

## InPact – A Participatory Design Approach to Securing Public Space

**Arjun Harish Rao**  
The Sustainable Design School  
Nice, France  
arjunrao2709@gmail.com

**Mathieu Andries**  
The Sustainable Design School  
Nice, France  
mathieu.andries@the-sds.com

**Fanny Ricciardi**  
The Sustainable Design School  
Nice, France  
fanny.ricciardi@the-sds.com

**Julian Coiffard**  
The Sustainable Design School  
Nice, France  
julian.coiffard@the-sds.com

### ABSTRACT

On the aftermath of the terrorist attack in Nice on 14th July 2016, the government decided to install barriers along the Promenade des Anglais, a landmark in the French Riviera to deter similar future attacks.

Our research is an attempt to view terrorism through a lens of radicalization and lack of public participation in place making. We chose games as Participatory Design (PD) tools to engage multiple stakeholders in playful yet thought-provoking ways. The research takes place in three phases. In the first phase, we explore the context through contextual inquiries. The second phase is engaging with experts at the Week of Security. The third phase focusses on public participation. The outcome of the research is a playbook of PD tools along with prototypes of the games that foster alternate conversations on the notions of security.

### Author Keywords

Participatory Design Tools; Civic Engagement; Security; Games; Design Methods; Urban Design;

### INTRODUCTION

We often frame terrorism as a military or a security problem, which leads to counter-terrorism policies that are focused on “capturing” and “eliminating” terrorists, increased surveillance and target hardening. [1] Research on the effectiveness of such strategies

shows no significant impact on reducing terrorism.[2] The history of terrorist attacks in France highlights the problems of “home-grown terrorism”.[4]

The field of PD extensively discusses ways in which citizens can be an active part of the design process. This research attempts to open up a space for conversation on these topics with experts, the people with a say in determining security policies as well as people who do not have a formal say in the matter.

The use of games in PD has been acknowledged widely. Games create a playful, subversive and irreverent space described as the “magic circle” which enables participants to engage in meaningful conflict.[3] The paper aims to present the use of games as PD tools to engage multiple stakeholders and provide a voice to the underrepresented in public space-making. Shifting away from the traditional top-down model of urban design, the project aims to lay the groundwork to challenge the notions of expertise and democratize the adopted practices of creative placemaking.

### PROCESS

The project was a partnership between the Métropole Nice Côte d’Azur and the Sustainable Design School with funding from the European Union. The project took place in three phases over four months.

#### Phase 1 : Understanding the Context

We began with conducting contextual inquiries on the Promenade. We conducted 50 interviews with participants varying in age, gender, work and ethnicity. Participants were often hesitant in discussing sensitive topics like terrorism while they would freely express their opinions on the matters of surveillance and no-

tions of security in public space. The conflict between liberty and security in public space was highlighted by many of the participants. The interviews also revealed public perceptions on the barriers in the Promenade with one of the participants revealing that *“In an attempt to conceal with the events that happened, the barriers serve as a stark reminder of the attack”*.

### **Phase 2 : Engaging with Experts**

We had an opportunity to engage with security experts from various countries at the European Week of Security (Dec,2019) in Nice. Based on our insights from the interviews, we organized a workshop with games inspired by local cultural cues, designed to provoke alternate thoughts on the security of urban spaces.

### **Phase 3 : Engaging with the community**

Based on the feedback received from the Week of Security, we iterated on the games and engaged in public participation by conducting the games in various public places in Nice. Nice has a largely unacknowledged case of migrants, often enduring harsh living conditions and lack of opportunities to voice out their frustrations. The games provided a space for underserved communities to participate and provide their perspectives on how they perceive security and safety in urban spaces.

## **RESULTS & DISCUSSION**

The notion of security in public space is largely influenced by one’s perspective on what one considers as being safe. The two games designed focus on understanding these perspectives and encourage conflict through choices available in the game. “Occupy”, a game modelled on the French game Petanqué allowed for a creative approach to questioning existing notions of security and safety. Using humour as a tool to engage in serious discussion allowed people to freely express their thoughts without having to provide the “correct” answer. The competitive environment of the game also encouraged people to respond to ridiculous questions generated through gameplay. “Parcour”, is a construction game wherein participants work together to create an ideal public space with various devices of security and public amenities that could be purchased. Choices made during the construction of the board would then affect the scenario when teams were divided, with one team being the protagonist and the other, the terrorist. The game allowed for reflection amongst the participants on what they typically consider as safe, and re-evaluate their perspectives on these

topics with an increased sensibility towards over-securisation in public space. Measuring impact through the games was done by creating evaluation matrix for each of the activities along with feedback forms for our participants which helped us provide insights for future iterations of the games.

The settings in which the games were conducted played a key role in the seriousness of participation. A controlled environment of a workshop allowed facilitators to better engage the participants as compared to engaging people on the streets. The games when played on the Promenade took people by surprise and as such were unwilling to commit time for participation. However, the people who did engage with us were excited to have a space to voice out their opinions.

Engaging with the migrant community required us to adopt a different approach. Trust building was a key aspect, and trying to directly engage the migrants with the games proved unsuccessful. We engaged the participants over 2 weeks, identifying a balance between addressing their immediate needs with the goals of the research. Collaborating with an external organization like Secours Catholique, which has a history of working with migrants in the region, helped us further in balancing these needs. Secours Catholique was also encouraged by our participatory approach to addressing the needs of the migrants and are considering adopting a similar approach within their organization.

## **CONCLUSION**

The project is the first phase in a three-year plan to secure European cities against terrorism. The research aims to criticize the traditional top-down approach to placemaking and security in Nice while identifying ways in which the process could be democratized. Games have proven to be an effective way to encourage public participation on these topics. The notion of public participation in policymaking is a fairly new concept in France and the project aims to lay the groundwork for it by providing our partners with a toolkit to enable this process. The toolkit consists of various games and activities conducted throughout the research, a participatory guidebook and a magazine which contains details of the process, challenges and key insights from our research.

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