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PALIMPSEST CITIES

PALIMPSEST CITIES: GAMIFICATION AND STORYTELLING FOR ARCHITECTURAL HISTORY AND CULTURAL HERITAGE AWARENESS
ÇOK KATMANLI ŞEHİRLER: MİMARLIK TARİHİ VE KÜLTÜREL MİRAS FARKINDALIĞI İÇİN OYUNLAŞTIRMA VE HİKÂYE ANLATICILIĞI

The

Closing Lecture

of the Palimpsest Cities Course

ALANYA ÜNİVERSİTESİ

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Exactly one year ago, we launched our Palimpsest Cities project. In December 2022, we set out to raise awareness of the importance of our multi-layered cities, choosing gamification and storytelling as our main educational tools. During this year, the whole project team, together with two universities in Alanya and Istanbul and two NGOs in Bucharest and Volos, designed the Palimpsest Cities course as the main output of our project. In Fall 2023, we started to implement this new course in university education at architecture faculties. Now, we would like to briefly describe the course and its first implementation.

Hello, my name is Muzaffer Özgüleş. I am an architectural historian and a children's author. I am the coordinator of the Palimpsest Cities Project on behalf of Alanya University.

Hello. My name is Zeynep Kuban. I am an archaeologist and a professor of architectural history. I am the coordinator of the Istanbul Technical University team, one of the project partners.

This new course, "Palimpsest Cities", which has the same name as our project, aims to put the learner at the center and to make the learning process -that is, the discovery of the city- a game. Our intention is to enable our students, and then the city dwellers in general, to discover their cities mainly through games, through direct experience and by having fun.

Our aim is to enable all the beneficiaries to listen to the stories told by the different layers of the city. We want them to internalize these stories and feel that they are part of the city. Therefore, we have prepared a curriculum that combines several innovative methods, especially gamification and storytelling.

So, how were the first test lectures?

We did two different implementations: one in Istanbul and the other in Alanya. We used the new course syllabus, which was specially designed for these two multi-layered cities, with seven different modules spread over the 14 weeks of the semester.

These seven modules were implemented at Alanya University and Istanbul Technical University with some differences due to the difference of the cities and the conditions of the teams. The content was naturally different and each of us adapted the modules in a different order and likewise the number of weeks foreseen for the modules were rearranged according to the needs of the class. So this became a proof that the

curriculum can be modified for different contexts. Let's have a look at our first semester of implementation.

In our introductory lecture we shared the aims, methodology and content of this new course. We met with the players, i.e. with our students, in the classroom environment and tried to understand their relationship with the city, their view of the concept of cultural heritage and their interest in the historical texture, through games.

Field trips

In the Gamified Field Trips module, we first introduced the area of interest. Instead of just taking a tour of a historical site, we enriched the field trips with various gamification techniques. We let our students explore the city and its buildings in a game-like setting, accompanied by us. We shared our knowledge about buildings, but above all we tried to sensitize them to the ways of seeing, perceiving and differentiating historical, social and economic layers, and to open their minds to the threats to the built and living environment. As the content of the course is subject to change each time it is run, the itineraries were not fixed either. But we have chosen typical places in our cities that have the potential to give us the most input and output.

Timeline Travel

An important part of learning is collecting and using information independently. One course module was dedicated to the timelines our students created on a mobile application called Timeline Travel, focusing on buildings, people and events from different periods of the city's past. Our students collected data about the city's heritage on their own and integrated it into this app. They did the research and preparation themselves and presented their timelines to each other in the classroom with a discussion.

Model of the Palimpsest City

The Model of the Palimpsest City module was a perfect hands-on activity in which the layers of the city were presented on a model. As a group activity, the model of the multi-layered city was designed and built by the students, integrating all the data they had collected so far. Depending on the sequence of the course, the model can serve as an integration station for the data collected in previous weeks or as an original set for their digital storytelling films.

Digital Storytelling

In another module, we asked our students to write, shoot and edit their own digital stories. They first wrote their own stories by creating fictions that took place in one of the periods in the timelines they had prepared, and related to the structures, events and people of that period. Then they went behind the camera and became actors, animators and directors of their own films. After the editing phase at home, where everyone created their own short films using a simple video editing software, we came back to the classroom to watch the films, talk about them and give “film awards”.

City-on-trial

While the other modules combine digital media with hands-on activities, there is one module called 'City-on-trial' that tries to sensitize students to the problems of the city through role-playing. The class is divided into a prosecution team, a defense team and a jury; and they have to solve a particular urban problem that they have seen and learned about on their field trip.

In the last week of the semester, we review all the activities that have taken place during the semester. The students evaluate the course, the modules and give us feedback. The final lecture is held in the classroom and we have time to discuss the results and their relation to our common cultural heritage. The model and all other outputs are also exhibited in the university to fellow students outside the course.

Although there was no module dedicated to this topic, the cases of intangible heritage in the study area that the course covered during the semester play an important role in understanding and living in heritage areas. Therefore, we also documented examples of intangible heritage of our cities ranging from wild goats to fishing, from legends of past inhabitants to traditional building techniques, and we incorporated them into the models we created.

Many people cannot connect with the places and the past of the cities in which they live. The history of the city is taken for granted without ever being questioned or inhabitants usually spend their lives as if the existing built environment has always been there. As a result, our common heritage is overlooked, neglected and even destroyed unnoticed.

That is why we have developed and are running the Palimpsest Cities project, to create an alternative and a way to sensitize as many people as possible to the different historical layers of the city and to contribute to the protection of our cultural heritage. We are particularly targeting architecture students, who will be among the creators of future spaces, but the new educational model we are offering is not a top-down model, we are trying to reach all segments of society.

This new course at university level is the central theme of the project, but in fact the city, its layers and its voices from the past should be experienced by more people than just architecture students. We are trying to put aside a static concept of 'heritage' and replace it with the city as an inexhaustible source of human stories.

Accordingly, the flexible and modular structure of the course has been designed to reach a wider audience. The modules can be adapted to workshops and activities for different age and social groups. We are also making adaptations in our own cities for disadvantaged groups with limited opportunities. We have also made a guide available on our website for anyone interested in this new form of education.

We hope that our project will be a lasting step towards a respectful and sustainable approach to the rich multicultural past of our cities. And we hope that everyone living in palimpsest cities can benefit from the results of our project.