

“Mapping Lost Homes” ¹

Mike McCall
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mccall@itc.nl

Beyond the terrible loss of life and infrastructure caused by the tsunami disaster in coastal South and Southeast Asia was the physical loss of home spaces and neighbourhoods and the cultural, social and psychological losses of community which go along with that. The physical neighbourhoods cannot be recovered materially as they were, but something might be done for reinforcing and reinvigorating the spiritual life of the communities. Within those communities the survivor children suffered a special damage from the tsunami. Children may be resilient, but they also have less life experience on which to rebuild normality

There is an opportunity, maybe an imperative, for working with children affected by the tsunami to use drawing and the ‘mapping of lost homes’, both as therapy and as recovery of heritage. These two elements elide here to support the survivor children:

- Drawing and painting are therapeutic after the trauma of surviving the tsunami, especially for children, and
- For children, as for everyone, memories of home, neighbourhood and community need preserving, including a “home map” which recreates the child’s mental picture or “mental map” of the lost home and its surroundings.

Drawing Therapy

There is plenty of evidence and experiences that drawing and painting have an amazing power to heal after terrible experiences. This is true also for releasing emotions and imaginations through play-acting, and dance etc., but here the concern is with visual pictures. Children can express through drawings, paintings and other art forms, feelings and emotions that are difficult to describe in words. These forms of expression have no language barriers. The idea of children making paintings is frequently applied for individual children after personal or family traumas, including violent accidents, fires, or attacks. And it is also used on a bigger scale with children after major traumatic events, such as after the Bam earthquake in Iran, the 9/11 attack in New York, earthquakes in China, civil wars and hostage atrocities in Serbia and Chechnya, etc.

“Home Maps” as Therapy

Drawing “mental maps” of their former home and life spaces can have long-lasting benefits, especially for children. Not only is it a therapeutic activity for them related to the recent pains, but it is also about overcoming the losses of home space and neighbourhood, the places where they used to roam and play and to walk with their parents and siblings and friends. The neighbourhood is the immediate areas and streets and open space near the house where they used to live, but can also include the houses

¹ McCall, Michael K. (2005) Mapping lost homes. [GIS@ development](http://www.gisdevelopment.net/magazine/years/2005/jun/homes.htm) 9 (6) 24-27.
<http://www.gisdevelopment.net/magazine/years/2005/jun/homes.htm>

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of grandparents, cousins, relatives and friends, and where they played and shopped with their mothers. Many of those places have been physically lost, but they stick mentally in the children's minds and dreams. Recovering them by drawing does not make the memories worse, it helps the children to accept what has happened.

Home Maps as a Record

Making 'mental maps' of where they used to live has an additional important benefit. It would also be the opportunity to re-create some life heritage for all the survivors of this tsunami generation, children and adults alike. Moreover it would be a heritage for the children when they grow up, and even for following generations.

Hambantota, on the south coast of Sri Lanka, for instance, lost upto 1/3 of its homes and the neighbourhoods. Other places in Indonesia and elsewhere fared far worse. How will people remember their daily lives? In years to come, people will struggle to remember what the streets and community looked like in their neighbourhood which used to be so familiar. These reconstructed mental maps of their old home areas are like keeping photographs of loved ones. Most of the affected families will not have photos of their old homes and communities. Recording and preserving these life places and spaces has to be done fast.

Methods

There are organisations and groups with much experience on drawing or art therapy with children, as well as others with expertise in making participatory or mental maps. (See below)

The basic ideas of drawing Home Maps are straightforward, and they all depend of course on the children being in a school or club group or with individual teachers in whom they have trust and confidence. Being and working/playing in such a group is much more important than the actual techniques of how to make the pictures and how to record them. Some children will easily just get on with it and make the maps, but others will be shy and uncertain and will need some structured activity to get started.

Children's Maps include mapping the positive happy side of their neighbourhood, - play areas, gardens, areas for cricket or football and games, favourite shops and stands, or "secret places" where they play. The Maps can also include the less happy locations, places where children felt afraid for real reasons or just in their imagination.

Making the Maps

The children's maps can be of many types –

- Most simply, they can be imaginative sketch maps made with crayons, paints, marker pens, colour pencils, on paper or card; or painted on children's boxes.
There is no necessity to make the sketch maps to a consistent scale, or to be concerned with geographical exactness or precision. Precision is not the point, - what is essential is the content, what is being shown, and how the child shows it.
Some sort of identification of the children's symbology (a map 'legend') is needed, so that other local people can recognise and relate to what the children have drawn. This legend may have to be culturally translated if the pictures are to be used elsewhere.
- Or, the children's images can be drawn upon standard (topographic) maps of the locality, or on aerial photographs, if they are available, on which the children can mark their home areas, and their happy and unhappy places. Big prints or photocopies need to be enlarged of topographic maps, or images (of aerial photos, or perhaps good-resolution space images processed so that features are recognisable by children).

Marking is not done by drawing on the map or air photo itself, but with marker pens on plastic overlays which cover the map. Thus each child can make her or his own map separately on an overlay.

- Alternatively, 3-dimensional models can be created:
A stiff cardboard base can be used with little models of houses, trees, and special places stuck on it. Or, clay models could be made, but these are more complicated.

All materials should be simple and cheap and easy to obtain.

Saving the Home Maps

It will be important to record the mental home maps that the children make, if they are to be also kept as a record or memory for the future. Colours fade and the paper materials will get damaged by damp and sun and salt and eaten by insects. A simple and relatively inexpensive way to record them is to take digital photographs of each Map. A digital camera can be borrowed for the whole group, and the images can be stored on several people's or institutional computers. This is faster than scanning, and if wanted, the pictures can be uploaded on the web for transmission.

Some hard copies of course should of course also be printed for the families and the schools as part of the therapeutic process.

If the home maps were made by overlaying on aerial photos or topographic maps, then the digital photo can easily be recovered in a GIS format – when and if that is useful.

An alternative to taking digital photos, is to apply a portable digital scanner. There are low-resolution image scanners which are palm-sized, and in 'flipchart' mode can scan a whole flip chart. <http://www.lib.umich.edu/knc/howto/acrosan/capshare2.pdf> But usually, a digital camera is handier.

Sources of Assistance

a) Drawing as Trauma Therapy

The **International Child Art Foundation (ICAF)** based in Washington DC is a member of an international network dealing with art therapy in the aftermath of the tsunami tragedy, called "Healing Arts of Tsunami Survivors". The website of ICAF is:

http://www.icafe.org/programs/healingarts/tsunami/index_tsunami.html#tsu4

ICAF have a downloadable Training Guidelines for workshop leaders, teachers, and other adults dealing with all kinds of trauma and stress.

<http://www.icafe.org/programs/healingarts/tsunami/guidelines.pdf>

ICAF's partners in South Asia are:

Sri Lanka: Colombo Children's Book Society, in Colombo, email: child-books@eureka.lk

India: Chandana Art Foundation International (CAFI), Bangalore.

<http://www.indev.nic.in/chandanaartfoundation/>

Malaysia: Yellow House. Kuala Lumpur. <http://www.myyellowhouse.org/>

b) Mapping with Children

Several organisations have considerable positive experience with "Mapping with Children" for all sorts of purposes, including stress conditions.

Common Ground, based in Victoria, BC, Canada, works with communities around the world to make mental maps of neighbourhoods, specifically by, with, and for, children. The "Community Mapping Project" of Common Ground is supported by Canadian Government and IDRC. It encourages people to make a specific type of neighbourhood map called Green Mapping which concentrates on the positive and negative environmental

conditions of the community or town. Children and schools get deeply involved in this, - and have fun in the process. <http://www3.telus.net/cground/>
<http://www3.telus.net/cground/schools.html>

Another organisation making community maps, based in California, is the Orton Family Foundation. <http://www.orton.org> <http://www.orton.org/programs/mapping/>

Neighbourhood Mapping is an initiative of GIS Development, based in Delhi. The Neighbourhood Mapping approach is more technically advanced, because it uses GPS and hand held computers (iPAQs), and it is aimed at improving science skills in schools. Nevertheless they work closely with children to map places important to children in their neighbourhoods, including environmental and safety issues. The staff of GIS Development and “Neighbourhood Mapping” have considerable experience in working with children’s mapping in India. Website <http://www.neighbourhood-mapping.org/>
<http://www.neighbourhood-mapping.org/papers/mapneigh.pdf>

Conclusion

Of course pictures and maps are not everything, but recorded and preserved, they can be one part of the survival and recovery process and of an inheritance.

The same therapeutic affects can be seen with adults, and another programme could address the mental mapping ‘recovery’ of ‘lost’ neighbourhoods for adults. But this is obviously more difficult to organise. Adults have to be persuaded to do this, initially they might find it odd, they are extremely busy with rebuilding their lives and livelihoods, an appropriate place to do it has to be found, and so on.

There could also be local people’s (adults and children) participatory maps made for other purposes:

- Mapping of the former locations and patterns of natural resource sites and management. This is especially important for mapping the inshore fisheries, marine products and other resources of artisanal fisher people, which were probably never recorded before, and now, tragically, not so many people know them.
- Another use would be for participatory planning of preference areas and making selection maps for the new settlement sites. (In many places, survivors will now have to relocate 1 km. or more inland.) These maps would allow local people to reconsider and rearrange any elements of the locality because the spatial layout is starting anew. In this way, a sketch map accomplishes some documentation and planning tasks, and these maps can become participatory preference blueprints for their community.
- The community can be asked, where and how safety efforts should be included, not only protection from tsunamis, but from other natural disasters and environmental hazards and degradation the locality may be prone to.