Community, Drawing a Map of the Future
Community Mapping Center, Wansoo Im, Ph.D.
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What constitutes a typical community has been changing with communication technology. Today, people create communities in virtual spaces around personal interest without the limitation of time and space. Consequently, the role of public institutions, which exist to serve their communities, has changed significantly.

To keep up, Dr. Wansoo Im, Director of the Community Mapping Center, invented a location-based mobile data platform that enables members of the community to upload and maintain community maps that show information about education, social work, and the neighborhood.

The Concept and Role of Community

A community is a group of people bound by common interests in which members can share their goals and lives. Through communities, many individuals cultivate a sense of belonging and identity. While previous communities were bound by shared geography, family trees, schools and workplaces, current communities are more strongly driven by personal interests.

"The reason past communities have focused on geography is because of hard limitations on communication methods. Now, people are able to communicate without the constraints of time and space. They can easily assemble in online forums, which are expanding beyond our imaginations."

Community Mapping

This idea inspired Dr. Im to create the concept of 'community mapping'. Community mapping is the process of collecting information on a specific topic useful to the community and then mapping it. The information can be practical: the location of restrooms, bicycle racks; it can also be educational: the location of cultural heritage sites, bird species, hunting grounds. This information can then be accessed by anyone.

Community mapping is a system that uses collective intelligence to upload local information to a map. Since the information is updated by locals, the information can contain high quality, detailed information gained by long observation and experience.

"Community mapping makes participants feel more engaged in their community, especially if it can change their neighborhood positively by motivating, and building data-driven momentum towards policy change."

Even if a person lives in a neighborhood for a long time, they can be unaware of its rich culture heritage or local attractions. Community mapping can help people become more aware of, and attached to their neighborhoods, which can foster greater participation and investment in their communities.

The Role of Public Institutions

"The human is a social animal and there is little he/she can do alone. In some cases, communities are considered a byproduct of communication and not of certain shared goals. But it's so much more than that, and there is much more to be gained from it. It is hard to ignore the value of community in education, public health...it helps members build social skills, accumulate cultural experiences...as a network, it enables broad based change."

In recent decades, the rise and spread of new technologies have prompted public institutions to ask themselves what they can do to make themselves more relevant in this new era. In answering these questions, Dr. Im cautions that the institutions should remember their missions.

"The temptation can be to develop a project not affiliated with the institution's mission simply to value a technology trend. These will be lacking in value and meaning. The intention is good, but the focus on relevance and modernization is best when it exists hand in hand with the core mission.
For example, if the local residents agree to solve an issue in the village together, experts in the field should think about how technology can be harnessed to educate the residents on the issue at stake and planners appointed by public institutions should think about technology that can provide easy to understand but thoughtful alternatives and guidelines. It is the role of these institutions to educate people to understand the choices given to them and make sound decisions. Technology can help them do this, but only if is viewed in light of the mission."

The Role of the Library

When there are large changes, instead of building new institutions, it's often more effective to repurpose existing institutions to serve the community in the new era. An obvious candidate is the library. Libraries have the infrastructure essential for building community.

"The library is the place in which time, space, and data come together. People can read books and get information at the same time and build more intricate information systems through community activities in the library. In fact, there is a project that I would like to collaborate with libraries on. I thought of this idea a long time ago."

This idea is the interactive mapping of books via crowdsourcing. Many books contain information about time, and location. Books of fiction and nonfiction often meander through different cities, states, countries in different seasons and times. Book club members can map

book chronology, and these maps, in turn, can become a search engine for literature. By engaging in this process, book club members can enjoy reading books, while contributing significant information. Dr Im recently piloted the idea through the project "Mapping the Daily Life of Mr. Gubo."

The 'book' has long been the central medium that bridges libraries to physical communities. New technology now offers the opportunity to bridge libraries to virtual communities as well.

The Librarian: the Guide to the Future

According to Dr Im, it is hard to 'find books' in the Meharry Medical College library in the United States where he is a faculty member.

"Knowledge doesn't exist in isolation but in relation to other pieces of knowledge so knowing those other pieces improves understanding. But nowadays, a substantial number of books have been digitized and are available via search online and it's tempting to just 'grab and go': get the piece of knowledge you're interested in, but not the context. When you had to go physically find a book, you saw the surrounding titles and materials as well, and better understood that book, that piece of knowledge in its context. So there are benefits of analogue methods not fully captured in current technology and I think libraries and librarians can play an important role in shaping search technologies that provide context-rich knowledge.

Librarians are at the forefront of the changing trends. Instead of passively adapting to the future, libraries are in a great position to actively guide it...But this role is solely up to the libraries and librarians. If librarians develop their ability to understand science and technology data, not only will the librarians themselves be able to calmly face the tumultuous future, but also, they can also help shape the institution of the library to fulfill its mission in the community.

It is an unique opportunity in history to see such deep and wide change. I hope that we will be able to see technological change as an opportunity to advance and build stronger, happier communities, not as a threat."

About Wansoo Im
Wansoo Im is one of the pioneers of community mapping in the United States. One of his well-known works is a community map of gas prices, which was created and maintained when Super Hurricane Sandy barrelled through the East Coast in late 2012, causing sharp shortages of gas. In response, he and local high school students created an "online gas station map", which helped inform disaster response and gained public and media attention.

Some of his community mapping projects in South Korea include:

- Accessibility Map for Persons with Disabilities
- 'Gwangjin-gu Bicycle Road Map'

- 'Seongbuk-dong Hanok Map'
- 'Roadkill Map' in Korean Express Highway
- 'Map of Middle East Respiratory System - an online disease tracking system'
- 'Accessibility Map for Persons with Disabilities' was recently chosen as a creative idea to bring happiness to humankind in the Google Impact Challenge, a Google global contest.