

Pandemic Participation: Revisiting Three Central Tenets of Good Practices in Participatory Mapping in Times of COVID-19

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ABSTRACT

This article revisits the three foundational principles of participatory mapping practice identified in good practices in participatory mapping. These include processes that strive for transparency, are unencumbered by time, and prioritize trust: the ‘Three T’s’. Authors Kelly Panchyshyn and Jon Corbett analyze the relevance of these principles under the spectre of the global COVID-19 pandemic. This reflection is carried out within the context of Kelly’s Master’s research. Over the course of 2020, Kelly worked with staff and citizens of the Kwanlin Dün First Nation to map Indigenous and non-Indigenous plant harvest foodways within Łu Zil Män, an expansive stretch of land on the edge of Whitehorse, Yukon. In exploring both the barriers and opportunities created by conducting this project during a pandemic, the authors determine that the ‘Three T’s’ remain essential for conducting meaningful participatory mapping. However, they also argue that each T takes on new dimensions within contexts of isolation and social distancing, particularly for Northern and Indigenous communities.

KEYWORDS

COVID-19, Participatory Mapping, Plant Harvest Foodways, Time, Transparency, Trust, Whitehorse, Yukon

INTRODUCTION

This article revisits the three foundational principles of Participatory Mapping practice identified in *Good practices in participatory mapping* (Corbett, 2009). These principles include establishing mapping processes that strive for transparency, are unencumbered by time, and prioritize trust between researchers and mapping participants - the ‘Three T’s’ - transparency, time and trust. Together, the authors explore the robustness and relevance of these principles under the spectre of the global COVID-19 pandemic.

The authors’ reflections on this topic emerge from their work together on the *Creative and Collaborative Land Planning in Canada’s North: Supporting Plant Harvest Through Participatory Action Research in Whitehorse, Yukon* project over the Spring, Summer and Fall of 2020. This project focused on documenting the harvest of wild plant foods and medicines by Indigenous and non-Indigenous residents of Whitehorse, a town of 33,893 people located just above the 60th parallel

DOI: 10.4018/IJEPR.299547

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(Government of Yukon, 2021, p. 3). As the capital city of Yukon, Whitehorse is home to roughly 79% of the territory's overall population and is considered Yukon's only urban hub (Government of Yukon, 2021, pp. 1-3). In partnership with several staff and citizens of the Kwanlin Dün First Nation (KDFN) the researchers worked to develop planning supports for the practice of wild harvest in Łu Zil Män, a popular green space on the periphery of city's urban center. As of late 2021, the area of Łu Zil Män is about to undergo a land planning process and although the lakes, forest and tundra mountains found there may not be a typical of most urban environment, spaces like these are a key aspect of day-to-day life for many residents and help to give Whitehorse its identity as the 'wilderness city' (Department of Tourism and Culture, Government of Yukon, 2021). Thus, planning in this area is an important step in supporting the well-being of many Whitehorse urbanites. However, it is important to note that in Canada and elsewhere, there is a systemic exclusion of Indigenous voices from planning and decision-making (Monosky & Keeling, 2021).

The research team chose to use a participatory mapping approach to better understand local harvest ways and how to ensure that they are incorporated into the Łu Zil Män planning process. In practicing this method of community engagement, the project team sought to uphold the best practices set forth by the Three T's. However, the team also had to consider how best to apply these principles while carrying out research during the COVID-19 pandemic.

The first section of this article covers the basic principles followed in the practice and research of participatory mapping. The second section introduces and discusses the project's application of participatory mapping within the context of the pandemic. The final section reflects on how to expand beyond the Three T's with regards to research and participatory mapping within Indigenous and northern communities like Whitehorse, Yukon.

CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

Participatory mapping, in its broadest sense, is the creation of maps, both paper and digital, by local experts (Corbett, 2009). The term 'expert' here, does not necessarily mean academics or government officials, rather, it means community members with the embedded knowledge and experience needed to map a particular place and the environmental or social histories embedded within it (Chambers, 2006).

Participatory maps represent unique ways of understanding and relating to space and place (Brown & Kyttä, 2018). These ways of knowing are rarely, if ever, depicted in mainstream maps or the planning initiatives informed by such maps. What unites practitioners is their belief that representing spatial knowledge and communicating it through the media of maps can have profound implications for those whose perspective of place and space are marginalized by conventional mapping (Tosi Roquette & McCall, 2021). When properly undertaken, maps produced by the community can become interactive conduits for networking, discussion, information exchange, analysis, and decision making (García-Díez et al., 2020). They can stimulate innovation, and ultimately, they can encourage positive social change.

The use of participatory mapping with Indigenous communities is a particularly relevant component of the practice. In Indigenous contexts, participatory mapping can provide a mechanism for representing the deeply rooted relationship between Indigenous communities and the lands they steward (Pyne, 2020). Within a decolonial framework, mapping can yield "profound insights about Settler-Indigenous relations and may even contribute to a shift in power toward Indigenous Peoples and other marginalized groups" (Altamirano-Jiménez & Parker, 2016, p. 91). As Mishuana R. Goeman explains, this shift in power comes when we use maps to investigate the "epistemologies that frame our understanding of land and our relationships to it and to other peoples" (2013, p. 3). Such an investigation can then be used to better understand the processes that have come to define "our current spatialities" and how we might begin to challenge them (p. 3). In this sense, Indigenous mapping or 'remapping' offers a starting point for identifying and confronting the systems of colonization that shape community member's relation to the land and to one and another.

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