Chapter

Digital and Physical Spaces in Informal Settlements

Migrants, Refugee Camps and Mapping

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ABSTRACT

Design tools to help understand the migratory journeys and experiences of individuals and communities from countries in crisis heading towards Europe have been well documented and studied in recent years. In particular, the use of new media (social media) and related technologies, like mobile phones, has recently become a useful instrument of connection between individuals with both shared and different cultural, ethnic, and linguistic backgrounds.

The existing literature can be divided into two main categories: the studies that focus on using new and traditional media to trace and record both individual and communities' experiences on their journey, and those that examine and propose new technologies to create maps and log the details of the journey and their connectivity, and a more intersubjective experience.

Existing studies are therefore helpful in providing insights into both the physical journey and the individual experience of it. However, they are limited to the data available and to the traditional

ways employed to elicit information from individuals in transit, including refugees. A large number of individuals are less represented within these studies, and often their stories are not told in a subjective manner. New ways of eliciting information, mapping individual experiences and gathering and interpreting data are necessary.

In this chapter we present an analysis of a case study in which refugees in Calais, northern France have actively contributed to group initiatives involving physical and digital mapping. Using this case study as a starting point, we elaborate on ways in which new and advanced technologies could be used to improve communication between refugees and the charities and volunteers working with them.

The people with whom the Art Refuge team come into contact in Calais, northern France, are largely from countries in the Global South, predominantly north-east Africa and countries in the Middle East. These men have fled conflict, persecution, and poverty increasingly exacerbated by climate emergency. In this specific context, we have found that the large maps provide opportunities for experiences to be articulated and routes to be drawn from individuals' own viewpoints, perspectives and world views.

This chapter explores ways in which such data can be gathered in order to have new insights into the experience of refugees in camps and informal settlements through new technologies. We reflect on new ways in which maps can be drawn and relationships of individuals with the territories that they temporarily inhabit are formed and recorded.