
Erwin Raisz' Atlases – multi-method storytelling-approaches for cartographic communication

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Abstract:

Hungarian-born American cartographer Erwin Raisz is best known for his physiographic maps that describe landforms using a variation on an isometric projection, to show the topographic scenery on maps. These hand-drawn "landform" maps are still sold today and have not forfeit their visual allure. In his seminal text book *General Cartography* (1938) Raisz wrote "The good cartographer is both a scientist and an artist" and this thoroughly characterises his approach to communicate spatial data through adapted visualisations.

More silently, Raisz developed three atlases that followed his approach employing hand drawn maps accompanied by carefully arranged text, pictures and statistical graphics, thus pre-empting infographics that are common today.

The *Atlas of Global Geography* (1944), *Atlas de Cuba* (1949) and the *Atlas of Florida* (1964), even though published in different production contexts, show a development of Raisz idea to use rather simple maps but add additional information features to simplify rather complex topics and thematic interrelations. The scope of visualisation methods used exceed those of recent atlases and corroborate the importance of aesthetic variety in successful user-oriented cartographic communication.

The paper situates the atlases of Erwin Raisz in the tension field between positivist cartography and cartographic aesthetics, thus reflecting the ongoing development of and discussion on cartographic communication and narratives employed in atlases. In this respect the three atlases of Erwin Raisz may be seen as predecessors of recent atlas products, that break with traditional concepts by employing alternative story-telling approaches to communicate spatial knowledge to a broader audience.