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Suggested citation:

Özçetin, Seda and Özçetin, Şeyda (2024) Making a Case for Mapping a ToSsphere. In: Proceedings of Relating Systems Thinking and Design, RSD12, 06-20 Oct 2023, Washington, D.C., USA. Available at https://openresearch.ocadu.ca/id/eprint/5164/

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Relating Systems Thinking and Design
(RSD12) Symposium | October 6–20, 2023

Making a Case for Mapping a *ToSsphere*

Seda Özçetin and Şeyda Özçetin

Terms of Service agreements now govern the ongoing relations between users and digital technologies. However, with their text-based medium preferring complex and lengthy technical and legal jargon, they have demonstrated to be failing in obtaining informed consent. While they have been approached from a perspective of usability in human-computer interaction, in this exhibit, we attempt to introduce a different scale. We start by reading a Terms of Service and Privacy Policy. Then, we translate our repetitive readings into a *relational mapping*, which we later transpose into a *spatial mapping.* These mappings not only make visible actors and relations that constitute the complex policy ecosystems that we call *ToSspheres,* but also serve as entry points to understanding and intervening into these policy ecosystems.

KEYWORDS: Terms of Service, ToSsphere, mapping policy ecosystems, revealing design, relational mapping, spatial mapping

RSD TOPIC(S): Cases & Practice, Mapping & Modelling, Methods & Methodology, Policy & Governance, Sociotechnical Systems

Background

With the digitalisation of everyday life, ownership of things has been replaced by ongoing relationships regulated by Terms of Service (ToS) agreements and their accompanying policies (Özçetin, 2023a; Özçetin & Wiltse, 2023; Redström & Wiltse, 2019). However, several studies report low engagement with these that hardly go beyond checking the 'I agree' buttons, mostly limited to seconds of readership due to length, complexity and the cost of time (Bakos et al., 2014; Luger et al., 2013; Maronick, 2014; McDonald & Cranor, 2008; Obar & Oeldorf-Hirsch, 2018; Özçetin & Wiltse, 2023). This failure of engagement has mostly made ToS a human-computer interaction problem that is explored through the perspective of usability with the goal of making them more accessible, engageable, and readable (Özçetin & Wiltse, 2023).

In this exhibit, instead of staying at the human-computer interaction scale, we approach the issue at hand at a systemic scale by going behind the checkbox in an exploration of the entangled nature of the policy ecosystems introduced by a ToS. Starting with reading the ToS and privacy policy (PP) of a *femtech*[1] application, we translate them into a *relational map* and then that into a *spatial map* in our attempt to make sense of our readings. We then discuss what these mappings allow us to see.

Concept and description

This exhibit consists of three acts of encountering a *femtech* application's ToS and PP: reading, *relational mapping*, and *spatial mapping*. Translating and transposing one medium to another, authors explore what mapping and different mediums hide, reveal, and allow to see.

The first act focuses on reading the ToS. The exhibit shows the ToS and PP of the application and represents the additional policies introduced by the third-party services with document icons. The audience is invited to read the policies to familiarise themselves while also paying attention to the actors, roles, and relations.

[1] Digital technologies for female health (Tin, 2016)

The second act shows one of the *relational map* outcomes that emerged in parallel to and out of reading this ToS (Özçetin, 2023a; Özçetin, 2023c; Özçetin and Wiltse, 2023). The map, while unfinished, illustrates a distribution of actors over geographies and the relations they form as listed and described in the policies. Instead of a single user, multiple users were introduced to the ecosystem. Legal frameworks were depicted as encapsulating environments.

The third act shows the authors' attempt to make sense of the reading and *relational mapping* through a transposition into a *spatial mapping* exploration that took place in an existing landscape, an urban forest in Umeå in the Sápmi region of northern Sweden. A video that shows the unfinished mapping takes the audience for a stroll in this policy ecosystem (Özçetin, 2023b, Özçetin, 2023c).

Reflection

While reading a ToS and PP is quite informative, it is still limited in terms of providing one with an overview of what one encounters. As a result of the repetitive readings of the lengthy and complex ToS and PP that combine the technical and legal, a series of mapping explorations emerged.

The *relational mapping* in the exhibit started by placing actors on a blank canvas through encounters, grouping them based on companies, distributing them across geographies, and forming relations among them following the text. This distribution allows one to see the weight of actors and regions. Furthermore, the introduction of multiple users makes a comment on the sense of lonely user imposed by the individual interaction with these policies.

The map illustrates the overwhelming, complex, and entangled nature of the policy ecosystem one engages with, usually unknowingly and hints at the necessity of a conceptual shift that allows one to convey its essence. We call these distributed and dynamic policy ecosystems, which serve as blueprints of services by listing actors, roles, rights, and responsibilities, *ToSspheres* (Özçetin, 2023a; Özçetin, 2023c; Özçetin and Wiltse, 2023). Providing an overview of actors and relations in this *ToSsphere*, it also makes visible different paths one could take or different connections one could imagine, such as among users (Özçetin and Wiltse, 2023).

The *spatial map* exploration, on the other hand, that is based on the *relational map* at hand, started with location scouting in the forest. Trees were selected to depict actors in the map. Their policies were hung around them. Relations were formed between these actors by tying threads between them. Balls of cotton threads depicting users then were illustrated to enter this ecosystem through an 'I agree' checkbox interaction. Mirrors spread within the ecosystem were used to multiply the threads of interactions.

Doing this mapping in an existing landscape and the process of selecting which trees in the landscape could represent actors in the relational map made us realise the possibility of approaching these *ToSspheres* in the same 'modular' way. There are many actors in the market, and one could assemble their preferred *ToSsphere* by adding and subtracting actors as in Levi Bryant's (2014) *deconstruction* and *terraformation* as described in onto-cartography (Özçetin and Wiltse, 2023) or as a practice of patchworking or mending (Özçetin, 2023c).

Furthermore, by taking policies out of office spaces and juxtaposing them with nature made us take notice on the absence of nature and natural resources that are essential in providing these digital services and maintaining these relations (Crawford, 2021; Crawford & Joler, 2018; Özçetin and Wiltse, 2023).

Conclusion

The exhibit is part of the design explorations the first author is conducting within her PhD project, designing alternatives for the Terms of Service. Mapping as a method has enabled her to scale the ToS interaction from one-to-one human-computer interaction to one-to-many that provided different perspectives into these ecosystems. Mappings not only made visible the entangled nature of technology interactions and the policy ecosystems governing these interactions, but also brought to attention what was absent. The *relational maps,* that constitute a part of a practice of *revealing design* that aims to sketch a design space for democratic data governance, together with the *spatial maps* open pathways for imagining eco-social contracts that better distribute agency and power among actors in sociotechnical systems (Özçetin and Wiltse, 2023).

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Acknowledgements

We acknowledge the Sami people of Ubmeje Sápmi, the land on which we now partly live and work. We pay our respect to past, present and future Custodians and Elders and their continuing cultural, spiritual, and educational practices. We also pay our respects to land, water, and air that sustain life.

This work is in part supported by the project DCODE. This project has received funding from the European Union's Horizon 2020 research and innovation programme under the Marie Skłodowska-Curie grant agreement No 955990.