

Role Playing Grounds

Designing Transitions between Ludic Activities

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Abstract

Aim of this project is the design of a real-life game map in Athens. Situated in a district rich in industrial and cultural spatial characteristics, this theme park explores the emerging possibilities of combining architectural with game design principles. The conception of digital and physical play as a continuous ludic experience was a design premise that pervaded this project in all of its aspects. Consequently, final design illustrates a space of playful possibilities and emerging opportunities, designed to be experienced either in segments or as a continuum in the urban fabric of Athens.

Background

“Role Playing Grounds” is a project that draws inspiration from different disciplines and it is theoretically situated in the field where Architecture, Game Design and Virtual Reality technologies converge. “*Fun Palace*” is a conceptual project designed by architect Cedric Price during the 1960’s and current design thesis heavily draws on its process which is expressed by the implementation of certain diagrams that conceive space as the plateau upon which certain ludic events are enacted. Steffen P. Walz’s “*Towards A Ludic Architecture*” is a book which highlights the playful aspects of certain architectural archetypes as well as emphasizing on how different spatial layouts are related to certain types of play. In addition, it provides a holistic framework in regards to certain “player types” which current thesis considers as the main users visiting the park. Furthermore, papers encountered in my Research Thesis, focusing on the spatial elements of videogames such as H. Jenkins’ “*Game Design as Narrative Architecture*” and G. McGregor’s “*Play and Architecture in Videogames*” were considered as detailed catalogues influencing the overall appearance of the map. Finally, research papers focusing on technology and techniques used in virtual reality applications have been studied thoroughly, in order to elucidate the techniques implemented in certain VR parks around the world- more precisely techniques such as *Redirected Walking*, *Rotational* and *Curvature Gain*.

Methodology

“Role Playing Grounds” design process is expressed in three main steps. Initially, the main user types were categorized and associated with certain “Ludic Activities” that expressed certain forms of behavior that constitute play. In this way, a general design diagram was conceived and designed, addressing space as a result of the activities occurring in it. These activities are conceived and designed as successive events, in order to provide an environment open to player’s choices. Secondly, aforementioned diagram was adapted to the site’s characteristics. Simultaneously, the map was divided into three discreet zones, each enabling a different kind of play. Landscape and structural elements were conceived as integral parts of the theme park,. For the final phase, Jenkins’ notion of *Evocative Spaces* played a crucial role in the design of the scale and the appearance of above-mentioned zones. *The Forest*, *The Orchard* and *The Oasis* were the landscape elements of each zone, accompanied with certain structural elements. *The Arena* is a place design to host E-sports competitions, *The Incubator* is a village-like concept facilitating secondary functions and *The Machine* is a construct where players could experience digital play by wearing virtual reality equipment. The resulting design is a “cultural landscape” that closely resembles the experience mainly encountered in many open-world digital games while merging physical and digital play into a cohesive, hybrid experience.