

Panel 36. Reconfiguration of the City: technology, play, art

Convenors:

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Keywords: City Reconfiguration, Technology, Urban Art, Urban Play, Urban Playfulness

We aim to explore the intersection of technology, play, and art as vital tools for reimagining urban spaces and adapting cities for the future. As cities face increasing challenges—climate change, social fragmentation, and rapid technological advancements—these tools become essential in fostering more resilient, inclusive, and sustainable urban environments. By intertwining technology, play (and gaming), and various forms of art, we can not only reshape physical spaces but also reconfigure societal interactions, perceptions of urban life, and approaches to community building and social cohesion. Cities are living entities, constantly shaped by human behaviors, culture, practice, and politics. In the context of reconfiguration, urban spaces can be understood as dynamic systems that can be altered through creative interventions. AR and digital platforms reshape urban experiences. Playable cities enable interactive, gamified civic engagement, allowing innovative citizen-environment interactions. De Lange (2015) argues these transform cities into spaces of possibility, where play fosters critique, creation, and civic imagination. Incorporating artificial intelligence (AI) and big data analytics into urban planning and design provides cities with the tools to adapt to evolving needs (Cao et al., 2020; Komninos et al., 2014; Zerza & Park, 2020). For example, interactive public art installations and urban games can transform public spaces into places of collective imagination, allowing citizens to co-create their city's future. Through this lens, technology, art, and play become mechanisms for rethinking urban infrastructure, fostering resilience, and promoting a more engaged and empowered urban population. Rather than focusing on physical renewal, this panel aims to argue that technology and play can equally regenerate the social fabric of cities. Playable cities and gamified urban spaces create environments where citizens can reconnect with their surroundings in new ways, revitalizing their sense of belonging and collective identity (Lange, 2018; Seixas, 2021). This approach fosters social regeneration, where neighborhoods can build stronger bonds, and citizens can participate actively in shaping their environment (Papangelis et al., 2020; Kim, 2018; Conti, 2024). As Horn (2021) illustrates through examples of urban games, these playful interventions act as improvisation technologies, facilitating spontaneous encounters that dissolve conventional social boundaries, allowing for new, temporary forms of collaboration and engagement. This panel will explore the role of participatory art and playable technologies in promoting urban recuperation, tackling requalification, environmental degradation, loss of public space, and social alienation.

List of possible (but not limited to) topics:

- configuration of user experiences and social interactions in gamified urban spaces;
- the role of play in regenerating social connections in fragmented communities;
- "scripts" embedded in urban technologies;
- participatory and/or urban art, community cohesion and collective identity;
- artistic interventions as tools for addressing social fragmentation and environmental challenges;
- social and emotional recuperation through technology and art;
- creative interventions and collective participation in public space reclamation;
- art in tackling urban stress and support for emotional resilience;
- technoscientific imaginaries and their impact on future urban life;
- enhancing collective well-being by reimagining urban experiences.



ID 349 - Visual Design of the Sites of Memory in Augmented Reality Applications: The Case of İzmir Kültürpark

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Keywords: Cultural Heritage, Augmented Reality, Collective Memory, The Art of Memory, İzmir Kültürpark

This paper focuses on the visualisation of the sites of memory in Augmented Reality (AR) applications for the public good, focusing on their potential to sustain collective memory and urban identity. As urban environments evolve, the destruction or transformation of spaces central to a city's identity leads to their invisibility and eventual forgetting. From a semiotic perspective, the interaction between the observer (urban inhabitants) and the observed phenomenon (lost built environments) depends on effective visualisation strategies that reconstruct meaning. AR technologies offer innovative ways to visualize and reinterpret these lost environments, bridging the gap between past and present through interactive and immersive representations. With the convergence of physically visible features and digitally created appearances of the heritage, not only personal memory of the visitor but also collective memory of the local community is rooted in the site of memory. However, memory entails both remembering and forgetting and what one remembers and forgets in these converged environments depend immensely on the highlighted and neglected qualities of the lost built environments. This paper, based on a research project, explores the effects of different visualisation modes of the lost built environments to enhance the visibility of memory in urban spaces and ensure their sustainability in collective memory through the use of AR technologies.

İzmir Kültürpark (Culture Park) serves as a compelling case study for investigating the role of AR in enhancing the visibility of the sites of memory. Established in 1936 as one of the biggest urban public parks of the new Republic and as the home of International Fair, Kültürpark has undergone extensive changes, leading to the disappearance of many built environments that once symbolized the collective memory of İzmir. The inability to visualize these erased spaces has weakened inhabitants' emotional connections and created challenges for sustaining its urban identity. In the framework of a research project, an AR application has been developed to explore different visual design approaches for selected sites of memory within Kültürpark, including 3D reconstructions, historical overlays, and narrative-driven interfaces. This paper examines how these approaches influence cognitive processes of observers, thereby shaping their experience of memory spaces. The observers' experience is analysed through a method derived from classical memorizing technique of "the art of memory" which is based on placing the images, which are mental representations of memorized thing, in well-ordered and mentally completely constructed loci. This study revisits this technique to delve into the effects of interfaces in shaping memory through different modes of representation created in an AR application prototype. Through this analysis, it identifies visual design criteria for AR applications, emphasizing the importance of balance between historical accuracy, immersive storytelling, and user-centred design and it contributes to the discourse on digital tools in heritage preservation. It demonstrates how AR technologies can strengthen urban inhabitants' connections to their city's past, making lost memory spaces more conceivable. Additionally, the findings align with public policy goals of creating sustainable cities and preserving cultural heritage, offering insights for integrating visualisation tools into urban planning and collective memory initiatives.



11 JUNE 2025 09.00 - 11.00

ID 399 - Museums and Digital Narratives: New Urban Perceptions between Physical and Virtual Space in a Mapping of the City of Reggio Emilia

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Keywords: Semiotics, Museum, City, Images, Digital narratives

Contemporary cities are increasingly influenced by the convergence of physical and digital space. In this context, museums - traditional guardians of cultural memory - are taking on a new role in urban reconfiguration, thanks to visitors' digital narratives. Posts on Instagram, reviews on Tripadvisor and other user-generated content contribute to creating a shared image of urban space, changing its perception and use, and providing direct feedback on cultural heritage, phenomena and landscapes.

This contribution is part of the research Mapping Perceptions of Reggio Emilia and Enhancing Communities through Digital Narratives, conducted by Prof. Ruggero Ragonese and his team. The study explores the link between digital narratives and urban configuration, with a focus on the perception of the city.

In this paper, the results are presented in particular on the images posted by visitors in the museums of Reggio Emilia: Palazzo dei Musei, Museo del Tricolore, Collezione Maramotti and Chiostri di San Pietro. The research is based on a corpus of data collected from the main image-sharing platforms, such as Instagram. It uses socio-semiotic analysis tools to identify recurring patterns in the descriptions of museum experiences and their link with the perception of the city. A central aspect of the investigation is the identification of the narrative strategies employed by visitors to represent their museum experience. Through a semiotic approach, discursive, enunciative and narrative strategies are examined, taking up the studies of Greimasian generative semiotics (Greimas & Courtés, 1979).

The comparison between the various museums highlights differences and similarities in the modes of objectification and subjectification adopted by visitors, analysing their enunciative dimension (Dondero, 2020). It also highlights the different ways of narrating the museum experience through digital platforms and how these are articulated in various regimes of visibility (Zunzunegui, 2003), expressing values, passionate and esthetic elements. The user-generated contents are compared with the analysis of the museum space as a spatial text (Pezzini, 2011), in order to assess the reciprocal determinations between the meaning generated in the physical space and its media extension, as well as the way it is enjoyed by visitors.

The results are presented as a mapping of the mediated perception of museums in Reggio Emilia, highlighting how these spaces, far from being static, become narrative nodes in which technology, art and community interact to create new urban experiences. Digital platforms, therefore, are not mere communication tools, but true spaces of co-creation, where the city is narrated, reinterpreted and made usable through users' digital narration.

11 JUNE 2025 09.00 - 11.00

ID 403 - Mapping languages in urban spaces: the potential of the app Lingscape

Andrea Ghirarduzzi, Università di Parma

Keywords: landscape, city, language, app, mapping

The so-called Linguistic Landscape (LL) Studies is an area of research which analyses the languages present in urban spaces around the world, and has proven effective in providing useful data on how languages are represented or underrepresented in modern globalised societies.

When the discipline was born, at the end of the 20th century, research tended to focus on the mapping of specific urban areas and on the categorisation of signs according to the languages represented, the prom-



inance of some languages over others and the distinction between "top-down" (official and institutional) from "bottom-up" (unofficial and private) signs. This phase has been defined as "1.0 LL" (Bellinzona, 2021: 55). Over the years, new tools, such as the app Lingscape, have been created in order to help researchers with quantitative data collection related to LL.

Starting from the New Millennium, research has expanded to include more qualitative data collected among the "actors" of the LL, i.e. speakers who live or frequent the investigated neighbourhood (interviews, walking tours, participant observation, etc.). This phase has been defined as "2.0 LL" (Bellinzona, 2021: 55).

Potentially, the use of apps like the above-mentioned Lingscape can be exploited in various ways, for example in order to make education more mobile and to respond positively to some of the challenges teachers of foreign/second languages, geography and history deal with every day in their classroom.

Yet, since the LL can be intended as a semiotic dimension in which all the speakers are immersed, actively taking part to meaning construction, transmission and negotiation, the potential of the app extends beyond the educational field. In this sense, the direct mapping of urban areas or, as an alternative, the consultation of mappings previously carried out by other people or researchers can be promoted as instruments to give people a better knowledge of the cities they inhabit and/or they visit in terms of language diversity and variety (number of languages and alphabets present in the public space, official and unofficial languages, etc.); language policies (official top-down signs, languages authorized on bottom-up signs, etc.), over- and under-representation of languages, local and national history and geography (place names, dedicatees of streets, historical plaques, dead and local languages).

During my presentation I will talk about the possible uses of the app Lingscape in both educational and non-educational contexts and I will delve into the different tagging functions of LL pictures provided by the app, especially in terms of taxonomies.

11 JUNE 2025 09.00 - 11.00

ID 430 - Is It Still Relevant to Talk About Pokémon Go? Pokémon Go and the Gamification of the Urban Experience

Giulia Conti, Università di Modena e Reggio Emilia

Keywords: Augmented Reality (AR), Urban Gamification, Playable Cities, Pokémon Go

Urban play is emerging as fundamental tools for reconfiguring urban spaces and social interactions. Pokémon Go (PGO), launched by Niantic in 2016, remains a significant case study in urban gamification, integrating geolocation technology to overlay digital experiences onto physical environments. This game incentivizes players to engage with real-world locations, interact with cultural landmarks, and form transient or lasting social connections (Urwin & Flick, 2019). The technological affordances of AR and mobile gaming redefine how individuals perceive and navigate urban spaces, transforming everyday mobility into an interactive and immersive experience.

Despite mobility restrictions imposed by the Covid-19 pandemic, PGO sustained its relevance, demonstrating the adaptability of AR-based urban play in maintaining social connectivity. The game's mechanics encourage users to actively shape their environments and foster community engagement, reinforcing urban playfulness as a driver of social regeneration. Through participatory interaction, players contribute to the ongoing reconfiguration of cities, both digitally and physically.

This paper explores how augmented reality (AR) and location-based gaming, specifically Pokémon Go (PGO), contribute to the gamification of urban environments, fostering social cohesion, participation, and redefinition of public spaces. While research has extensively examined the well-being, the psychological and social dimensions of PGO (Marquet et al., 2017; Urwin & Flick, 2019; Arjoranta et al., 2020; Malik et al., 2019), its role in urban reconfiguration remains underexplored. To address this, a series of qualitative interviews (N=64) were conducted, employing exploratory walks and flânerie as methodological approaches. This study investigates three key aspects: (a) how AR gaming facilitates social bonding among



strangers and strengthens urban connectivity; (b) how urban gamification fosters a sense of belonging and promotes collective identity; and (c) how digital play contributes to the reconfiguration of urban spaces through interactive participation.

By framing Pokémon Go within the broader discourse on playable cities and digital urbanism, this research highlights the evolving role of AR and gamification in shaping contemporary urban life. The findings contribute to ongoing discussions on the intersections between technology, social engagement, and urban transformation, aligning with broader themes of urban resilience, inclusivity, and participatory design.

11 JUNE 2025 09.00 - 11.00

ID 648 - Gamification and urban art in the reconfiguration of the city

Federico Montanari, Università di Modena e Reggio Emilia

Giulia Conti, Università di Modena e Reggio Emilia

Keywords: Urban Spaces, Gamification, Urban Design, Playable Cities, Socio-semiotics

Urban gamification, through interactive and location-based experiences, has been increasingly used to promote civic engagement and reimagine urban spaces. Playable cities leverage digital and analog interventions to encourage social interactions and enhance public participation in city creation (Seixas, 2021; Conti, 2024). Simultaneously, urban art-from street murals to digital projections-has emerged as a means to reclaim neglected spaces, create new narratives, and promote inclusive urban identities (Horn, 2021; Lange, 2018).

In addition to offering a general introduction to the topic, the presentation aims to present case studies of urban gamification and participatory art projects that have successfully contributed to the social and spatial redevelopment of cities. Examples include interactive public art installations, AR-based urban storytelling, and community-driven game design that foster collective engagement and urban resilience (McCartney & Barratt, 2020). By analyzing these cases, we investigate (a) how gamified experiences facilitate social connections and community building, (b) how urban art fosters emotional and spatial reattachment to the city, and (c) how technology can mediate new forms of public engagement in urban reconfiguration (Zerza & Park, 2020; Cao et al., 2020). Another theme we find interesting is the issue of conflict, of risk management (think of the return of new "risky" urban parks), as a form of urban transformation.

By framing these phenomena within the broader discourse of playable cities and digital urbanism, and beyond, this paper highlights the role of gamification and urban art in shaping contemporary urban life. The findings contribute to ongoing discussions on the intersections of technology, social engagement and the transformation of urban spaces, aligning with broader themes of resilience, inclusivity and participatory design.

11 JUNE 2025 09.00 - 11.00

ID 654 - The Right to Play, the Right to the City How Children Who Are Used to Playing Independently in the Streets Challenge the Rules and Take Ownership of Their Neighborhood

Agathe Gillet, Independent

Keywords: children's spatial knowledge, right to play, independent mobility

This study explores children's spatial knowledge, autonomy and ability to play within their neighborhoods through walking interviews. Findings indicate that children generally have a good understanding of their surroundings, appreciating their neighborhood despite recognizing its challenges. Independent mobility plays a crucial role in their spatial awareness, with those regularly navigating the area exhibiting greater familiarity and confidence. The desire for autonomy is closely linked to social interactions, as children highly value mobility that enables them to be with friends. However, mobility constraints, such as distant



play areas and adult-organized systems, often limit their independence. Notably, the ability to play in the neighborhood without adult control allows children to question rules and appropriate urban space, fostering a deeper connection with their environment. Differences emerge between children with established neighborhood experience and those newly gaining mobility, with the former demonstrating greater ease, adaptability, and willingness to challenge imposed restrictions. The study highlights the importance of fostering children's autonomy and play in urban spaces to support their development and social integration. Further research is recommended to assess the long-term effects of early independent mobility on adolescent and adult experiences.

