

The Shifting Personalities of Map-making

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Keynote Presentation

Cartography seems to polarize opinion as do many cartographers. We're all too often seen as embodying a strange discipline and profession, sometimes misunderstood and oddly separated from other more revered professions. While medicine, law and architecture are generally regarded with high esteem, cartography seems to have developed a public relations problem. We're qualified, knowledgeable and practiced professionals. We combine art, science and technology that underpin so much of daily life and act to communicate the results of geospatial analysis. We're masters of our craft and have much to celebrate and offer through collaboration. But how many of us face unease when showing our colours as if being a cartographer is a dirty secret?

Using personal examples, this talk will explore some of the difficulties cartographers face in a world where the value of cartography is perhaps seen as largely irrelevant to many map-makers. The plethora of simply dreadful maps that are regurgitated daily across our social media palette evidence the lowering of standards set by a new wave of people who seem to eschew what has gone before. Old is new again yet modern examples show that many map-makers seem unaware or unwilling to dip into the vast repository of cartographic work to inform their own map-making. Poor work is rising to the top and overshadowing quality cartography and this is an epidemic that is becoming as virulent as the latest viral map. The need to encourage the ever-increasing number of map-makers to think about design, aesthetics, appropriate construction and long-standing techniques has never been more pressing. So how do we, as a dwindling group of 'professionals', tackle this modern epidemic?

I'll shed light on the problem using personal examples and explore some of the ways I think we can look forward with renewed hope and vigor.