

# PLAY ME - Theatre Game Concept

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## ABSTRACT

PLAY ME is an interactive theatre role-play in an enclosed abstract urban environment using smart phone technology. In this theatre game one participant from the same group gets a life of another participant to play. The game itself consists of narrative structure with different events and tasks, which can be modified for different purposes and themes. At the end of the game each participant receives a report of his own life, played till its end by someone else. Every person stays anonymous during the game. This theatre game will be made possible and produced by using mobile media technology and gaming theory.

This position paper describes the general concept, ongoing process, potentials and difficulties of the project.

## Author Keywords

Digital Theatre, Game theory, Computer-mediated theatre, human behaviour, interactive storytelling, role playing, life simulation

## ACM Classification Keywords

Algorithmic game theory and mechanism design, Network games, Augmented Reality, Information visualization, Collaborative content creation, Ubiquitous and mobile computing, Interaction techniques

## INTRODUCTION

The work group developing PLAY ME theatre play concept consists of architects, graphic designers, game designers, computer scientists and event producers from different countries. Their goal is to develop and execute performances involving the audience as actors and inspire them to rethink their daily decisions through extraordinary social and sensual experiences, supported by cutting edge media technology. The format includes concepts and aspects of theatre, (computer) game, role-playing and group experience.

## THE GAME PLAY DESCRIPTION

The players are actors and active participants of the game, not passive spectators. They play lifelike situations, events and tasks according to the biography and future goals of another participant registered at the very beginning (see Figure 1). The game is a multisensory experience for the players. They receive information and instructions through a wearable device – the “Communicator” – and act within the game space by moving around between different game zones such as “Home”, “Work”, and “Community”.

They will interact physically within the game environment. To reach given game goals participants will have to communicate directly or via the Communicator with other participants and the control system.



Figure 1. One example of the game registration views

The Communicator will guide them through the game and record all events, tasks and decisions made during the game. At the end all participants will get a summary of their game performance. Total length of the game is about 1-60 minutes. There can be 20–30 participants per game session. One minute represents one year in the game. Players will be spatially recognized by the movements they make. Situations, tasks and possible problems will pop up to their screens or devices according to different life scenarios and pre-defined narratives. They will have to react and make decisions quickly in order to achieve goals and survive.

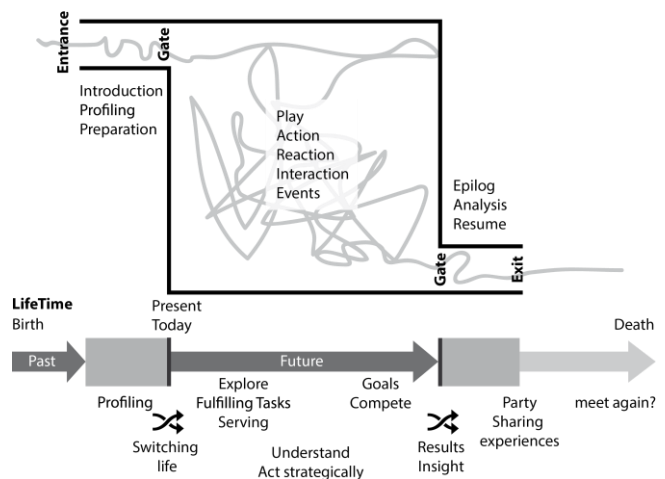


Fig. 2. Abstract spatial setup together with a game timeline

The overall task for each player is to plan other person's life path within the ongoing game according to what has been set in the beginning as a past and as future goals for each role. These decisions refer to work, health, social, spiritual etc. aspects of life. In the group level each of the decisions made by every participant influences strongly the development of the game dynamics. The game will also include group tasks. Participants will have to make decisions on collaborative or competitive tasks. Group tasks can be contradicting or favouring individual's game goals causing moral dilemmas.

**PURPOSE**

This theatre game is a fun, experimental and engaging way for the participants to think about choices they made in life – how those affect and build their lives and society in general. Due to the underlying dynamic system, decisions made will bring some unwanted consequences with them. In contrast to digital games here all participants are physically assembled. Emotional aspects and empathy will be important part of the game, they cannot be faded out for achieving personal goals. Each game session offers possibilities to collect quantitative data for further research purposes. The game is designed to be a multipurpose platform. It allows possibilities to make change with the setup (spaces, visualization, tasks etc.). The game itself is an internationally applicable game format. The same game

setups can be run in different locations. It offers possibilities to make comparisons between different game sessions and groups.

**TECHNICAL SETUP**

PLAY ME is structured into 3 Phases: Profiling, Acting and Reflection. The “Communicator” will be realised by handing out a smartwatch or tablet to each participant connected via Wi-Fi to the central control system (Server). It displays real-time information and instructions for game tasks and allows simple input such as a selection between different options and voting.

Tracking and identification technologies like iBeacon, QR-Codes and NFC track the position of the individuals (resp. their Communicator), measure their activities and trigger events accordingly. Augmented Reality technologies will visualize 3D objects and environments on the wearable according to the play state. Ambient displays on the wall or floor surfaces show global public information. One further option is to equip the Communicator with mobile projectors to display live contextual information on clothes or walls. The technology and user interface have to be integrated into the whole play, game elements and environment so that participants are able to be ubiquitous, focusing on the game situations, narrative and experience instead of a gadget focused fascination.

THIS IS HOW IT GOES:



Figure 3: A first version of the game instructions handed out to participants

**CONCLUSION**

This theatre game role-play is in a planning phase and scheduled to have its first pilot setup running by 2015.

It handles complex social experiences in a controllable fixed game space. At the moment there are many open conceptual questions related to the workshop topic:

- What would be the best way to visualize different game zones (“Homes”, “Work”, and “Community”)? Level of abstraction with game design and elements, dynamic properties, privacy, invisible technology etc.
- What are the different “roles” of displaying information on the floor, the walls, objects or the wearable?

- How much information should be provided at the same time to avoid cognitive overload? And with which intensity to keep the game interesting and engaging for the participants?
- How can the same playground be easily changed to serve all three, very different phases?

Through the concept of playing another person’s life in the game with just a fragment of information, stereotyping is likely unavoidable. Though this is a necessary process in many real-life situations, it can be insightful if we nearly fail to do this in an artificial situation.