

Critical Analysis of Maps

This guide proposes a set of questions for a critical analysis of maps in peace and conflict contexts. The guide was created for the series of workshops on collective map analysis organised within KonKoop project as a working document that will be updated at several points during the project. It is assembled by the Leibniz-IfL VisLab and based on the approaches developed by:

- Mattern, S. Critiquing Maps II. 2013. Available at <https://wordsinspace.net/2013/09/05/critiquing-maps-ii/>
- Rose, G. (2006). *Visual Methodologies: An Introduction to the Interpretation of Visual Materials* (2nd edition). Sage Publications Ltd.

In particular, the guide follows the proposal of Rose (2006) to critically look at visual material by focusing on the three sites at which it is encountered (“itself”, its production and its interpretation).

Map ID:	
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Map Itself

- **Theme:** What is on the map? What is the title and the theme? What is the specific argument for peace and/or conflict that the map presents?
- **Design:** What’s the “base map”? What projection is used? What space is in the centre of the map? How do these features (title, projection, centre, base map and framing) shape the way we see and understand the map? Are projections and centring used to enforce a specific perspective on peace and conflict?
- **Symbology:** How is data presented? What symbols, colours, background, projection and other features in the map image contribute the map’s message? What is the use of symbols, colour palettes, imagery, specific visual tones to depict peace and conflict? What is the appearance of the map - what ‘atmosphere’ does the map convey (e.g. disturbing or calming)?
- **Subjects:** What identities does the maps construct or produce (explicitly or implicitly)? Can we identify different actors or parties in conflict on the map? How are different parties represented with design features?

Map Production

- **Authorship:** Who made the map? Who were the actors and participants in the mapping process and what were the relations between them? Whose logos and names are on the map? Is their approach and position communicated transparently on the map? If not, what might their agenda have been?
- **Technology and Methodology:** How was the map made? What technology and visualisation methods were used to produce the map? How does the technology

of production shape the ways we see and understand the map? How was the map shaped through time and influenced by previous maps?

- **Data Collection and Analysis:** How were the data derived? Through what methodology? How was the data analysed? What type of data is shown? What are the classification techniques? What are the concerns with how data was collected and analysed related to e.g. representation of conflict areas, sourcing of data, ethics? What data is missing on the map? What do missing data and cartographic absences say about dominant and silenced perspectives?

Map Interpretation

- **Audience:** Who are the map's users and audience(s)? Where and how might they encounter and use the map? How do they gather around the map and discuss it in conflict contexts? In what occasions is the map used – is it publicly displayed or discussed behind closed doors?
- **Interpretation of data:** Is there a legend that explains how data should be interpreted? Is the interpretation of data explained, and how does the map argue to be objective and neutral? What tone does the map attempt to convey to a specific audience in relation to the conflict?
- **Presentation:** How is the map presented? What are its material and form? What format and media is used to present the map? How does this presentation shape the ways we see and understand the map? How does the map use rhetoric devices to persuade or affect the audience?