Between communication & participation

uses of transmedia storytelling in urban planning and design

Call for communication
International conference, 16-17/02/23
Following on from the pioneering work of Mandelbaum (1991), Healey (1992), Throgmorton (1992, 1993, 1996, 2003), and Sandercock (2003), urban-studies research has taken much interest in the similarities between the practice of urbanism – both planning and projects – and narrative practices, whether in terms of identifying the way in which narrative allows us to “generate a more capacious approach to planning” (Throgmorton, 2007), making it possible “to achieve an ideal balance of competing legitimate claims” (Eckstein and Throgmorton, 2003; Bulkens et al., 2015), or of generating more inclusive approaches (Mandelbaum, 1991; Forrester, 1999; Bloomfeld, 2006).

Other researchers have explored the structure of plots (Walter, 2013; Keunen and Verraest, 2012) developed by narratives in urban planning, which are in this sense close to literary practices (Keunen and Verraest, 2012; Uyttenhove et al., 2021). At the same time, the use of narrative to convey a project, explain it (Vitalis and Guéna, 2017), make certain areas desirable (Redondo, 2015), or construct the reception of urban-planning documents by a wider public (Matthey, 2014) has given rise to numerous monographs.

While narrative is now everywhere in urban planning, leading to a veritable “narrative turn” (Ameel, 2016, 2021), little attention has been paid to its transmedial dimension. Certainly, studies have already addressed the multiplicity of narrative media in urban planning (text, image, sound, etc.) or the diversity of formats used (book, film, internet, etc.). However, the way in which these media and formats contribute to a specific narrative world, which produces more or less fictional worlds, remains to be explored.

Increasingly, urban planning and projects are using narrative to convey their intentions. However, narrative does not use a single medium. It is translated into different formats. Our hypothesis is that this translation goes beyond mere adaptation. It seeks to get the audience involved in creating parallel stories, and to help produce what are commonly called “narrative extensions”. Adaptation tells the same story in different worlds or through different media; transmedia storytelling seeks to give rise to “different stories about a given world” (Ryan, 2015, p. 2).

From this point of view, it updates our understanding of the production of works.

What we need to examine is the interactions between a “media system”, a diversity of “platforms”, a heterogeneity of “audiences”, and a multiplicity of modes of engagement (Jenkins, 2013); we should also look at the way in which satellite narratives revolve around a mother ship, which co-ordinates them without necessarily being affected by these peripheral productions. This symposium, which concludes the FNS-COST project “The Narrative Making of the City”, wishes to contribute to this exploration by focusing on three points.

– The first one will be to attempt an analysis of the storyworlds produced through the narration of urban plans and projects. The proposals in this area will seek to show how a plan or project emulates a world meant to replace the actual experience of a place. How different media and/or formats interact to convey fragments of this world, reinforcing the main narrative (the mother ship) or weakening it by producing divergent fictions.
The second focal point will be documenting the various translations operating from one medium to another, from one format to another, during the development of a transmedia narrative. We will, for example, seek to find out how a given type of media and/or format makes up for the limitations of another. We will reflect on how it mobilises specific perceptual regimes able to reinforce the immersive experience of the narrative. We will attempt to give an account of the immersion regimes produced by increasing the number of media formats in the field of urban communication.

Thirdly and finally, we will specifically target the reception of storyworlds produced by transmedia urban-communication devices. The proposals submitted on this topic will look at the audience of such devices. The goal will be to understand their contribution, that is, their involvement in conveying urban plans and projects, whether by helping to put them together or working to extend them.

These three avenues and their intersections should allow us to explain the growing hybridisation of participation and communication in city making. Increasingly, communication in urban planning and design has helped renew participatory techniques and devices. Conversely, participation deploys actions which, seen from above, may seem strictly event-related. However, in each of these fields, the aim is to broaden the audiences of city making, strengthening their engagement with the planning processes or urban projects. At the same time, another aim is to maintain a certain control over potentially divergent narrative lines produced by these new communication and participation devices (Matthey et al, 2022; Ambal, 2019). This opens up the possibility of re-examining urban powers (Lambelet, 2019).

References


Submitting a proposal
Proposals for papers in English or French will be submitted via the electronic form available at this address: https://tinyurl.com/a5uu668 (copy and paste the link in the address bar of your browser).
You will need to complete the following fields: title, abstract of (maximum) 600 words, 5 keywords, surname, first name, and email address of author(s).

The abstract will mention the paper’s theoretical framework and outline its topic; reference to a methodological framework, a “field”, and (expected) results is desirable.

The submission deadline is August 22, 2022.
Proposals will be assessed by the scientific committee and their authors will be informed whether they have been accepted or rejected in the second half of the month of September 22.
Successful applicants will need to submit an extended abstract of 1,500 words by December 23, 2022, following formatting and bibliographical guidelines which will be sent when notified of their acceptance.
Some of the papers presented during the study day will be published in a collective work or specialised journal following a process of selection by the organising committee and then the assessment committee.

How the symposium will be run
The aim of this symposium is to enable researchers from different disciplines to hold discussions around the question of the uses of transmedia storytelling in urban planning and design.
Perspectives will be descriptive and/or critical.
The papers submitted will give rise to discussions rather than presentations. The workshop format will be favoured..

Place and date
February 16/17, 2023, University of Geneva.
Scientific organisation
The symposium is being organised by the University of Geneva and the Haute École de Travail Social de Genève, as part of the FNS-COST research project “The Narrative Making of the City”. The organising committee is made up of:
– Julie Ambal, University of Geneva.
– Laurent Matthey, University of Geneva.

Scientific Committee
– Hélène Bailleul, Rennes 2 University.
– Alice Chénais, atelier Olga.
– Laurent Devisme, Nantes School of Architecture.
– Florent Favard, University of Lorraine.
– Yankel Fijalkov, ENSA Paris Val-de-Seine.
– Federico Ferrari, Nantes School of Architecture.
– Irène Langlet, Gustave Eiffel University.
– Alexia Mathieu, HEAD Geneva.
– Pieter Uyttenhove, Ghent University.