



Activity – Maps and Technology

Following on from our discussion of policy, let's consider the use of technology in helping to communicate geographical patterns to different audiences. There is no doubt that technology has changed how we view the world and indeed how we do Geography at school and university. The most significant development in recent years has been in the field of Geographical Information Science (GIS) and remote sensing. You may have been introduced to GIS at school.

GIS can be applied to a wide range of physical and human phenomenon from the monitoring of glacial melt or species distribution (see the Biodiversity topic) to the locations of crime. Using satellite technology it is possible to collect 'geo-referenced' data, which can be mapped using specialist software.

Does new = better?

According to media reports, when it was launched in 2012 Apple's 'Maps' was initially criticised in some quarters because of apparent inaccuracies. Read the BBC's account of the software ('New Apple maps app under fire from users', <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/technology-19659736>) and their technology correspondent Rory Cellan-Jones' take on it ('Apple loses its way with maps' <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/technology-19664487>).

The story directs our attention from the producers of maps towards their users. What maps look like and how we use them continues to change. Maybe maps are used more now than at any point in the last few decades. Maps seem more widely available than ever before, on our smart phones and satellite navigation systems.

- What if technology is changing our relationship to mapmaking and with it how we use maps and how we understand the world?
- Does this matter?
- What are the effects of this kind of technology on cartographic literacy?

Conclusions:

The development of new technologies raises interesting questions about the democratisation of map production and map usage, but from our previous exercises we should also note that it raises important questions about cartographic literacy.

Beyond Geography...

If you are studying aspects of criminology as part of your studies then you may find it interesting to explore reactions to the introduction of these maps. Use different newspaper websites to search for comments. If you are studying Government and Politics, can the introduction of these maps be tied to any notable trends in government policy?