

7 | YAPASPHOTO: PROMOTING REGIONAL PUBLIC TRANSPORT AND TOURISM WITH A BOARD GAME

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ABSTRACT

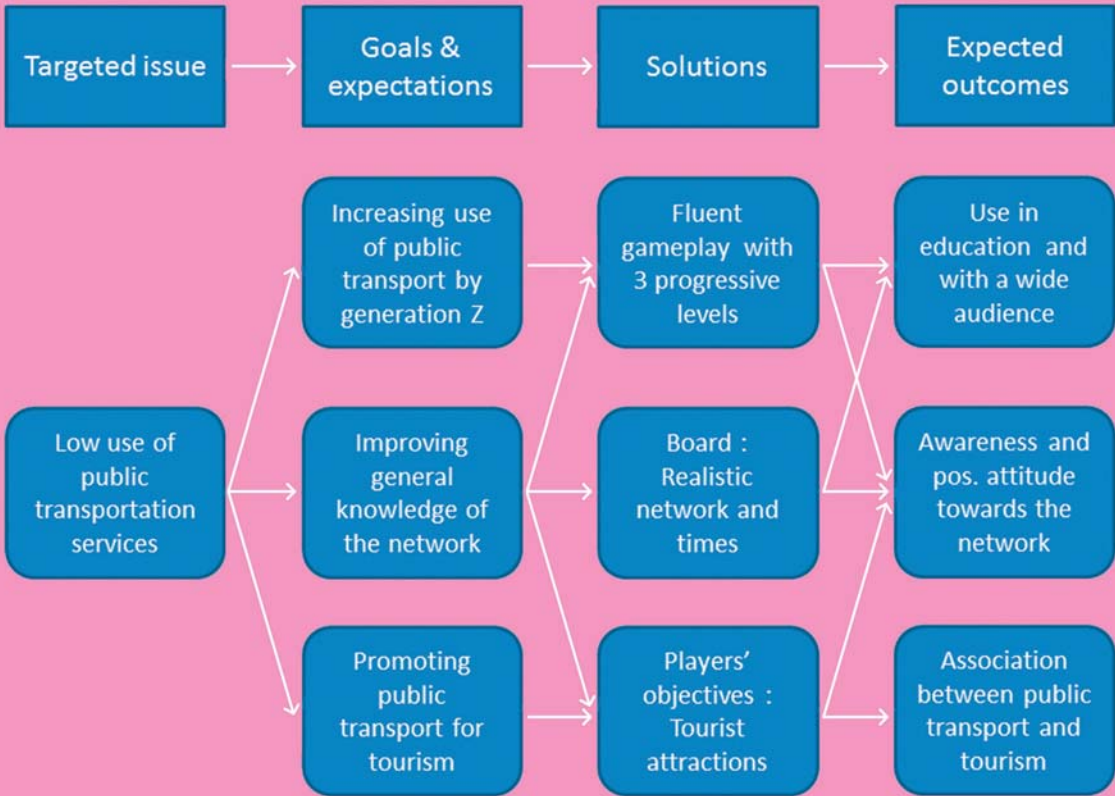
Reducing individual motorised transport use and promoting public transport is an important political and societal objective in the Canton of Neuchâtel. Building on previous initiatives which promoted sustainable development with serious games, we aimed at contributing to this objective through developing a board game picturing both the public transport network and the tourist attractions reachable through it. This game, called YAPASPHOTO, has three progressive levels and was launched in November 2018 and presented to a wide audience. The game efficiency on players still needs to be scientifically tested, in terms of their network knowledge, their attitudes and behavioural change.

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KEYWORDS

Board game; Public transport; Sustainable development; Tourism; Promotion; Education.

Figure 1 – Theoretical conceptualisation of the project YAPASPHOTO.





CONTEXT

Educational games, including board games, show an expansion in the last decades, notably to promote sustainable development and sensitize various audiences to climate change (Wu & Lee, 2015). Moreover, there are numerous modern board games related to public transport (see Haffner, 2019, for a list). However, most of these games only picture trains and, to our knowledge, “Ticket to Ride – Switzerland” is the only published modern board game picturing the Swiss railroad network. Furthermore, the vast majority of these train games have no educational purpose and their large geographic scope and game mechanics do not enable a realistic and detailed representation of the public transport network. One notable exception is “Dots & Dashes”, a serious game developed in Delaware to raise awareness on the regional public transit planning (Hacker et. al, 2009). Its authors encourage the transfer of such initiatives to other regions.

The political and societal context in our region favoured a similar project. Indeed, public transport development, promotion and use are priorities of the Plan Directeur Cantonal (République et Canton de Neuchâtel, 2018). In addition, municipalities, transportation companies (TransN), schools and the RUN association (Réseau Urbain Neuchâtelois) have shown interest in our project.

TARGETED ISSUES

As stated in the Plan Directeur Cantonal (République et Canton de Neuchâtel, 2018), individual motorised transport is still excessively used and there is a need for a modal transfer towards public transport and “soft” mobility. It constitutes a societal and political priority, but the low use of the existing and rich train and bus network is one of the issues.

The project had to fulfil various expectations of the involved public and private partners. For example, there was a need for a sensitization tool to use both in schools and with the general public. In addition, for marketing and educational reasons, the project had to picture a realistic network and inform players about the interesting touristic places that can be accessed thanks to public transport. Hence, the challenge was to design a simple game to target a wide audience, while keeping it realistic and reasonably comprehensive. Moreover, the partners greatly expected a regional anchorage of the project, in terms of creation, development and production.

PROPOSED SOLUTION

The project consists of the development, testing, publication and promotion of an educational board game. The prototype, called “YAPASPHOTO, Course en Pays de Neuchâtel”, was originally developed by three students of a technical school of the region (CIFOM-ET). The game finalisation and production were done by the cooperative company “Entrée de Jeux” (2018).

The game represents the public transport network (trains and buses) of the Canton of Neuchâtel, the reachable destinations within the canton and surrounding regions, as well as touristic and cultural points of interest. The game is a race. Players have to move efficiently between destinations. Importantly, there is a realistic system indicating the proportional times of each journey. The scoring system takes into account the number of objectives reached by the players, in terms of reached destinations and visited points of interest.

This game allows the players to (re)discover the regional public transport network, its high density, as well as the ease of access of most major points of interest, including museums and natural sites. It is aimed at a wide audience, including students, to promote the use of public transport in schools and elsewhere.

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Figure 2 – During its launch in November 2018, YAPASPHOTO was played in a train.

RELEVANT INNOVATION

To our knowledge, this is the first time in Switzerland that a board game is specifically designed to promote public transport use. By focusing only on a small region, this game allows a nearly comprehensive network representation and time needed between two given destinations. Hence, it gives the players an opportunity to learn rather precisely about their possibilities when using the network.

Another innovation is that instead of using plastic or wooden tokens on the board the players use erasable pens on a laminated map to indicate their actions. This adds a dimension of graphic creativity to the players' experience.

Additionally, the game has three progressive difficulty levels. The first is a simple race around the canton. The second adds the possibility of visiting points of interest. The third adds "action cards" that allow players to interact and interfere with others' plans. This progressive aspect is rather uncommon in board games and makes this specific educational serious game adaptable to a very wide audience.

PROJECT OUTCOMES & RESULTS

The project has been successfully managed, so far. It included final developments: fundraising, tests, graphic design, publishing process, production and distribution. All creators and partners are based in the region. The prototype and final game versions have been tested and presented in several public events, including the "Festival Ludesco" in La Chaux-de-Fonds and the "Printemps de la Mobilité" in Neuchâtel. It has been appreciated by audiences of various ages and expertise regarding board games. Thanks to the partners' support, one thousand boxes have been produced and more than eight hundred have been sold, mostly in the region represented on the board.

CONCLUSION

YAPASPHOTO appears as a promising medium to promote, among students and general public, the knowledge and use of public transport in the canton of Neuchâtel. This innovative board game has been developed thanks to a wide range of individual actors, as well as public and private partners. We hope this project will contribute to the modal transfer from individual motorised transport to public transport in the region.



PERSPECTIVES & NEEDS

The game efficiency on players still needs to be scientifically tested, in terms of their network knowledge improvement, their attitudes towards its use as well as their behavioural change.

Many perspectives exist, since its game mechanics can easily be transferred to other cities, regions, or even to the national level. In addition, we are considering live action or digital adaptations.

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