Number 66, Schematic Mapping Workshop Special Edition

The third and final special-theme newsletter (which fills the space of the April edition) wraps up this series with a brief report on, and links to, the website for the Schematic Mapping Workshop 2019 (held on April 11th and 12th at TU Wien in Austria) and also a preliminary announcement for the next one.

On the web
The Vienna Centre for Logic and Algorithms has another report of the workshop, with photographs and competition winners. There is also an article in German from APA-Science in Austria.

Workshop news
The workshop was well-supported and there were sessions on history, usability testing, real-world requirements, automated layout, and use of schematisation beyond transit networks. We are currently finalising a few of the papers and these should be available soon, but the majority are ready to download from the workshop website. There were sneak previews of how schematic map functionality can be improved with new technology, and the workshop dinner, at the excellent Wiener Linien Infocentre, included an exhibition of delegate posters and designs. We concluded with a visit to the Austrian National Library, home of a 13th century copy of the Roman schematised map, the Tabula Peutingeriana.

Date for your diary
The third Schematic Mapping Workshop will be held on 15th/16th April, 2021, at Universität Würzburg, Germany. We are currently working on the new workshop website. Once this is completed, the generic web address, www.schematicmapping.org will be redirected to the new pages, which will, in turn, link back to previous workshops. More details as they are finalised.

Web page news
My two position papers for the Schematic Mapping Workshop are online on my personal web pages.

- Roberts, M.J. (2019). The decade of diagrams. Schematic Mapping Workshop, TU Wien, April. This brings together my collection of schematic network maps from the 1930s. It argues that their quantity and diversity could just as likely result from the forces of modernism sweeping the world as the Anglocentric view that designers discovered schematisation techniques via Beck’s London design.

- Roberts, M.J. (2019). Us versus them: Ensuring practical and psychological utility of measurements of schematic map usability. Schematic Mapping Workshop, TU Wien, April. Here I discuss methods of measuring schematic map usability and the assumptions that underly them, along with the desirability of at least some correlation between objective measures of usability and subjective user-assessments.

Map of the Month: More from the decade of diagrams
The 1930s was an era of great creativity, with transit networks around the world adopting schematisation techniques for their system maps. I have been slowly accumulating a collection of designs from this decade which showcase a huge diversity of technique.

Added to my compilation last year, via Twitter, is a splendid 1930s diagram from Chicago, the earliest colour-coded network schematic from the Americas that I am aware of. This rare design survived as a decalcomania transfer attached to glass and, not surprisingly, time is not kind to such artefacts. The awful state of the surviving maps would
normally make one an ideal candidate for me to attempt a digital recreation. Luckily, I don’t have to because, recognising its significance, a modern restoration has been painstakingly created by Antonio Buccini, who is a designer from the Chicago Transit Authority Signage and Wayfinding section.

What does this schematic network map tell us about the development of the genre? Unfortunately, its exact date of creation is unknown; the lines it depicts were static between 1931 and 1943, although a memo dated 1936 refers to its installation on trains. Elsewhere in the world, diagrammatic maps were often created alongside network modernisation or expansion, but the 1930s were a dormant period for the Chicago elevated network; the Chicago Rapid Transit Company went into receivership in 1932. The sumptuousness of the publicity for the 1933/4 Chicago World’s Fair might have inspired something appropriately modern. Another possibility is that the designer visited London and was impressed with the Beck design, and attempted to recreate something similar for Chicago. However, this needs corroboration: the forces of modernism were encouraging designers to simplify works worldwide, and such people were perfectly capable of discovering simple straight lines for themselves! Of note is that, of all the USA cities with historic rail transit networks, Chicago has the strictest grid structure, and therefore little topographical distortion was necessary to create this.

Stylistically, the Chicago map has little in connection with the London approach, other than basic schematisation techniques but, intriguingly, it has much in common with the New York City Subway 1967 New Services Map that was discussed in Newsletter 53, with relatively thick lines, white dot stations, and use of shallower-than-45º diagonal lines. The distinctive New Services Map was stylistically unprecedented for New York City, and it would not be outlandish to hypothesise some sort of connection between the two.

With so much to report, I hope readers will forgive me for the long gap without newsletters, followed by a deluge. The catching up process is now complete, and we will soon be back to monthly mailings. To find out what is in store, subscribe at www.tubemapcentral.com.

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