Online Neighbourhood Mapping: The Case of Siena's Online Eco-museum

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This article uses a case-study approach to Siena's online eco-museum, which is run by the city's neighbourhoods, to explore their mapping impulse on the World Wide Web (WWW). An interactive map, which is part of the eco-museum, enables the neighbourhoods to highlight various places that are important to them and to link these points to text, photos, and audio and video files. The investigation shows that the mapping impulse of neighbourhoods and communities is a performative representation and practice that places their collective identity online. Making their view of the world public via the WWW, neighbourhoods and communities create online places that can be thought of as concrete space-time configurations. The investigation shows that the neighbourhoods do not represent their identity arbitrarily but employ a specific visual and rhetorical style in which practices of control and technological processes are involved. They create emotionally-charged online places and at the same time provide an idealised version of their collective identity to a global audience in order to legitimise their practices and retain control over their way of life. This paper argues that the online mapping impulse can be conceived of as a mode of coming-to-the-world by unfolding space and time online.

Cities and communities have become aware of the possibilities offered by having a presence on the WWW. Presenting emblematic sights, hotel offers, and other aspects online the municipalities try to create a positive image of the city. In the case of Siena, not only does the municipality provide an extensive website, but the seventeen neighbourhoods of the city centre, that part of the city inside the mediaeval walls, have set up an online museum. In this so-called eco-museum they present their collective identity and view of the city online. In order to do so they have created a mashup based on GoogleMaps, where they mark selected places of the city and provide information about these sites that is produced and edited by members of the neighbourhoods. In so doing, the neighbourhoods create online places by mapping their neighbourhoods in relation to each other, to the city as a social and material environment, and to the global public.

The proposed paper will discuss the following questions: How does life unfold on the WWW through such mapping practices? How do neighbourhoods and communities create places online? How does their mapping impulse shape these online-places? The conclusions will not only be related to the case of Siena but will also discuss the possibility of doing research on online community mapping in general.

After an introduction that will include information related to the methodological approach and the applied methods, two theoretical sections will briefly discuss the recent literature on eco-museums (Davis 2009; Hawk 2011; Montanari 2015) and critical geography (Kitching /Dodge 2007; Caquard 2015, Zook/Dodge 2009). In this context, the author will highlight an important similarity between both fields of research, i.e. that they both highlight the importance that eco-museums and maps have for the creation, maintenance, and empowerment of communities (Bryan 2007; Gerlach 2014; Parker 2006; Pickels 2004). Furthermore, these sections argue that a phenomenological approach can be beneficial for critical cartography, through using the concepts of "inhabiting" and "coming-to-the-world" (Crampton 2003 and 2009; Sloterdijk 2004, Silverstone 2004) to view online activities as part of the contemporary way of constructing the world. This approach follows the suggestion of Kitching and Dodge (2007) that research in cartography should be focussed on the ontogenetic character of maps and mapping instead of on their ontological status. In the process of inhabiting, human beings create online places where they connect sites with stories and history. From this perspective, the mapping impulse is a culturally and historically variable practice that is dependent on the config-

uration of human beings, their environment (physical, cultural, and social), and technology (Castro 2009; Lukinbeal 2010). Today, online maps and websites form a crucial part of the coming-to-the-world for communities and neighbourhoods. Through this performative practice of representing their collective identity they create emotional ties between members, their ideas, and objects, thereby placing their identity in both local and global contexts. Consequently, emerging online places can be thought of as emotionally charged socio-material-technological fields of meanings.

The case study will be divided into three chapters. The main focus is on an analysis of the content of the eco-museum's webpages and how it is related to observations and twenty interviews conducted with community members during a four month stay in Siena 2015. The analysis will be structured in correspondence to the theoretical framework in order to shed light on the configuration of the socio-cultural, material, and technological elements of the mapping impulse of the neighbourhoods. There-fore, in the first section the social and material embeddedness of the neighbourhoods in Siena, their history, and their relation to a global audience will be presented. In the second part the technical en-vironment of the online eco-museum, the approaches to selecting and presenting information and of connecting that information with the map will be explored. The following interpretation of the con-tent of the webpages shows that the neighbourhoods use texts, photos, videos, and GoogleMaps to represent their neighbourhood as a community with a long history, and that they occupy concrete places both offline and online. Their mapping impulse interweaves space and time as well as offline and online social, cultural, material, and technological elements. Through a particular rhetorical and visual style that they employ to expound their identity, as well as special practices employed while constructing their website, they try to maintain control over their collective identity in the globalised world.

The conclusions will outline the implications of the theoretical and empirical findings for carrying out research into how communities map their identity online. The findings of this case study will be gen-eralised to broaden its scope through comparisons with other studies, while the wider implications of the theoretical and methodological framework will be underlined.