

Media release of February 7, 2023

ZHAW School of Architecture, Design and Civil Engineering

Video game “Where Am I?” lets Ukrainian children explore Zurich

A video game aims to help refugee Ukrainian children and teens in Zurich discover the city in a familiar setting. The interactive project was launched by the Zurich University of Applied Sciences (ZHAW) together with Blindflug Studios.

War and destruction mean a sudden loss of familiar things, especially for children. Far from their homeland, Ukrainian children and teens have to find their way around in an often foreign environment. That is why the ZHAW has developed a video game that allows them to familiarise themselves with the city of Zurich and at the same time create a connection to their homeland. “Де я знаходжуся?” is the title of the game in Ukrainian, “Where Am I?” in English. It was funded by the Digitalization Initiative of the Zurich Higher Education Institutions (DIZH) as part of the project call “Dealing with Emergency Situations as Consequences of the War against Ukraine”.

Architecture and familiarity

The video game “Where Am I” takes up the architectural culture aspects of fleeing their home country. Not only are buildings in the Ukrainian homeland damaged and destroyed, but the new place is also foreign. By virtually embedding Ukrainian buildings in the city of Zurich, a part of their homeland is integrated into the unknown city. Under the direction of ZHAW researcher Andri Gerber, students built detailed models of famous landmarks from Kyiv and Zurich and inserted them into a colourful 3D version of Zurich's city centre. With the help of the Swiss game developer Blindflug Studios, a mobile game was created in which players can explore Zurich and find the landmarks of both cities.

Explore Zurich digitally

The game world stretches along the Limmat to the ETH Zurich and the main station, and is explored with the help of a map and a scooter. During the game, some Zurich buildings disappear into thin air during the game and the players have the task to return puzzle pieces scattered around the city to the buildings. At the end of each puzzle, however, it is not the Zurich building that appears, but a landmark from Kyiv such as St. Andrew's Church, Shevchenko University or the Salyut Hotel.

“The game was well received by the Ukrainians involved in the project, but now we are of course interested in the reactions of those affected,” says Andri Gerber, co-director of the ZHAW Institute of Constructive Design. “The video game aims to help the Ukrainian children and young people to familiarise themselves with Zurich through play.”



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Video and Downloads

Video (with English, German and Ukrainian subtitles): <https://vimeo.com/795327607>

“Where Am I?” on the Apple App Store: <https://apps.apple.com/ch/app/where-am-i-zh-kiew-metonymia/id6444795067>

“Where Am I?” on the Google Play Store: <https://play.google.com/store/apps/details?id=com.ZHAW.WhereAmI>



Digitalization Initiative of the Zurich Higher Education Institutions (Digitalisierungsinitiative der Zürcher Hochschulen, DIZH):

The mission of Digitalization Initiative of the Zurich Higher Education Institutions (DIZH) is to promote cooperation on digitalization issues between higher education institutions in Zurich, thereby strengthening the greater Zurich area as a hub for research and business. The University of Zurich (UZH), Zurich University of Applied Sciences (ZHAW), Zurich University of the Arts (ZHdK) and Zurich University of Teacher Education (PHZH) are part of the DIZH network, which aims to advance research and innovation on digitalization by using interdisciplinary approaches.

Institute of Constructive Design, Department of Architecture, Design and Civil Engineering, Zurich University of Applied Sciences:

The Department of Architecture, Design and Civil Engineering is one of the most traditional, largest and most innovative educational institutions in the Swiss educational landscape. It comprises the degree programmes Architecture and Civil Engineering as well as the two institutes Urban Landscape and Constructive Design and the Centre for Building Technology and Processes. The Institute of Constructive Design investigates the material conditions of construction. Architectural and constructive research questions are always integrated into a discourse on building culture and reflected on via various media, including video games.

Blindflug Studios:

About Blindflug: We are an indie game studio founded in 2014 by Jeremy Spillmann and Moritz Zumbühl, based in Zürich, Switzerland and Poznań, Poland. Our mission is simple: We want to create beautiful, imaginative and incredibly fun games, that center around real-world dilemmas. We believe that games are an incredible medium for allowing players to experience the most complex of problems while being hugely entertaining too! Our first title First Strike, a nuclear war RTS game, has been played by more than eleven million players so far. It was followed up by the highly critical acclaimed Cloud Chasers that explores the topic of migration, the dieselpunk action game Airheart and the Apple Arcade launch title Stellar Commanders. With over 50 nominations and prizes at international awards and festivals, like the Best GDC Pitch and German Developer Innovation Prize, Blindflug is one of the standout indie game studios in Europe.

Blindflug also works for innovative clients and helps them find new ways of communication with video games. Like Finance Mission Heroes, the first game in the Swiss-German curriculum that teaches kids financial literacy; Enter - IT Security Training, a puzzle game that tests your feel for digital loopholes; and (re)format Z:, a stealth game about the Swiss Protestant Reformation that tells the story of a similar revolution in a dystopian Zurich.