

AR3A160 Lecture Series Research Methods

THE ROUTE TOWARDS MAPPING

Self-reflection on the influence of perception on mapping

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I INTRODUCTION – RELEVANCE OF THE METHOD MAPPING

The method of a research provides a guideline for obtaining specific types of answers. These can include different goals, for example to communicate, to verify or to identify something. Every research is carried out in a different manner because the researcher can apply various instruments in numerous ways. These can be different parameters, like scales and context or techniques like modelling or sketching. As a result, a method always leads to different results, which was also evident in the lecture series of the course Research Methods (AR3A160). During the lectures the importance of communication within architecture highlighted extensively since the conveying of ideas forms the basis of our profession. And since there are many methods for communication, this is an important theme to reflect upon. In the lecture of Fransje Hooimeijer¹, the versatility of the method of mapping, to communicate between different disciplines, stood out.

Reflecting on used methods is important to develop and raise awareness of the application, since in fact every action can be seen as a method as long as it provides progress for your investigation. George Hernandez urges that the moment that there is a system of steps, or a single step, behind it, it actually already concerns a method² without even knowing, for certain, what the outcome will be. Reflection is a main theme in this paper because it is the only way to become more consciously engaged with the practice which can solely be achieved by gaining more experience³.

The graduation studio of Heritage & Architecture commissioned an investigation into the values of so-called 'modern heritage'. The possibilities of the potential heritage were examined, in this case concerning the residential area De Werven, being the first housing area of Almere (1979). An interesting issue considering that Almere is a newly designed city. At that time, the polynuclear city was created with the most modern visions. The residential areas in Almere-Haven, the first core of Almere, which we now take for granted when it comes to Dutch living principles, were innovative, exceptional and probably even challenging at the time. Given the national issue of densification in the Netherlands, such housing estates could perhaps offer a solution.

For the study, mainly analytical maps were created to provide insight into the current situation, given that the residential area is relatively new and that at first sight it is not very evident how the appreciation of the area would be shaped. Next to that the historical context of the district was investigated where the original visions and designs were also mostly expressed in the form of structuralistic maps, fitting within the zeitgeist. The often utopian lines of thought have been extensively visualised in convincing maps, which suggests that the plans could be nothing else but successful.

In this case, it seems that the visualization of the map influences the perception of the reader. And this has apparently evolved over the years in different methods, since there are so many ways of visualising. This made me wonder if these differences have an influence on the outcome. Therefore, this paper investigates visualisation and communication of the method: mapping. I used this method in my own research as a tool for analysing, which led to the question: 'To what extent did my choices influence the final outcome and conclusions?'

II RESEARCH-METHODOLOGICAL DISCUSSION - THE OUTLINE OF MAPPING

As mentioned before, the investigation of the neighbourhood in Almere concerned largely analytical maps that gave information about the content of the area. A lot of numbers could be extracted out of the maps which implies a clear quantitative character of the map, being objective and measurable⁴. In a broader sense this is a easy method to translate or apply the information into another practice, like Hooimeijer also showed during her lecture⁵.

The maps meet all the procedures involved; scale, framing, selection and coding, effectively providing structures for conveying or communicating information between people, places and even times, as said by Denis Cosgrove⁶. Procedural actions imply the application of methodology based research as explained by Ray Lucas⁷, so that in the most accurate way comparable results emerge. This completist character that the map implies, according to Lucas, is also confirmed by Cosgrove, who talks about the apparent stability and aesthetics of closure and finality of the map, but points out that this makes people forget that maps can have an enormous influence on the reader, ranging from feelings of fear of to even liberation⁸. This calls the methodological approach into question. According to James Corner the representation of a map is in the analogy; namely the direct impression of the ground. But the abstractness of the map, through framing, scale, orientation, projection, indexing and naming, brings artificial geographies to the surface that are not visible with the naked eye⁹. This can also be seen in my own maps where I tried to show the diversity of the district, while from the outside it is actually very monotonous.

This reveals that the map is actually largely based on personal interpretations and assumptions that have been represented, or rather omitted, by filtering. Because of this, map making seems to be more phenomenology oriented, because it is based on how the world is perceived¹⁰, or actually how I, as a map-maker, want the world to be perceived, which is also mentioned by Kevin Lynch. This equates to a play between the observer and the observed, because the maker can reshape to his own desires and thus has the possibility to show even more than that there really is¹¹, also illustrated in Hooimeijer's lecture where drawings were shown of underground worlds that we could never see with the bare eye.

Even though the quantitative notion of the purpose of mapping takes the lead: looking deeper into the basis of this, it can be seen that mapping is mostly done out of the ideas of the one who draws the map which means that the map-maker has a lot of influence on the perception of the map which suggest a more qualitative character since it is based on individual perspectives¹². The opacity of the map, as explained by Lucas, determines the quality¹³. Despite the fact that maps often look objective, it is a way in which irrelevant details are filtered or abstracted based on the opinion of an individual, namely the maker of the map. This makes mapping fit into the emic mould¹⁴. In my own case, I deliberately chose for instance not to flatten out the maps of the neighbourhood but to twist them a little into an axonometry. A personal choice to show the reader of the maps the building heights.

Ultimately, the map is a tool to visualize, conceptualize, record, represent and create spaces graphically¹⁵ and is an easy tool to communicate as people quickly understand how a map works, Lynch: "As long as he can fit reality to it, he has a clue the relatedness of things."¹⁶ This could be the reason why I, in my own maps, quite subconsciously, coloured in the bodies of water. It does not add any information regarding the purpose of the maps, but it does offer reassurance that the readers can orientate themselves quickly.

III RESEARCH-METHODOLOGICAL REFLECTION – EVOLUTION OF MAPPING

According to Lucas, a map does not always have to be a literal translation of the environment, which he illustrated by the example of Harry Beck, who in 1933 revolutionised the map of the London metro system. Resembling more of a system, the aim of Beck was to make people recognise connections more quickly without unnecessary details such as literal distances and shapes. The map was meaningful enough to understand and orientate¹⁷.

Considering the history of map making, according to Corner we, planners and designers, remain stuck with primary tools such as planimetry, ichnography, triangulation¹⁸. In fact, before 1980 the majority of maps produced were conventional; maps that are an entirely objective representation of reality or a thematic representation of phenomena¹⁹. Perhaps this also affects the way readers interpret maps; we do not know better than that it is objective because this has practically always been the case.

In the same year as Beck made his revolutionary map, the CIAM conference about analysing the city was being held in Paris. The aim was creating a more standardized format so that maps could be read universally over time. Architects and designers from different countries therefore used the same approaches to represent their cities so a comparison could be made. Looking back at this conference, Gregor Harbusch explains; however, it turns out that no single map ultimately looked the same, it appears that every environment needs its own representation²⁰, a conclusion that at that time did not really stand out, but is of great importance. A conclusion that did stand out of the conference, is one that is still relevant today; thanks to filtering, or deconstructing of the reality, more things come to the fore that can be worked with, or therefore can be constructed, which is acknowledged by Corner, who describes that mapping can reveal unimagined realities²¹.

Moving on to 1960s, structuralists compared the still 'self-evident' objective maps with their own ideas²², which probably led to a great reliance on new visions, something I was curious about in the beginning of this research. However, what Cosgrove also points out is that no map can be seen in isolation from opinions and context, as was actually already clear at the CIAM conference, but what people were perhaps not yet aware of, or not acknowledged since many major projects in those years are based upon one type of mapping visualization. After all, all maps contain choices, omissions, uncertainties and intentions - *authorship*²³.

In 1992 there was a necessity to rethink the way in which maps should be constructed. On the one hand due of the awareness that we live in a world full of unstable places and structures that are constantly flooded with new techniques, and on the other hand because of the revolution in the rapidity and precision of mapping, made possible by the computer. This makes it easy to manipulate a map in many ways²⁴. The speed of information distribution is something new in our world, and we have to deal with it consciously. Something that Hooimeijer also points out in her lecture; it is important to deal critically with the information that you find, since information is obtained extensively.

Cosgrove remarks that because of the speed at which we can manipulate maps it is possible to almost consider mapping as a form of art²⁵ and this is something that Corner even likes to encourage since maps have such a great potential, being able to create new worlds²⁶. At the moment we are stuck on the quantitative character of the map, using them as inventories and plans as self-contained ideals, whilst we could be leading the exploration of map-making²⁷. In this sense, maps can offer completely different insights I could personally imagine before I did this research.

Since the making of a map is thus actually based on association of the map-maker, you can look differently at the tools with which a map is made, described in the previous chapter. This is something we should be well aware of when mapping or even reading a map: The scale can be seen as a powerful imaginative act by the map-maker; the instrument of 'selection', which gives the stable and uniform appearance of the map, is effectively based on unstable, uneven, fragmentary, specifically

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positioned and haphazardly transferred information because it was created by a personal vision; and coding is theoretically unlimited since it is provided by the imagination of the map-maker and only constrained by the practicalities of legibility and comprehension²⁸.

IV POSITIONING – MAPPING AS AN EXPLORATION

In a time when the context can no longer be ignored because of various matters including climate-related concerns, the making of maps remains an important part of architecture and nowadays possibly even in a bigger respect. This is a theme that Hooimeijer also discusses during her lecture, explaining how the advantage of using maps is the ease to display multiple disciplines in the same format, in an understandable way for every user of the map.

This makes it a method to effortlessly compare things with each other²⁹. However, as a result from the research in this paper, the approach is always different since it is preceded on the basis of a large personal association, and the comprehensibility, as mentioned earlier in Lynch's quotation, is simply to provide that it should not imply the obviousness of the map.

Diving deeper into this, the personal association with mapping could be linked to the individual experience of the map-maker which is something that Lucas does not deny³⁰. In my opinion, an experience determines what you, as an individual, will feel attracted to. And when you, inevitable based upon your experience, make a map it will probably influence the way in which it is filtered and coded.

The notion that in the past maps were mainly corresponding to a representation of reality may well suggest that we often regard maps as objective, but when Corner's idea of using it as a tool to create new worlds is taken up, then the map is highly subjective as it is all based upon the vision of the map-maker. Perhaps this has even always been the case which means that a map can never be seen as a timeless way of communicating, but, maybe even more interesting, a representation of the spirit of the times, something of which you should be well aware. In this case, the way in which a map is drawn probably says not only a lot about the corresponding time, but also about the artist and his personal association with the world.

When I drew my own maps for the project, I had the idea of creating a completely objective picture of the current situation, but now I know that the way in which I drew the map actually says a lot about how I want something to be viewed. This is not a problem at all, I have discovered, but it is merely something I have to deal with consciously.

Personally, I find it fascinating to consider that when you no longer make maps with a quantitative purpose, it becomes possible to make cognitive maps that could be used for exploration instead of creating inventories³¹. You are then capable of showing readers new things in the world that could not be seen with the bare eye. This asks for a degree of abstraction which makes a map user friendly and meaningful³², making it a perfect tool for communication. In a world where it is nowadays difficult to make something outside the 'normative', a method such as mapping is of great importance because it offers the possibility of revealing hidden forces³³.

In conclusion, it emerges that the, in my opinion, the analytical maps that I made for the studio can never have a fully analytic character. There is always a personal association attached to it, which are also for my own maps probably based on the experience I had in visiting the environment as well as making the map and retrieving the information for the map. To consider that this is the case, which I have to take into account, is not limiting, but rather broadening the number of possibilities that a map can offer when viewed in the same way as by Cosgrove and Corner. And as Hooimeijer emphasised in her lecture, a map is a great method of bringing disciplines together, which is unavoidable in the field of architecture and should be explored even more, so that current problems in regard to the climate, ethnographies and economies can be brought together and new possibilities can be discovered.

END-NOTES

- ¹ During the lecture of Fransje Hooimeijer in the Lecture Series: Research Methods, an example was given about combining two disciplines in a research.
- ² During the lecture of Jorge Mejia Hernandez, in the Lecture Series: Research Methods, an explanation about methods was given.
- ³ Elise van Dooren. „Making explicit in design education: generic elements in the design process.” *International Journal of Technology and Design Education*, 2013, 14.
- ⁴ Ray Lucas. *Research Methods For Architecture*. London: Laurence King Publishing Ltd, 2016, 36.
- ⁵ During the lecture of Fransje Hooimeijer in the Lecture Series: Research Methods, she showed a clear connection between maps, diagrams and drawings and how they can be translated into one another.
- ⁶ Denis Cosgrove. *Mapping Meaning*. London: Reaktion Books Ltd, 1999, 2.
- ⁷ Ray Lucas. *Research Methods For Architecture*. London: Laurence King Publishing Ltd, 2016, 13.
- ⁸ Denis Cosgrove. *Mapping Meaning*. London: Reaktion Books Ltd, 1999, 2.
- ⁹ James Corner. *The Agency of Mapping: Speculation, Critique and Invention*. London: Reaktion Books Ltd, 1999, 215.
- ¹⁰ Marieke Berkers explained during the Lecture Series: Research Methods that phenomenology oriented research is based on the (individual) perspective of how we perceive the world around us.
- ¹¹ Kevin Lynch. *The image of the city*. Massachusetts: The M.I.T. Press, 1960, 120.
- ¹² Ray Lucas. *Research Methods For Architecture*. London: Laurence King Publishing Ltd, 2016, 13.
- ¹³ Ibid; 179.
- ¹⁴ Ibid; 10.
- ¹⁵ Denis Cosgrove. *Mapping Meaning*. London: Reaktion Books Ltd, 1999, 2.
- ¹⁶ Kevin Lynch. *The image of the city*. Massachusetts: The M.I.T. Press, 1960, 11.
- ¹⁷ Ray Lucas. *Research Methods For Architecture*. London: Laurence King Publishing Ltd, 2016, 179.
- ¹⁸ James Corner. *The Agency of Mapping: Speculation, Critique and Invention*. London: Reaktion Books Ltd, 1999, 218.
- ¹⁹ Denis Cosgrove. *Mapping Meaning*. London: Reaktion Books Ltd, 1999, 3.
- ²⁰ Gregor Harbusch. *Atlas of the functional city*. Verlag: THOTH Publishers, 2014, 36.
- ²¹ James Corner. *The Agency of Mapping: Speculation, Critique and Invention*. London: Reaktion Books Ltd, 1999, 213.
- ²² Denis Cosgrove. *Mapping Meaning*. London: Reaktion Books Ltd, 1999, 7.
- ²³ Ibid.
- ²⁴ Ibid; 6.
- ²⁵ Ibid.
- ²⁶ James Corner. *The Agency of Mapping: Speculation, Critique and Invention*. London: Reaktion Books Ltd, 1999, 214.
- ²⁷ Ibid; 224.
- ²⁸ Denis Cosgrove. *Mapping Meaning*. London: Reaktion Books Ltd, 1999, 12.
- ²⁹ Ray Lucas. *Research Methods For Architecture*. London: Laurence King Publishing Ltd, 2016, 179.
- ³⁰ Ibid.
- ³¹ Denis Cosgrove. *Mapping Meaning*. London: Reaktion Books Ltd, 1999, 7.
- ³² James Corner. *The Agency of Mapping: Speculation, Critique and Invention*. London: Reaktion Books Ltd, 1999, 222.
- ³³ Ibid; 214.

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