Drawing Futures (Genève, 7 Dec 26)

HEAD – Genève, Dec 07, 2026
Deadline: Oct 25, 2026

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Drawing Futures: Technologies of Representation in Humanitarian Spaces.

A drawing can do many things: it can scan the built environment, or model its future. Drawing effects are socially embedded, but they are at the same time precise and open to interpretation. In this ambiguity lies the politics of representation, which play a crucial role in contemporary humanitarian crisis response.
From geographic information systems to satellite imagery, video games to digital twins, social media to collaborative mapping platforms, these tools promise greater efficiency, participation and spatial understanding. But they also raise urgent questions: who designs these virtual spaces and with what interests in mind? Who maps what? Which bodies, communities and forms of knowledge are made visible—or rendered invisible—in these representations? What new forms of control, surveillance, data extraction or counter power might these technologies introduce in contexts already marked by vulnerabilities?
As part of the research project 'The Future of Humanitarian Design' (humanitarian.design), HEAD – Genève, in collaboration with EPFL's EssentialTech Centre, is organising a symposium exploring the future of material-technological interventions in the humanitarian field. Through the research strand on camps and settlements, this event aims to examine how virtual and digital technologies are transforming, challenging and, at times, complicating the design, management and representation of humanitarian spaces (but also non humanitarian), refugee camps, informal settlements and other forms of habitation in crisis contexts.
This call invites researchers, designers, engineers, architects, humanitarian workers, activists, artists and theorists to submit original research or practice-based projects that address these issues from three perspectives:

A. Virtual technologies for spatial design in humanitarian crises. This section focuses on the use of virtual and digital tools – 3D modeling, video games, collaborative platforms, amongst others – in the design, planning and management of refugee camps, settlements and other humanitarian spaces. We are seeking contributions that examine specific cases, projects, design methodologies or experiences of implementing these technologies, as well as their potential and limitations in relation to the real needs of the affected communities.

B. Ethics and politics of virtual spaces in humanitarian crises. This section aims to foster critical reflection on the ethical and political implications of the virtualization of humanitarian spaces and its consequences. What power relations are at play in these technologies? How do they affect the privacy, consent and autonomy of displaced populations? How does this manifest itself in work

with particularly vulnerable people? We welcome proposals that analyse these tensions from critical, decolonial, feminist or spatial justice perspectives, as well as case studies on surveillance or data extraction in humanitarian contexts.

C. Innovative methods for mapping and representing spaces. This third theme explores emerging methodologies and tools for spatial mapping and representation — participatory cartography, community mapping, point clouds, generative modelsc, novel view synthesis, open data platforms, amongst others — without being restricted to the humanitarian sphere. We invite submissions of research, practical proposals or projects, from any discipline or context, that challenge dominant representational conventions and propose alternative ways of making the spatial life of territories, communities or environments visible.

Format of presentation: 20-30 minute talk

Submission Guidelines
· Title of your presentation
· Preferred track (A, B, or C)
· Abstract (300–500 words)
· Biographical Note (150 words)
· Affiliation and contact details
Send your submission to: aida.navarro@hesge.ch
For further information: https://humanitarian.design/

Organised by: The Future of Humanitarian Design (HUD), HEAD – Genève (HES-SO), in collaboration with EPFL's EssentialTech Centre.
Scientific Committee: Javier Fernández Contreras, Damien Greder, Rachel Howell, Aida Navarro Redón.
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