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COLLECTIVE CRITICAL CARTOGRAPHY- A TOOL IN GEOGRAPHICAL STUDY

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Abstract

Teaching and learning is a complex process. In the recent years, the focus has been learning centric teaching. Since, the engagement of students becomes the core of learning process. Mapping is the basic tool in learning and teaching geography. There has been an array of cartographic tools for representation of spatio – temporal data. Collective Critical Cartography (CCC) is one of them. Collective Critical Cartography is a set of new mapping practices and theoretical critique grounded in critical theory. It differs from academic cartography in that it links geographic knowledge with practical knowledge about the surrounding. It is a process which use collaborative methods to complete or rewrite information which transmitted by traditional maps (and last but not at least, the world view which is mediated by them). Collective critical cartography or CCC is a method which uses co-operative mapping as a tool. An activity on mental mapping was carried out with fifteen Post-Graduate students of Geography of Parvatibai Chowgule College (Autonomous), Margao-Goa. These students were divided into three groups. The main aim of the activity was to mobilize the knowledge of a particular community about the surrounding area, which can then be improved and made more efficient. Therefore, the college campus area was taken into consideration as a particular community. It was noticed that each group had different perceptions about the surrounding area of the campus. Hence, this practice helps to understand how humans look at the particular area and process the information internally and externally.



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Introduction

Our representations of the world are extremely important when defining a critical position in respect to it. Reflecting about our territory and forming new perceptions is essential as we organize ourselves and think through tools of social transformation. Collective Critical Cartography is a creative tool that facilitates the construction of a collective story over a territory. Three main important aspects of CCC are a) collective construction b) Open participation and c) Critical knowledge production of diverse realities.

Mental maps are a part of a broader movement of people's environmental perception and they represent the social construction of an area (a district, town, country and so forth). This means that these maps are associated with the spatial tasks of orientation and the behavior of people (Gregory et al, 2009). Everyone has his individual ideas about the 'real' world based

on their own knowledge, experiences and impressions of an area. Some people have a very narrow and localized map. This means that they live in a small world (for example in a very small village). People who live in a large world have a more abstract and broader mental map.

History

Collective Critical Cartography was developed in the late 1980s and early 1990s in opposition to the dominant tradition of mapping as a progressive and neutral reflection of the environment. (Wood, Denis; Krygier, John , 2016). Since ancient historical times, maps have been produced to benefit the visions of the ruling class. Advocates of critical cartography aimed to reveal the “hidden agendas of cartography as tools of socio-spatial power”. Collective Critical cartographers put forward new mapping practices, called Counter-mapping, that challenge formal maps of the state. Counter-mapping mostly refers to maps made by indigenous cartographers but can include maps from other sources as well. Indigenous cartographers engage in counter-mapping in an attempt to represent their land to reduce threats posed by external forces. Counter-maps are especially important because they demonstrate community claims for rights over land. The aim of CCC is to reduce the gap between a more technically oriented map design and a more theoretical analysis of power in society. Organizations such as Counter-Cartographies Collective (USA), Iconoclastas (Argentina), and Bureau d'Etudes (France) work to change the way people think about maps and power.

Discussion

A mental map is a first-person perspective of an area and how they interact with it. An easy example would be the image you have of your neighborhood. Your mental map of where you live allows you to know how to get to your favorite coffee shop. It is what you use to plan activities and routes to travel. (Matt Rosenberg, 2017)

The activity on collective mapping was carried out by Mrs. Kata Muranyi, a Research Scholar from the University of Pecs, Hungary. To start with the activity, a map of a particular area, a set of trigger questions (where is the canteen, gym, football ground, parking lot, danger zone of high electric lamp posts etc) and a series of signs and symbols are required to be prepared. The activity of collective mapping was carried out based on three stages: 1) Pre-field work, 2) Field work and 3) Post-field work.



Mrs. Kata Muranyi briefing the students about Collective mapping

In the Pre-field work, three groups were formed; each group consisted of five members. Group leaders were selected from within the groups. The map (Google Map with streets) of Chowgule College campus, colour paper strips and stationery was provided to each group and the instructions of the activity were given. An example of how a mental map should be prepared was delivered.



Mrs. Kata Muranyi explaining of how the activity should be conducted

During the fieldwork, respective group leaders conveyed the instructions of the activity to their respective group members which was then followed by a group discussion among the members to set trigger questions. All the group members contributed their work collectively, identified and figured out different features, places, attributes on the map which were then symbolically represented on the map. The group members had to draw a rough sketch with symbols symbolizing the cultural features, places and attributes on a chart paper and coloured sticky notes along with the name of the symbols were attached on the chart paper. The session of the activity was for one and half hour. A final sketch of a mental map representing

the college campus area was prepared using various symbols, signs, demarcating zones with lines and points.



Post-Graduate students engaged in the activity

In Post-field work, all three groups reported back with their respective mental maps prepared by them and to know what was worked and how. This part of the activity is very important because learning is then shared and a debate emerges from the distinct points of views. Comparisons of all three maps were done by the groups. In the process of comparison, there was identification of unknown features that varied from each group. Elements such as roads, landmarks etc are important in mental maps because people use these features to orient themselves and to navigate within a place or region. The last step was to systematize all three maps to one common map. From all three maps, the information from different groups was condensed into one common map.



Comparison of mental maps of three groups

According to Kamini Raikar, *“Collective mapping is a fun based learning activity which helps one to think and produce a picture of a particular location or place”*. While Delcia D’Souza said that, *“It is a great tool for us as students to see and explore things in greater detail”*. Adrel Gomes stated that, *“It helped him to provide greater understanding of places being studied”* and Apurva Desai remarked that, *“Though I am a part of my college for three*

years, I thought I knew everything around the campus. But after this activity I learnt some new elements that existed in my college which I never knew before". The question is where this engages and enhances teaching-learning of geography. Based on the above responses, it can be firmly stated that this activity helps one to think and produce a picture of a particular place, to explore things in greater detail and to provide greater understanding of places. Secondly, the most important skill acquired by the students were, how to work together in a group, the communication between team members and most importantly how to imagine and memorize the geography of one's surroundings.

Conclusion

Collective Critical Cartography is a process of knowledge production and transformation. It is not just the 'final product' but the process itself can involve learning together and producing new knowledge by bringing together multiple perspectives, by connecting different personal maps, or by creating collective maps through rotation, negotiation or consensus. It is a best way to democratize knowledge-production. Mapping can also emphasize relations to institutions, landscapes, wildlife and environments, leading people to re-conceive their relation to invisible structures or the natural world. More fundamentally it involves a reconfiguration of relations to space, dis-alienating one's relationship to space through the application of imagination.

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