

Making the Neighbourhood: Analyzing Mapping Procedures to Deal with Plurality and Conflict

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Abstract : Spatial projects are often contested. Despite participatory trajectories in official spatial development processes, citizens engage often by their power to say no. Participatory mapping helps to produce more legible and democratic ways of decision-making. It has proven its value in producing a multitude of knowledges and views, for individuals and community groups and local stakeholders to imagine desired and undesired futures and to give them the rhetorical power to present their views throughout the development process. From this perspective, mapping works as a social process in which individuals and groups share their knowledge, learn from each other and negotiate their relationship with each other as well as with space and power. In this way, these processes eventually aim to activate communities to intervene in cooperation in real problems. However, these are fragile and bumpy processes, sometimes leading to (local) conflict and intractable situations. Heterogeneous subjectivities and knowledge that become visible during the mapping process and which are contested by members of the community, is often the first trigger. This paper discusses a participatory mapping project conducted in a residential subdivision in Flanders to provide a deeper understanding of how or under which conditions the mapping process could moderate discordant situations amongst inhabitants, local organisations and local authorities, towards a more constructive outcome. In our opinion, this implies a thorough documentation and presentation of the different steps of the mapping process to design and moderate an open and transparent dialogue. The mapping project 'Make the Neighbourhood', is set up in the aftermath of a socio-spatial design intervention in the neighbourhood that led to polarization within the community. To start negotiation between the diverse claims that came to the fore, we co-create a desired future map of the neighbourhood together with local organisations and inhabitants as a way to engage them in the development of a new spatial development plan for the area. This mapping initiative set up a new 'common' goal or concern, as a first step to bridge the gap that we experienced between different sociocultural groups, bottom-up and top-down initiatives and between professionals and non-professionals. An atlas of elements (materials), an atlas of actors with different roles and an atlas of ways of cooperation and organisation form the work and building material of the future neighbourhood map, assembled in two co-creation sessions. Firstly, we will consider how the mapping procedures articulate the plurality of claims and agendas. Secondly, we will elaborate upon how social relations and spatialities are negotiated and reproduced during the different steps of the map making. Thirdly, we will reflect on the role of the rules, format, and structure of the mapping process in moderating negotiations between much divided claims. To conclude, we will discuss the challenges of visualizing the different steps of mapping process as a strategy to moderate tense negotiations in a more constructive direction in the context of spatial development processes.

Keywords : conflict, documentation, participatory mapping, residential subdivision

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