Urban *Jamification*: *Gincanas* as location-based mobile games in Brazil

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Abstract

Gincanas are a traditional event in Brazilian culture where groups of people compete against each other by solving tasks. Recently, the Dutch Waag Society and the Brazilian Mobilefest developed the location-based game called Global Gincana, where players use their phones as interfaces to interact with the game space through solving location-based tasks about the countries' history and culture. By exploring the history of Brazilian gincanas and how they have evolved through the spread and appropriation of mobile technologies, this article addresses two main research questions: (1) how mobility and the configuration of urban space influence the design and performance of location-based mobile games; and (2) how the urban and socio-economic context of developing countries, specifically Brazil, shape mobile technology appropriation and location-based mobile game design. We demonstrate that urban spaces can convey a multiplicity of performances, encompassing a vast arrange of applications, ranging from education and philanthropic to marketing oriented.

Keywords

gamification; gincana; location-based games ; mobile phones, Brazil, global south

By exploring the history of Brazilian gincanas and how they have evolved through the spread and appropriation of mobile technologies, this article addresses two main research questions: (1) how mobility and the configuration of urban space influence the design and performance of location-based mobile games, and (2) how the urban and socio-economic context of developing countries, specifically Brazil, shape mobile technology appropriation and location-based mobile game design. In order to answer such questions, we first define location-based mobile games through the theoretical frameworks of net locality (Gordon and de Souza e Silva 2011). We address how commercial location-based mobile games distinguish themselves from artistically-driven games, and how these kinds of games make specific commercial use of urban spaces. We then present the case study of the Global Gincana, in order to illustrate how location-based games cross and challenge cultural barriers and create new playful grounds. We do that by first describing a brief history of gincanas, and then linking this history to the more recent development of location-based games in Brazil.

Location-based mobile games use the city space as their game board. They are multiplayer games, in which players use mobile devices to communicate with each other depending on their location in urban space (de Souza e Silva and Hjorth 2009; Shklovski and de Souza e Silva 2012). First developed within academic circles (Lantz 2006; Chang and Goodman 2006), such games—also named Alternate Reality Games (ARGs) —were commercially appropriated as advertisement campaigns most prominently for movies and cars (McGonigal 2007; Hjorth 2008). Some well-known examples are *The Beast* for A.I. in 2001, and *I love Bees* for the Halo 2 game release in 2004. Location-based mobile games often subvert the traditional playspace of digital games, merging digital and physical spaces through the mobility of players (de Souza e Silva 2006; Gordon and de Souza e Silva 2011). As a consequence, they have the potential to transform

modes of mobility and immobility within everyday life, allowing players to rediscover local surroundings through playful interactions.

Although location-based games have been extensively studied in North American and European contexts (Licoppe and Inada 2006; McGonigal 2007; de Souza e Silva 2009; Montola 2005), scant attention has been paid to how mobile technologies and urban spaces act as game interfaces in developing countries. This is particularly interesting as technologies are appropriated differently in diverse parts of the world (Bar et al. 2007), and distinct environments affect urban practices of mobility, game design and play. When researching mobile technology appropriation and the gamification of urban spaces, Brazil represents a relevant case study. The country is a developing leading world economy with the 5th largest mobile market in the world (de Souza e Silva et al. 2011). The country has also witnessed artistic and commercial development and deployment of urban and location-based games in its major cities. For example, Blast Theory performed *Can You See Me Now?* in Belo Horizonte (2008, Arte.Mov festival) and Audi developed the ARG *Art of The Heist*, to sell their Audi A3 car in 2005 (Gosney, 2005). Despite the growing popularity of these initiatives, few studies have looked at how the configuration of urban spaces, mobility and mobile technology use in the developing world influence game design and play.

One interesting example in Brazil is the Global Gincana (MobileFest and Waag-Society 2009), a location-based game developed in 2009 as a collaboration between the Brazilian Mobilefest, an international festival dedicated to mobile art and creativity running yearly in São Paulo since 2006; and the Dutch Waag Society, an art, science and technology institute focused in technology for social innovation from Amsterdam, Holland. The piece was based on the "gincana" concept, a traditional event in Brazilian culture where groups of people compete against each other by solving tasks involving a wide range of capacities. Gincanas may be described as a fusion between Olympic games and scavenger hunt. However, in the Global Gincana, GPS-enabled mobile phones were the game interface. On a map on the participants' mobile phones they could see the location of tasks to be performed. Once they stood at a task location, instructions would pop-up on their mobile screen (de Souza e Silva & Duarte). For example, "you are now at Casa das Rosas – one of the oldest buildings on Paulista Avenue. Ask about the history of the building and look at how it is situated. Take photos of the most striking contrasts (of old and new)."[1] This is one of the most famous avenues in the city of São Paulo in Brazil. The Global Gincana's tasks had as a purpose to teach participants about São Paulo's and Amsterdam's history, culture, and urban spaces.

Gincanas are not a new phenomenon. They were very popular events throughout the 1970s and 1980s in the third largest Brazilian city, Salvador. Normally local governments and schools organized them. Gincanas aimed at engaging, helping, and educating large groups of people on social, political, and cultural topics. Government organized gincanas tended towards philanthropic causes, as well as creating awareness towards local issues and attainments. Some of the tasks included blood donating, collecting non-perishable food for donation to impoverished areas, as well as writing and performing plays based on famous historical events. Another type of gincana was the gincanas promoted by local schools, which besides having philanthropic tasks, also had specific learning goals within the school syllabus. The tasks varied from solving mathematical equations within a given time constrain, play performances of chemistry combinations, as well as many others, which included not only the school pupils from first grade to senior high-school, but also their parents and school employees. These events were highly organized and required a fixed structure, despite its mobile aspect, due to technological constrains of the time. As mobile technology was not an available source, team members had to rely on fixed arrangements. They had to be at specific locations at specific times in order to receive and

deliver the tasks. Therefore, these events were geographically and therefore socially bound, with limited communication resources and little space for improvisation regarding time and space. In contrast, participants of the Global Gincana were able to defy space boundaries and coordinate experiences cross-Atlantic, challenging gincanas' early constrains. Tasks coordinated by various locations, times and devices, instead of fixed ones, open up for a range of possibilities within play in urban environment. As in the Global Gincana, gincanas are being rediscovered and re-appropriated through location-based technologies. Simultaneous and independent games run locally and globally.

We use the case study of the Global Gincana to demonstrate that urban spaces can convey a multiplicity of playful performances including a vast range of applications, from education to marketing-oriented. We conclude that the popularization of mobile technologies and location-based services in the developing world help not only economic development and information access. These technologies are also creatively appropriated to foster new types of collaborations and constructions of urban spaces.

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[1] http://holambra.wordpress.com/results/