Issue Mapping for an Ageing Europe

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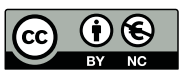

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Contents

Acknowledgements 7

1. Introduction: Issue mapping, ageing, and digital methods 9
   - 1.1 Issue mapping 9
   - 1.2 The ageing issue and its place in Europe 12
   - 1.3 Mapping theory: Social cartography, risk cartography, and critical neo-cartography 14
   - 1.4 Digital methods for issue mapping: New formats, data, and traceability 29
   - 1.5 Digital methods and the visualizations employed in the mappings 32

2. A social cartography of ageing 41
   - 2.1 Ageing as a social issue 41
   - 2.2 How to trace associations: Operationalizing social cartography using digital methods 42
   - 2.3 Ageing as a European issue? The EU initiatives and local agendas 45
   - 2.4 Polish ageing NGOs, issue formats and the local variation on Europeanization 53
   - 2.5 Which issue formats lend themselves to domestic debates on pension reform? The cases of the U.K. and Poland 60
   - 2.6 Tea and pens as 'cosmos-objects' in the British public sector pension reform debate 60
   - 2.7 Staging the pension reform controversy in Poland: Which formats could empower action? 66

3. A risk cartography of ageing 71
   - 3.1 Age U.K.'s hyperlinking behaviour 79
   - 3.2 Care worker migration as ageing issue (in the U.K. and beyond) and the quest for the cosmopolitan moment 82
   - 3.3 Migration of healthcare and social care workers and the impacts on victim states 84
   - 3.4 Care worker migration to the U.K.: A risk cartography 87

4. A critical cartography of ageing 93
4.1 Critical cartography and map-making 95
4.2 Practicing critical map-making 97
4.3 Neo-cartography and digital methods: The mash-up and the layer 99
4.4 Issue layer I: The Polish care worker migration layer 105
4.5 Issue layer II: Ageing issue centres and peripheries – NGOs, events, and sources of authority 109
4.6 Issue layer III: Cross-cultural analysis of ageing issues 116
4.7 European ageing resources map 124
4.8 Ageing well according to European local domain Googles: Ageing tips and an anti-ageing shopping list 130

5. Conclusion: Mapping for an ageing Europe 141
5.1 Producing social cartographies of ageing: The EUropeanization of ageing? 142
5.2 Producing risk cartographies of ageing: Winner and loser places 146
5.3 Producing critical neo-cartographies of ageing issue layers and resource maps 148

Glossary of tools used 153

References 157

Notes 163

Index 165

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1. Introduction: Issue mapping, ageing, and digital methods

1.1 Issue mapping

Stakeholders, students, issue professionals, workshop participants, practitioners, advocates, action researchers, activists, artists, and social entrepreneurs are often asked to make sense of the social issues that concern and affect the organizations and projects they are involved with. In doing so, they have to cope with information sources both aggregated and disaggregated, where opposing claims clash and where structured narratives are unavailable, or are only now being written. At the same time, the issues must be analysed, for they are urgent and palpable. The outcomes of the projects also need to be communicated to the various publics and audiences of their work. These issue analysts employ a wide range of strategies and techniques to aid in making sense of the issues, and communicating them, and as such they undertake, in one form or another, what we call 'issue mapping'.

In a small workshop setting, the analysts may draw dots and lines on a whiteboard, and annotate them with sticky notes and multicoloured markers, in order to represent actors, connections, arguments and positions. At the sign-in table, at a barcamp, hundreds of activists write down on a large sheet of paper the URLs of their organizations or projects, forming a long list that is typed into the computer for the mapping to proceed. Analysts will harvest the links between the websites, and put up a large map for the participants to pore over and annotate. The attendees will ask questions about the method behind the mapping, and also how their nodes can become larger and less peripheral. Indeed, issue mappers may use hand tools and software to capture and process network and issue data. They output visualizations that show alignments, reveal patterns and display affinities. They are just as likely to display disalignments and opposition.

Issue mapping takes as its object of study current affairs and offers a series of techniques to describe, deploy, and visualize the actors, objects, and substance of a social issue. It is concerned with the social and unstable life of the *matters on which we do not agree* and with how the actors involved are connected to each other, or otherwise associated with each other. Ultimately, the aim is to produce mappings that will aid in identifying and tracing the associations between actors involved with an issue, and to

render them both in narrative and visual form so that they are meaningful to one's fellow issue analysts and their audiences.

This is a practical guide to contemporary issue mapping for issue analysts, increasingly using online data and software, but also coloured markers and sticky notes. It is intended to be a companion for those who already include or wish to include issue mapping in their work. We would like to introduce the techniques and tools together with mapping theory. We believe that only half of the problem lies in how to retrieve and process digital information, and the presence of tools and their manuals do not necessarily guarantee a good mapping. Instead, we believe that it is necessary to provide researchers with conceptual frameworks that will assist them to imagine what could be achieved with the tools and data, and especially what kind of questions they can answer.

Issue Mapping for an Ageing Europe, as the title suggests, documents the practice of mapping the social issue of ageing in Europe, using online tools and data. We chose the case study of ageing, among other reasons, for it is a contemporary issue with increasing activity around it. Ageing as an issue refers to the instability currently arising from the idea of a society in which for the first time the old outnumber the young. What is at stake? According to whom? What is to be done? How to map and communicate the substance and the conflicting expressions of the issue, so that action is both captured as well as taken?

In order to proceed, we have selected three leading authors who have shaped the practice of issue mapping, namely, Bruno Latour and his theories about social cartography, Ulrich Beck and his writings about risk cartography, and, most recently, Jeremy Crampton and his work on critical cartography and neo-cartography, the latter of which refers to the work by those outside the profession of cartography using online mapping tools and applications. Taking ageing as a case study, we apply the authors' concepts and, crucially, operationalize them into mapping techniques with digital methods and tools. Each of the chapters is dedicated to the application of one author's cartography or mapping in a practical way: How to map ageing as a controversy? How to map ageing as a risk and how to map ageing from the perspective of critical neo-cartography, employing the new online mapping tools, such as Google Maps? The chapters also build iteratively upon each other, for Latour's social cartography is taken up in Beck's risk cartography, and Crampton's is compatible with Latour's and especially Beck's. Our project is thus a layered description, containing multiple social, risk and critical mappings of the issue of ageing in Europe (see Figure 1). It also inquires into (and seeks to demonstrate) the productiveness of bringing

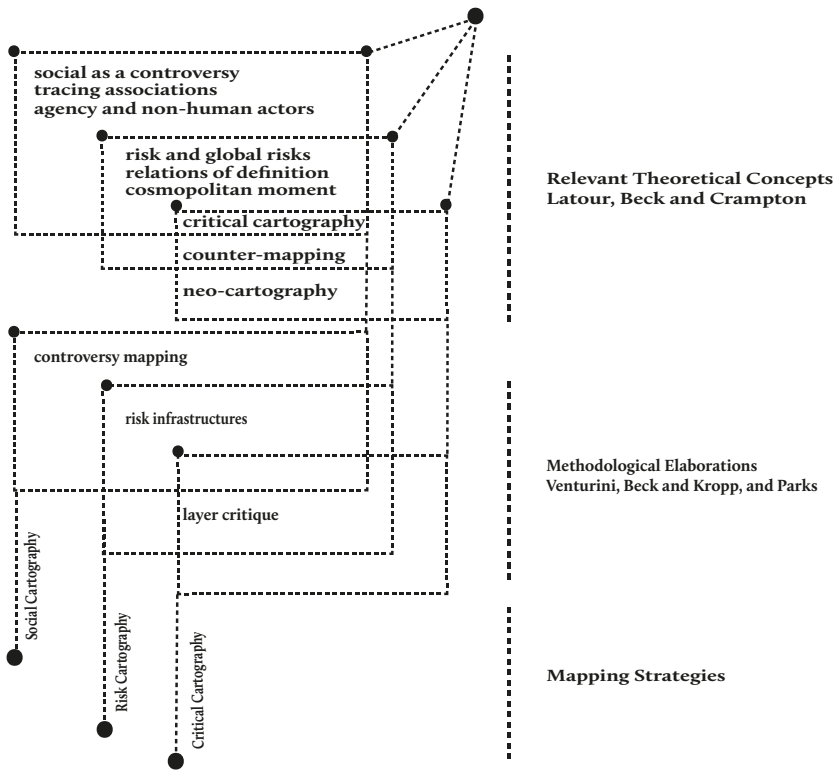

Fig. 1: *Methodological elaboration of cartography theories for issue mapping.* The graphic displays a three-layered methodological development. The first layer contains concepts extracted from the works of Latour, Beck, and Crampton. The second layer contains methodological elaborations on them by Venturini, Beck/Kropp, and Parks. The third layer contains the resulting mapping strategies, namely social cartography, risk cartography, and critical cartography.

together operationalizations of social, risk and critical cartographies in a single issue-mapping practice.

In discussing the famous Maya Atlas project of the 1990s, a mapping that aided indigenous peoples make land claims to the Belize state, Crampton quotes from a recent reflection on the project: '[Maps] are [...] practices that weave together power and social relations. The effective indigenous "counter-map", then, is one that unsettles the very categories that constitute the intelligibility of modern power relations' (Crampton, 2010, p. 125). To Crampton (like Latour), mapping is a practice of tracing relations and redoing categories. Like for Beck a 'good' issue mapping also displays the points of view of the down-streamers and victim states. One of our cases concerns care worker migration to places with ageing people and fewer

trained staff or local family members to look after them. As we discuss in our mapping, the question is whether those ageing places recognize that the source nations also need care workers themselves.

1.2 The ageing issue and its place in Europe

Ageing is currently a subject of some concern, and is under analysis by issue professionals in Europe. How to anticipate the interlocking issues and problems associated with increased life expectancy? When are demographic shifts challenging which sectors of society? When (and where) are we able distribute the responsibilities of caring for populations living longer, and take advantage of longevity? In the past few years different parties have prioritized the issue of ageing in their agendas, each emphasizing what they consider as urgent. In the event, the European Union designated 2012 as the European Year for Active Ageing and Solidarity between Generations with the overall objective 'to reverse the idea that older persons are a burden on society. As Europeans live longer and healthier lives, governments are looking for ways to involve older persons more in society and to keep them active; these changes could result in economic benefits for society as a whole' (Eurostat, 2011, p. 9). Putting the issue on the calendar is a means to take it up in earnest and to mobilize actors to organize events, and generate attention to them and the issue more generally. Somewhat differently, social entrepreneurial organizations such as the Young Foundation in the United Kingdom, partnering with such issue-focused, non-governmental organizations as Age U.K., are putting forward means to prevent or future-proof (as it is called) a social crisis associated with the care of an older population. The numbers they put forward in the debate express the urgency, and in doing so also show how issues become such through formatting them with pithy statistics. We term such formatting of issues to grant them urgency, 'issuefication'. As a case in point, according to the Young Foundation life expectancy in the U.K. 'is increasing at more than five hours a day, every day' (Young Foundation, 2012, p. 2). There is also action to be taken. The Foundation encourages new equilibria between sick and healthy, and longer participation of the elderly in their communities.

Both the expressions as well as consequences of this new demographic (im)balance are subjects of public debate. When are people considered to be old and according to which sectors? How will society cope with greater numbers living with chronic illness at the same time that the work force is dwindling? How should individual and state responsibilities be weighed?

Will privileged nations drain care workers from less privileged nations? How will ageing motivate migration across countries? Which places will become (good) ageing places?

The heterogeneity of the questions associated with ageing makes it a special kind of distributed issue, both in the sense that it crosses a number of broad sectors but also in that it moves across cultural and geographical borders. It mobilizes large sets of resources and people across the globe. In other words, what it 'means to grow old' is tied intensely to local, international and transnational agendas, to employment markets as well as policymaking: ageing is defined by place at the same time that it is producing new geographies. A mapping of ageing is pertinent and potentially useful in the hands of the decision-makers and all others involved.

The contents of this book capture and report on good practices of issue mapping (a phrase we prefer over 'best practices'). In mapping ageing, we also aim to contribute to the stabilization of the ageing debate, as any mapping does, however fleetingly. Most of all, we also would like to share

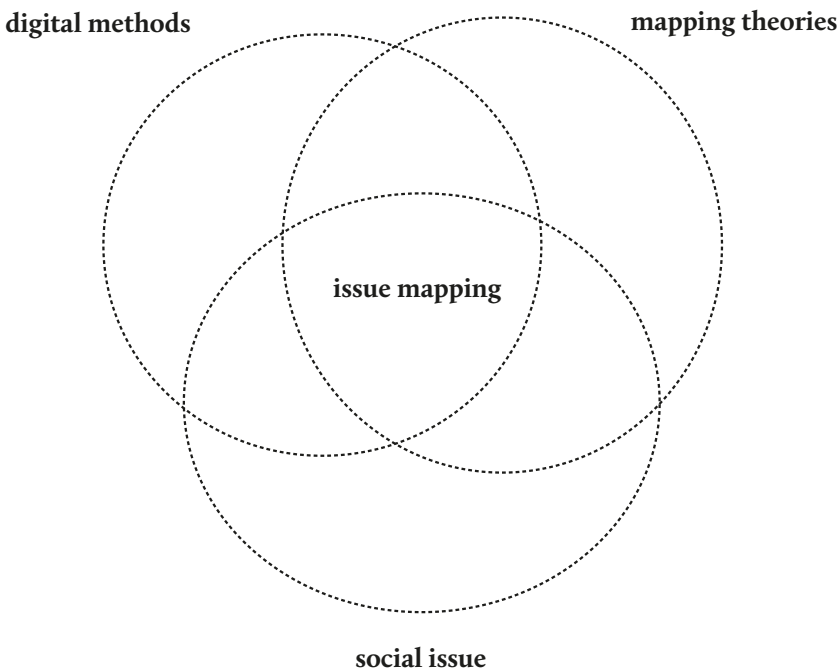

Fig. 2: *Simplified schema of issue mapping*. Mapping theories, digital methods (with tools), and the social issue together comprise the issue mapping.

our operationalizations of mapping theory (the cartographies), the digital methodologies and the nitty-gritty practices of how to map. While it is not meant to be generic or universalizing in the sense of a toolbox that may be carried to the next social issue, *whatever* it is, it does offer some recipes for how to map (as well as literal recipes for what to eat, the anti-ageing menus, treated in the conclusion).

In the following we would like to introduce briefly a selection of mapping theories put forward by Bruno Latour, Ulrich Beck and Jeremy Crampton and the concepts that we consider relevant for a practical approach to issue mapping. The authors serve as different triggers, organizers and catalysts, showing how one issue creates different assemblages of people, ideas and things depending on the moments the questions are posed. Figure 2 is a simple representation of the issue, theory, and method, where together the mapping is formed. It is an ideal representation, yet it serves as a reminder that neither the theory, nor the method, nor the tool alone or two in tandem comprise good mapping practice.

1.3 Mapping theory: Social cartography, risk cartography, and critical neo-cartography

The first section and layer of our project is dedicated to a mapping of ageing as a social issue and controversy. To guide us in this process we employ some of the key concepts developed by French sociologist of science, anthropologist and philosopher Bruno Latour. From the large body of work produced by Latour we focus on his guide to mapping, *Reassembling the Social: An Introduction to Actor-Network-Theory* (2005). This book is meant to be a travel companion for social researchers, and especially for the sociologist of associations and the practitioner of actor-network theory, bodies of thought developed by Latour, with contributions from Michiel Callon, John Law, Annemarie Mol, Noortje Marres and others. In fact, Latour writes that his book responds squarely to a demand for a more practical and straightforward explanation of the bases of his theories and of what could constitute the work of deploying the state of affairs of an issue. For this reason to us *Reassembling the Social* is an extremely useful and practical text that echoes throughout the entirety of this book. Three sets of key concepts can be considered to be especially relevant to the practice of issue mapping: namely, Latour's redefinition of the social as not structure but movement, the redefinition of the role of the social researcher as tracing associations created by the actions of the actors involved in a controversy, and thirdly,

Latour's widening inclusion of non-human actors as equally relevant (or at least not to be forgotten) in a given controversy.

From the outset Latour differentiates between two opposing definitions of the social, and how to study (and map) it. The two opposing ways to think about the social should be taken into account before any attempt at social cartography and issue mapping. On the one hand, Latour explains, there is the idea of the social as a pre-given substance. Its existence is assumed as sorts of phenomena called 'society', 'social order', 'social factors' or 'social dimensions'. Such thinking has consequences for the study of the social, and a social cartography, where one would seek structure, order and forces, and where one's maps would show social infrastructures of the given powers. In that case, society and the social are used as a kind of context in which everything is framed and explained. Latour is highly critical of the pre-given social, and social forces, some out there, and others hidden: it is a sort of 'magic glue' that helps explain everything else (Latour, 2005, p. 5). Latour puts forward another approach. He advocates understanding the social not as a substance but instead as the movement of actors constantly in the process of (re)assembling, (re)associating and (dis)agreeing.

> [T]here is nothing specific to social order; [...] there is no social dimension of any sort, no social 'context', no distinct domain of reality to which the label 'social' or 'society' could be attributed; [...] no 'social force' is available to 'explain' the residual features other domains cannot account for [...]. [S]ociety, far from being the context 'in which' everything is framed, should rather be constructed as one of the many connecting elements circulating in tiny conduits. (Latour, 2005, pp. 4-5)

This shift from structure to movement is a key insight for mapping, for it forces the analyst to trace instead of dig, expose or unveil. Furthermore, the social that was usually used as an explanatory category in more traditional endeavours, becomes for the Latourian researcher the question in need of an answer, and that to be mapped. That is, the social is not the explanation for the state of affairs of an issue; instead the state of affairs of an issue is precisely the social being performed by the actors. To be mapped are the actions and associations that assemble different actors together into a state of affairs that is not pre-given but instead performative: 'Even though most social scientists would prefer to call "social" a homogeneous thing, it's perfectly acceptable to designate by the same word a trail of *associations* between heterogeneous elements [...] *a type of connection* between things that are not themselves social' (Latour, 2005, p. 5).

The social is the trail of connections, a particular movement of re-association and re-assembling. Society is what is produced with the connections. It is active, performing and redesigning itself. The social is 'visible only by the *traces* it leaves (under trials) when a *new* association is being produced between elements which themselves are in no way "social"' (Latour, 2005, p. 8). It is the role of the researcher to trace these associations in order to describe how the social comes into being. The way to do so for Latour is to follow the actors themselves:

> The task of defining and ordering the social should be left to the actors themselves, not taken up by the analyst. This is why, to regain some sense of order, the best solution is to trace connections *between* the controversies themselves rather than try to decide how to settle any controversy. (Latour, 2005, p. 23)

Instead of presenting, in advance, a divided and classified list of the actors, domains and methods that are meant to compose the social, Latour suggests that controversies should be taken as a starting point and then the focus should be on the struggle, the action, and the movement. In other words, Latour advises his readers when the social is triggered, so the actors, agencies, group formations, and their associations become visible and therefore traceable.

In the most practical terms, Latour, in the role of a guide, proposes five types of instructions for the researcher, and the social cartographer, to look into in detail. The first states that there are no groups, but rather only group formations. By this Latour explains that there is no such thing as fixed groups a priori, but instead group-like formations in becoming that are in continual development, that are often arrangements that change and whose boundaries need to be defined over and again. A group formation, contrary to a group, requires constant input of actions to define its boundaries, limits, and meaning. Crucially, the researcher is instructed to follow the actors themselves and render visible the group formations, instead of assuming the existence of groups. Latour's emphasis on association as foundational for how the social comes into being is not only an emphasis on group formation as opposed to pre-existing groups, but also that assemblages are not stable but dependent on the behaviours and actions being performed between actors.

At this point in the argument Latour introduces the distinction between a mediator and intermediary, which is useful both conceptually and practically for mapping, as it provides a pointer to what or whom to concentrate on when mapping. An intermediary 'transports meaning or force without

transformation', and its outputs are predictable (Latour, 2005, p. 39). (It is like a black box which has stabilized what it produces, including the interpretation.) On the other hand, a mediator's input cannot predict its output, for every time it is different. Mediators 'transform, translate, distort, and modify the meaning or the elements they are supposed to carry' (Latour, 2005, p. 39). They may lead the researcher (and move the action) in multiple directions. It is always uncertain if an entity is acting as a mediator or intermediary, and it is a question always worth asking.

The second instruction set begins with the thought that we never act alone – 'We are never alone in carrying a course of action' – and the actor is not the unique source of the action (Latour, 2005, p. 43). What makes all of us do the same thing at the same time? It is in a network where action is distributed and translated. The researcher's task is to map out agency: What causes transformation, and what is the figuration or format of action? This particular question prompts the researcher to take seriously action formats, that is, how issues are made into matters of concern and calls for doing something about them, collectively. The third set of instructions concerns non-humans. '[O]bjects, too, have agency' (Latour, 2005, p. 63). To include objects implies changing what agency and action mean. Anything that changes the state of affairs (that acts) is on the map (as a mediator). To paraphrase Latour, map not just human-to-human connections or object-to-object ones, but the zigzag from one to the other. However, this is not simple 'symmetry between humans and non-humans', but the call to ignore the assumption of such a division (Latour, 2005, p. 76). The fourth instruction is equally crucial, for it fills in further the notion of an issue, and a specific form of its study, alluded to above as issuefication. It is to consider the difference between a matter of fact and a matter of concern. Getting the facts straight does not necessarily result in the end of the disagreement. Track instead how facts come into being and are deployed so as to form matters of concern. (One recalls the Young Foundation's deployment of facts to make ageing a matter of concern: life expectancy in the U.K. 'is increasing at more than five hours a day, every day'.) Relatedly, the fifth guideline is that we are mapping and writing accounts of what is termed, second-degree objectivity. When and to whom are matters concerns, and how are they expressed and formatted as such? Which facts are deployed by whom? Ultimately, a good account traces the network and helps us to describe the state of affairs composed of actors and things that make other actors and things do something.

The practical implications of actor-network theory are explored further by Tommaso Venturini, who describes in detail a didactic version called