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PROGRAM

MAPPING (FOR) SUSTAINABLE TRANSITIONS

EXPLORING THE POTENTIAL OF (CRITICAL)
CARTOGRAPHY AS A TOOL FOR TRANSITION DESIGN
AND SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

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Author: Kim Jennifer Huber

ABSTRACT

Maps can show us where we are and where to go. They can also show us where we are at - in terms of our impact on our natural environment. But can they also be a tool to foster and facilitate action for sustainable development? As multi-faceted as the challenges are, as diverse the efforts need to be to tackle them. Transition Design is committed to design-led solutions for more sustainable futures. Maps are tools for spatial understanding, navigation and orientation in various contexts. Additionally, in the field of Counter Cartography or Critical Mapping they are being used to challenge prevailing power relations and fight for political and social causes. The goal of this thesis is to explore how the concepts of Critical Mapping or Counter Cartography and Transition Design (can) relate to each other. In essence, the main question guiding this research is how (critical) maps can be a tool for designing for social transitions towards sustainable futures. It explores the "transitional" potential of maps. By studying the relevant literature in both fields as well as practical mapping examples it gives an overview of the development of cartography from early history until today, with a focus on the shift towards Critical Cartography or Counter Mapping. This thesis explores what characterizes this shift to then discover the potential and limitations of (critical) maps for Transition Design purposes. Two Germany-based online maps (giessdenkiez.de and the map implemented on foodsharing.de) serve as case studies to compare the insights from the previous research with practical cases. The cases are examples for "mapping for a cause" in a local context while thinking globally. They show how maps can be implemented to visualize and inspire initiatives. Maps can be effective for encouraging social engagement and action towards sustainable futures, if understood and applied accordingly. This research suggests, that Critical Mapping and Transition Design have a lot in common. Both Critical Mapping and Transition Design are challenging the status quo on many levels - be it social, economic, political, environmental. Representatives of both are committed to being agents for positive change, responsible citizenship, stewardship of Earth, transparency and empowerment. This research aims to contribute insights to the fields of Transition Design practice and theory Design Research as well as provide a new perspective to the field of Critical Mapping.

Keywords: #critical mapping #counter cartography #design research #transition design #sustainability #sustainable development #transitional maps #foodsharing #giessdenkiez