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Rappresentazioni urbane Urban Representations

a cura di ETICity

- Simone Tulumello & Giacomo Ferro |
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Who's maps? Interrogating authorship in collective map-making

@ Maria Luisa
Giordano |

Collective
cartography |
Urban
representations |
Local knowledge |

In the framework of my PhD research, this paper describes some considerations I developed before and during my fieldwork, as I faced several challenges related to the legitimacy of my role as a cartographer trying to integrate local knowledge and inhabitants' representation in academic research. In this paper I discuss the researcher's role and potential influence in the construction of cartographic knowledge in fieldwork and institutional project, as well as in academic teamworks, provoking deeper considerations. When local knowledge is integrated in mapping, studies often talk about participatory and collective mapping, or participatory GIS. The negotiation among the different kinds of knowledges and representations, nonetheless, engender power relationships in the map-making. Moreover, I draw a parallel between collaborative and participatory mapping and academic teamworks, as all these processes share the goal of integrating different kind of knowledges. In this perspective, this paper analyses the question of the authorship of maps, as a pretext to interrogate the roles of actors involved in collective map-making processes. I argue that only a deep analysis of the context and of the research design can help to identify these power relationships.

Introduction

Every collective map-making process is a constant negotiation among different kinds of knowledge; cartographic knowledge nonetheless is dominant as it gives to the results their final expression (the map). The power relationships between producers and users of maps have been deeply analysed (Kitchin et al. 2011; Crampton 2011; Harley 2008; Parker 2006), but a deeper attention could be paid to dynamics in cartographic teams, in order to apprehend how they influence the process of map-making.

This paper describes some considerations developed before and during

the fieldwork conducted in the framework of my PhD research on the use and appropriation of the notion of neighbourhood. In particular, I consider the role and potential influence of the cartographer in research featuring local knowledge and representations. Deeper ethical considerations have arisen, when facing the problem of the legitimacy of the cartographer's work and of determining the best way and moment to integrate into map-making the knowledge of the interviewed actors.

This paper will develop some reflections about the authorship of the map, as a pretext to analyse the map-making process and the role of the cartographer in collective teams in academic and field research, as well as in collaborative grassroots or governmental projects.

In interrogating authorship, the concern here is not with intellectual property; rather, the aim is to identify roles, contributions and responsibilities in this process.

I will try to identify some key-questions about the dynamics of map-making, particularly when just one actor has a cartographic knowledge, even though collective map-making can take place in quite distinct contexts, some dynamics can be compared.

The comparison between collective map-making in fieldworks or participatory processes and in academic teamworks illustrates some common dynamics which are more easily identifiable in the second context. The parallel shows how complex the dynamics among actors in a collective mapping activity can be.

Fieldworks?

Generally speaking, despite the great variety of collective and collaborative map-making processes, two common elements can be identified: the idea of integrating local non-professional knowledge and the goal of producing maps.

The first refers to Turnbull (2000, p.132) statement, "if the full power of the knowledge is to be recognised it is not enough for it to be valued in its own right, it must also to be understood in a comparative context". In other words, all the knowledges playing a role in the process have to be involved in a same-level exchange. Moreover, according to Turnbull (*ibid.*, p. 20), "a necessary condition for fully equitable comparison is that Western contemporary technosciences, rather than being taken as definitional of knowledge, rationality or objectivity, should be treated as varieties of such knowledge systems".

If every actor contributes to the process with a specific knowledge, this is true also for the cartographer(s).

Moreover, there is often not only a variety of actors, but also a variety of geographical and cartographic knowledge. When different kinds of knowledge contribute to the same product, (the map), power relationships should be taken into account (Parker 2006).

In relation to mapping practice, many studies have paid attention to the different cartographic tools which can be involved. Many reflections have come from critical cartography, as well as from research on participatory mapping, because different kinds of cartography emerge from different

ontologies and epistemologies (McKenna et al. 2008).

Crapton & Krygier (2006, p.18) state that “critiques of Euclidean space which point to its ideosyncracies, localness or its contingent nature show that not all knowledge can be “scientized”. Debarbieux & Lardon (2003, p.22) argue also that avoiding the obligation of topographical precision makes mobilising this competence easier, because, as Soini (2001, p.235) also states, drawing can “represent a natural way of communicating spatial issues and values related to them”. Moreover, according to Sieber (2006), one of the key issues is when, in such a collaborative endeavour, maps begin to be used or produced.

These elements point to a key-question: who concretely draws the map? Who is considered a cartographer?

Parker (2006, p.475) argues that “[...] little is known about how organizational and individual perceptions and decisions structure the inclusive (or exclusive) nature of community-mapping projects”.

Moreover, Sieber (ibid, p.499) highlights that the integration of technology can create problems with non-professionals: “The corollary is how much GIS must be learned by individual stakeholders and what technologies can be supported by available resources”. In my opinion the technological divide, which can be partially surmounted through pencil sketching or training sessions, is only one of the problems of authorship in collective map-making. I think that the key-point concerns power relationships among actors with and without cartographic knowledge in the team because, as Parker (2006, p.475) states, “[...] intentional exclusion, limited resources, and lack of critical reflection can impede mapping projects from attaining input from diverse groups [...]”.

Three key-questions, crossing the characteristics of projects, can help to illustrate the construction of these power relationships:

1) Bottom-up or top-down? In a grassroots project, the community leading the process usually is concerned that the project be collective. Parker (2006) argues that inclusion, transparency and empowerment are nearly universal goals of community-mapping projects. Institutional projects sometimes integrate collective or participatory processes, but the link with the institution makes the power relationship stronger. Sieber (ibid) highlights that Public Participation GIS can either empower or marginalize a group, depending on how the process is structured and organized. Moreover, she argues that “the eponymous incorporation of the word participatory is problematic because it necessitates a role for an intermediary”. (Sieber ibid, p.500).

2) Are there professional cartographers? In both grassroots and institutional projects professional cartographers can be involved to facilitate the access to technological tools or to contribute to the map-making; rather, sometimes, the members of the team are already able or learn to use the cartographic tool(s). Craig and Elwood (1998) argue that, in a community-mapping project, there is a power relationship between technically able actors and nontechnical ones. Sieber (ibid. p.500) states also that “academics and practitioners may be placed in an external position of critiquing the participatory GIS models employed by less powerful agents, instead of being

granted a position to intercede on their behalf”.

3) What is the intersection of expertise, research interests and activism? The context and the final goal of the map-making process contribute to define power relationships. Moreover, in every of these processes not only the goal of the involved actors is important, but also the goal of the cartographers: comparing knowledge systems, contributing to communities empowerment, or gathering information for an institutional project entail different power relationships. Sieber (2006, p.502) highlights that the goal can influence the process: “An academic, for example, may be driven as much by the stated goals of a project as by his or her hopes for a job retention, tenure, and promotion [...]. A CBO¹ may simply want a researcher to produce a series of paper maps that show neighbourhood conditions, which may conflict with the researcher’s goal to build the GIS capacity of that CBO”.

Or teamworks?

Cartographers usually work with other with other researchers in groups with different organizational structure in which they have different roles. In particular, when the team is multidisciplinary, the cartographer can be integrated in different phases of the research.

Referring to my personal experience, for instance, in 2009, as a student, I made a map with a classmate that was later published in the atlas of *Le Monde diplomatique* (Halimi 2009). We did the research, we conceived the representation, but the graphic designers of *Le Monde diplomatique* changed the layout to fit the Atlas’ one. Is it still the same map? In 2012 I made a map for a colleague’s book about the history of Ethiopia (Sohier 2012). I tried to respond to her needs, but the map-making is mine. We both signed the map, because I did not want to sign it alone, as it was not my research topic.

These examples show on the one hand that different organizational structures in the team create different different balances in matching cartographic knowledge and practice with other researchers’ knowledge. Therefore, who is the author of those maps? Despite the efforts, is the cartographer’s influence identifiable in the final representation?

In academic teamworks usually there is a same-level exchange among researchers who share comparable goals, and the main problem deals just with publication strategies and with the fact that a map is rarely evaluated as a scientific product on the same level of a paper; but these experiences contributed to my reflection on the role of cartographers in the construction of geographical knowledge.

These examples show the importance of the role of the cartographer in the construction of geographical knowledge. I think that these considerations not only apply to academic research group, but even more to some fieldwork dynamics in research featuring local knowledge.

Discussion

The role of the cartographer in an academic teamwork and in collective or participatory map-making is comparable because in both these cases the

¹ Community Based Organization.

aim is joining different kinds of knowledge together. In academic research the problem of authorship arises. In field research or participatory processes the role of the expert needs to be analysed.

The same reasoning behind the idea that a map cannot be evaluated as a paper in a publications list in my opinion engender a general underestimation of the role of the cartographer in collective map-making.

Nevertheless, out of the academic teamworks the balance among actors could be different and the cartographer can have different roles, according with the organizational structures of the team and with the goals of the process. Thinking the collective map-making in terms of teamwork is a way to identify the roles.

More precisely about authorship, as Parker (2006, p.476) states, "community authorship can help make the map more credible or accountable to local community members as the knowledge is derived from those familiar with and presumably knowledgeable about a place".

Nevertheless, a deeper analysis should be conducted about the dynamics of power relationship in the different kind of mapping processes, as "[...] maps are active; they actively construct knowledge [...]." (Crampton & Krygier 2006, p.15).

Therefore, power relationships in map-making processes depend on the organizational structures of actors and on several elements which define the context.

On the one hand, for instance, some elements, such as the idea of same-level exchange among the actors involved, are more easily identifiable in the academic context. On the other hand, the definition of "collective" or "participatory" mapping should be analysed in each step of the construction of the cartographic knowledge. Sieber (ibid. p.500) argues, for instance, that "a bottom-up process may be preferred; the word participatory prescribes an element of top-down intercession".

The role of the researcher (and in particular of the cartographer) in different contexts changes, according with the research design, and it engenders dynamics comparable to those which critical geographers identified in the relationship between map producers and users.

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È stato bello fare la tua conoscenza!
cercaci, trovaci, leggici, seguici, taggaci, contattaci, ..

It was nice to meet you!

search us, find us, read us, follow us, tag us, contact us, ..

