

# ID 1644 | THE IMPACT OF INTERNATIONALLY URBAN CULTURE IN REDESIGNING AND RECLAIMING LOCAL PUBLIC SPACES VIDEOGAMES AND STREET-ART MOVEMENTS AS DESIGNING PLATFORMS FOR PUBLIC SPACES

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**ABSTRACT:** Public spaces have been seen as common spaces for social gathering and for developing and presenting various art installations. Most of the time public spaces have been designed by city planners from their offices and from their own perspective. This has led to derelict, disconnected from its surroundings, and abandoned spaces. Emerging internet subcultures of video games and underground movements such as street art have progressed beyond entertainment and fun towards a more innovative world. These subcultures have encouraged a different way of thinking, seeing and doing things. The tools that these subcultures have developed can be wisely used to change landscapes and redesign and recreate attractive and usable public spaces. Using these internet platforms to do tactical urban interventions, in a sense of transforming these internet based platforms to useful and practical tools through creative practice, can respond and fill the gaps of cooperation between digital/video games communities and urban/street art, artists and the city planners to addressing the problems with abandoned and disconnected public spaces. This study provides, firstly, an overview of how subcultural theory could contribute to a study of the use of algorithms of video games and urban/street art movements in innovation and creation of public spaces and redesigning of existing ones. The first part will focus on widely used video games such as SimCity and more dynamic GTA to see how these two video games can be used to create innovative public spaces and also to redesign existing ones by engaging the community as well. The second part of the paper will look at the urban/street art global movement and the impact they have in our everyday life and in the public space we together share. Street art movement most of times have sought, through their guerrilla art actions, to reclaim the public space. Due to increased attention, cultural recognition and institutional support graffiti/street art have been gaining in recent times, it is important to analyse the significance that this subculture could have into the creation of the public space. This paper will analyse particular projects that have applied the approach of using video games and urban/street art to reclaim public space and turn it into a creative and attractive public space for all. Although, this approach has been used in different cities around the world in Prishtina this approach has only been used once by the UN Habitat in cooperation with the City of Prishtina to transform an abandoned site into an attractive playground for children and a public space for adults, by using the tools of Minecraft video game. The main objective of this study is to analyse how the combination of the tools we find in video games and street art could transform cities, improve lives and reclaim public space.

**KEYWORDS:** Public space, urban culture, urban design, videogames, street-art, subculture

## 1 INTRODUCTION

Public spaces, in its divers contexts, describes as a neutral or shared space of its own urban dynamics. Whether these public spaces are functional or abandoned, used or misused, “free or invaded” they are in close tie with the way how they have been designed. The traditional approach known as “planning from desk or office” led to non-usable space for its first purpose. This kind of “space abuse” or “spatial misuse” (Özkan, 2008) brings to the question of redesigning and reclaiming the value of the public spaces as an alternative. Urban culture as much as complex as it can be, can validate public spaces using subcultures as socially engagement of various communities within.

Videogames and Street-art are internationally renowned subculture movements have impacted our modern society. They also impacted pretty much isolated society’s such as City of Prishtina, capitol city of Republic of Kosovo, through the only platform looking at the world-internet. These two internationally movements that can puzzle-in in locally urban lifestyle as an “imitation game” of these globally urban

movements. It is important to explore other alternatives of approaching in creative and playfulness of planning public spaces. These “tools” gives to our post-conflict society an opportunity to conduct an independent alternative and develop constructive knowledge of modern dynamics of city’s landscapes evolution and its transitions towards more innovative and sustainable public space.

This paper is focused on these two subcultures of urban lifestyle as tool or platforms. First part of the paper (1) describes different aspects of videogames as an indoor activity or how different algorithms of videogame’s virtual space can be used to transform physical local public spaces into lively places for society and its naturally needs. Various perspectives will be discussed, example of Electronic Arts Inc. SimCity, developed more as axonometric, or traditionally known as planner’s perspective. Rockstar’s Grand Theft Auto-GTA conceptually 3D dynamic game, that is more developed from pedestrian perspective. Even conceptually abstract cityscape, put in through Arkham Asylum videogame that storyline comes from DC’s Bat-Man superheroes comic book as part of urban culture steps into reclaiming of public/good from misuse/abuse or evil forces of City of Gotham in a subconscious player’s/planner’s struggle to redesign space that citizens own for their city.

However, in this part (1) the focus of analysis takes an independent videogame as Minecraft by Mojang Ab company, that explores many possibilities to engage different communities in designing public spaces according to their needs. Case of UN Habitat initiative through the program Block by Block in Prishtina, republic of Kosovo can be a good analytical or study case. Starting from the story of game to platform or community tool to discuss community perspective for redesigning or reclaiming public spaces in step of their threshold, this study will give an example how this videogame can work as an alternative tool for redesign these common spaces.

Contrary to videogames “manipulative” aspect of or with virtual space, in second part (2) we analyze globally street art movement as a primary outdoor activity. Although, many definitions of street art, we will try to gather all non-institutional and independent art forms in public spaces that provoke or defines society within. Rather it is graffiti, post-graffiti or street art, guerrilla art or marketing, public art or public interventions, legally or illegally we refer these subgenres under one term of street art movement. Here, we address the impact of several local case studies that uses street art to revalidate and make attractive public spaces.

The notion of space traditionally refers to something anonymous (Sherry 1998; Tuan 1977) and universal, public space are more described as place of meaning of certain activities. Thus, cities are “both physical and imagined” spaces (Brown-Glaude 2008, 114), where “differences are constructed in, and them-selves construct, city life and space” (Bridge and Watson 2000, 507, quoted in Brown-Glaude 2008, 114, quoted in Visconti et al, 2010.). Attempts to change one dimension may prove worthless or even counterproductive in the absence of connectivity to the others. It is, in the end, the symbiosis between the three that matters (Harvey, 2005). So, this paper study refers to public spaces as physical common grounds as a fusion of diverse actions or where life’s drama takes places in its natural order. Referring to it as public space to streets, parks, squares, under or overpasses, etc.

However, the group activities are political, artistic or research group, etc. where virtual environment simulate real world places and activities (Witmer, 1996). In that context need for physical public spaces transgress into processes of socialization online as a virtual public space. This can reveal an important interplay in redesigning physical public space. Virtual space is non-physical spaces created by the development of technology. It could be a music record or Internet social network for example, Facebook and Twitter, where Internet is the first true virtual space (Shields, 1996, quoted Alranyes, 2012).

Although, “despite seeming like public spaces, these services are really not public. Virtual public spaces try to seem like public spaces, but they are like shopping malls: commercial spaces that encourage only a subset of public behaviours. Virtual public spaces are not public spaces, but as we spend our public time in them, we drain the life from alternative public spaces.” (Smith, 2013). The term of virtual public space known also as cyberspace includes also internet platforms public domains as social media networks, community forums, online videogames, web database sharing content, etc.

Due to different urbanization movements, public spaces as complex structure faded into various impacts and planning methods in a dialectical context. As this topic “surfs” from internet our main method is analytical model of case study. Analytical model is based on qualitative as much as critical analysis of case studies. That includes site location and process analysis based through redesigning those public

spaces. Many of the ideas in this paper study were collected from reading various articles, journals and books or from internet that is main source of our inspiration as videogames and street art and their impact became internationally best known from it. Through the paper, the tendencies are to lean on Henry Lefebvre's "The Production of Space" (1991 (1974)) as theoretical framework of appropriated space or in our case into re-appropriated, redesigned and reclaimed public space, its production from videogames and street art movements.

Accordingly, the community these days are much more active and engage in redesigning their common ground our goal is to present them these new alternative platforms to express ideas in more simple but powerful way of urban design and planning of their/our common ground.

Finally, the aim of the paper is to explore how these platforms as tools can fill the gap of choosing an alternative way to redesign or reclaim public spaces into more attractive appropriating areas of engaging communities to shape and redesign.

## 2 VIRTUAL PLAYGROUNDS OR PLANNING WITH VIDEOGAMES

Interactions between physical and digital domains that used to be considered as largely different in our concept of perception of time, space and place, social relationships and identity, technologies made it faded or blended in our human imagination. Technologies can be conceptualized as an interface between the digital domain and the city (Ito et al, 2009). These media technologies tie digitally mediated communication and information to physical contexts, and at the same time enable the uploading of "real world" experiences to the digital realm. (de Lange M, 2009). Before trying to explore these tools, the focus is to overview the link between the videogames as urban culture and urb-architectonic aspect of city's landscape.

Shortly, to describe these aspects, Space Time Play: computer games, architecture and urbanism: the next level (Von Borries, et al. 2007: 12-13), is very useful analytical book that shows some 'levels' where games and urbanism meet. First, there is an 'architecture of computer and video games' that is a distinct spatiotemporal design where for architects is important spatial context and quality characteristics from the game. This kind of design is 'democratic' way that player is free to redesign its own game (e.g. Sim City). For videogames creators, on the other hand, it's about finding creative elements that constitute game space and which spatial attributes can give a specific type of interaction. This can lead to videogame players to experience physical space differently and thus use it differently. In this context, videogames in hands of player or communities engaged can provide many creative solutions to reshape public spaces.

Second level of "make believe urbanism" bring coherence of virtually generated spaces and how these 'virtual communities' present their identity between the representation of the city in games and the city as metaphor for the virtual specialization of social relations. Interplay between digital and physical spaces, gives us a city as playground where certain communities besides socio-cultural developments of present they build an imaginative future for public spaces.

Third, "ubiquitous gaming" is actual platform or tool practise that describes real space – public space in redesign process into a videogame virtual space using gaming technologies and creative game concepts or that may modify the social functioning of urban places (de Lange M, 2009). Potential and flexibility of videogaming can produce future redesigning of public spaces. At this level interaction between players and spaces is direct action of social and cultural behaviour of a virtual world as tool.

In the fourth level, "serious fun", or "serious tool" the specific game elements have serious uses in redesigning public spaces. There are some examples where videogames are used in architecture and city planning. UN Habitat settlement program Block by Block is one of them. This program takes place also in not so attractive neighbourhood Sunny Hill which we will discuss later on this part.

In the concluding fifth level of understating virtual spaces through videogames architecture and concepts that defines it, playfulness of videogames critically reflects the future of public spaces. For instance, many maps and mapping apps and their potential whether it can be cultural, social or database of certain activities can be major shift on how we navigate in future. Overall, by understating and using flexibility of virtual space in videogames communities can designed but also reclaim any public space that is invaded

or abandoned into attractive and liveable spaces. These creative platforms can benefit from each other in designed and planning rather than excluding one. Merging virtual and real can be an opportunity and alternative in sustainable planning for cities in general and public spaces in particular.

While videogames are increasingly popular cultural product, it can be a reason that they do inspire our imagination. Even, Situationists said that 'elimination or disappearance of competition is in favour of collective concept of play' which is contrary of videogames concept, 'it's a ludic construction of time and space that must invade the whole life' (Débord, 1958). Later in utopian architectural projects such as "Fun Palace" (Price, 1959) where visions of the public spaces intended to be inventive and playful towards its users as is case in virtually space with videogames. Also, applying of different aspects of virtually playfulness is spotted at "Plug in City" (Cook, 1964), where Archigram's avant-garde ideas was there to provoke debates in which architecture, society and technology can create ludic spaces together. In this context architecture and space within had to be redefined by literally merging with technology.

## 2.1 GAMEFULLNES - TOOLS OF SIMULATION

"Cities are amazingly complex systems," says Will Wright creator of Sim City in his interview for Guardian... "Millions of autonomous agents – the people – making millions of decisions: where to live, where to work, where to eat lunch. Those millions of decisions are the city." Creators of SimCity acknowledges early foundations of computer simulation model for balancing population, housing and industry within urban space in 1969 "Urban Dynamics" book by Jay Forrester. Than they used his 'simulations proposed predictions to impact urban city and not to solve urban decay by intuition' (Forrester, 1969). Sim City's vividly strong colonial approach is based on abundance of land in early USA cities. However, 'abundance of open space' (Rybczynski, 1995) nowadays this is much more a responsibility than benefit to contemporary urban planners. Sim City, from early beginnings tend not to be just a game. Although, reflects an aspiration towards an "ideal city". Due to GIS rigidity that is based more geographically databased, Sim City is providing data on different socio-cultural issues that can impact city. SimCity demonstrates the fundamental appeal of observing and interacting with systems (Maxis et al, 1989). Therefore, with Sim City communities can play, plan, generate and simulate multiple design options that puts them into city planner's role to recreate public spaces of its own.

In contrary of 'space abundance' (Rybczynski, 1995) in Sim City, Tetris is a narrow but on top endless virtual space of constant falling blocks. While players see a limited space of play – original version is 10x20 square grid – they tend to manipulate blocks by rotating them and shifting them into a puzzle. This gives a player to anticipate in small amount of time and very little space solutions for liberating as much space as they can. Led by this contradiction of space to re-appropriation of space (Lefebvre, 1974) a collective of urban based artist by squatting an abandoned house in Prishtina and transform it to a public gallery or space where anybody can exhibit their works. They also called it Tetris-Manipulative Space (Pic 1.).



Pic 1. Public art gallery "Tetris", city of Prishtinas (<https://web.facebook.com/groups/tetrisspace>)

Many say that Rockstar's GTA – Grand Theft Auto takes place in an explicit urban background. Often this kind of influence can tackle our imaginative urban landscape. Here we have a presentation of experiencing a real city. However, it took many artists and designer to replicate scenery of real city. More than 250, 000

photographs and countless hours of video are distilled to put Los Santos, Rockstar's version of Los Angeles to work as their concept was developed. What we have here is vice versa impact of real world that defines the videogame space in virtually world. This pedestrian perspective game allows our imagination to refined other ways of navigation in streets and public spaces. Main character of game is metaphorically Space Fighter, it compares series of selected and possible projective simulations, results and outcomes of urbanistic chain reactions (Maas, 2007). That leads to 'spatial contradictions' (Lefebvre 1974) of powers of social production from its own dynamics

### 2.1.1 MINECRAFT – AN INTERNATIONAL TO LOCAL EXPERIENCE

For UN Habitat's public space program, urban life is essential for cities to prosper. Specially, cities that can reevaluate notion of 'public' and thereby provide green spaces, parks and other recreation facilities demonstrate a commitment to improved quality of life. Quality public spaces are excellent entry points to improve the standards of urban life for all citizens. The Municipality of Prishtina and UN Habitat-Kosovo office initiated a Minecraft pilot project – among first of its kind in the world – in Sunny Hill neighborhood in Prishtina. Intention was that through application of modern planning methods, enhanced a democratic and transparent way of planning, community participatory process, public spaces policy and strategy formulation that address space cohesion and socio-cultural inclusion.

Minecraft is a 'sandbox' videogame originally launched in 2009 as a beta version by Swedish independent gaming company Mojang AB and was published as a full release version in 2011. To date, the game sold over 50 million copies worldwide, making it one of the world's best-selling computer videogame. Minecraft concept is perhaps best imagined as a complex of digital Lego blocks. Creative concept of Minecraft allows player to build structures out of textured cubes in 3D generating a virtually space. There is multiplayer mode that imitates real world construction site with a lot of workers, carrying out different construction roles simultaneously.

In 2012, UN Habitat and Mojang AB entered in a partnership, named Block by Block that uses Minecraft as a participatory and engagement tool for communities into design and implementing of public spaces projects in Kenya, Nepal, Haiti, Mexico and Kosovo. All the amenities deriving from the final Minecraft solution than where used to define the concept and detailed design to taken forward by the Municipality of Prishtina with UN Habitat's support.

Site selection was selected due to social and cultural interplay. Enhancing community cohesion among variety of social groups. Engaging and empowering youth was one of them. The farmers market place was selected by meeting criteria mentioned above. The broader area is mostly covered by social housing blocks build during 70's and 80's (pic 2.). The area includes some small businesses and facilities. There is a population of ca.4000 inhabitants. The population in neighborhood is divers in terms of income, gender and age (reflecting the national situation of 38% under 20 years old). In regard of connectivity the project site is located along main junction of B segment (Road B). Entire project area is ca. 1836 m<sup>2</sup> of land under municipal ownership.



Pic 2. Software visualization of the Block by block concept, city of Prishtina (<http://www.unhabitat-kosovo.org>). Issues and problems in current situation with the lack of space treatment, uncleanness, stinking waste smells and is unsafe for passing by. Lack of accessibility leading to lack of frequentation within site,



undefined line between the road and inner spaces and informal trading activities are other problems of abandoned site. On the other hand, by implementing Block by block program, purpose of project is to recreate and reclaim a multifunctional public space that will entwine spaces for socializing, passive and active recreation and enriching small businesses with pedestrian friendly paths and urban furniture.

Considering, that this innovative approach is in pilot phase, expected outputs for this project are respect for public spaces, as well as awareness rising for their importance, maintenance and preservation. Motivation and engagement of all possible stakeholders into planning and implementing that redesign and reclaim their public space. Finally, although Minecraft serves as a solid framework, using Minecraft as tool for planning it refers to Lefebvre distinction of boundaries of re-appropriated common social public space as mode of production or planning. To date, project is under construction (Pic 3.).



Pic 3. Ongoing project implementation of the Block by block concept, city of Prishtina.

### 3 STREET ART AN ALTERNATIVE FOR PUBLIC SPACES

Street art began as an underground, self-expressed, sometimes anarchic, but more in-your-face appropriation of public visual surfaces. (Lefebvre, 1974). In 1990's street art has recognized itself in urban landscape, projecting its artistic anger potential into facades of cities, giving them an identity. Metropolises like New York, Los Angeles, San Francisco, Paris and London becomes known for its distinctive style of street art. Legends of street art artist started to rise and by late of 90's names like Shepard Fairy, Banksy Ron English and Swoon become well known for their style and works. During 2000's new generation of artists erupted and along the way leaved their mark in street art genealogy.

A street work can be an intervention, a collaboration, a commentary, a dialogic critique, an individual or collective manifesto, an assertion of existence, aesthetic therapy for the dysaesthetics of urban controlled, commercialized visibility. (Irvine, 2012). This paper study puts focus into logic of re-appropriating public spaces by local initiatives or local art collectives. A good example is the long concrete wall in Road B in Prishitna, where various businesses invaded the wall with very poorly aesthetically advertisements. This caused immense anger among youth generations that stared to "bomb" or puts their "throw ups" over them. Lately, a group of young artists have tried to change this situation that led to organized a 'Street art festival' with a help of many international street art artist and graffiti writers through a platform known as "Meeting of Styles".

This was very powerful example of how this subculture impacted the need of ordinary youngsters to change visibility of entire Road B, where these days is friendly pedestrian pavement along with cycling path and an extraordinary city scape or an imitation of bigger metropolises (Pic 4.).



Pic 4. Road B graffiti intervention, city of Prishtina.



Pic 5. District heating company's abandoned building transformed onto community space, city of Prishtina

Another, misused space (Ozkan, 2008) is abandon building of city's central heating system in Prishtina, that turned into a community space by collective of fine artists and musicians. They make it the venue space for local 'gigs' and tiny concerts that gathers a community of art lovers. This was achieved firstly by taking action or reclaiming it with street art in buildings facades and then by re-appreciating the space within.

A flagrant example in Prishtina is made by local government when they put an overpass into a very non-appropriating space that derives to unusable overpass even it was needed very much. This structure has been an annoying act for communities and citizens. Instantly, this annoying structure was object of debate among its (non)users whereas this can be torn down. Therefore, a non-formal group named "Free 4 Rent Movement" acted with tactical urban intervention. They put big signs of kind of – renting this overpass with an imaginary phone number. This intervention (dis)led a lot of people who was interested to rent this structure and open probably a café, due to its view to flags roundabout junction. Normally, they were very disappointed when they learned that was city's public property.

After that, a number of artists and other interested communities exhibit their works into overpass spaces. This re-appropriated space is caused by direct action or cities urban dynamics that Lefebvre advocates for many years ago.



Pic 5. Overpass tactical urban intervention, city of Prishtina.

## 4 CONCLUSION

In this open conclusion, this paper study shows that redesigned and reclaiming public spaces is a very complex process, especially in post-conflict countries like Kosovo. Awareness of respecting common spaces is very important as it is important acting for them. Videogames and street art can be useful tools as direct action of re-appropriating public spaces for common uses of communities. Leaning on Lefebvre framework for 'productive space', these 'tools' can produce very attractive public spaces as listed through examples in this paper study. Impact of various internationally not just artistic movements can be a guide for solutions in urban planning. Although, embracing or coping different global urban movements, postmodern society needs alternative ways as well as tools to exceed problems in urban public spaces.

Furthermore, our aim is to present these urban movement or tools within them in very profound manner to engaged communities into urban planning as the only way towards qualitative life in cities.

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## ID 1652 | VILLAGE CHARACTER – TO THE ROOTS OF RURAL AESTHETICS

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**ABSTRACT:** Quality of public spaces is one of the crucial themes of contemporary architecture and urban design also because its significance is evident not only to the architects. Even in the era of strong individualism, public spaces pertain to the whole of a community and jointly form its identity. Therefore, it is reasonable to pay attention to their aesthetic nature on a general level. This paper aims to provide an intelligible ground for a creative grasping of the rural character of environment based on two criteria: 1) the relationship of figure and ground, 2) the level of urban character. These criteria apply both to remote territories as well as to fragments of former villages engulfed in metropolitan areas. It is based on the interpretation of selected features of rural environment which are generally considered valuable by architects.

### 1 INTRODUCTION: APPROACHING THE CHARACTER

An aspect of a village green or a village lane differs from that of an urban square and streets. Or does it? Viewed from distance, many differences between urban and rural environment seem rather obvious; however, the closer we focus on individual features the more difficult it is to determine where the threshold lies or even if there is any at all. Moreover, many features which used to be considered as intrinsic manifestation of ruralness seem to be fading or are being turned into projections of romantic sentiments. Today it is often emphasised that we are living in an urban age or that the concepts of landscape or countryside descend directly from urbanisation. No wonder one has plenty reasons to doubt whether it is legitimate to ponder upon any innate features of rural environment at all.

My argument is that such aim is not only possible but also an important one. In this paper, I shall focus on the space-in-between the houses of rural settlements, or in different words, on the physical facet of public space – the background on which the life of communities happens. My approach will be one of an architect-urbanist, of a profession especially trained in interpretation of material environment in various scales. The countryside will be viewed from a vantage point of central Europe; however the upshots could be applicable in other contexts as well.