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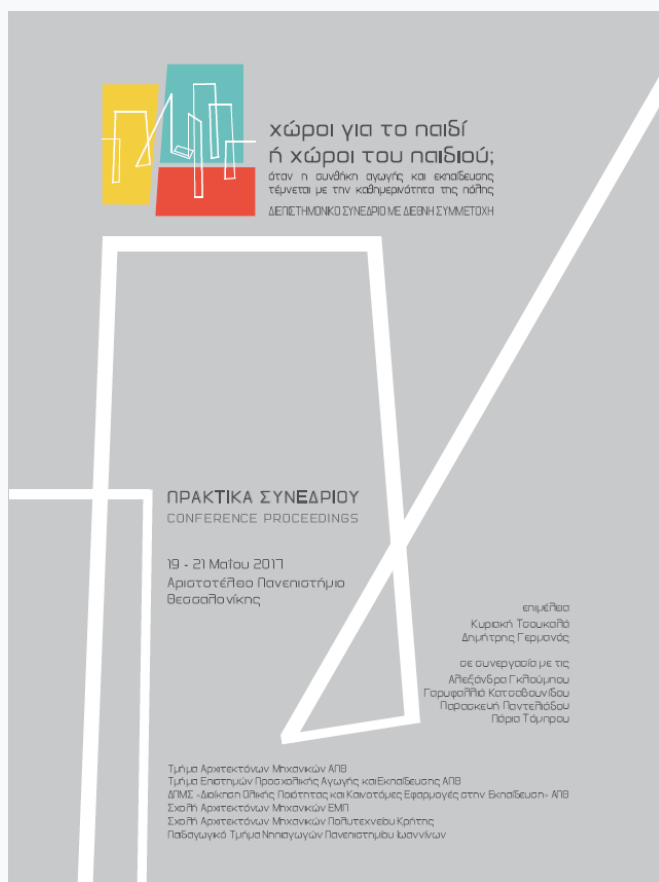
Πρακτικά Συνεδρίου 'Χώροι για το Παιδί ή Χώροι του Παιδιού; Όταν η συνθήκη αγωγής και εκπαίδευσης τέμνεται με την καθημερινότητα της πόλης'

"Street Edventures", εξερευνώντας τη γλώσσα μέσα από την τέχνη του δρόμου

Λαμπρινή Χαρτοφύλακα (Lamprini Chartofylaka)

"Street Edventures", εξερευνώντας τη γλώσσα μέσα από την τέχνη του δρόμου
"Street Edventures", exploring language through street art

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Περίληψη
Το γκράφιτι και κάθε είδους δημόσια εικαστική παρέμβαση (τέχνη του δρόμου) αποτελούν ενεργά στοιχεία της ταυτότητας του αστικού χώρου. Για πολλούς, τα παραπάνω συνθέτουν μια μορφή 'εικαστικών εργαλείων' για την ελευθερία της έκφρασης στο δημόσιο χώρο, ένα μέσο επικοινωνίας μεταξύ των ανθρώπων. Η ιδέα του project "Street Edventures" βασίζεται στη χρήση της δυναμικής του αστικού περιβάλλοντος ως κοινού τόπου μάθησης σε καθημερινή βάση, απόκτησης γνώσεων και ενίσχυσης της δημιουργικότητας των παιδιών. Το πρωτότυπο (σε μορφή game design document προς το παρόν) προτείνει μια σειρά από γλωσσικές ασκήσεις που αφορούν την κατανόηση και την εξάσκηση της γραμματικής, ορθογραφίας κ.ά. με περιεχόμενο βασισμένο στα μηνύματα που αποτυπώνονται στους τοίχους των αστικών συνοικιών. Για όσα έργα δρόμου έχουν μόνο οπτικοποιημένη μορφή (συνεπώς καθόλου κείμενο προς επεξεργασία), το παιχνίδι θα προτείνει ασκήσεις αφήγησης ιστοριών (storytelling) με σκοπό την ενίσχυση του γραπτού και προφορικού λόγου. Το παιχνίδι θα σχεδιαστεί για παιδιά πρωτοβάθμιας εκπαίδευσης που έχουν ως μητρική γλώσσα την ελληνική ή/και για παιδιά που μαθαίνουν Ελληνικά ως δεύτερη γλώσσα. Η ιδέα για το παιχνίδι Street Edventures αναπτύχθηκε κατά τη διάρκεια του Α' έτους του μεταπτυχιακού μου. Ο τελικός στόχος είναι να μετατραπεί σε ψηφιακό παιχνίδι μάθησης σε μορφή εφαρμογής (application) ή ηλεκτρονικής πλατφόρμας που θα χρησιμοποιηθεί για εκπαιδευτικούς σκοπούς. Στην πρώτη του εκδοχή χρησιμοποιήθηκαν ως ερέθισμα παραδείγματα της γαλλικής γλώσσας.
λέξεις-κλειδιά: τέχνη του δρόμου, αστικό περιβάλλον, παιδιά, εκμάθηση γλώσσας, παιχνίδι.

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Abstract
Graffiti and all kinds of public art interventions (street art) are active elements of the identity of urban space. For many, the aforementioned are perceived as a form of "art tools" that facilitate freedom of expression in the public space, a means of communication between people. The idea of the project "Street Edventures" is based on the dynamic of the urban environment use as a common place for learning, knowledge acquisition and enhancement of children's creativity on a daily basis. The project (existing as a "game design document") is designed as a series of linguistic exercises related to the understanding and practice of grammar, spelling and more using as a core stimulus: graffiti slogans on the walls of urban neighborhoods. For street art works without a written message (therefore no text for processing), the game suggests storytelling exercises to enhance writing and speech. The game will be designed for primary school children whose native language is Greek and / or for children who learn

Greek as a second language. The "Street Edventures" game prototype was developed during the first year of my master. The idea is to turn it into a digital game as an application or as an e-platform for educational purposes. The first version is developed using as stimuli examples of the French language.

keywords: street art, urban environment, children, language learning, games.

Introduction

Street Art

"A wall is a very big weapon" argued some years ago the elusive street artist Banksy (Bansky 2001). Yet, in many parts of the world, street art is a juxtapositional phenomenon as it can be seen either as an aesthetic intervention or as a vandalism activity. Throughout human evolution, starting from primitive drawings on cave walls, humans have always yearned to express themselves and share their thoughts in a public way (Smith 2007). Today, especially in countries like Greece, all these public art practices are evidently part of our visual culture and open new potentials of considering them as part of our cultural heritage (Merrill 2014). And as stated by many street artists: empty walls are just canvasses in waiting, seen very little as something that should be damaged or destroyed (Halsey et al. 2006). On the contrary, they are perceived as surfaces in which they can express their personal beliefs and values on a daily basis, as a way that they can get their message out into the world and create a dialogue with others (Hughes 2009). In this way, street art is a means of communication, freedom of expression between people and a way to spread an idea to the outside world.

Figure 1: "Today, once more I tried to find a way to approach you"

Notions of 'street art', 'street artists' in this text
'Street art', often cited as post-graffiti movement, was first used as a term in the 1980's respecting the urban guerrilla art that was not hip-hop graffiti (Semple 2004). In this paper, it needs to be clarified that the term 'street art' is used as reference to all the aesthetic practices such as graffiti tags, stenciling, wheat pasting, stickering, art installations that take place in public settings (walls, floors, signposts and more). The project "Street Edventures" emphasizes the need to explore and use not only the work of identified artists (professionals, amateurs) but also the omnipresent art in the streets created by anonymous artists, by people. The focus in this language related project is to capture the emotions, values and opinions of people who advertently decided to express their viewpoints, often related with the actuality of social and political scene, in a public way. At this point, what is more important is the support of the need of making connections to their lives with the lives of others in such an unconventional way.

Cities as learning scapes

Nowadays, as cities can be perceived as vibrant places for social change and revitalization that can challenge behaviors of individuals, it is quite significant the blossoming of inclusive initiatives and projects for transforming them into learning

landscapes. Within this scope, the game project "Street Edventures" which is described in detail below aims at mingling learning initiatives for young children with urban landscapes. It is described as a potential case study that can combine visual, linguistic and spatial educational needs of young learners, proposing their neighborhoods as their prime laboratory of exploration. Once we change the kaleidoscope of approaching the urban space, learning potentials can grow in our everyday walks and neighborhoods (Hirsh-Pasek 2016). For the moment, even though scientists support that children enrolled in a full-time program spend only 20% of their walking time inside the school settings (Hirsh-Pasek 2016), they tend to spend more than 1000 hours of instructional time per year, and therefore often their education process gets clung to conventional ways of thinking, speaking and relating to the outside world formed by the modern-industrial world (Sanger 1997). As a matter of fact, there are many opportunities to capitalize on their time spent outside school so as to connect their lives with a more place-based learning approach, while at the same time during their interactions with public signs and urban elements they could enhance and practice notions in a language.

State of art

Over the years, previous studies have made observations on how the human-landscape relationship has been proved useful for the facilitation of learning and the human developmental process. For the time being, we are more interested in findings on cases of social and psycholinguistic growth in humans in respect to their interactions with the urban place, and therefore with street art abundance. *'Sense of Place' concept*: It is argued that a strong link exists between the memories that people made in places and spaces that shaped their characters and influenced their feelings. The sense of place strengthens our identity evolution, most importantly our identity of belonging into the world, and plays an influential role for our social interactions and our cultural and psychological perspectives to grow individually and collectively (Gieseking et al. 2014). It is essential to provide and develop more practices to young children that promote the so-called 'sense of place' playing approach. Hence, there is the need of developing first-hand learning experiences inseparably linked with children's (urban) natural environments (Wilson 1997). *'Linguistic Landscapes' field*: Especially in the field of sociolinguistics, there is an interest on the analysis of the relationship between languages and spaces. It refers to all the linguistic elements, mainly in the form of signs, displayed in public view. Semiotics, the study of signs, are a multimodal source of developing literacy skills, especially in second language acquisition. Reading comprehension is being enhanced as a side activity of processing a written text. Multimodal literacy, that exists in linguistic landscapes, takes into consideration the text as a physical object, the way that a text is written, and the space that it is displayed (Cenoz et al. 2008). Furthermore, it is important to present two case-study projects related to "Street Edventures": a) The *"Word on the Street"* project (Burwell et al. 2015) which was implement in Canada and was designed for students of Grade 10 students (ages 15-16 years old). Based on the idea of linguistics landscapes mentioned above, it aimed to develop the research and critical views and insights of those teenagers on the visual, linguistic and spatial texts of their direct urban environment, their neighborhoods. Teenagers had also the opportunity to create audiovisual resources, in fact place-based documentaries, related to their urban communities and the knowledge gained when exploring them. b) The *"Florentin Urban Culture Tour"* is a touristic project based in the Florentin neighborhood in Tel Aviv, Israel. Guy Sharett,

the founder of this initiative, organizes original cultural walks for tourists through which people can decipher messages conveyed in street signs, graffiti and other artefacts and learn the basics of Hebrew language. It is a walking tour (total duration: one and a half hours) by which individuals can develop their linguistic skills and at the same time get insights into contemporary Israeli culture. All in all, all the findings mentioned above aim at highlighting the importance of transforming the cities into playful fields that could offer for people of all ages various learning opportunities in a context.

My approach - Street Edventures project

It is vital to stress that "Street Edventures" (Street + Ed + Adventures) is a game prototype, aims to be used as a hybrid one, that was developed during one of my master courses called "Scientific Game Design" in which students were asked to develop a game, as a paper prototype or as a tangible game interface around a concept across a wide range of scientific fields. Since walking and observing street art works was always my favorite way of experiencing a city, for this project I wanted to combine my avidity for street art works with a language exploration and awareness approach. Due to my previous work experience with children of primary education, my choice of having them as the target group for this project was justified. Along with that, there are additional reasons for using this specific group as target audience. On the one hand, language functions as way of communication with oneself and with others. Especially from early childhood, language instinctively works as a form of social act by which children can communicate information, ideas and opinions to others (INTO discussion document 2004), even though their first language acquisition is still at an incomplete stage. On the other hand, it is implied that elementary school students, aged 7-11 years old, are inclined to merge with their natural environment and adapt of geographical sense in the world around them (Sobel 1998). All things considered, giving to children the freedom to explore and understand the mechanics of their language through a play-based approach helps them make sense of their social worlds (Barblett 2010) and acquire a sense of place as an experiential learning affinity with their natural surroundings, their communities and their everyday way of living in urban settings (Sanger 1997).

Research Question

The most important research question that this experiential project identified is whether the urban street art work, in all its forms and applications, can be used to encourage and improve child's verbal-linguistic intelligence. This theory mainly refers to the way that one knows a language and communicates through using it for speaking, reading and writing tasks. It involves a deeper understanding on the meaning of a word while one properly uses a language. In fact, linguistic learners are people who think in words, love learning new ones and express themselves at a high level. My intention is to implement "Street Edventures" as a side activity project that children can enhance these capacities into using big cities' elements as a learning environment. Notably, our hypothesis is that every thoughtful initiative that is addressing creative play for children and is being developed in alignment with the environment, urban and rural, can only bring benefits for the well-being of a child.

Project Description

"Street Edventures" is a game prototype that proposes a language-learning experience by playing, currently tailor-made for the city of Athens. The main concept of this game can be easily adapted for any other city of the world, on that condition that the stimuli-content of the game will be adapted to the dominant spoken language of the respective city. The aim of this game is that players will meet the diversity of urban art (slogans, tags, drawings, installations to name a few) and at the same time they will enhance their knowledge in the Greek language through a city-based blended learning game. Depending on the type of the street artefact, ludic activities will be proposed to the user from a wide range of exercises concerning the use of Greek language (grammar, orthography etc.), storytelling and many more, out of a specific curriculum. At the same time, the user would be asked to submit their own exercises. This game suggests a new way to encourage citizens to observe, to extract information from their urban environment and learn/produce something from the messages conveyed through street art. The project is much inspired by the slogan of May '68 movement: *Les murs ont la parole (The Walls can Speak).*

Target audience

The game is designed for Greek speaking children of primary school age or/and non-native language speaking children who are learning Greek as a second language.

Game environment & proposed materials

The game environment as I have designed it, and explained in detail below, it would be the city map of Athens. There would be several spots on it: each one is leading the user to different street artefacts. In each spot, there would be a set of street artefacts that the users can explore. Two types of activities depending on the artefact will be proposed to the user: a) *Linguistic exercises* and b) *Story-based exercises*.

Figure 2: "I want to live life with everything"

A. Linguistic exercises

Stemming from a written idea expressed in a wall, the interest on these exercises is an alternative approach of a language text as a tool for learning ideas and its utilization in new communications. Along with that, in every street artefact which contains words, the idea is that the game proposes linguistic exercises arousing players' curiosity around Greek language. To illustrate, in the example shown in the picture (Figure 2), the phrase: *"I want to live life with everything"* is written in Greek. Exercises like the following ones could be proposed:

a. Write the simple present form of the verb "live"
b. Find compound words with the word "life"
c. Think of synonyms of the word "want".

B. Story-based exercises

While for street artefacts which contain no words, with a pictorial focus rather than textual, there would be proposed self-reflection activities on the content, on the emotional expression of the human figures represented in them like the example of

Figure 3. In addition, there would be suggested activities so as to generate stories (storytelling) inspired by the graffities and various text production activities regarding the (social) messages that the artist wanted to convey creatively through art. Some of the triggering questions (more on the Annex part) that improve child's introspection could be:

a. What do you see in this picture and what is your first reaction?
b. How do you think this character feels and why?
c. If the character could say something to the people who are passing by, what this would be?

Figure 3

It is one of my aspirations that "Street Edventures" would be used as a learning tool both for the student and the educator. In this way, all these aforementioned exercises can structure a valuable space between those two groups where they can discuss together and exchange views on important issues concerning the values of equality, justice, human existence and freedom. Moreover, one future feature is that users will have the option to submit their own findings from the city, to create and propose their own exercises.

Pedagogical objectives of "Streets Edventures"

Using street art works as an educational tool can be of high importance and have great potentials both for the educator and the student. The pedagogical objectives of this initiative have been developed around four basic axes towards child's learning process and skill development: observation, imagination, analysis, feelings. My main objectives focus on providing the time and the space to children so as to:
- Learn and strengthen linguistic skills as far as grammar, orthography, syntax, spelling, punctuation are concerned
- Improve skills on text production and story generating
- Encourage users to behave as actors, as field researchers, as (potential) smart citizens who learn by observing their urban environment

Adding to the last point, the development of my project relies on children's active experience in the psycho-geographical phenomenon known as 'dérive'. This is a phenomenon that was introduced in 1956 by Guy Debord as 'Theory of the Derive' (Debord 1956). It basically suggests that through our daily journeys in the environment that surrounds us, there are many opportunities to get emerged, mainly emotionally, and embrace the urban atmosphere and strengthen our sense of belonging from the million encounters that we find in the outside world.

Game Overview Outline

In the following section, there will be presented some of the game's different features as mentioned in the Game Design Document of my assignment.

Game flow summary

First of all, when the players launch the game, they have to create their personal account which will include their own special "Street Edventures" portfolio, a collection

of photos from the exercises that they will make later on their own inspired by the street artwork during the game. It is highly encouraged that the players add their personal findings from the streets of Athens or/and small group activities inspired from the city of Athens during their classes. In addition, before starting the game, they will select their character from a range of characters found in Greek children's books. The overall goal is to stop to as many street artworks as possible, gain points, create and propose new exercises and gladly become an explorer, an observer and the "future ambassador of learning in the city".

Figure 4: Game environment example – city center of Athens

"Let the game begin": This would be the home screen of the game. Several points of Athens will be pinned in this map (Figure 4), indicating where the player can find the elements of the street artefacts. The player will have to choose one of the "star" spots in Athens and click-on it so that they can start their journey around the city. However, not all the spots will be available from the beginning of the game. The player by proceeding forward through the game and completing several exercises, he/she will then unlock more spots of the game. The player needs to go through a series of levels to complete the game. Each spot in this exemplary map of Athens represents a different exercise based on a different street artefact.

The players can start from whichever spot they want. In each level, four different types of challenges will be given to the player: 3 linguistic exercises that they need to be solved (with an escalating level of difficulty), and a "story plotting exercise" (the player needs to produce a small text, drawing diagram, a slogan etc.). To complete a level,

Figure 5: Level structure of Street Edventures

the player needs to solve all the above challenges and upload their materials. Gamification badges will be awarded to them as they complete more exercises. Nonetheless, any time the player wants to quit a level, they have the option to go back to the home screen and choose to explore another spot in the city. In the main menu, there is the option zoom in/zoom out so that the player can see the spots which they have already visited (or not) and the most known Athenian points of interest around the spots they select.

Look and feel

The game will be set in a present-day world. The game environment of "Street Edventures" will bear a resemblance to the real, outdoor, urban environment of Athens, but in a more vivid, colorful way in order to capture children's interest. The areas of the game's environment and the objects will be colored in bold, bright, light colors so as to elicit a comforting and pleasurable
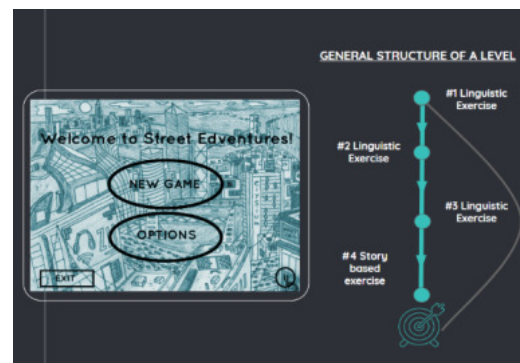

Figure 6: Game environment example – Look & Feel

experience for children. In many cases, for emphasizing the shapes of the objects, there will be used black lines around them (Figure 6).

Insertion in a pedagogical scenario

In the scope of examining the pedagogical insertion of this project, Street Edventures can easily serve as complementary tool to be used in classes so as to improve the linguistic skills of the students, evaluate their knowledge and challenge them to produce their own educational materials. This game should be played individually, but there are exercises such the ones of "generating a story" that could be done collaboratively from all students of a class. Among others, this teaching method in which students "learn by playing" can be used by the teacher-supervisor so as to identify specific difficulties of the students in Greek language, for example in grammar or writing. The teacher could then modify the content of their course according to the needs of the students (personalized learning experience). In addition, students and teachers could much benefit from the clues provided just below each exercise (indicated with a light bulb) which contain information on the specific linguistic phenomenon and in this way to refresh their knowledge. Furthermore, in this game there is the option for the player to create and store their work samples in a personal portfolio which can record their personal effort and progress. Lastly, starting with this game, motivated educators could organize field trips around the city that could train and sharpen the observation skills of the students.

Gameplay

The game in its core is designed to run according to the pace of each student. There are no time constraints, no timers to put a pressure to the student to solve in rapidity the exercises. There is no competition on playing this game, as each student tries to strengthen their knowledge and then if possible to cooperate with their classmates so as to produce together some of the required exercises. For the moment, the main challenge that the player faces is concretely the completion of the exercises. In order to unlock more spots, he/she will have to complete more and more exercises. It is not excluded that in the future, the game will keep record of the performance of the students so as to provide ideal exercises that are respective to his/her learning style. Points will be added to the personal account of the player after the accomplishment of each exercise as well as gamification badges will be attributed to the player to level up his/her involvement to the game.

Game options

Bonus options will be planned for the future editions of the game. Next to the progress of a player during the game, gamification badges will be attributed ranked by his/her performance with role play names such as debutant, achiever, explorer, observer, smart citizen to name a few.

Constraints /challenges due to the pedagogical objectives

The player is highly encouraged to work on his own in a fair way so as to solve the challenges imposed to this game. He / She should be aware that they can always have access to the information below each exercise and ask for the help of their teacher so as how to proceed. In this way, the user will get constructive indications/information for completing the exercises. In addition, there are exercises, for example the ones of text

production for which he/she can always exchange their creative ideas with their classmates or/and collaborate to produce them together. This game enables a collaborative and project based learning for the users.

Future Outlook

The practical application of the game "Street Edventures", firstly in a form of educational workshops then in a form of tangible game-based learning interface, is not yet tested. Therefore, preliminary results are not available now and the identification of project's advantages and drawbacks is not feasible. Some potential research topics could be firmly associated with the "Street Edventures" project:
a) Place-based education: connecting classrooms with the local community & environment
b) Placemaking policies: advocating public spaces as places of creative learning & innovative teaching
c) Digital cityscapes: integrating digital technologies into creating child friendly cities
Furthermore, as for the research methodology and approach for collecting data concerning the use and effectiveness of the project, *exploratory design techniques* will be used for evaluation. As for the development and application of the project the most common way to collect (qualitative) data is the mapping of street artefacts in the city of Athens.
Method 1: It is essential in a first phase to identify the variety of these street artefacts, to pinpoint the spots that they are usually depicted and to categorize them depending on the thematic of the existing iconography and messages conveyed in the streets.
Method 2: It is vital the conduction of interviews with professionals, such as street artists, urban sociologists, educators, urban planners, city counselors, who are working around the related multidisciplinary topics of urban design, planning and development and have a mutual interest in street art to shed light on their views on this movement and the benefits of using street art work for educational purposes.
As for the assessment tools that can be used afterwards for the collection of evidence concerning the learning process and the impact of "Street Edventures" on children, then the following methods could be used: phase observations naturalistically (pro & post implementation), quick quizzes to measure their understanding of Greek language and the evaluation of the work submitted. All in all, as this project aims to enhance the collaborative learning between the students and their perception of the public space as a "laboratory environment", video recordings on participants' insights, feelings and observations could be implemented. Within this aspect, further empirical evidence can be obtained, transcribed and analyzed, shedding light on a better understanding of their learning process and the areas of their knowledge extraction from street art works.

Conclusion

The "Street Edventures" project was developed during my university semester course entitled "Scientific Game Designed" and it is still in a form of a prototype, as it was presented during the international conference *"CHILDREN'S SPACES OR SPACES FOR CHILDREN? When education intersects with the everyday life in the city"*

(Thessaloniki, 2017). It is my aspiration to test in the first place this game within a real urban environment, namely in lively neighborhoods like Exarchia (Athens) in collaboration with primary school students and teaching staff. Street art will be introduced and investigated as an educational tool through workshops aiming at making connections to children's lives and the lives of others and at the same time expanding their linguistic competences. These workshops will be organized and focused on the reflective learning process and behavior of young children towards street art, while in the future the outcomes of such experiences could be included in the design and the development of a digital game for them. As a social designer stated, *"Street art is a window into a city's soul"* (Kendall 2011), so it is highly vital to develop more projects, digital based or not, that promote the nexus of 21st century cities and supportive learning initiatives for all.

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Image Sources

Figure 1: Personal collection.
Figure 2: Personal collection.
Figure 3: Personal collection.
Figure 4: Modified photo for noncommercial use. Hot-maps.de (1854). Stadtplan Athen City-Zentrum [Online]. Available at: http://www.hot-map.com/images/tn/Stadtplan-Zentrum-Athen-8097.jpg. (Retrieved: 30/6/2017).
Figure 5: Personal collection.
Figure 6: Tsevis, C. (2013). Nothing really ends [Online]. Available at: http://www.cuded.com/wp-content/uploads/2013/10/nothing-really-ends_by_christina-tsevis600_764.jpg. (Retrieved: 30/6/2017).

Annex

Below are some examples of questions that can be used from educators to trigger conversations with their students, depending on the street artefact in any case and especially in the case of story-based activities.

1. What do you see in this street artefact?
2. What is happening in this artefact?
3. What is the figure doing? How does this figure feel? (if any)
4. Why you think one left this message on this public wall?
5. Is this work created by one person or more?
6. What is this street artefact trying to tell us?
7. Are there any symbols included in this street artefact, what do you think they mean?
8. What is art for you? Do you consider this as art and why?
9. Have you seen a figure like this before in real life? How did you feel?
10. What colors have been used?
11. What pictures do you observe on your daily trip from your home to school?