen participation processes; the need to recognise diversities of expertise, knowledge and experience; and the changing role(s) of academe in collaborative knowledge-generating contexts.

What is participatory cultural mapping?
Participatory cultural mapping is rooted in practices of community engagement and collaboration, working to make visible and co-produce knowledge that is of value for community identity formation, reflection, decision-making, advocacy and development. As historian Jo Guldi (2017: 80) records, the 'first recognizably participatory maps … emerged [as] embedded in global social movements where writers and activists stressed a variety of [graphic] tools that social activists could use'. By the 1970s, the emphasis, especially in North America, moved from social advocacy to a more pragmatic social and municipal planning agenda. Still, the promise of individual and collective empowerment—of giving voice to the many through mapping—persists.

Today such mapping aims to recognise and make visible the ways local stories, practices, relationships, memories, rituals and physical elements constitute places as meaningful locations. It embodies knowledge-building processes and comprises a platform for sharing and dialogue. On one hand, cultural mapping is a highly pragmatic knowledge-building 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). On the other hand, it is also a humanistic conversational platform and meeting place for discussion, sharing and learning, which is intentionally used as a methodological tool to bring a diverse range of stakeholders into conversation about the cultural dimensions and potentials of a place. Furthermore, there is growing recognition of the importance of participatory cultural mapping as a platform in which knowledge is not only *shared* but *co-created* in conversation (Duxbury, 2022). In other words, beyond the value of making visible/documenting individual experiences and knowledges, it is extending and building new collective knowledge in the process.

The phenomenon of cultural mapping has gained extraordinary international currency during the last 30 years as an instrument of communal expression, empowerment, intercultural dialogue and community building (Abrams and Hall, 2006; Bryan, 2011; Caquard, 2013; Crawhall, 2007; Gerlach,

2010, 2014; Guldi, 2017; Hunter, 2019; Kerski, 2014; Kitchin and Dodge, 2007; Roth, 2009). Participatory cultural mapping seeks to combine the tools and techniques of cartography with vernacular and participatory methods of storytelling to represent spatially, visually and textually the 'authentic' knowledge and memories of local communities. It is a social practice that invites multiple forms and modes of non-specialised vernacular discourse—from Indigenous communities, locals, those with lived/living experience, peers and those from not-for-profits and grassroots organisations representing multi-sectoral viewpoints—into the public sphere of community identity formation, political and social advocacy, local knowledge production, municipal planning, cultural sustainability planning, participatory decision-making and community engagement.

Participatory cultural maps take many forms, with choices ranging from the simple spatial arrangement of post-it notes on a flip chart, to mind map diagrams, to photo-voice exhibitions, to cultural asset maps, to group discussions and survey responses documented through graphic facilitation or web-based inventories, to detailed hand-drawn renderings of places and experiences and journeys, to multi-media compendia and even works of art (Cochrane et al., 2014; Corbett, Cochrane and Gill, 2016; Duxbury, Garrett-Petts and Longley, 2019; Stewart, 2007). Of these choices, it is the hand-drawn sketch maps, journey maps and story maps that are becoming increasingly recognised as rich cultural texts redolent with individual experience and especially worthy of greater attention from both scholars and practitioners (e.g., see Crawhall, 2007; Duxbury, Garrett-Petts and MacLennan, 2015; Pillai, 2013; Poole, 2003; Roberts, 2012; Sletto, 2009; Strang, 2010).

The potential of map creation implies possibilities for 'moving ideas into the world whether through representations of data or platforms for imagining' (Longley in Duxbury et al., 2019: 1). Cultural mapping projects create spaces and processes for collaborative research, learning, visualising, dreaming and community action. They provide opportunities to critically examine the past, assess the present, examine representations, make connections, address absences and envision continuities and change into the future. As Rike Sitas (2020: 16-17) points out, participatory cultural mapping and related initiatives can play a key role in inclusive urban planning:

> To leverage culture and heritage for more just cities, pluralistic narratives that link fundamentally to places and people's lives are critical. These stories exist and are always in the making but need avenues through which to be surfaced… These narratives help shift our social imagination—the capacity to imagine alternative future worlds… Liberating culture, heritage and the imagination from rigid frames also opens up ways of thinking spatially and temporally… and this can foster the ability to speculate for more fantastical futures…

In this way, participatory cultural mapping is much more than assembling information, and its role in creating participatory platforms for sharing, discussion, thinking together and imagining future possibilities forms an essential dimension.

Extending from this, participatory mapping can be viewed as a mechanism to foster citizen-led interventions and democratic governance, based on processes that spearhead new modes of participatory interaction with citizens (Ortega Nuere and Bayón, 2015). However, in most situations, participatory cultural mapping tends to be employed as a one-time initiative, a project rather than a long-term strategy, and thus typically remains not fully articulated or integrated within community planning and development practices (Duxbury, 2019; Garrett-Petts et al., 2021; Garrett-Petts and Gladu, 2021). If cultural mapping is to become sustainable and transformative, community engagement must be based on partnerships that are more than merely transactional—that is, focused on more than operational tasks and fulfilment of short-term expectations (Duxbury and Garrett-Petts, forthcoming).

In the face of rapidly changing societies and diversifying forms of social exclusion, new approaches to citizen empowerment, citizen participation and social inclusion require ideas, knowledge(s), experiences, resources and capacities that are (dis)located across an array of arenas and distributed among different actors. Participatory cultural mapping processes and participant-generated cultural maps assert that 'local inhabitants possess expert knowledge of their environments and can effectively

represent a socially or culturally distinct understanding of the territory that includes information excluded from mainstream or official maps' (Duxbury and Garrett-Petts, forthcoming, n.p.). This approach is akin to counter-mapping, open to diverse perspectives, knowledges and ways of expressing, and to bringing these perspectives and knowledges into a public sphere. It foregrounds the importance of building cartographic literacy within communities—as is the focus of many counter-mapping and Indigenous mapping (see Pareira and Sletto, this book) initiatives in recent years. It acknowledges that the process of making implicit knowledge explicit and mobilising the symbolic forms through which local residents understand and communicate their sense of place, also have ethical and political dimensions.

Contextualising: community-academe collaboration
In contemporary academe, aspirations to 'co-create' knowledge with communities are heightening and becoming more visible, but we also observe resistances to fully embrace the challenges and implications embodied in meaningful community-academe collaboration. Participatory cultural mapping as generally practiced is also a highly mediated activity, inevitably informed by learned disciplinary assumptions and practices, and scaffolded by those with expert technical knowledge about community-based mapping processes.

Cultural mapping typically involves scholars and activists, cartographers and GIS specialists, workers from development organisations, local researchers, NGO volunteers, municipal workers, hired consultants, or others working with the community members in workshop settings or in the field, gathering and organising information. While both the local participants and the researchers/facilitators share many aims, there are nonetheless differences at play. The voices and individual perspectives embedded in the maps are easily paraphrased or otherwise subsumed by a more authoritative, synthesising and official discourse—ironically, a discourse driven by the desire to faithfully celebrate, preserve and learn from local voices (Garrett-Petts, 2016; Garrett-Petts and Karsten, 2019). At the end of the day, the maps and the processes that produced them become data available for expert collation, analysis, interpretation and re-representation; and, as might be expected in any emerging field, proponents of cultural mapping defer to what they already know, invoking processes and disciplinary practices which lend themselves more to the collection and analysis of the tangible (as opposed to the intangible) elements of local culture.

Lacking an agreed upon and informing theory of participation, cultural mapping has proven at best inconsistent in its efforts to represent local individual voices in all their dimensions. As Robin Roth notes (2009: 207), 'Community-based mapping, despite, or perhaps because of, its popularity, is … recognized as having unintended effects on rural communities'. Drawing on the work of Jefferson Fox, who has documented what he refers to as the 'ironic' effects of mapping, Roth cites increased conflict, increased privatisation of land, loss of Indigenous conceptions of space and increased regulation by the state as examples of 'the potential epistemic violence associated with counter-mapping and the entanglements of power that can shape mapping projects in unfortunate ways' (207). Roth notes further that

> The unintended effects of mapping ... stem from the dominant conception of space that frames and guides the cartographic representations of indigenous territories. They are … an outcome of rendering a complex spatiality into abstract space; allowing the 'more-than-abstract' spatial practices to go unrepresented. Community-based mapping using abstract space insists upon a singular representation of indigenous territory in a way legible to the state; insists upon fitting 'indigenous people into the spatial configurations of modern politics' (207).

A chorus of similar concerns has been expressed recently and mainly by academics, in particular cultural geographers and anthropologists, who urge consideration of 'unintended' or 'unforeseen' impacts of mapping, especially mapping of Indigenous cultures, that gloss over or minimise local difference, including identity formation, histories and the lived experience of personal landscapes (Abrams and Hall, 2006; Hale, 2005; Hodgson and Schroeder, 2002; Peluso, 1995; Sletto, 2012). As Brenda Parker (2006: 470) argues, while participatory mapping aspires to the values of 'inclusion,

transparency, and empowerment,' questions nonetheless remain regarding the maps' composition, 'how they should be evaluated, and the relationship between community maps and power'. She concludes: 'How mapmakers think through and engage ideas of empowerment and for whom it is envisioned and occurs need to be better understood. Furthermore, these projects need to be understood in relation to extant power relations and possibilities for social change' (479–480).

Furthermore, among those encouraging participatory democracy, championing local self-government and the right to the city, citizen participation and the techniques of cultural and community mapping are increasingly viewed through a cautionary lens:

> *... consultations with the public make a lot of sense, and this can take the form of surveys, focus groups, open houses, community mapping, community visioning, and much else. The techniques are now quite sophisticated. The key thing is that the authority to make the final decisions— and decide what sort of consultations are to occur—remains where it always was. As Leonard Cohen might have put it, "everybody knows" that the consultations are meant to help the authorities, not displace them. So, if you don't want to be a helper—like a little child in the kitchen—the attractions of taking part are not very great. Is it surprising that people refuse to participate?* (Magnusson, 2015: 58; italics in the original)

All these doubts and concerns inevitably raise questions about the broader implications of initiatives aiming to democratise knowledge through meaningful community-engaged processes.

Questions about the nature of individual participation and the depth of engagement in the public sphere are not new: since the 1960s, and especially with the publication of Sherry Arnstein's 1969 manifesto, 'A Ladder of Citizen Participation', planners, community organisers, social activists, artists and others have been categorising public participation on a spectrum of involvement. Arnstein references eight degrees of participation, steps on a ladder leading from 'manipulation' to full 'citizen control'—from informing to empowering. Anticipating the current academic commitments to inclusive excellence, including meaningful collaboration and co-creation involving both expert and lay knowledge, Arnstein makes us more aware of how context, power relations, social justice and motives influence the degrees of participation possible, allowing for conditions of no citizen power, counterfeit power and actual power. How, then, might participatory cultural mapping fulfil its potential as a field of inquiry dedicated to principles of empowerment, equitable inclusion and collaboration, co-creation and validation of diverse vernacular cartographies in the public sphere?

Re-situating and positioning participatory cultural mapping
In a sense, just asking such questions seems a critical first step. There is no doubt that participatory cultural mapping remains a valuable, relevant and increasingly deployed qualitative method for cultural inquiry; and critical self-reflection evidenced among its theorists and practitioners seems poised to provide the theory, history and examples requisite for the further development of participatory cultural mapping as an evolving field of study and practice. The work of scholars like Guldi, Roth, Gerlach and others makes us more acutely aware of the field's core principles, and the importance of using those principles to inform the mapping guides, handbooks, practices and assumptions employed.

In addition, and crucially, we need to re-situate and position participatory cultural mapping within the larger field of cultural mapping generally. The contemporary roots of cultural mapping intertwine academic and artistic research with policy, planning and advocacy contexts. The field's current methodological contours have been informed by six main cultural mapping trajectories: (1) community empowerment and counter-mapping, (2) cultural policy, (3) cultural planning and municipal governance, (4) mapping as artistic practice, (5) academic inquiry and (6) literary, music and film mapping (see fig. 1). The complexity, strength and vitality of cultural mapping arises through interconnecting these perspectives, sources of knowledge, approaches and methods, and trajectories of work. As we explore in detail elsewhere (Duxbury and Garrett-Petts, forthcoming):

While these trajectories can be distinguished in terms of their relative emphasis on the instrumental or the immediately pragmatic, they inevitably overlap, as suggested by the involvement of artists or social activists or academics in counter-mapping, cultural policy, and municipal cultural mapping initiatives. At the same time, each trajectory establishes a definable rhetorical purpose for mapping from the ground up. For example, the public documentation of land claims, the public representation of authentic cultural resources and traditions, the public inventorying of tangible and intangible cultural assets, the public and private deployment of cartographic techniques and sensibilities for aesthetic practices, or the public and ongoing interrogation of the visual and spatial turns in disciplinary research. The common challenge for cultural mapping in each context is the garnering of *deep community involvement* and the *affirmation of local knowledge* (n.p.).

Given this diversity of motives and approaches, it is helpful to provide a bird's eye view of the field in two organising schemas: First, evolution along *two main branches*, corresponding to 'ideal types': (1) cultural resource/asset mapping and (2) 'humanistic' mapping approaches (Freitas, 2016). Second, *three general orientations* of cultural mapping projects, according to the purpose, context and thematic focal point of a project. This general organisation, we believe, has influenced the way the field sees and defines itself, as well as the ways in which efforts are applied to advance methodological practices in each of these areas.

Branches of cultural mapping
Developing since the 1960s, *cultural resource/asset mapping* seeks to identify and document tangible and intangible assets of a place, usually in order to develop and incorporate culture and creative industries in strategies that address broader issues of a locale. In this context, a general distinction has often been made between *asset mapping* (physical or tangible cultural assets, such as cultural venues, public art works, historic sites, monuments and identifiable organisations and persons) and *identity mapping* (intangible elements—both historical and contemporary—that provide a sense of place and identity for a locale). *'Humanistic' mapping* approaches are rooted in social advocacy and community development work and tend to be associated with the rise of critical cartography (Dodge, Kitchin and Perkins, 2009). This type of mapping adopts a culturally sensitive, humanistic approach to understanding specific issues of a place, creating a multivocal platform for discussion and finding community-based solutions. Focusing on the people who are resident, living and interacting within a territory, it considers their knowledges, experiences, movements and memories integral to defining the cultural assets and meanings of the territory. The topics being examined, discussed and mapped can include both tangible and intangible elements. While *cultural resource/asset mapping* tends to emphasise the documentation of 'information' and the development of 'cultural or creative sector intelligence', *humanistic mapping* approaches tend to focus more on 'participation' and 'meaning'. However, they are not mutually exclusive and are increasingly blended and mutually informing approaches.

Three orientations
Characterised by the motive and purpose of a mapping project (rather than the types of items mapped), three general orientations can be observed within cultural mapping: (1) self and place, (2) community attachments to place and (3) culture(s) of place (Duxbury, Garrett-Petts and Longley, 2019). *Self and place* projects focus on personal attachments and connections between an individual and a place. The 'self' may be the mapper or another person. The mapping can document travel routes and sites of experiences, and may explore personal feelings, impressions, memories and other place-specific narratives and connections. The compilation of multiple individual maps can create a collective sense of a place. Informed by journey mapping approaches in health care and business, this type of cultural mapping practice has been applied to other social issues. *Community and place* projects focus on relations between a collective of people, their culture(s) and the territory they inhabit, and on how places are meaningful to the communities that live there. The knowledge collected can be collective in nature (that is, without enabling individualised extractions) or can be a pluralistic compilation of individual voices to provide collective messages and impressions, highlighting shared commonalities and

differences. *Culture(s) of place* projects attend to the cultural dimensions and aspects particular to a locale that make it distinct or significant. While also examining people–place entanglements, they focus more on the landscape itself, considering how a place itself is a repository of cultural information and impressions. These projects often emphasise understanding a place through multisensorial, material and experiential encounters. They may also attend to the immaterial dimensions that generate a 'sense of place.'
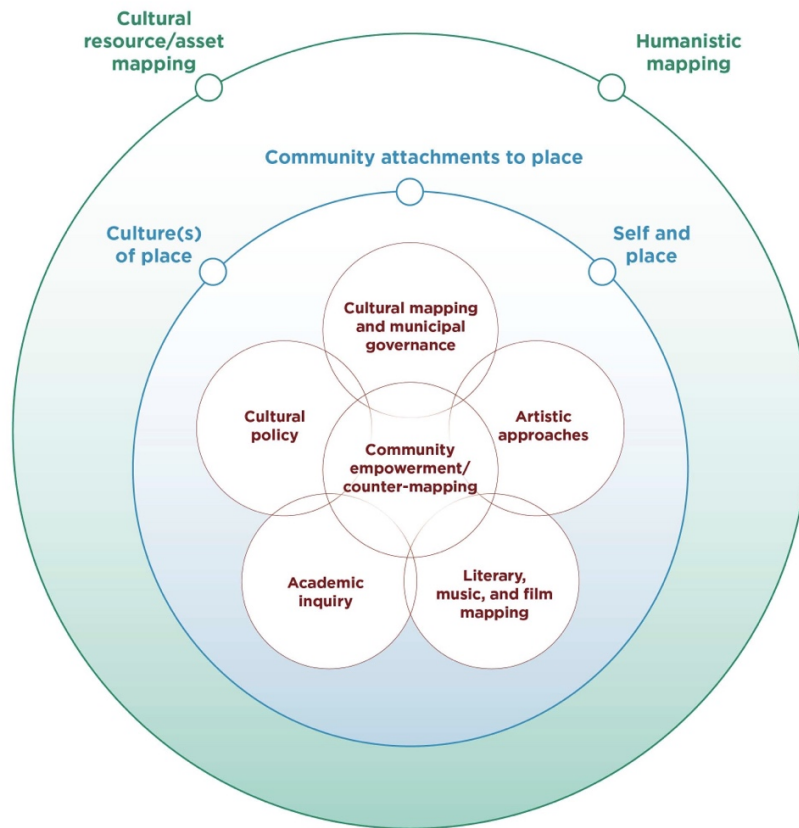

Fig. 1. Organising the field of cultural mapping: key branches and orientations. Created by the authors.

ALT TEXT: Three ways of organising the field of cultural mapping are presented in concentric circles. At the core, we present seven informing fields: community empowerment/counter-mapping; cultural policy; cultural mapping and municipal governance; artistic approaches; academic inquiry; and literary, music and film mapping. At the next level, these fields are depicted as being informed by three orientations: culture(s) of place; community attachments to place; and self and place. At the outermost level, the fields and orientations are depicted as governed by two overarching branches: cultural resource/asset mapping and humanistic mapping.

Moving forward

At a conceptual level, the project of re-situating the field of participatory cultural mapping still needs a more sophisticated and case-specific theory of participation specific to cultural mapping. This will help us understand when and where levels of participation are most crucial, and how they inform the integrity and impacts of cultural mapping projects. While its alignment with other types of participatory mapping work will inform this endeavour, the essential cultural dimensions of place-based meanings, memories and knowledges require additional input from allied culture-focused fields.

We also need further reflection on what we might call the rhetoric of the vernacular in cultural mapping: in practice, the inscription, validation and interpretation of individual viewpoints will remain at best inconsistent without a working theory of the vernacular. As Gerlach's (2010, 2014) groundbreaking work in this area suggests, an enhanced understanding of vernacular theory would provide a coherent body of ideas helping ground mapping practices, particularly for participatory cultural mapping seeking to make visible personal viewpoints and insights drawn from lived experience.

Increasingly, participatory cultural mapping is recognising its obligation to make room for and embrace the different forms in which knowledge is found and the means through which it is communicated. At an operational level, developing theoretically grounded, pragmatic approaches to recognising, appreciating and bringing together different types of knowledges and perspectives is needed. This includes articulating methodologies for processing and analysing results in ways that retain the original voices and meanings of the participants, underlined by attending to the inherent plurality in ecologies of knowledge (Sousa Santos et al., 2008). Incorporating artistic approaches in participatory cultural mapping projects may help address this imperative for embracing and synthesising diverse forms of knowledge. Artistic processes often aim to engage with the 'felt sense' of community experiences, an element often missing from conventional mapping practices, and can challenge conventional asset mapping by animating and honouring the local, giving voice and definition to the vernacular, recognising *place* as inhabited by story and history, and highlighting the importance of the aesthetic as a key component of community self-expression and self-representation (Duxbury, Garrett-Petts and Longley, 2019).

In concert, continued attention to enhancing sensitivities and knowledge concerning community-academe collaboration is needed to resist hierarchical arrangements and perspectives while retaining the application of research skills and knowledge in these horizontal relationships. The implementation of participatory cultural mapping projects can be a platform for strengthening community-academe relations that fosters cartographic literacies and capacity-building among community members. Furthermore, the question of what comes about as a result of participatory cultural mapping projects, how it might feed into other public and strategic processes, and who makes these follow-on decisions must be considered as integrated elements of participatory cultural mapping projects and initiatives.

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