



# UCC

Coláiste na hOllscoile Corcaigh, Éire  
University College Cork, Ireland

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**Assignment Title:** Assignment 1: Spatial Humanities: Open Street Map Participation

## **Assignment 1: Spatial Humanities, Evan Scanlan (119383676)**

### **Introduction:**

In this essay I will refer to my experience of participating in a community-engaged project to compile special data for public use. I will discuss the processes I undertook, the implications of what I contributed, what I learned from the experience and also how I feel I might be able to apply the spatial or crowdsourced initiatives in my own work or life – now or in the future.

### **1. The processes I undertook:**

Much alike the majority of my classmates I had never been introduced to OpenStreetMap or MapSwipe before. It was quite the experience as I quickly took to the mapping and almost found it therapeutic in a sense. I downloaded MapSwipe onto my mobile phone and undertook a small tutorial. The concept is very simple and before I knew it, I had completed over 3,500 tasks. I participated in the South Sudan Natural Disaster project as shown below as well as others. I have included screenshots below. The premise of the app is simple, and it is quite intuitive. By tapping you select certain squares and identify them deciding whether they are building or roads.

I also delved into the world of Open Street Map, completing its tutorial during our DH tutorial. Here I learned its mechanics and how it operated as a mapping tool as well as a working guide for people. Anyone can edit on the software if they wish, however, it can also just be used for navigation purposes as mentioned above. I began searching, looking at how well the surrounding area was mapped, if it was mapped at all. To my surprise, the level of detail and scale of the mapping was immense. Cork city and county was mapped to a vast scale, including my hometown of Carrigaline. I began playing around updating certain features in my hometown as some of it was slightly outdated. I changed bus stops and added restaurants that were recently opened.

I then turned my attention to the project of mapping Cork City. The project is available to see here: <https://tasks.openstreetmap.ie/project/14>. I participated by verifying other mappers work and also mapping multiple tiles myself. I mapped 5 tiles and validated 5 also. I did this over a few days taking my time as to not make any major mistakes, though I certainly came across a few! One major issue was the addition of a blue line one user had added to the map which I presume was not intentional. I began deleting the line and eventually got rid of it. I have included a screenshot of the map showing the line.

On the next page I have displayed some screenshots of MapSwipe, here it shows how selecting tiles work and also the South Sudan Natural Disaster response to flooding.

15:18 📶 🌙 🔋 (78)

**Missions** More

**Natural Disaster Response - South Sudan (2)**  
OSM South Sudan

♥️ 44% by 158 mappers

**Natural Disaster Response - South Sudan (3)**  
OSM South Sudan

♥️ 10% by 58 mappers

**Natural Disaster Response - South Sudan (4)**

15:54 📶 🌙 🔋 (35)

**NATURAL DISASTER RESPONSE - SOUTH SUDAN (5)**  
OSM SOUTH SUDAN

♥️

14% GLOBAL PROGRESS BY 71 MAPPERS JUST LIKE YOU.

Since July 2019, Pibor county of Jonglei region in South Sudan has experienced devastating flooding, which has led millions of people to be displaced and caused many to move to refugee camps in the neighboring countries in search of safety. OpenStreetMap South Sudan is responding remotely by identifying and mapping areas which are most affected by the flooding.

Tutorial

Map Now

Bugs? Clear Project Data

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← You are looking for:  
Buildings or roads ⓘ



100m  
300ft

15:54 📶 🌙 🔋 (35)

← You are looking for:  
Buildings or roads ⓘ



100m  
300ft

## **The implications of what I contributed:**

One could argue, at first glance, that mapping itself would not have much of an effect on the world. However, there are plenty of examples of mapping contributions leading to substantial implications. One example is the Natural disaster response mapping in South Sudan which I participated in. This could have numerous uses for first responders. The area has not been widely mapped due to its lack of commercial value to Google or any other company. Instead it is up to individual mappers to scan the area.

In South Sudan, floods have destroyed the local terrain and because of the lack of maps this is a major issue. Due to the people contributing in community led projects in MapSwipe, the people in this area may receive help or aid which makes a great difference. Of course, the information provided could be used for malicious purposes but this is not a major issue. By contributing in such a way as using MapSwipe as I did, it can have a big effect on the area itself. First responders may be able to navigate quicker and also determine where heavily populated areas are located leaving to more lives saved and more people taken to safety.

By mapping in a non-commercial manner such as editing through Open Street Map there are numerous implications also. Firstly, the surrounding area is mapped to a finer detail, including trails and walking paths which are extremely useful to tourists and others visiting the area. Due to this, the number of visitors in the area may increase generating income for the region. By contributing in such a way as I did in my hometown, I believe people could benefit from smaller features that are displayed and added to the map.

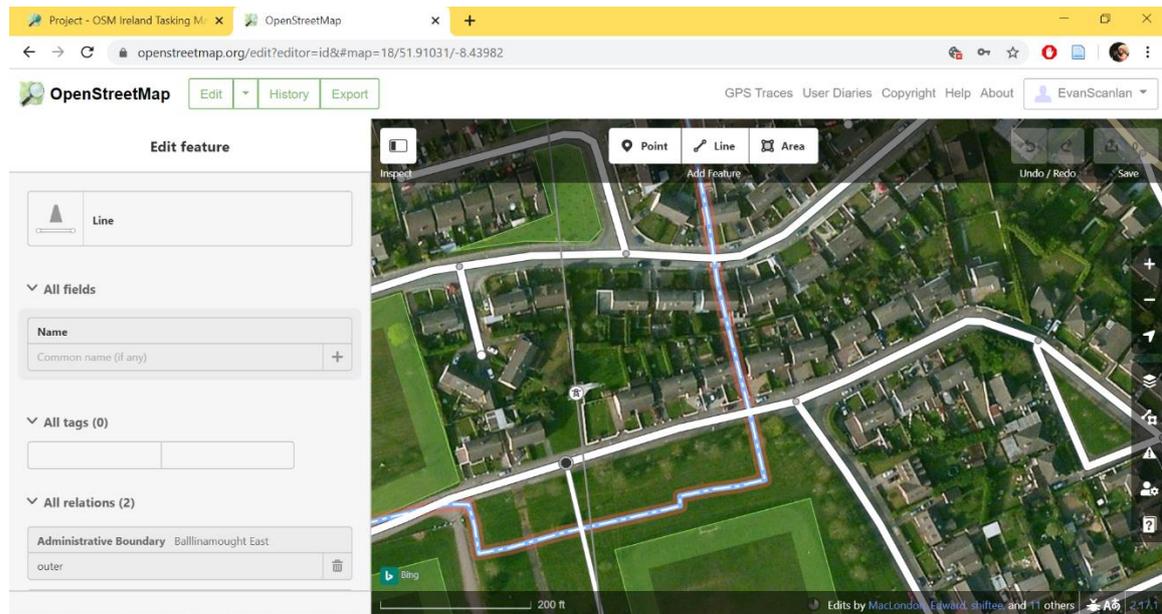
Another example is the addition of bus stops. Some stops and shelters were displayed on the map in Carrigaline but very little to no information was available on which buses run, whether there is shelter or even whether a timetable was displayed. By adding information to these it could lead to more people visiting the area through public transport or simply more locals using the transport available.

Another implication in relation to Open Street Map is the steering away from total commercialisation with one company dominating our way of life. Typically the number of people using Google Maps or Apple Maps is much higher than any other platform. Google has taken over to a certain extent, even essentially claiming the word “maps” in society nowadays. There is a certain sense of satisfaction and pride with using a software created by one giant community. By contributing as I have, one could argue that it helps the platform grow as a whole leading more users to utilise the map and even participate themselves.

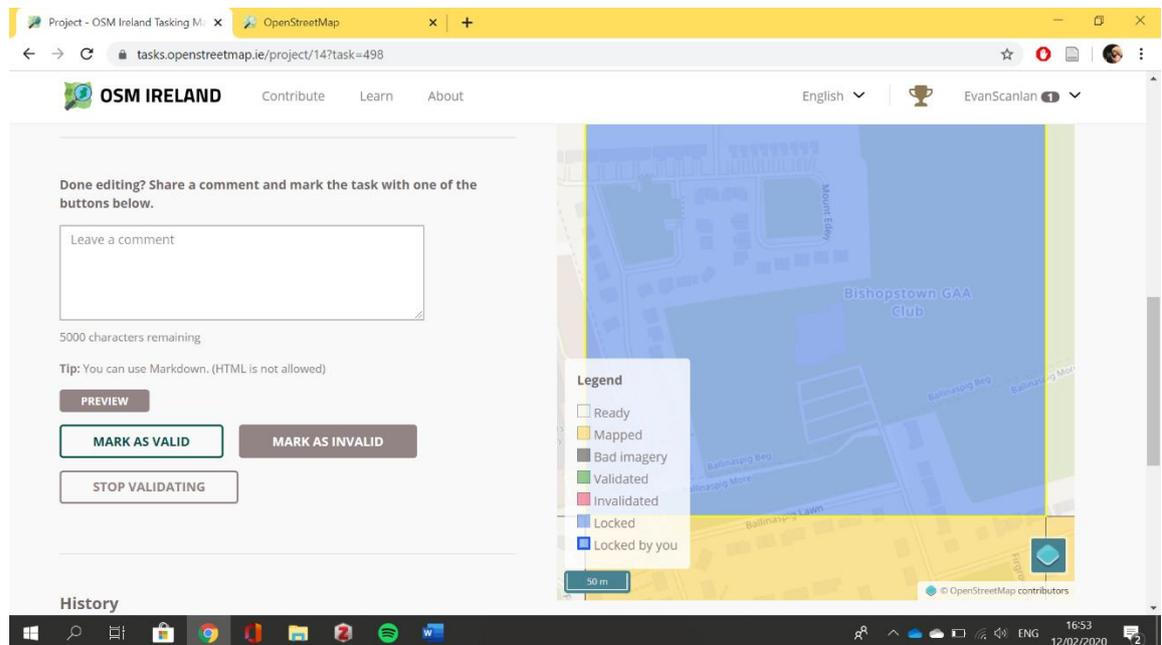
Another implication of my contribution to Open Street Map relates to my fixing of errors and mistakes I discovered while mapping. As I mentioned previously, I encountered a major error with a line stretching through houses and random locations, which was clearly unintentional. By doing this, it has had an effect on the map itself. If major errors like this were not seen to or fixed, chaos would ensue. The map would be nothing more than thousands of lines with no coherence or structure. The fact anyone can edit the map is truly a blessing but of course it does not come without consequence.

It is in this way I believe my contributions to both MapSwipe and Open Street Map have had implications in both the real world and within the online communities that keep these platforms alive.

Below are screenshots I have taken of OpenStreetMap. In the first you can clearly see the highlighted blue line I am after previously mentioning.



Below is a screenshot showing the validation system in OpenStreetMap



## **What I learned from the experience:**

In a very short period of time I believe I learned a tremendous amount in relation to mapping software and the world surrounding them. First of all, I learned quite a bit in relation to editing and using mapping software, after only a few brief tutorials I was fairly familiar with both platforms. I learned how to complete tasks in MapSwipe to an advanced level in a very short period of time due to its simplicity. Open Street Map was far more advanced but I learned quite quickly due to its intuitive design.

Through using MapSwipe and Open Street Map I discovered many minute communities scattered throughout. I learned about community itself through projects such as the one led to map Cork. By participating in this project, I feel I have a much better understanding of mapping and appreciate the countless hours people put into it.

I feel I have learned more about society in modern day also. By editing areas and using mapping software I began to realise how reliant and truly dependant we are on this technology. Physical maps are no more and instead Google dominates the market with smaller companies attempting to cash in. Through using non-commercial outputs of this technology, it could better the world and provide a more useful meaning to the map itself.

## **How you feel you might be able to apply the spatial or the crowdsourced initiatives in your own work or in your life - now or in the future (c 400 words).**

I feel as though I would be able to apply the spatial or crowdsourced initiatives such as MapSwipe and Open Street Map in my own work and my own life in a number of ways. Firstly, I believe I could apply the community spirit and attitude into my work. The sheer amount of work these people put into their platforms is truly inspiring. The fact their users are so collectively motivated and work together so well is something I aspire to put in my own work, whether this is in college or a future career. I intend to build on this not only now but also throughout my future.

I also feel I may be able to apply the spatial or crowdsourced initiatives like the missions and Natural Disaster responses in MapSwipe into my everyday life. These activities made me realise how many different ways there are to aid those in need whether that be through mapping or other charitable activities. Donating to charities is not the only way to lend a hand to those who are struggling. Of course, this is essential, but you can do a lot more yourself. I aim to take this into account in my life now and in the future. I seek to involve myself in these missions and responses to real disasters and ongoing occurrences much more.

I intend to apply the spatial and the crowdsourced initiatives in my own work in the future. I believe the topic crosses over with my studies in Sociology and I aim to delve into the topic and blend the two together. I would love to examine the way people participate in crowdsourced initiatives and also the way they interact in online communities such as Open Street Map. I now appreciate the spatial humanities to a great extent and aim to utilise this experience in both my work and life both now and in the future.

I also intend to apply these initiatives in my own life in reference to benefiting my local area. Open Street Map has incredible potential to be used all across the world and could

greatly impact my local region if used to its full capability. I have a strong intention to carry forward my contributions in Open Street Map and utilise other platforms that may aid in the development of more rural areas such as my own. Other types of software could influence planning, generating new concepts for the area using computer aided design.

To conclude, I aim to apply the spatial and crowdsourced initiatives in my own work and life in numerous ways and believe it will change not only the way I think, but also the way I live.

### **References:**

Open Street Map: <https://www.openstreetmap.org/>

Open Street Map Cork City Project: <https://tasks.openstreetmap.ie/project/14>

Mapswipe: <https://mapswipe.org/>