

Preferred cartographic representation for tourist information

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Abstract:

Tourist maps convey spatial information by means of graphic symbols, allowing tourists to localize objects in different scales with appropriate level of detail, depending on the extent of tourist exploration. The usefulness of a given map may be correlated not only with its map design, level of detail, geographic scale, and the extent to which it includes useful information that a person is searching for but also with to what extent the person can read the relevant information. What seems interesting is the fact that recipients prefer specific cartographic representation for tourist information for a given geographic scale, considering them more informative.

In this research, we propose a geographic-cartographic and sociological approach, resulting from a specific understanding of tourists' preferences towards spatial information. Thus, the number of times a given cartographic representation was selected by a person searching for information over other representation types is the indicator of the informative value of this cartographic representation. Users' preferences can be organized into a pattern that puts map design in order from the most to the least frequently selected ones. We were also interested in whether the preference for a given type of map design and selecting them in a specific order depends on two groups of variables: the type of information searched for and cartographic competences or habits.

The main objective of the study was to identify the correlation between the geographic scale and the abstraction level of cartographic representation in the context of searching for spatial information by tourists. It was interesting for us to examine how the type of the information searched for, in terms of the geographical area: country – city – city square; and nature of information: general, related to tourist attractions and access roads.

The following points were included in the research with an on-line questionnaire:

- expected result: ranking of cartographic representations for three information types: general information, tourist attraction information, and information about travelling routes;
- research subjects: 50 students of geography and 50 of sociology (non-geography) from one university, who have never been to the mapped country;
- research objects: cartographic representations according to geographic scales and levels of representation abstraction: three sets in different geographic scales (country, city, square) with different map design according to abstraction level (orthophotomap, touristic map with pictorial and pseudo-3D symbols, physical hypsometric map, city plan with pictorial signs, tourist map with symbolic signs, etc.).

Four selected map designs according to abstraction level of cartographic representations are linked with different level of mapping's conventionality, starting with the most indexical mapping, photographic in nature, and ending with the entire conventional, symbolic mapping. The cartographic material included: country – North Macedonia, city – its capital city Skopje, and square – Macedonia Square in Skopje.

Among many interesting results for cartographers and sociologists, we have put forward the following: the level of map design conventionality does not seem to matter too much in choosing the map with necessary information; the greatest part in the decision-making process play is whether or not the map includes the information that respondents are currently seeking, relevant differences in the way geographers and sociologists choose maps occur only when they search for

information about the entire country but not when searching for the information about the city and the city square; and both geographers and sociologists (non-geographers) significantly value traditional hypsometric maps.