ArtWar (2019)

Research Team: Dr Anthony Schrag (Nina Luostarinen, Anthea Moys, Katie Bruce)

Research Inquiry: This research explores the confluence between art, play and place via three case studies that enacted artistic and playful methodologies asking: Can art [framed as play] engage with adults in reflecting on [and changing] their relationship to ‘place’.

Partners: Lights On! (Finland) / HUMAK University (Finland) / GoMA (Gallery of Modern Art - Glasgow) / CounterPlay (Aarhus) / South London Gallery (London) / Platform (Glasgow)

Description: The researchers developed art-based, creative games that responded to the particular location and context of the case studies. The games were adapted from play theory, and specifically explore physicality and conflict. For example, The islands of Vallisaari and Kuninkaansaari are former military bases, situated only a few kilometers from Helsinki harbour. They were integral to Finland’s conflicts with both Russia and Sweden, and therefore inherently linked to questions of conflict, identity and nation. The game for this site began with two groups being tasked to develop a manifesto and flag for their own ‘Micronation’, and in this they collaboratively explored their political, social and cultural beliefs. In the second part of the game was designed around a traditional ‘capture-the-flag’ game with each group was assigned one of the two islands to defend from the opposing team/Micronation. In GoMA and Aarhus, the games was designed around a board-game divided into ‘insiders’ and ‘outsiders’ that responded to the location, and teams competed to invade opposing territory on the board which then translated to performing these playful acts in the real territory on which the game design was based.

Impact: Interviewing those who had engaged in the games, the games proved that such playful acts were successful in changing an adult’s relationship with place. Predominantly this was a positive change, as indicated by the following statements:

- “I was able to see hidden paths and looked maps differently because we needed some strategic thinking. It was more holistic experience that way.”
- “It gave a bit different experience. I saw the surroundings with different eyes.”
- “It takes you away from how you usually behave [in an art gallery], which is more the point here, so leaving your own comfort zone to do something new.
- “We opened our eyes to the playful parts of our surroundings, whereas we would normally just navigate go to the coffee place or go to train station.”

In this regards, the impacts of the artwork

Outputs + Dissemination:

As public performances, the three case studies engaged with around 75 participants in total. These were marketed widely by the partner organisations via Facebook, as well as via their internal marketing departments.

- Symposium …and then what (25 attendees)
- Paper: ArtWarPlay: Rehearsing for the Future (Currently submitted to the American Journal for Play)
- Performance: Vallisaari and Kuninkaansaari, Helsinki (40 attendees)
- Performance: Gallery of Modern Art, Glasgow (25 attendees)
- Performance: CounterPlay, Aarhus (20 attendees)
- Video: ArtWarPlay
- Photographic Documentation
- Submission: Journal of Artistic Research
- Blogs