

RT06 | SERIOUS GAMES FOR URBAN PLANNING: JUST A HYPE OR THE MAGIC BULLET?

Chairs

- Katharina Gugerell - University of Groningen

Speakers

- Oswald Devish, University of Hasselt;
- José Carlos Mota, University of Aveiro;
- Sharon Wohl, Iowa State University;
- Francesco Pilla, University College Dublin.

Description

Complex urban questions demand the engagement of a broad variety of stakeholders and local actors that transgress traditional administrative and institutional boundaries. Civic engagement, participation and democratisation of decision-making processes are core features of urban governance and adjacent policy-making. However, such communicative approaches to planning are also experienced as unsatisfactory by the involved parties as the procedural approach of spatial planning processes leaves little room for un-anticipated proposals (Horelli, 2002). Moreover, they have brought forward a number of new challenges, such as motivating people and organizations to take part in participatory processes, sustaining actors' involvement and fostering long time commitment, integration of underrepresented actor groups or overcoming unequal resource distribution, lack of knowledge and literacy to engage in a meaningful dialogue and negotiating conflicting interests (Fainstein 2000; Uitermark and Duyvendak 2008; Innes and Booher 2010).

Games are systems that are expected to be entertaining and motivating. As serious technologies, they are expected to support the appropriation of knowledge, and to support self-organisation, negotiation, deliberation, immediate feedback, capacity building, and collective efficacy. In short, serious games are expected to support civic learning, during which civic actions transform individual into collective learning experiences (Gordon and Baldwin-Philippi 2014) that cover the consolidation process of learning, reaching from passive single loop to more inquisitive forms of triple loop learning (i.e. Lozano 2014, Crookal 2010). Because of these properties, serious games and game based approaches have been recently put forward as tools for engaging a broader audience with complex urban development issues. The discourse around smart technologies and the emerging debate on smart cities have pushed the agenda on the development of digital tools, games and gamified environments for urban planning and other related disciplines (i.e. Poplin 2014; Tan 2014; Devisch et al 2016).

However, it seems important to remain sceptical as to whether the proliferation of digital devices and smart technologies can produce durable effects or if their popularity is mainly linked to their fancy appearance (Lerner, 2014). Particularly in the field of gaming, this popularity has triggered critique pointing at a fragmentary implementation of game elements, lack of story telling, simplistic gameplay and lack of player experience that mainly produces so called 'clicktivism' (Bogost, 2016).

In this round table, we will discuss the current opportunities and limits of serious games and playful approaches by playtesting different serious games that were developed in the JPI Urban Europe project "Playing with Urban Complexity". It is an active round table session, where we will explore the conditions and success-criteria that are necessary for games and game-based approaches to address the challenges associated with civic participation?