Review: Disability and Belonging

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Project
Disability and Belonging

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Project URL
https://arcg.is/0CrCeH0

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Project Overview
Katherine Sorrels

This ArcGIS StoryMap aims to offer an accessible introduction to the complicated issues in debates about what kinds of living arrangements are ideal for people with intellectual and developmental disabilities. It is a companion project to my book in progress, On the Spectrum: Refugees from Nazi Austria and the Politics of Disability and Belonging in the UK and US. I focus on the Camphill movement, an international network of residential communities where people with and without disabilities live together in extended-family style households and work together on the land and in the crafts. Disabled community members are cared for by their non-disabled household members, most of whom choose not to earn an income. Rather than paying them wages, the community provides for their housing, food, and other needs.

Camphill’s first community was founded in Scotland in 1939 by refugee physicians from Nazi Austria. They had been trained in Curative Education at the University of Vienna Medical School, one of the research centers from which the autism diagnosis emerged. Today, there are about 140 Camphill and Camphill-inspired communities in Europe, North America, and a few other places around the world. Camphill is championed by some disability self-advocates, allies, and scholars — including Temple Grandin — and strongly criticized by others, which makes it a useful example through which to unpack debates not only about housing, but about disability inclusion and belonging more broadly.

I created this project for three reasons: First, to investigate whether there was a spatial dimension to Camphill’s history that would generate insights I might otherwise have missed (there was). Second, to share visual material — images and interactive maps — that are difficult or impossible to include in traditional publications. And third, to communicate the complexity of a fraught topic accessibly, to a broad audience. More specifically, I hope the StoryMap can be useful to all stakeholders involved in debates about inclusion
and belonging for people with intellectual disabilities. This includes disability self-advocates, family members, healthcare providers, and scholars concerned with balancing empowerment, safety, and care.

In its design and content, the StoryMap conforms with the American Historical Association’s guidelines for digital scholarship, which include the use of digital platforms as new vehicles for dissemination, as new methods of analysis, and as tools for public engagement. Users can engage with the StoryMap as they might a traditional online article, reading from beginning to end, but they need not do so. The maps and photographs are not simply illustrations, rather they are arranged to make an argument. Users can study them independently and then dip into the text as they wish for further context and elaboration. They can also use the tabs in the top banner to explore in whichever order they prefer.

I began the project by building a database of Camphill locations, dates of operation, age groups served, and facilities. I then studied the data and identified trends related to the emergence of disability rights legislation. I built maps in ArcGIS to visualize the trends and created the StoryMap to introduce and contextualize them. I also integrated a large collection of images (with permission). My selection of images showing disabled people was informed by literature on ethical image-based research on intellectual disability.

My work was supported by an NEH Summer Stipend and a UHP Discover Grant from the University of Cincinnati that allowed me to work with undergraduate student Meredith Chin to research the role of housing in disability inclusion and create the infographics used in the “Key Issues” section. The grant also allowed me to hire graduate student Joseph Eskin to research disability housing and build the database for a map showing Camphill’s expansion in the context of deinstitutionalization. Amy Koshoffer of University of Cincinnati Libraries’ Research and Data Services division and her graduate student consultant Man Qi provided ArcGIS mapping support.

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**Project Review**

Jennifer Guiliano

At the core of Katherine Sorrels’ Disability and Belonging is the question of what kind of living arrangements are acceptable for those living with physical and mental disabilities. Focusing on the Camphill movement, which Sorrels describes as “an international network of residential communities where people with and without disabilities live together in extended-family style households and work together on the land and in the crafts,” this ArcGIS StoryMap explores the origins and expansion of this non-profit network throughout the world.

Tied to Sorrels’ forthcoming book *On the Spectrum: Refugees from Nazi Austria and the Politics of Disability and Belonging in the UK and US*, the strength of this project lies in the archival and secondary source research that contextualizes the movement within larger frameworks of the history of medicine, the role of World War II and Nazism in forced movement of Jewish physicians, the role of utopian and philosophical communities, the
emergence of the counterculture movement, and deinstitutionalization. Built in ArcGIS StoryMaps, the project is broken into seven major components (Introduction, Key Issues, Origins, Expansion, Geography, Demographics, and Conclusion) as well as sections for personal connection, media and publications, further reading, and acknowledgements.

Those unfamiliar with the Camphill movement will find the structure easy to explore as Sorrels clearly has a public audience in mind. Extensive visuals including photographs, infographics, and maps draw users’ attention to a nuanced argument that demonstrates that the Camphill movement rose to attention at the same time as the general public questioned the wisdom of rural asylums that were underfunded and were sites of trauma and violence. The timelapse mapping, which demonstrates the spread of Camphill communities starting in 1938 (appearing in red), is juxtaposed with established asylums (appearing as blue dots). Clicking on the settlements provides further information including the targeted age of those in the community (e.g. adolescents and adults), the name of the community, date of establishment, longitude and latitude, and whether the site was urban or not. Prose offered alongside the maps serves as a quasi-legend with words color-coded to align with map components. Camphill, for example, appears in red in the demographic expansion map while mainstream institutions appear in blue text.

The project would be well-served with the addition of a “how to use this project” section in the introduction that signals these types of stylistic choices. Given the potential for these maps to be excerpted by users, I’d encourage the creation of legends for all maps as well as formal citations for all images that signal the archives and collections that items are gathered from. Similarly, the personal connection section appears towards the end of the project, yet it is clear that access to the Camphill materials and communities was, in part, granted because of the author’s status as a former Camphill community member. I’d encourage Sorrels to disclose this nearer to the start of the project, as it frames her access to materials and interviewees.

Given the wealth of published materials by Camphill members, voices of other members of the community within the StoryMap would add a new dimension to Sorrels’ own perspective. She notes in her methods section that she does not want to reproduce already canonical viewpoints, but because users may not have prior knowledge of the Camphill community, some additional context would be welcome. A further area of consideration would be how to ensure the StoryMap is accessible for blind, low-vision, and other disabled users. Given the topic, I’d also love to see considerations of how disabled members of the Camphill community might benefit from or want access to the project and their responses.

These future considerations, however, do not take away from Sorrels’ excellent project. She offers a compelling model of how digital mapping and narrative storytelling can transform academic scholarship into public scholarship. Other scholars interested in creating digital projects to share their research with multiple audiences can look to Sorrels’ outstanding example.
**Project Director Response**

**Katherine Sorrels**

I’d like to express my gratitude for this very thoughtful and generous review. I look forward to integrating many of the suggestions. Because I wanted the project to be public facing, I avoided highlighting methodology and scholarly apparatus, but concerning access for blind, low-vision, and color-blind users: the images are alt-texted, the color ramps are color-blind accessible, and the maps are narrated in order to make the StoryMap screen reader friendly. And formal citations are in the captions for each image (photos from Camphill archives usually don’t have collection names and folder numbers associated with them; this info is included for images from other archives).