

Significance of Collaborative Cartography



It is well recognised that mapping has perhaps changed more profoundly in recent years than in any previous era. In the past map production was reserved for professional cartographers and dissemination was radial: users were amateurs who consumed professional products. The revolutions in digital cartography, initiated in the 1980s, did little to alter expert control over mapping, and GIS if anything exacerbated the power of the producer. Now, however, websites such as Google Earth offer everyone the chance to produce their own individual maps, in many cases without the need of any professional qualification. Never before has such democratisation been as widespread. So many users today are brought together via the internet that producers and consumers are no longer

distinguishable.

Ambivalence

These developments evoke ambivalent attitudes: some critical writers have argued they spell the end of traditional cartography. There is an increasing need for dynamic, and particularly interactive, maps, and web 2.0 offers a suitable platform for these new approaches to the acquisition, assembly and publication of geographic information. Others embrace a new era of map production with undreamed-of possibilities offered by the bi-directional collaboration that characterises the new mapping worlds of web 2.0. New terminologies are emerging to reflect this changing conceptual field: in contrast to the old cartography, there is now 'neogeography', embracing the integrative power of ubiquitous computing in which geography brings together the formerly separate. Yet others cast these developments as volunteered geographic information (VGI), stressing the potential of locally sourced or volunteered information.

Control

To date, most academic cartographic research has focused on controlling the syntactical dimension of communication and trying to provide better maps by exploring useful semantic aspects. However, the collaborative and participative nature of web mapping 2.0 will lead to a change in research priorities. It is the user's behaviour and interests that determine the communication process in web 2.0: semantics, and especially symbol and sign syntax, are usually beyond the control of collaborative users. The increasing significance of the user in contemporary mapping systems is reflected in some ICA commissions, such as that on Use and User Issues, and increasing research is being devoted to contextual studies. Cartography in the age of participative mapping will be challenged to define and offer rules, methods and techniques that can be applied to collaborative data input. Topics such as cartographic generalisation, cartographic symbolisation and visualisation techniques will all be profoundly altered in the world of web 2.0.

Endorsement

The ICA aims not only to reflect these developments in its discussions and commission works, but also to endorse them by actively seeking to offer platforms. The community of the Open Street Map Initiative will meet in Vienna from 15th to 17th July 2011 for the State-of-the-Map Conference, and ICA is endorsing this event. The ICA is seeking even further to use up-to-date communication possibilities on the ICA website to offer therefore contemporary possibilities for more communities to share and contribute to the exciting world of cartography.