

## **Ghent Mapped: linking heritage to places and histories of Ghent**

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In this long paper, we introduce *Ghent Mapped* (2020-2023), a public history pilot project that (re)connects Ghent's cultural heritage, its histories and historical maps with the city's urban landscape and inhabitants. The project's premise is that cultural heritage has a spatial context that can be organised using the concept of place (Agnew, 2011; Tuan, 2002). A map-based history platform is being developed that provides users access to georeferenced historical maps, geotagged collection items and place information. Through this, the project investigates the intricacies and relations between the notions of space, place and heritage.

The curation process for Ghent Mapped instigates both theoretical and practical debates about the significance of place and space in the conservation of cultural heritage (Dameria et al., 2018, 2020; Kirby, 1997). From a conceptual viewpoint, Ghent Mapped is confronted with its role in the act of place-shaping and the variability and contingency of heritage. Technically speaking, the partnering heritage institutions have diverging digital infrastructures and metadata schemas (Lamsens et al., 2022), with each partner handling the notion of space in their collections differently, or not at all. Therefore, a customised approach is required for each contributing partner to identify and map pertinent collections.

Since archival and cultural heritage are fragmented across different GLAM institutions, Ghent Mapped required a structured way to reorganise the collection items. In order to spatially map the collections, Ghent Mapped created a geographical index of historical places - a gazetteer - which uniquely describes each place with a unique identifier and additional place properties (Shaw, 2016). In order to promote the gazetteer as a platial vocabulary for the cultural heritage sector, the gazetteer links to several other linked open datasets (CRAB, Inventaris Onroerend Erfgoed) and is being further developed in ongoing doctoral research (Ducatteeuw, 2021).

The question is still open as to what form of urban history this spatial framework enables. Ghent Mapped focuses on the evolving functions and perspectives of the city rather than the architectural history of its buildings. The curation process for both historical places and heritage collections was based on local historiography and public history projects by the partners. As a result, there seems to be an implicit emphasis on (contested) changes in urban planning. Further raising the question whose history we are (re)telling and reproducing with the curated heritage. The spatial component makes this issue even more complex, as places are not neutral. This begs the question of how Ghent Mapped can show users - both technically and content wise - that there are multiple ways to perceive and experience the city, in the present as well as in the past.

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