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I-CReST 2025:106-070 – Engaging the Next Generation: Gamified Approaches to Citizen Participation in Urban Public Space Design in Japan

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ABSTRACT

In Japan, local governments have increasingly emphasized citizen participation in urban planning and public space design. Yet, such efforts often remain limited to formal hearings or passive information sessions, leading to low engagement—particularly among youth and underrepresented groups. While the integration of information and communication technologies (ICT) has expanded opportunities for electronic participation (e-participation), these approaches frequently fail to foster sustained or inclusive civic involvement. This study investigates the potential of gamification—the use of game-like elements in non-game contexts—as means to enhance motivation, inclusiveness, and interactivity in citizen engagement. Focusing on recent Japanese initiatives, including Minecraft-based urban design workshops and 3D simulation platforms employed by local governments, the paper examines how gamification influences participation design, demographic outreach, and institutional linkage. The International Association for Public Participation (IAP2)'s Public Participation Spectrum is used as a theoretical framework to assess the depth and quality of engagement achieved through these methods. The findings suggest that while gamification can attract new participants and promote creative forms of engagement, its application in Japan is still largely experimental, short-term, and loosely connected to policymaking processes. Key challenges include the lack of institutional receptivity, insufficient mechanisms for policy integration, and the need for more inclusive and sustainable design frameworks. This paper argues that for gamification to contribute meaningfully to participatory governance in Japan, it must be embedded within broader administrative and cultural structures. The study offers insights into how playful engagement can coexist with serious democratic practices in local governance contexts.

Keywords: Citizen participation; Gamification; Youth engagement; Inclusiveness