

Can videogames enable greater engagement with urban treescapes?

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Video-game co-development and play can enable children and young people to build their knowledge and understanding of the roles that trees play in urban and peri-urban environments.



Headlines

Playing videogames to explore urban and peri-urban treescapes can **inform and engage otherwise hard to reach audiences** in recognising and valuing these treescapes.

Observation of **children and young people co-designing or playing** a treescapes videogame **offers a rich, authentic expression** of how treescapes are viewed, both as imagined and lived spaces.

Being attuned to the emergent environmental and political perspectives of children through observing gameplay will **improve consultation and planning for urban treescapes** and positive connections between online and physical environments.

Background

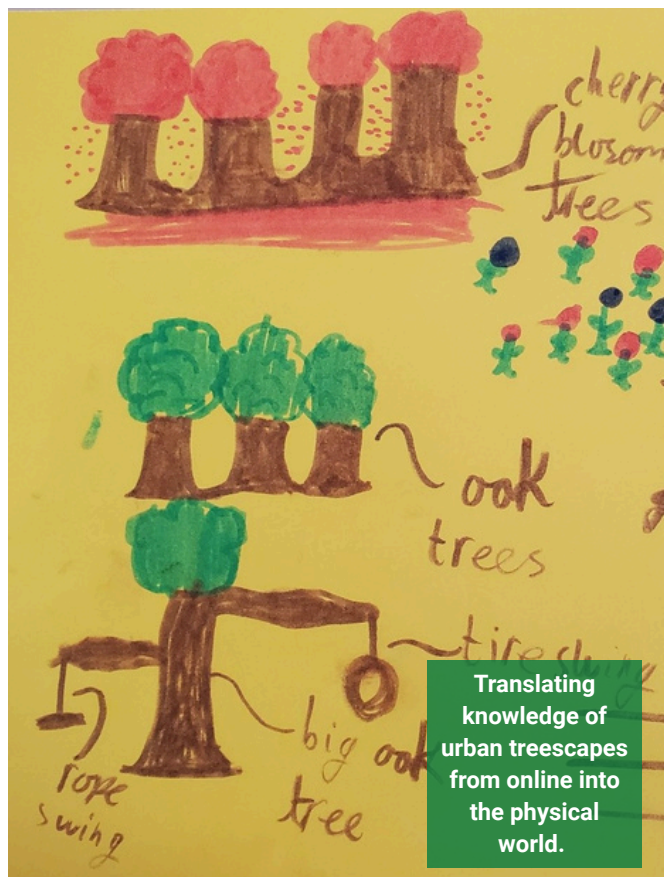
We worked with children at two schools to co-develop a videogame exploring their relations with trees in physical and online environments. Co-production (see the Voices of the Future impact note) enabled us to observe how children's ideas and relationships with urban treescapes emerge. We used the game to understand how children's values and environmental frames evolve between 8-12 years of age, and how these translate into their relationships with treescapes in the physical world at local to global levels. Our work is relevant to individuals or organisations planning, planting and caring for urban treescapes alongside children and young people.

Findings

Games about treescapes are useful in **building engagement with the physical world**. Gaming allowed players to learn 'by stealth' about key urban treescape ecology, engaging those who would otherwise be less concerned with formal learning about trees. We found that **this learning transferred from the online to the physical environment**.

Co-production of a videogame is less important than playing the game for building engagement with treescapes. Playing the game was sufficient to focus how children viewed and valued local treescapes.





Findings

Co-design offers insight into children and young people's perspectives on environmental and political issues. We found the game design and playtesting, with workshops on world-building, character design and game mechanics enabled children to **articulate their perspectives on their immediate physical community and wider environmental themes in authentic rich, powerful ways.** This highlighted how global issues of climate and biodiversity crises and the politics of surveillance and oppression emerge in children in the final years of primary school.

Observing how people play the game is useful in formulating urban treescapes policy. Observing **gameplay by the children** in the project and seeing how they articulate their relationships both within imagined online and embodied physical worlds offers insight that **goes beyond what information can be captured from a survey**, especially for those public audiences less willing to engage in a formal consulting process.

Implications & Recommendations

Videogames **enable players to build connections between people and trees that blend learning with exploring**, reaching audiences often otherwise missed in environmental consultation.

- Game playing encourages understanding that **builds connections between children and trees** that goes beyond what is just 'taught'. It enables those connections to permeate both education and domestic life.
- **Play can provide energy and inspiration for transformative action.** Online game playing directly feeds the imagination of children (and all gamers) to translate ideas into the physical world. Observing this play is a valuable experience for urban tree planning and designers.
- Children's **world-views around environmental and political issues are more sophisticated** than is usually recognised in social surveys, and being attuned to and observing these hopes and fears can facilitate better planning of urban treescapes.

The children and young people today will be the future witnesses and judges of the decisions made today to plan, plant and maintain treescapes. Developing better methods, including gameplaying is key to ensuring their authentic voices are heard and acted upon.

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The Digital Voices of the Future Treescapes game is hosted on Roblox, and is accessible here: <https://www.roblox.com/games/112320875314191/Treescapes-V2>