

MEDIAPOLIS Dossier: Playable Cities

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“Through play we experience the world,
we construct it and we destroy it”.

(Sicart 2014, 5)



[Image: Peter Berko](#)

The city is a playground. But is it really? This dossier takes this recurring metaphor as a starting point to explore what ‘playability’ means in the context of the urban environment. From the use of simulation games in city planning (cf. Lammes 2008) to urban installations that invite playfulness, from alternative cityscapes in video games to activist interventions for more public spaces: Play can be understood both as a way to imagine the city – and a way to disrupt it. It is often positioned as an alternative to a more constraining and utilitarian form of “smart” urbanism, one that emphasizes contingency and freedom (De Lange 2015; Gordon and Walter 2016). If playing is a form of “understanding what surrounds us” (Sicart 2014, 1), thinking about the intersections between play and the city also points to larger questions of access, belonging and ownership of spaces. In this context, we are also interested in how urban play – both physically and virtually – can be a way to “resist the givenness of the place” (Boano and Talocci 2014, 112). Exploring how playable cities are represented, designed and built points us to the complex connections between imagination and practice in making cities more ‘livable’.

Some of the questions we are interested in:

- # What makes a city ‘playable’?
- # How is play rendered (in)visible in the city?
- # What forms of play and playing are possible/desired/designed in the city?

- # How is 'playability' operationalized in public policy and urban planning?
- # In what ways are urban infrastructures made 'playable'?
- # How are urban environments represented in virtual games?
- # How can activist interventions in public space draw on or be framed through play?
- # How can we approach play both as a concept and method?

The call engages with media studies, games studies, geography and urbanism, alongside researchers and practitioners from other relevant disciplines. Building on recent work in those fields, for instance, a recent special issue on "Cities as Playgrounds/Playgrounds as Cities" (Davies, Hjorth and Lammes 2024), it explores the benefits and limits of playability as an urban metaphor. What is lost or gained when cities are compared to – or even built upon – games, toys, playgrounds, performance spaces and the like? We invite contributions from diverse fields, including, but not limited to, urban studies, film/television studies, game and gaming studies, sociology, geography, gender studies, political studies, philosophy, new media theory, disconnection studies, history, and so on. We are especially interested in contributions exploring 'Playable Cities' from a global and interdisciplinary perspective including artistic research and architectural practice.

Please submit an abstract of your proposed article (300 words) and a short bio (100 words) to Linda Kopitz (l.kopitz@uva.nl) by **15 October 2024**. Authors will be informed of the selection within two weeks after the deadline. Full articles (3000 words) will be due in **May 2025** and will subsequently go through an anonymous peer review process. The dossier is scheduled for the **September 2025** issue.

Mediapolis: A Journal of Cities and Culture is an interdisciplinary online journal of media and urban culture. We publish research across multiple academic fields — including, but not limited to, media studies, urban studies, geography, film, architecture, art history, visual culture, digital humanities, sound, and music.

References:

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