Activity 1 – Maps and reality

Consider maps of the world, the kind that you may have seen hanging on the wall of a classroom (for some examples visit [http://www.mapsofworld.com](http://www.mapsofworld.com)). Think about how different projections – effectively how mapmakers represent on paper the spherical shape of the earth – change the relative sizes of countries. Consider the development of different map projections:

- What do they tell us about the history of mapmaking?
- How might different projections shape how we view our place in the world?

Visit [http://www.worldmapper.org/](http://www.worldmapper.org/). This is a brilliant resource. Look at the way in which the cartographers expand and shrink the size of countries in relation to the characteristics or trends that they are plotting. These are known as cartograms. Consider the implications of representing trends in this way:

- Compare how Worldmapper projects global trends to other more traditional map outputs. What are the benefits of presenting data in this way?
- Can you think of any limitations?

(Alongside this you may like to look at Danny Dorling, Mark Newman and Anna Barford (2008) *The Atlas of the Real World: Mapping the way we live* (London: Thames and Hudson). Here the authors examine some of the trends that have been identified by the Worldmapper project)

It is also important to think about the collection and accuracy of the data that goes into producing such maps. Bad data does not make a good map, but how would we know? The Worldmapper website tells us what data has gone into its maps. We need to ask the same question for the other maps that we use.

Conclusions:

People make maps for all sorts of reasons. And the mapmaker can leave something in or take something out. They can be selective, or deliberately choose to exaggerate some trends at the expense of others. We might say that maps represent reality, then. They simplify in order to make something make sense. One very famous example is Harry Beck’s tube map at [https://tfl.gov.uk/corporate/about-tfl/culture-and-heritage/art-and-design/harry-becks-tube-map](https://tfl.gov.uk/corporate/about-tfl/culture-and-heritage/art-and-design/harry-becks-tube-map). This is a topological map – the distance between the stations is not represented accurately. You can see a gallery of tube maps on the BBC website - [http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-england-london-20943525](http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-england-london-20943525).

Beyond Geography…

The Worldmapper project includes a wide variety of plots. Try and find a plot that illustrates something that you have studied in another one of your A-Levels or IB courses. For example, if you are studying Biology have a look at the map of Cardiovascular Disease Deaths. Can you explain the variability shown in the cartogram?