

Educational Peacebuilding in Medellin and Acapulco: Understanding the role of education, culture and learning in responding to crises

Briefing Paper 4: Mapping cultural and nonformal education at the community level in Acapulco



This project originally anticipated conducting participatory mapping to gain insight into the community under investigation. However, due to Covid-19, this mapping process could no longer be done in person. This briefing paper explores the adapted version of online participatory mapping, the challenges and benefits, as well as some preliminary findings of engaging in this process.

Community Participatory Mapping

Community mapping is a participatory method conducted with the community for the community (Coghlan and Brydon, 2004). Working collectively, it explicitly aims to identify gaps and needs in the area. It can be used as a basis for action, articulating the resources and infrastructure available and needed. Importantly, the process highlights the assets and capacities in a specific geographical area.

Working alongside community members to gain localised knowledge facilitates depth of understanding and helps researchers to locate and express community perceptions and opinions towards their geographical areas (McCall & Minang, 2005), ensuring a more nuanced and detailed place assessment. This type of mapping facilitates a participatory process that gains insights into people's experiences of a site and explores the hidden realities from multiple perspectives. One of the benefits of this technique is that it can provide localized knowledge of the community that is not possible from non-participatory desk-based research. Therefore, participatory mapping can play an essential role in testing the assumptions created by desk-based research.

Some of the areas often explored in community mapping are: who makes up a community, the unwritten rules in a community, where the conflict areas are and where people congregate and socialize. This technique helps to explore the sense of community and the intricate relationship between physical places and people's perceptions. It can also provide insight into the gatekeepers in the community and facilitate a detailed understanding of the relational dynamics within the area.

Online Participatory Mapping

Given the current context and the specific impact of Covid-19 we decided to complete participatory mapping through web-based mapping. This method allowed stakeholder engagement in mapping community resources and the exploration of local perceptions in an online environment (Falco, Zambrano-Verratti, and Kleinhans 2019; Zhou, Li, and Larsen, 2015). Web-based mapping allows the identification of locations and objects. Via online communication platforms, we can collectively look at the same map and include information as gathered. Another advantage of this method is that the technology allows for the inclusion of various information layers and the possibility of linking them to other resources, enhancing place recognition to reduce error with geocoding locations. A recent study in Venezuela using a web-based mapping in informal settlements shows the importance of such technologies - especially when working in unsafe, hard to access, or politically unstable places (Falco, Zambrano-Verratti, and Kleinhans 2019)- to assess the perception and geolocations of social, cultural, and physical infrastructure.

Mapping cultural activities help geolocate where social relationships happen. Offering the opportunity to track positive relationships, and actions and activities that favor a climate of peace and non-violence has been a huge benefit to online participatory mapping. In the case of Acapulco, a municipality in Mexico deeply affected by violence, mainly from drug trafficking, it is crucial to identify and geolocate these activities. In this sense, recognizing the cultural, educational, and artistic spots can account for the opportunities and the potential sites within the city which can promote social cohesion and localised actions to address identified issues.

Mapping Acapulco cultural and nonformal educational peacebuilding resources

In Acapulco, accessing communities who live in remote areas or in places affected by violence has been more challenging due to Covid-19. As Lawrence (2020) notes, research studies must adapt into new health and social conditions, where safety and ethics must be redesigned to include rapport and credibility as part of the research challenges.

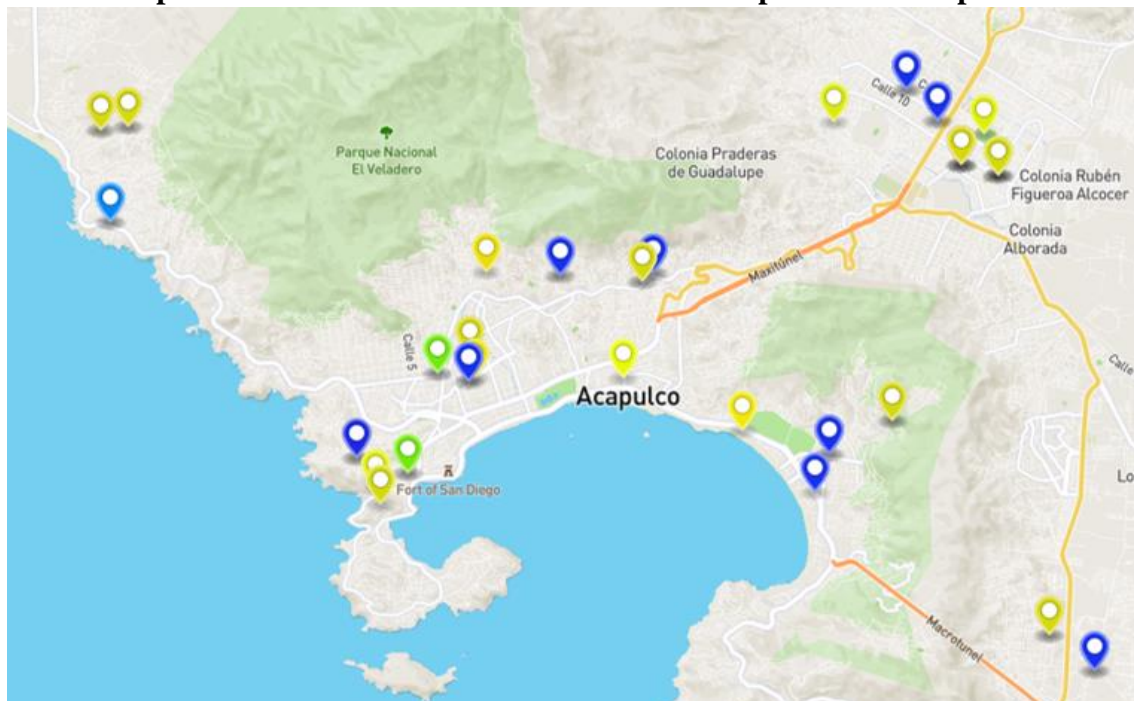
In complying with this, the mapping has been divided into two phases. Firstly, desk-based mapping was carried out through the reviewing of documents from the Acapulco city council, local organizations and private initiatives. The review included programmes and activities within the city to support nonformal education activities, support victims of

violence, and cultural programmes to tackle the impact of violence and to pursue peacebuilding. Secondly, the mapping included interviews with key stakeholders such as local officials, grassroots organization representatives, business people, and academics who live and work in Acapulco. These interviews explored the awareness of the peacebuilding programmes and their impact and stakeholders' roles in developing these interventions. The mapping thus provided a multi-level analysis of local knowledge, official discourse and documented narratives of cultural and informal educational projects.

For mapping, we used the open-source software called GeoJSON. GeoJSON was chosen because it is one of the most straightforward and freely available mapping options. It allowed us to gather and export spatial attributes, supporting geometry types as point, multipoint, and polygon. It uses a geographic coordinate reference system to store and translate data. All the educational and cultural programmes mentioned in the interviews were compared with the ones identified in the first phase and details added to make the map more complete.

Preliminary findings

Map 1. Cultural and nonformal education comparison in Acapulco.



Yellow: Cultural and nonformal education places identified through desktop research
Green: Cultural and nonformal education places identified through interviewed participants
Blue: Cultural and nonformal education places identified by participants and through desktop research

The evidence shows there are a range of nonformal and cultural infrastructure supporting peacebuilding activities and interventions. There have been several interventions across the city of Acapulco over the last 10 years, but these are often very localised in their nature, highlighting a lack of information sharing between stakeholders and/or

peacebuilding initiatives outside the immediate community. Participants were often not aware of projects found through desk-based research, either because they do not have a significant impact on their day to day lives or they are not visible in the community. Many of these projects were only known about by the immediate beneficiaries and developers.

Another finding which has emerged from the mapping has been the engagement and motivation found at the community level. Most of the participants have been involved in peacebuilding or violence reduction activities. However, it was hard to geolocate many of the activities because many have been sporadic interventions without a fixed geographical basis. This demonstrates the importance of including community voices in gaining localised knowledge of peacebuilding activities that are organic, responsive and short term. They may not have a specific locale but their impact, the interventions they provide and the work they do with local communities is vital in the day-to-day process of negotiating peacebuilding.

Covid-19 prevented the research team from walking around a community. From meeting people, talking, smelling, seeing and engaging in a localised context. Participatory community mapping with local community members and key stakeholders was not possible in the way it was initially envisaged and there have been some challenges, such as poor connection and lack of electronic devices. However, in adapting to the current context and using online mapping tools we have still gained insights that would not have been possible solely from traditional interviews. The capacity to collectively engage over a map allows participants to point out areas, to tell stories and to visualise an area together.

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Get in touch: evelyn.arizpe@glasgow.ac.uk; sinead.gormally@glasgow.ac.uk



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* **Sinead Gormally**, Senior Lecturer in Community Development and Adult Education at the University of Glasgow, UK Sinead.Gormally@glasgow.ac.uk

* **Alejandro Bahena**, Associate Research at the University of Glasgow, UK
Alejandro.Bahena-Rivera@glasgow.ac.uk

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