

REPRESENTATIONS, DIAGRAMS AND VISUALIZATIONS OF SPACE AND PLACE

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Users have a wide choice of artefacts for use in gaining a greater understanding of geography. They are generously provisioned with maps, diagrams, imagery and visualizations that can be output on paper, viewed on screen or manipulated as an interactive product. Generally, in the past these products were generated by a designer/producer prior to actual use. However, relatively recently, 'self-generating' maps have become possible via Web 2.0. (Web 2.0 is the use of the Web by individuals and groups of individuals to provide and share information, including geographical information. It provides a new model for collaborating and publishing.) These have little or no cartographer input and they are generated from data captured and provided by sensors, cellular telephone data and satellite imagery. They provide immediate geographical visualisations to 'wired' map consumers.

Whilst these maps with self-generated content provide visualisations of massive amounts of data about space almost in real-time, do they provide any information about place whatsoever? Are they just a 'picture' of what is there (in a space), rather than a medium that can facilitate real information provision about place? It is argued that maps and diagrams generally provide a considered representation of place, whilst self-generating visualisations are merely a visual record about 'what is there'.

To providers of geographical information in the form of maps and map-related artefacts, the designer's goal is to produce a representation that informs about a place. However, if maps and diagrams are used to provision users with information about REAL places alongside maps with self-generated content/visualisations about a space, how can users of cartographic products be sure whether space is not confused or substituted for place?

This paper addresses the use of the growing number of self-generated maps, maps with dynamic content and visualizations that are now readily available via Web 2.0. It considers whether this form of cartographic artefact provides a tool for discovering the real nature of place, rather than just a 'pretty picture' of part of the Earth. The paper begins by discussing what is meant by place and space. It briefly discusses this element by referring to the definition of space and place, as defined by de Certeau. It then provides examples that illustrate the differences between representing certain places with maps and diagrams and just visualising spaces through maps with self-generated content.