

Proposal for Thesis Extension

Monday, April 19, 2010

My thesis focuses on community mapping efforts and the tools which I've created to facilitate participation in map-making. I was able to do initial field work in Lima, Peru due to its uniquely appropriate history of activist settlements, and the overwhelming need for bottom-up map-making capability. Due to the success of my mapmaking efforts in Lima, the project and the tools I've developed have excited interest in both the international aid community and the open-source mapping community. This was unexpected but I'd like to extend my thesis project to take advantage of this opportunity.

Following my presentations at O'Reilly's Where 2.0 and the subsequent WhereCamp, there has been a great amount of interest from organizations such as JumpStart International, MISTI India, and the OpenStreetMap Humanitarian Team in deploying the tools and techniques (balloon/kite mapping and the Cartagen web stitching tool) in informal settlements and conflict zones around the world. JumpStart International in particular, in an effort led by Jeff Haacke, is aiming to integrate a Grassroots Mapping curriculum in public schools throughout the country of Georgia as part of rebuilding and education efforts in the wake of their conflict with Russia.

MISTI has offered to fund a June/July project in Mumbai and Delhi as an extension of the Free Map India project of 2008. The potential to see these deployments through and to participate in creating curriculum around these sites – potentially resulting in thousands of people using Grassroots Mapping/Cartagen is very exciting.

I've built the tools and done initial testing, and this is a chance to take the tools and lessons from Lima, Peru, and prove their utility at a scale and reach I'd only dreamed of – and to situate my work in a truly ideal context. In presenting my work, larger organizations such as the UN have asked for more thorough, more controlled evaluations and case studies to support the use of my work in conflict and disaster areas. This is a chance to implement and document such examples, and I'd like to extend my thesis until August 15 in order to achieve these goals and include this data in my thesis.

In that case I would hand in a substantial portion of my thesis in draft form before leaving; essentially anything which I could write ahead of time. This will put me in a good position to complete it before the Aug 15 deadline.

The tools I developed on the Cartagen framework in the wake of the Lima project are now ready to be proven in broader use and I now have the attention of key organizations in developing world education and aid – I just need a chance to show how well they work for such applications. I believe that, given the time constraints of the proposed projects in India and Georgia, an extra 2 months will be the difference between a decent thesis project and a spectacular one.

Jeffrey Warren
MAS '10