

Underspecified, Ambiguous or Formal: Problems in Creating Maps Based on Texts

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How can a reading of a textual description of a landscape be expressed as a map? Maps form a medium different from verbal texts, and the differences have consequences not only for how things are said, but also for what can be said at all using maps. Where are these limitations to be found?

The source material for the research presented in the paper is a set of legal documents, verbal textual as well as in the form of maps, connected to border negotiations in Scandinavia in the mid eighteenth century (Schnitler, 1962). The research has been supported by a computer-based model of parts of the source text, built up through a semi-automatic modelling process. The historical process of creating the original text, as well as maps made by the same author, has also been studied. This is used in an investigation into how geographical information read from a text can be expressed as maps. Based on this work, a typology consisting of three types has been developed:

1. **Under-specified texts.** Based on such a text, more than one map can be drawn, and at least two of these maps are significantly different.
2. **Fully specified textual descriptions.** Only one map that can be drawn based on the description.
3. **Ambiguous figures and negation.** The spatial information read from the text cannot be represented as one single static map.

In order to differentiate between the reading of the text as such and the background information the reader already has, the contextual information one would get from a pre-existing map or knowledge about the landscape is

excluded from the model. So the process I have investigated is the process of expressing information about geography *as* a map, not *onto* a pre-existing map.

In the paper, this source based evidence will be seen in light of inter-art and intermedia studies, including Lessing (1893), Frank (1963), Mitchell (1980) and Elleström (2010). The typology will be presented in detail, together with the evidence in the source text on which it is based. Further, ways to overcome the problems of map representations will be discussed, and some conclusions about the relationship between verbal text and geographical maps will be presented.

References

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