

# HOW DO YOU MAP THE JUNGLE?

## An OpenStreetMap Student Project in the Jungles of Mexico

Helsinki, April 2019.

In March 2019, a group of Master's students from Aalto University began the journey to Ejido El 20 de Noviembre, a Mayan indigenous community in the UNESCO protected jungles of Calakmul, Mexico. The study trip is part of the course Sustainable Global Technologies (SGT) and Aalto Lab Mexico (ALM), a multidisciplinary project developed through the collaboration of Aalto University (FIN), Technological Institute of Monterrey (MX), the National Autonomous University of Mexico (MX) and the NGO Design Your Action (MX). ALM works with a wide range of disciplines, from Engineering, Science, Art, Design, Business, and Social Sciences with the aim of improving the community's quality of life whilst raising awareness about environmental sustainability.

Located close to the pyramids of Calakmul Archeological Site and surrounded by vast jungle greeneries, the village of El 20 has the potential to become a touristic destination for sustainable community tourism. Previously, to be able to find information online about the community and its location, you had to search by coordinates. This year, students of Aalto University focused on mapping the area, using open source technologies like Mapillary and OpenStreetMap. The team worked towards building a degree of online presence for the community by putting the place on the map, capturing street view images, creating public GPS traces to nearby attractions, and developing touristic promotional materials.

**Why does this matter?** The community needs a stable form of income to be able to afford basic necessities like clean water, health care, and proper sanitation. Community-tourism has been seen as one of the possible income generating avenues. By making El 20 easier to find and more visible to the world, we establish the first steps toward the development of community tourism. Furthermore, with this goal of economic security and financial independence in mind, students of three universities worked together not only in mapping the place, but also in finding ways to utilize the exceptional local craftsmanship skills, revealed in handwoven textiles, wooden artefacts, and jewelleryes, to create unique products that have the potential to generate new sources of income. Progress was made in the development of a community-based health insurance fund. A wide-ranging survey was conducted by students to investigate the frequency and economic impacts of health emergencies in the community, which in many cases place an unbearable financial burden to the families of the village.

**To go back to the first question: How do you map the jungle?** You take a few enthusiastic students who don't settle for anything less than the best of results. Go to the jungle village and start walking with the locals. GPS track your way, map every shortcut, hidden path, sacred building, and jungle trail. Lead yourself to the Mayan pyramids, stare in awe and amazement. Imagine the history of the place, be grateful that you are standing there, as part of the unconfined green that reaches the horizon.

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