



Cultural Mapping

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What is it?

Cultural mapping is a systematic tool to involve communities in the identification and recording of local cultural assets, with the implication that this knowledge will then be used to inform collective strategies, planning processes, or other initiatives. Cultural mapping promises new ways of describing, accounting for, and coming to terms with the cultural resources of communities and places. These resources are both *tangible* or quantitative and *intangible* or qualitative.

Who uses the concept?

Cultural mapping encompasses an array of traditions and trajectories that focus on different dimensions and approaches to understanding cultural meanings and resources. For example, since the turn of the millennium, the rising prominence of so-called “creative industries” internationally has meant cultural policy-related mapping research has tended to focus on defining and measuring the economic dimensions of cultural and creative industries and on mapping the presence and development of these desirable sectors. However, this comprises only portions of the field. Cultural mapping also encompasses artistic and counter-mapping traditions that prioritize the qualitative and intangible, valorize alternative perspectives, and widen the ways in which we understand cultural resources within broader community systems, relationships, and fields of meaningful interaction. In these ways, cultural mapping aims to recognize and make visible the ways local stories, practices, relationships, memories, and rituals constitute places as meaningful locations.

Fit with intercultural dialogue?

Cultural mapping – and in particular, its counter-mapping traditions and trajectories – highlights and aims to privilege plural perspectives and “alternate” knowledges, histories, and meanings. In the context of growing recognition that significant aspects of culture are contained in the intangible dimensions of cultural practices and knowledge systems, UNESCO views cultural mapping as a means to transform intangible and invisible knowledge into a medium that can support heritage management, education, and intercultural dialogue.

What work remains?

Key issues in the highly interdisciplinary field of cultural mapping include the questions of what to map, how to map, and to what purpose the “findings” should be directed. Issues of power, resistance, alternative perspectives and knowledge, and the question of what constitutes important cultural elements and meanings, are situated at the centre of the field. The process of making implicit knowledge explicit, and mobilizing the symbolic forms through which local residents understand and communicate their sense of place, also have ethical and political dimensions.

Resources

Crawhall, N. (2009). [*The role of participatory cultural mapping in promoting intercultural dialogue - 'We are not hyenas': A reflection paper*](#). Paris: UNESCO.

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