



Cultural mapping as a development tool



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ARTICLE INFO

Article history:

Received 12 April 2015

Received in revised form

8 October 2015

Accepted 13 October 2015

Available online 31 October 2015

Keywords:

Cultural mapping

Development

Public policies

Participation

ABSTRACT

This paper explores the challenges and potential of cultural mapping to be used as a development tool. Using a three-dimensional model of analysis I characterise two ideal-types of approach to cultural-mapping in an analytical continuum: on one end are top-down instrumental approaches to development and cultural mapping dominated by utilitarian rationality and a notion of development measured in terms of economic growth, and on the other end are bottom-up, constitutive approaches to cultural mapping that consider the complexity of the link between society and culture, and are dominated by concerns of integrated human development. The two representative cases analysed will contribute to illustrating how different processes and methodologies of cultural mapping may derive from different conceptualisations of development, levels of analysis and understandings of culture. These distinct categories in turn bear consequences for the use of the results of cultural mapping and its potential as a development tool. The objective of the paper is to propose a framework of analysis that can then be used and assessed with a broader range of cases.

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1. Introduction

Cultural mapping is an instrument for collecting, locating and systematising information concerning the distribution of cultural expressions within a certain territory. It cannot be seen merely as a technical and neutral mechanism, as it is strongly influenced by the objectives of whoever performs and/or contracts it. Such objectives are rarely confined to a purely intrinsic vision of culture, rather they generally have more strategic ambitions of improving the potential of the object of the analysis to contribute to development, be it economic, human or community development. In this process, the cultural mapping exercise becomes instrumentalized, in the sense that it will be used to enforce some sort of change or adjustment in the observed reality. Such instrumentalization is not in itself negative, but it is important to understand the consequences and determinants of the uses that are made of the results.

While instrumentality is present in any effort at systematising and planning, seeing cultural mapping as a “tool” for something should not be exempt from qualification. Existing literature on cultural mapping reflects this inasmuch as it tends to focus on a normative approach that takes cultural mapping as an instrument towards a more humane vision of society than the one dominated by economic concerns. The objective of the present article is to

highlight the different development models, levels of analysis and visions of culture that may underlie cultural mapping and interpret how worldviews and intentions affect the very structure, type of information collected, conclusions and further uses of the cultural mapping exercise.

In order to conduct the analysis I take two ideal-types in an analytical continuum, whose components may be to a larger or smaller extent observable in different instances of cultural mapping. The two have in common an idea of cultural mapping as a mechanism to promote development. However, one is driven from top-down (cultural mapping for policy development) with instrumental approaches dominated by utilitarian rationality and by a notion of development measured in terms of economic growth, and the other is driven from bottom-up (cultural mapping for community development), with constitutive approaches that consider the complexity of the link between society and culture, and are dominated by concerns of integrated human development.

The object of analysis in this paper is the actual cultural mapping instrument. Such instrument performs an identification of instances of cultural phenomena that are of interest to the author/client who commissions the study, whether in the form of a research; a policy report; a methodology; or a web resource.

The first case is a report commissioned by a government institution and focuses on macro-level of analysis, mapping the cultural and creative sector in Portugal; the second case is a mapping exercise performed for a local community and focuses on the micro-

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level of analysis, mapping the crafts in a city located in a rural area in Portugal. Through exploratory comparison of these two distinct examples, I highlight this dualism in cultural mapping exercises, which reflect different development models, have different mapping processes, use distinct methodologies and enable different uses or impacts of their results, thus having different consequences and potentials for change. I also explore how they propose different means for reflecting on intangible aspects of culture and the challenges of incorporating them into the more tangible and utilitarian needs of public policy planning.

2. Cultural mapping in cultural policy research

Clark, Sutherland, and Young (1995) use a community-based definition of cultural mapping, one that relies on combining the goals of identification and preservation of cultural diversity with economic, social and regional development. However, these goals were separated in a background paper delivered for the Intergovernmental Conference on Cultural Policies for Development in 1998. The authors, Bennett and Mercer (1998), made a fundamental distinction between cultural mapping and cultural industry intelligence, where the former would be a more insightful and qualitative approach and the latter would be a more standardised, strategic and quantitative approach. This distinction was recently taken up in (Duxbury, Garrett-Petts, & MacLennan, 2015) in their conceptualisation of cultural mapping, and the cultural industry intelligence dimension was downplayed.

Formal initiatives of cultural mapping are relatively recent, and initially focused on mapping indigenous peoples in order to preserve cultural diversity, including a concern with the possibility of using mapping as a tool for promoting intercultural dialogue (Crawhall, 2007). Later the interest in cultural mapping evolved into a contribution to sustainability, environmental concerns and development. In this process, local community knowledge was recognised as fundamental for understanding the dynamics and potential for developing public policies adjusted to local social and ecological contexts (Crawhall, 2007: 6).

Duxbury et al. (2015) identify five main trajectories of cultural mapping (community empowerment and counter-mapping; cultural policy; municipal governance; mapping as artistic practice and academic inquiry). These are useful in separating different ways of applying this form of research, but it retains a focus on its more qualitative and humanistic spectrum. One could argue that there is a tendency in most contributions in this volume to place cultural mapping as a normatively laden contribution to cultural policy research, in the sense that it is able to provide perspectives that are alternative to the standardised cultural industry intelligence. The former are more participatory (Chiesi & Costa, 2015), thus safeguarding the interests of communities or forms of cultural expressions that do not have access to tangible or statistically visible outputs. According to the Duxbury et al. (2015: 2), “cultural mapping is regarded as 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.”. Here the tangible ways of recording are distinguished from the intangible ones, with the same line being drawn between the quantitative and the qualitative methodologies, while aspiring to the integration of these assets in order to help define communities “in terms of cultural identity, vitality, sense of place, and quality of life” (Duxbury et al., 2015: 2).

Redaelli (2015) analyses more strategic, tangible uses of cultural mapping, that would likely fall within the cultural industry intelligence dimension, with an analysis of government reports that are based on largely standardised information, exploring how the

mapping analyses have been carried out, the meaning of mapping and the intended results of these analyses. The author identifies three sub-segments of this type of cultural mapping: mapping as economic measurement; mapping as geographic visualisation; mapping as network analysis. Despite their relative differences in the methodologies, meanings and intended results, the objectives of these forms of cultural mapping are essentially of a utilitarian nature. Network analysis would be the one most connected with the participatory nature that underlies the volume’s vision of cultural mapping.

Mapping is often conceived as a strategic tool that is used in corporate and public planning in order to effect desired change. Mapping culture within an organisation, for example, can provide an understanding of barriers to change, but it can also be used in an instrumental way to manipulate stakeholders towards a certain end desired by management (Scholes & Johnson, 2001: 183). It is therefore dominated by rationality, systematisation, and fragmentation of reality into components that are extracted from their context, depending on the nature and objectives of the mapping. It is assisted by the creation of indicators to help identify what is relevant to map. Stevenson and Young (2013), address the issue of culture and planning and propose a number of lenses from which to analyse the topic from a multidisciplinary perspective. While recognising that sectoral paradigms may not be mutually supportive, such as the antinomies of economic culturalization and culturalization as an approach to humane governance and planning, they emphasise the potential for theoretical and methodological exchange as well as joint learning, and ultimately leading to a convergence between these two paradigms.

An essential issue in the cultural mapping debate explored in this special issue, is how to turn the intangible cultural practices that are observed, into useful indicators for mapping and planning purposes and thus into tangible and more standardisable elements. This is very much linked with value-creation, or the ideas of what is valuable in a society as a means to translate the intangible into the tangible. Such translation is dependent on the lens that is used, which in turn is dependent on the development model that drives the process.

3. Analysing and interpreting cultural mapping as a development tool

This section is based on a set of propositions that together form an analytical framework to guide the proposed research. As mentioned above, the objective of the paper is to consider the relation between the methodologies used in cultural mapping and the underlying objectives, conceived in terms of worldviews and intended consequences of those who perform or contract the cultural mapping exercise. Theoretical reflections and preliminary empirical explorations lead to the construction of three analytical categories that structure the framework of analysis for cultural mapping initiatives: type of development model, level of analysis (top-down/bottom-up), view of culture (instrumental/constitutive).

3.1. Development model

The twentieth century was prolific in generating different discourses on development, in particular in reaction to the evident challenges of globalisation (Appadurai, 1996). While several distinct conceptions of development can be identified in the relevant theoretical and empirical literature, such as economic development, human development, social development, personal development, sustainable development, in practice they often intermingle. Nevertheless, a number of essential characteristics mark a strong ideological distinction between development models, which is here

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