

Grassroots Mapping: a toolkit for participatory and politically engaged cartography

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Chapter 1

Introduction

1.1 Overview

1.2 Defining Grassroots Mapping: Toolkit, Practices, or Community?

Exactly what makes up the Grassroots Mapping project? Is it a body of code, available under an MIT license at <http://github.com/jywarren/cartagen>? Is it a set of mapping practices, or tools, which have been employed in Lima, Peru, or Rio de Janeiro? Or is it a community of practitioners and the web site, wiki, and mailing list which tie them together?

Fundamentally this project is intended to make the process of mapmaking easier for lay users, with the intent to broaden participation in cartography. In most places, maps can be seen as a tool of the state and of industry to express control over world we live in. By simplifying the means to create maps, from the data gathering through the editing and publication of digital and print maps, the tools are designed to democratize cartography. In turn, it is hoped that the ability of a broader public to make maps at accessible costs will help to empower bottom-up cartographic activism and to circumvent the current power structure of mapmaking.

The core of the Grassroots Mapping project is the **application** of a novel combination of technology to specific communities. The technology consisted of low-cost aerial imaging with balloons and kites, and a novel online tool for stitching the resulting imagery into maps. The success of these tools is due to the effort and faith of the organizations and individuals who were willing to adopt these new and strange tools, and who saw their potential for use in the communities in Lima, Peru, and the oil spill crisis on the coast of the Gulf of Mexico. This includes Carla del Carpio of Manzanita "A" and Ernesto Fernandez of CEDRO, both in Lima, Peru, and Daniel Miracle and others from Escuelab, also in Lima. It includes Kris Ansin, Shannon Dosemagen, and Anne Rolfes of the Louisiana Bucket Brigade in New Orleans. It also includes the dozens of participants who tirelessly flew kites and balloons, and untangled and wound miles of string day after day. Perhaps most importantly, the tools grew and evolved in response to sustained use by participants, and with the input and collaboration of those who used them.

1.2.1 Grassroots Mapping as Pedagogy

To make this widespread adoption possible, the project also evolved to include a variety of teaching materials, printed guides, online videos, and workshops, both by the author and by the diverse collaborators who took ownership of the tools. These materials spanned a broad range of audiences, from 10-15 year old Spanish-speaking students to environmental activists in West Virginia and Kentucky.

This documentation evolved as the author collaborated with and instructed participants in dozens of workshops over the past year. These occurred in diverse contexts, from a two week high school workshop at Beaver Country Day School in Chestnut Hill, outside of Boston, to an hour-long teaching session in City Park, New Orleans, for volunteers mapping the April 2010 BP Oil Spill.

1.2.2 Grassroots Mapping as a Community

Ultimately, even the digital tools, including the Cartagen map rendering framework and the Cartagen Knitter, a tool for orthorectifying aerial imagery, were built with assistance and support of UROPs, colleagues, and contributors in the broader mapping community. That this has become the norm in technology projects does not detract from the fact that much of this work would have been impossible without such contributions.

Building tools is unlike developing more abstract technologies in that to be successful, a series of compromises and pragmatic decisions must guide the design process, as well as continuous communication with an audience of users. The Grassroots Mapping project has evolved in response to these needs and should be examined in the context of the specific uses it has attempted to address, rather as an isolated or 'pure' work.

1.3 Tools & Technologies

1.3.1 Audience

The tools developed as part of the Grassroots Mapping project address the needs of both committed enthusiasts who need powerful and efficient mapping technology, as well as those who have little experience and expertise but need simple and direct tools to make maps. Therefore, some of the tools, while being simple to use, are intended for 'power users' or those technically fluent in writing and editing code. The Cartagen framework falls under this category. Other tools, such as the balloon- and kite-based platforms for capturing aerial imagery, are intended for a wider audience, as is the Cartagen Knitter, a specific use of the Cartagen framework. A description of the various tools follows.

1.3.2 Software

Interfaces for participatory cartography

This section focuses on the framing, intent, and audience of the tools. A technical discussion of the tools can be found in Chapter 8.

The Cartagen framework

Rendering architecture

1.3.3 Hardware

Balloon Aerial Photography

Photography from Kites and Unmanned Aerial Vehicles

1.3.4 Practice, Community, Support structure

GrassrootsMapping.org

The Grassroots Mapping Wiki

Printed guides and support materials

Curricular guides and teaching notes

Documentation, case studies, Grassroots Map Collection

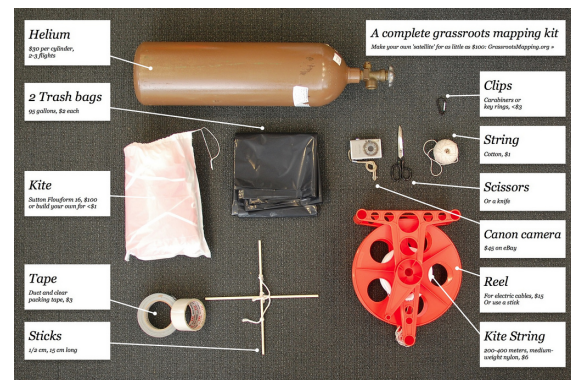
The Grassroots Mapping community and mailing list

1.4 Novel Contributions

1.4.1 Novel application of low-cost tools to well-established need for raster imagery

1.4.2 Novel approaches to map rendering

1.4.3 Central merit: technology or culture?



Chapter 2

Subjectivity in Mapping

The need for a more participatory cartography is predicated on the exclusion of many from the practice of map-making as it stands today. Even more importantly, it depends on the point of view that mapping is an inherently non-neutral practice, and that for maps to serve wider and more democratic interests, it must accommodate diverse viewpoints. Maps serve interests, and understanding their role not as documentation of what makes up the world, but as rhetorical, tactical, and *subjective* tools is an important prerequisite to what this document argues.

2.1 Neogeographers, Psychogeographers, and GIS

A brief description of three distinct groups of practitioners is worthwhile, as each embodies a distinct conception of mapmaking.

2.1.1 Psychogeography

2.1.2 GIS practitioners

Professional map makers have used Geographic Information Systems, or GIS since its development in the

2.1.3 Neogeography

With the rise of web-based data and display systems came a group composed primarily of programmers and web designers, who have adopted the name *neogeographers*. This group positions itself in contrast to 'traditional' approaches such as GIS, and

Rana and Joliveau suggest that neogeography rejects the 'prescribed role/interaction between the four main components, namely the audience, the information, the presenter and the subject...'. Andrew Turner: Introduction to Neogeography coined by Di-Ann Eisnor? <http://apb.directionsmag.com/archiv>

Define-Neogeography.html

"outsiders"

http://books.google.com/books?id=oHgDv4feV-8C&dq=neogeography+turner&printsec=frontcover&source=bn&hl=en&ei=gmdLS6_-KYj98AaY_KWXDA&sa=X&oi=book_result&ct=result&resnum=5&ved=0CBwQ6AEwBA#v=onepage&q&f=false

"NeoGeography and the nature of geographic expertise", Author: Michael Goodchild <http://www.informaworld.com/smpp/content-db=all-content=a911734343>

Orig. ref to Platial's usage: <http://placekraft.blogspot.com/2006/04/neogeography-defined.html>

2.2 The mythical 'complete' map

The most famous (yet fictional) version of this fantasy is Jorge Luis Borges' short story

'a mile to the mile!' 'So we now use the country itself, as its own map, and I assure you it does nearly as well.' p.169

This idea was later elaborated in Jorge Luis Borges'

The idea that maps accurately, or even completely depict a location is not entertained in a literal sense, yet amongst

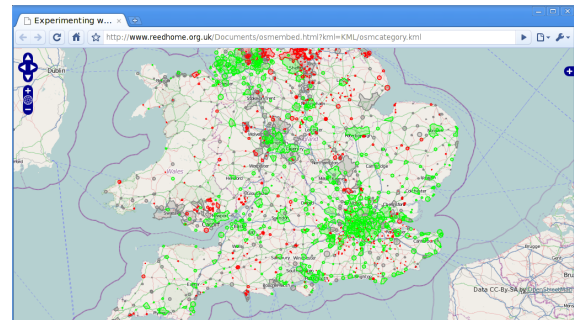
Chris Anderson

2.3 Maps as a 'window' onto the world

For a variety of reasons, maps carry the weight of authority in a way that few other forms of evidence do; the main driver being the widely held belief that satellite or aerial maps are a kind of 'window' into the world. In photography the editorial role of the author is accepted, not to mention the damage which 'photoshopping' has inflicted on the perceived truth or even objectivity of the photographic image. Maps, however, continue to be taken as direct representations of reality, despite the inherent subjectivity of image selection, color, brightness, and contrast processing, and the editorial eye necessary in reading and interpreting such imagery.

The best example of this attitude is of course the use of relatively low resolution satellite imagery by Colin Powell at the UN Security Council in February 2003, used as evidence to support the existence of weapons of mass destruction in Iraq. The subsequent complete absence of weapons did little to diminish the public's faith in such imagery as objective evidence.

"Let me say a word about satellite images before I show a couple. The photos that I am about to show you are sometimes hard for the average person to interpret, hard for



<http://www.reedhome.org.uk/Documents/osmembed.html?kml=KML/osmcategory.kml>



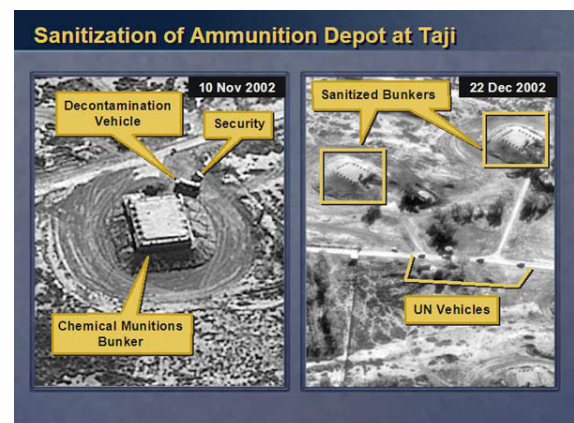
<http://www.gwu.edu/~nsarchiv/NSAEBB/NSAEBB88/>

...

The truck you also see is a signature item. It's a decontamination vehicle in case something goes wrong.” [2]

– 11.***/WEAK. We agree there has been suspicious activity [redacted], including presence of a decontamination vehicle. We caution, however, that Iraq has given UNMOVIC what may be a plausible account for this activity—that this was an exercise involving the movement of conventional explosives; presence of a fire safety truck (water truck, which could also be used as a decontamination vehicle) is common in such an event.” [1]

This aspect of the public perception of maps as an objective, quantitative measure may have



a relationship with the difficulty and expense of producing map imagery, and the traditional monopoly of government and high-tech industry in the production of such imagery.

2.4 Maps: rhetorical, even tactical

2.5 Ground Truth, or maps as testimony

2.6 Cartographic ethics

Cartography, ethics, and social theory: <https://commerce.metapress.com/content/c21115120603xj14/resource-secured/?target=fulltext.pdf&sid=gb5vtk2lhvt0dj55c1xba4aa&sh=utpjournals.metapress.com>

PGIS: Do your best to recognise that you are working with socially differentiated communities and that your presence will not be politically neutral Be considerate in taking peoples time (bibliography/rambaldi-practical-ethics-for-pgis.pdf)

Chambers, chambers-who-empowered-disempowered-gains-loses.pdf Outline of history and benefits of PGIS, but also of ethics and beneficiaries

2.6.1 Subjective cartography in practice

Chapter 3

The Need for Geospatial Data

3.1 Two worlds of mapping

Present-day users of web-based mapping products such as Google Maps are presented with an extremely rich cartographic landscape when they view maps of first-world urban centers such as New York and San Francisco. Real-time traffic data is often overlaid in lines of shifting red and green, and many buildings appear in orthographic '3D'. Well-known restaurants are interspersed with subway stops whose schedules may be called up with a few clicks. Routing algorithms offer turn-by-turn directions, optimized for pedestrians, bicyclists, and motorists.

Many are surprised when they view places such as Lima, Peru, a metropolis of 11 million people, and find that not far from the city center are vast areas of indistinct and unlabelled buildings. While some of these are recognized and official parts of the Municipality of Lima,

Views of Manhattan, left, and a settlement in Lima, Peru, right.

many are informal settlements, whose inhabitants lack deeds to their plots of land, and whose streets and buildings do not appear on any city map. Many of these settlements, or 'invasions' as they are known to Peruvians, are governed by leaders who are either elected by the several hundred inhabitants, or who maintain control through intimidation – employing thugs to collect taxes and enforce rules.

A legal process exists to establish official land ownership in these settlements, and to issue deeds to their inhabitants, but the state lacks the resources to quantify or map these areas:

In Lima, the organization in charge of land registrations, known as COFOPRI, requires residents to submit a plan – essentially a measured and drawn map of their plots – as one of many prerequisites to receiving a deed. Civil engineering firms have filled this gap by offering surveying and mapmaking services, but their high prices are a strain on the already poor inhabitants of the invasions.

The Grassroots Mapping project was conceived as a means to broaden access to mapping technology, and was developed in direct response to the need for maps in areas

...incomplete...

3.1.1 Urban slums, informal settlements

This state of affairs is not limited to Lima; by some estimates, a full quarter of the world's population lives in urban slums.

3.1.2 Tenure mapping

The invasion of Lima, Peru

The history of urban growth in Lima over the last hundred years can be described as a slow legitimization of vast areas of informal settlements; many populous and well-established districts such as Pamplona, Villa el Salvador and others, began as invasions decades ago.

Hernando de Soto, a well-known economist and champion of capitalism, ... quotation

Brief outline of fulfilled needs: chambers-who-empowered-disempowered-gains-loses.pdf, p.4

3.1.3 Mapping: a tool of empowerment or control?

...it's frankly the same security through obscurity argument peddled for centuries, brought out most recently in Mumbai, a strategy on the verge of finally dissolving in a world of openness and transparency. The IDF access to much better intelligence and imagery than we'd ever have, they fly drones over Gaza, there's a 2m resolution commercial limit in all satellite imagery over Israel guess who gets to see the sub-meter imagery? Gazans have nothing to gain by trying keep secrets, the asymmetry of that game is overwhelmingly not in their favor.[3]

In general, I view these edge cases as a question of power. Hiding information protects those already in power, but not those that are already marginalized. Legitimate cases to me is only information that puts dis-empowered people at risk, such as refugee routes along the Burmese-Indian border.[4]

Evgeny Morozov, "How dictators watch us on the web" - <http://www.prospectmagazine.co.uk/2009/11/how-dictators-watch-us-on-the-web/> <http://irevolution.wordpress.com/2010/01/07/morozov-vs-shirk/> (Patrick Meier)

many criticisms may represent limited experience mapping... circular? It is easy for activist cartographers who do not live in a community to advocate the use of tools which may put that community at risk.

"empowerment":(great article on definitions for empowerment and framework for discussing empowerment in the PGIS context)

Corbett, Jon M., and C. Peter Keller. 2005. An Analytical Framework to Examine Empowerment Associated with Participatory Geographic Information Systems (PGIS). *Cartographica* 40 (4):91-102.

3.2 Environmental assessment

Beyond issues of land rights and ownership, there are many other potential uses for inexpensive map data; the ability to produce photographic, or raster maps of sensitive environmental sites may empower small organizations which are unable to acquire timely or high resolution satellite images of sites of interest. A group of environmental activists in West Virginia ...

3.2.1 Asset allocation mapping and carbon cowboys

[5]

3.3 Open geodata and crisis mapping

3.3.1 Crisis mapping and Ushahidi

Ushahidi

The Ushahidi platform has emerged as a common and easy-to-set-up system for crowdsourced crisis reporting. Developed in collaboration with Kenyan programmers to help voters report election violence in Kenya in 200x, it allows citizens with mobile phones to send 140 character text messages to a publicized telephone number. These messages are read by a group of editors, who attempt to identify where the messages were sent from, and are published on a web site as red dots at their assumed location. That users self-report their locations, and can do so incorrectly, is tolerated because it may represent a means of privacy for users, and because in the aggregate it is quite difficult to 'fake' an event. Each report is 'verified' by ...

Ushahidi works in many cases because it is simple to understand on its surface; visitors to an Ushahidi web site see a series of dots with messages such as "I'm stuck under rubble" and imagine a person sending such a message from their cell phone. It makes use of existing communications infrastructure, namely that 'most people have cell phones' and relies on both a high level of literacy with text messaging and a willingness to send reports to a site which is not immediately viewable. However, it is not a means to 'make' a map, but rather to annotate an existing map with data points.

Ushahidi has been successfully used to gather and publish very up-to-date information about unfolding crises, for example in the instance created by the New Orleans-based environmental group Louisiana Bucket Brigade in response to the British Petroleum oil spill in April 2010. The kind of information it provides, however, is fundamentally difficult to verify or to quantify, and may be more useful in the context of emergency response than in evidence-gathering. Locations must often be approximated to the nearest town or city, and most reports are often just a few words with no name or photographic evidence. While geotagged photographs can be uploaded to Ushahidi, EXIF data can be falsified. In many cases there is an additional need for quantitative data. Map imagery provides better quality information in that every pixel of a map is georeferenced.

Photographs and maps as testimony

Satellite imagery access

Access to up-to-date imagery of crisis areas has become something of a hot-button issue in crisis mapping circles, as those companies and agencies in control of the imagery do not always elect to release it, or to license it freely for any use. Whether due to an unwillingness to offer expensive imagery for unrestricted use, or due to the administrative burden of actually offering such data for download under a permissive license, access to satellite imagery has become a frequent bottleneck for aid organizations.

Specifically in the bottom-up response to the Haitian earthquake and subsequent humanitarian crisis of January 2010, access became more difficult within weeks of the crisis. While GeoEye and

other vendors generously offered open access to satellite imagery in the initial weeks of the crisis, most did not elect to do so on an ongoing basis, or for subsequent crises such as the February 2010 earthquake in Chile.

Mikel Maron of the OpenStreetMap Humanitarian Team

Chapter 4

State of the Art

4.1 PGIS: Participatory Geographic Information Systems

Traditional GIS technology has been used for since the 1990's to support communities in developing contexts for purposes such as making tenure claims, environmental defense against petroleum and other extraction industries, as well as for planning purposes. This has become known as PGIS, or Participatory GIS, and typically...

4.1.1 PPGIS

Definition: <http://www.ppgis.net/ppgis.htm> Bibliography: http://dusk2.geo.orst.edu/gis/student_bibs/slurie.htm
bibliography/rambaldi-participatory-spatial-developing-countries.pdf

4.1.2 Participatory GIS for Development

4.1.3 Shortcomings of traditional PGIS practice

4.2 OpenStreetMap

Emphasis on 2 means of mapping: GPS/GPX and tracing

4.2.1 Humanitarian OSM Team

An offshoot of the OpenStreetMap project known as the OpenStreetMap Humanitarian Team or HOT was started in late 2009 by Mikel Maron, a map programmer and co-founder of mapping firm Mapufacture. Positioned in direct response to the need for maps in areas of humanitarian crisis, Mikel has organized members from the technology community to visit crisis zones such as Port-au-Prince as well as a long-term presence in Kibera, a large slum in Nairobi, Kenya. HOT uses the same tools as the wider OpenStreetMap community, and either runs a separate instance of the OpenStreetMap server and database, or directly uploads the data to the main OpenStreetMap.org service.

Free Map Gaza

Public domain data, JumpStart International

Followup projects

Challenges

Emphasis on local infrastructure

4.3 Existing techniques for low-cost orthorectification

While there are a diverse range of approaches to participatory mapping, several prior works have focused on free or widely available tools for orthorectifying aerial imagery as a means to produce and publish mapping data. Their uses range from stitching aerial imagery captured from hobby-level remote control aircraft to rectifying historical printed maps in order to digitize their contents.

4.3.1 Map Warper

Perhaps the most ambitious project of this type is the Map Warper software written by Tim Waters, Schuyler Erle, and Shekhar Krishnan, as part of their project to 'crowdsource' the digitization of the New York Public Library map archive. [\[6\]](#)

4.3.2 GonzoEarth and manual stitching with Adobe Photoshop

Chapter 5

Grassroots Mapping as an alternative means of participatory cartography

- a series of case studies

5.1 Aerial imaging with low-cost tools

Due to the need for cheap and up-to-date imagery, a major part of the Grassroots Mapping project has been the design and use of low-cost platforms for capturing images of the ground from above. The use of kites and balloons to raise consumer-level 'point-and-shoot' cameras has allowed participants to capture images of sites of interest at minimal cost. A 'Grassroots Mapping Kit' can be assembled for less than \$100.

5.2 Cartagen: an alternative architecture for digital maps

However, in order to orthorectify or 'stitch' aerial imagery into a flat, geographically referenced map requires a system to display and manipulate raster imagery. The ability to label, trace, and otherwise annotate the resulting rectified map requires a system to display and manipulate vector data. In order to meet these needs the author created a map authoring and display framework called Cartagen. Written in JavaScript, it enables users to ...

Chapter 6

Related works

6.1 Beyond symbolic mapping: Data-driven approaches to participatory mapping

Chapter 7

Evaluation criteria

7.1 Participants vs. collaborators

Triangulation

Construct validity

how theory was affected by data

Face validity

how research was received by participants

Catalytic Validity

how participation transforms the situation (self-awareness/reflexivity)

7.1.1 Interviews with local partners

Wiki, mailing list, blog, media coverage (Face validity)

Chapter 8

The Grassroots Mapping tool chain

8.1 Balloon/kite Aerial Mapping (BAM/KAM)

8.1.1 Accuracy and precision in kite and balloon imaging

8.2 Digital maps: reconceptualizing mapping interaction

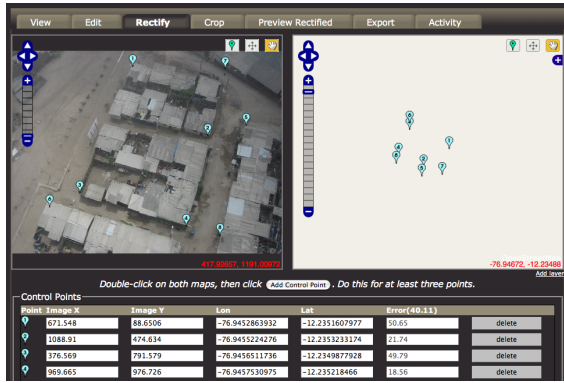
8.2.1 Beyond raster mapping/Tile politics

8.2.2 Cartagen dynamic rendering

8.2.3 An iterative toolchain development process

8.2.4 Web-based orthorectification and warping

In response to the collaborative design process and interviews conducted in Lima, Peru (Chapter 9), it was determined that the primary barrier to producing map imagery was the orthorectification process. While in Lima, participants made use of Adobe Photoshop CS3 as well as the Map Warper software developed by Tim Waters, Shekhar Krishnan, and Schuyler Erle. Attempts were made to instruct residents of the subject areas in the use of these tools. These techniques met with limited success due to factors such as availability of computers powerful enough to run Photoshop, latency in internet access, and most of all, the obscure interfaces which users were required to learn. Map Warper, which uses a ground control point (GCP) matching technique wherein users are asked to identify coordinates which appear in both a source image and a base reference map.



The Map Warper interface for identifying Ground Control Points. [6]

Using Adobe Photoshop to manually distort and warp imagery over an imported base map was a more direct and easier to explain process, but the low availability of the software and the need for a powerful computer to perform large image transformations were additional challenges. The need for a lightweight, easy to use system became clear. The additional ability to run such a program in any standard web browser would put such tools within reach of anyone with access to an internet cafe.

The Cartagen Knitter software, developed in the months following the Lima, Peru mapping project, makes this possible. Using the Cartagen Framework along with an HTML 5 distortion technique prototyped by Steven Wittens of acko.net [7], the author created an interface for users to upload images as overlays on an existing base map (typically OpenStreetMap vector data) and to manually distort an image by dragging the corners with the cursor. Tools for rotating, scaling, and adjusting the transparency of images were created, and the tool was tested and refined in a variety of workshops and mapping projects over several months.

"The process of creating a single mosaic from the images and then geo-referencing wholly to the USGS High Resolution Imagery resulted in a reduction in accuracy of nearly 100% in both location and orientation" [8]



Demonstration of JavaScript hack to insert Google satellite data for warping in areas with low feature density. [6]

Chapter 9

Case Study: Grassroots Mapping in Lima, Peru

9.1 Introduction

In the interest of basing tool development and design on real-world applications, and due to an ongoing conversation with Carla del Carpio of Lima-based Manzanita "A",
traveled to Lima, Peru in January 2010 to conduct field research and to collaborate on the Grassroots Mapping tool set with those who would be likely to use it.

9.1.1 Designing with, not for

Needs assessment

Potential beneficiaries/collaborators: Hector, Carla/Manzanita A, CEDRO, Escuelab, Shuawa

9.1.2 The Other Path: Lima's history of informal settlement

9.1.3 Valuation and 'grey' economies

9.1.4 Limits of state-sanctioned mapping efforts

9.1.5 A Grassroots Mapping curriculum

9.1.6 Mapping with Juan Pablo II

- Introduction to mapping - discussion: literal mapping difficult due to different mental models - tape-measure technique – bodystorming - introduction to Google imagery not relevant

First flights in Juan Pablo II

Situating mapping practice

Stitching maps with Juan Pablo II

- Stitching exercises - with kids - 'rubber sheets' - with teachers (secondary audience) - Map Warper, discussion of difficulties (see ahead)

9.1.7 Mapping with San Ignacio Loyola

- Manzanita "A" - usage of Photoshop primarily; fast mapping; 2-3 hrs flight, 1-2 hrs stitching - Hector: ideal user: - lives in an informal settlement - teacher, interested in using this in curriculum
- community leader - interest in tech, willing to try map warping - difficulty in trackpad/menu usage, took notes - engaged despite workload - sees applicability for mapping tools in settlements

9.1.8 Mapping with Cantagallo

- Escuelab - technology, art, society - engaged with a creative group, Shuawa

The Shipibo in Lima

- narrative of 10 year stay, claim to land, contested claims, and riverbank site - Escuelab sought political neutrality, but obviously interested in political situations: ex: shipibo language - Drawing exercises - 'amazon' home vs current home - non-literal mapping - related to issues of veracity re: Wherecamp sugg. of children mapping with stickers

Flying balloons with Cantagallo

- fastest yet - total images - usage of hugin/SIFT/Photoshop

Lower Cantagallo and local geographic dispute

- Escuelab and Sara/CEDRO - two cantagallos (three?) - Sr. Ricardo - possible political engagement/entanglement - entry into SETAME site; playfulness seen as neutrality? Or just no resistance at low levels to mapping activity? - not perceived as claim-related?

9.1.9 Computing literacy challenges with orthorectification

- map warper - designed for printed maps - large loop of interaction - overcorrection easy, no immediate feedback upon assigning GCPs - difficulty in explaining GCPs, and necessity of javascript hack for areas without base data - amazing for intended use, even note application in Mumbai - Photoshop better, but barely - stuart long uses photoshop, maybe bruce owen (see emails)

9.1.10 Evaluation

- based on criteria - Interviews!!!!!! transcribe them - Applications of maps we made - legal role - import to OSM? - World Bank mandate to map every home? do we support that goal? - education, urban planning, NGO planning support, demonstration project

9.1.11 Needs (Re)assessment

- Goals for a true 'pilot' that goes beyond information gathering and use of existing State of the art tools - planning of new, easier interfaces and techniques - Map Warper difficulties, speed - discussion and 'designing with' leading to Cartagena Knitter (see later discussion) - <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Rubbersheeting>
- needs assessment - user-centric design, appropriate design - Possibility of mapping a fast-changing community History/future assignments make explicit the value of mapping as an activity

Chapter 10

Citizen mapping of the BP oil spill

10.1 Grassroots mapping in crisis response

In late April 2010, the Deepwater Horizon oil rig exploded and sank, initiating what may be one of the worst environmental disasters in US history. As the spill grew in size, the author contacted Stewart Long of GonzoEarth.org and Oliver Yeh of 1337arts.com. Long has used remote control aircraft to produce maps, and Yeh specializes in high-altitude photography using weather balloons, having captured imagery from a balloon at altitudes of over 90,000 feet. The three decided to travel to the Gulf Coast area to spearhead a citizen effort to map the oil spill's effects. After making phone contact with Anne Rolfes of the Louisiana Bucket Brigade (LABB), a New Orleans-based environmental activist group, Yeh and the author flew to New Orleans on May 5th 2010, followed by Long on May 6th.

With the cooperation and extensive support of the LABB and other interested New Orleans residents, the team began leading almost daily trips to use balloons and kites to map coastal areas. While not attempting to produce imagery of the entire at-risk coastline, which stretches several thousand miles from Louisiana to Florida, the mappers focused on acquiring high resolution imagery of specific sites, with the goal of producing 'before and after' maps. The trips relied on the availability of free transport to affected areas, but in the initial days of the project this was not a problem, as fishermen and charter companies began calling in to offer their services for free. Increasingly large areas of the Gulf of Mexico were being closed to fishing, and with their livelihoods at risk, many in the fishing industry were eager to participate in the documentation of the spill.

The 2010 Gulf oil spill was seen as an opportunity to apply the low-cost mapping techniques refined and documented on GrassrootsMapping.org to a problem of immediate import. While many overflights were occurring, there was no publicly available, orthorectified imagery available in the initial weeks of the spill; up-to-date imagery was supplied mainly by the MODIS (Moderate Resolution Imaging Spectroradiometer) sensors aboard NASA's Terra and Aqua satellites. MODIS is limited to 1000 meter resolution for those bands which are used for ocean imaging, and while the daily images available were very useful in determining where along the coast was being hit by slicks and sheens, it was not of high enough detail to show any specific damage.

By contrast, the imagery collected by the LABB/Grassroots Mapping teams was up to 5 cm/px in resolution, and could be repeatedly captured over the course of days or weeks.

Chapter 11

Field trials in India

11.1 Goals

Chapter 12

Project sustainability and ongoing work

12.1 Wiki, blog and mailing list

Incorporation of new needs through dialogue (see Evaluation Criteria .. Face validity/Construct validity) Examples of community-based reformulation/innovation Crispen's suggestion of lat/lon rectification points (mentioned above) Pat Coyle's videos, bungee-cable design, and camera shut-down research

12.2 Illustrated Guide

Nathan Cooke, Pat Coyle Workshops/flights Community building, matchmaking (mentioned in strategies section above)



Figure 12.1: The Toucan

Chapter 13

ReadingList

Related readings

[New information technologies in the old political economy : an exploration of community-based GIS for improving basic services for the poor in New Delhi, India](#) - 2005 MIT DUSP dissertation by Claudia Canepa

[PARTICIPATORY SPATIAL INFORMATION MANAGEMENT AND COMMUNICATION IN DEVELOPING COUNTRIES](#) - Giacomo Rambaldi, Peter A Kwaku Kyem, Mike \McCall, Daniel Weiner, EJISDC, 2006

[The child's creation of a pictorial world](#), Claire Golomb

[Curriculum on "Children as Community Researchers"](#) - UNICEF, authored by [Children's Environment Research Group](#)

[Participatory GIS - A Paradigm Shift in Development?](#) - Jen Osha and Daniel Weiner, 2006

[Mapping for Change](#) - 2005 International Conference on Participatory Spatial Information Management and Communication

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[Bilingualism and identity: Spanish at the crossroads with other languages](#) - Geographic dispute in Canta Gallo, in Lima, [Chapter 7](#)

[Intervention: Mapping is critical!](#) - This intervention targets the much heralded demise of the map in geography and the recently proposed rethinking of maps. It comprises contributions from two political geographers, a military geographer, a political scientist, and two activist cartographers and argues that there is not so much a need to rethink maps, but to re-engage with the material practices of mapping, and above all to re-make maps.

[Mapping in a Shoebox](#) - A Grassroots Approach for Developing the Geospatial Literacy of Elementary Children - 24th International Cartographic Conference - Jaqueline M. Anderson, Sally Hermansen, Lorraine Innes, 2009

Lots of work by Proboscis: [Social Tapestries/Urban Tapestries](#), 2002-7 - Urban Tapestries investigated how, by combining mobile and internet technologies with geographic information systems, people could 'author' the environment around them; a kind of Mass Observation for the 21st Century. Like the founders of Mass Observation in the 1930s, we were interested creating opportunities for an "anthropology of ourselves" adopting and adapting new and emerging technologies for creating and sharing everyday knowledge and experience; building up organic, collective memories

that trace and embellish different kinds of relationships across places, time and communities.

BEST PRACTICES FOR SHARING SENSITIVE ENVIRONMENTAL GEOSPATIAL DATA

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