• Paper / Proposal Title:
Can the narrative use of cities in game design be used to encourage wider engagement in the design of real-world cities?

• Author(s) Name:
Rebecca Crabtree & Jake Montanarini.

• University or Company Affiliation:
Norwich University of the Arts

• Abstract (300 words):
A city’s appearance is not by accident however it is rare that a person in a city will actively engage in the explanations for its appearance. It is usual to relate to a city on an object by object basis, but it is also possible to consider the city in its entirety, as a whole narrative. Knowing a city’s history/narrative can be empowering – by understanding why things are, it is possible to change them. In a narrative driven digital game, the city in which the action takes place can be employed to help tell the story. The player is encouraged to wonder why the environment is as it is. Through the game, the history of the city is revealed. Information about the city can be revealed in a variety of ways (that further player immersion and/or contribute to the mechanics of the game). Some game cities are imagined, and some are modelled closely on real cities – both can be based on real urban design principles (and it can be argued that more immersive game play occurs when this is the case). In the real world, cities would benefit from a wider engagement in who determines how they look and work however without understanding how they have arrived at their present form, it can be easy to assume that
they are natural and unchangeable. In this paper we will consider whether digital games can be used to engage a wider audience in the narratives of urban design and whether this in turn could encourage wider engagement in the design of real-world cities.

• Author(s) Biography (200 words each):

Rebecca Crabtree is a lecturer and design studio tutor in Architecture at Norwich University of the Arts. She is a qualified architect who after working in industry, founded the studio P/ARC to explore (mis)communication in the construction industry (how the public communicate their desires, and how construction professionals communicate their designs) as a means of improving how we build.

She is interested in the architectural education of clients (and future clients) and uses a variety of approaches to explore this such as workshops, touch and feel, story-telling and model making. Rebecca wrote and presented the conference paper ‘Writing the client: a study of three architecture competition briefs and the ways in which they take on the role of the client’ to further explore this interest.

Rebecca has worked as a RIBA ambassador, she helped primary school children to design a structure for their playground and introduced them to the varied roles in construction. She has designed and run public workshops to foster community engagement in the built environment – workshops were based around questions such as ‘what makes safe public space’ and ‘how to grow old in a city’ - and employed group model-making to encourage conversation around the topics.

Jake Montanarini is a Game designer and philosopher. Jake is committed to the exploration and understanding of how games can document the collective perspective and narratives that make up our human experience. He believes that story is what weaves individual experiences into a collective one and that games allow for getting closer to these stories.

Jake is a Lecturer in Games Art and Design at Norwich University of the Arts where he continues his pursuit of learning to better understand the philosophies he teaches. He writes about the relationships between narrative and systems of play, or game mechanics. He designs games that are experience focused, using mechanics to tell relevant social, cultural, and political stories that aim to educate, inspire and challenge the player’s current perspective. However, most importantly, he plays as much as he can.