



A Guideline for Solidary Mapping

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Introduction

Cartography, mapping, making maps. All of these often lead to fascination in solidary and emancipative contexts of all sorts. A map can be used as a tool in order to show the spreading of ideas. It can be used in order to visualize threats, conflicts or potentials. The relation between mappers on the one hand and mapped initiatives on the other hand is often not easy. Not everyone wants to be put on a map, and not always does everyone share the same perspective on the depicted reality.

This guideline should be understood as motivation to deal sensibly with possible problems that may arise within mapping projects, as well as with the relationships these problems may create in the context of their surroundings. The guideline can be understood as a basis for the specification of sensitive or difficult topics or the precise visualization of these topics as a result of such a process.

The suggestions in this guideline cannot and should not be understood as "rules". Initiatives decide autonomously about their mapping practice. Nevertheless, the guideline can help to better visualize and show the root of a problem, so that decisions can be made consciously and these decisions can also be reconstructed and understood by outsiders.

The approaches and questions in the guideline were created in the context of a workshop which was collectively organized at the congress that focused on solidary economy in Vienna in 2013 by the people from "Platz da!" (platzda.blogspot.eu) and "Vivir Bien" (an online mapping project of solidary economy initiatives, active from 2009 to 2015).

The motivation for the workshop originated from experiences that were made in mapping projects, in which conflicts and pressures were revealed: While most of the mapped initiatives found the generated publicity helpful for their agenda and supported it, there were also those who found themselves being instrumentalized and limited in their self-definition and self-representation. They did not want to be linked with initiatives that did not share their political views and interests. The concrete disputes with these initiatives referred to general questions, which made it preferable to deliberately connect those who mapped and those who were being mapped in order to find a suitable way of dealing with these issues. The texts on the three topics that evolved are based on a mind map which was developed in the workshop.

Topics

I. "Respect Other People's Sovereignty of Self-Expression!"

Maps represent a selective view on the world. Content and circumstances are brought into relation. They delineate, and the single facts do not speak for themselves anymore. Maps are always based on analyses and views which can never conform with a general truth. At the same time, maps somehow seem reliable, objective and suggest they could show "everything that is important". The critique of the ideological or reality-constructing character of a hegemonic map also holds true for any alternative mapping!

It is exactly this character, that can turn an alternative map into a powerful, subversive and thought-provoking irritation. But all people involved in the mapping should be in agreement with this. Whoever maps groups or projects should ask these beforehand how they feel about being represented in the contexts these maps create.

Solidary mappings can furthermore generate a collective value of knowledge and dispute, if the first idea of mapping with all the represented individuals is opened for collective reflection and further developed. If the mapped "subjects" are at the same time involved in the production, this may lead to the mapping being more of a self-portrayal than an unwanted portrayal by somebody else. And this most likely leads to a better diffusion of the product and will probably make everyone involved happier. At the same time it is often sensible to consciously exclude certain actors. Grievances can rarely be mapped if the individuals responsible for these grievances are able to take part in the mapping process themselves. The objective of the map determines who should be mapping. As a tool for resistance, maps attack (hegemonic) interests, stories and perspectives. This does not require asking anyone for permission.

Needs of others

- They want to know that they are "being mapped".
- They want to know about the aim, the users and the statements of your map.
- They want to be able to decide which information about them is published where.
- They may want to remain anonymous.

Suggestions

- Let others know early in advance that you would like them to be represented on your map.
- Document the objective, potential users as well as the statement you want to make with your map.
- Let others participate in the way how and in which relation their project is presented on your map.
- Offer a direct option to correct data and give feedback.

II. "Show a Colorful World!"

The historical evolution of maps is tightly connected to the development of national states and their instruments of governing and power. Maps have formed the representative basis for claiming borders, hierarchies and order, and they still do. If a general city street map shows highways as large and bold without depicting any bike lanes, we can clearly see the meaning and value of bicycles in comparison to cars within urban traffic. Generally, official and commercial maps tend to represent hegemonic power relations of the state and the market.

Opposing this is the reclaiming of a possible other world through emancipatory projects, and this is also how mapping projects can attempt a critical approach towards the visual basis of their maps. Maybe it would be helpful for the mapped topics not to cite the ruling power structures.

Euclidian geometrical space does not necessarily represent the best structure of an alternative perspective on the world. Associative mind maps, relational maps and networks, scribble maps or fictitious spaces all represent alternatives to the established, mathematically and technically structured views on the world.

Needs of others

- Neither do they want to see their projects from a "governmental view" nor do they want to have to look at these kinds of maps over and over again.
- They want to autonomously interpret your maps without being instructed how to do so – they want to be able to find their way with your map but also to discover new things.

Suggestions

- Design your map!
- Create your map in different scales and representations.
- Use alternatives to known map techniques and spatial conceptualizations, and use your imagination in order to find the format that is most useful for you. Sometimes the most useful map is the one that looks the least like it...

III. "Create Commons!"

In the world of capitalism every single output, even media and information products, are by default subject to market and property logics. This means that, technically and legally speaking, your map or information collection can be viewed but not shared, modified or remixed by other people as long as you have not explicitly stated otherwise. This is contrasted by attempts such as those of the Commons movement or the Free and Open Source Software scene, whose goals it is to share and use resources as freely as possible.

Common tools for turning your map into a common resource are the licenses of Creative Commons. With the Creative Commons licenses you can easily define the precise ways in which other people can or cannot use your data or your map. In order to do so, it is enough to state that the work is protected by the chosen license and to link it to the license text. Other approaches, such as Public Domain or the "Do What The Fuck You Want To Public License" try to disconnect the work as much as legally possible from the copyright law.

Needs of others

- They want to use public data in other contexts.
- They may want to carry on and establish new projects based on your work.
- They want to update existing and contribute new data.

Suggestions

- Choose an open license for your map.
- Use other commons.
- Offer a direct option to give feedback as well as to correct data.

GO,
OCCASIONAL
CARTOGRAPHER,
GO!

