

Eszter HARGITTAI

***Visual Learning through Games:
The Case of GPS-Based Treasure Hunting***

One of the critiques of people's increasing digital media use in everyday life is that it removes, or at least distracts people from their physical surroundings in favor of what shows up on the screens of their devices. This one-sided view of digital media ignores the myriad of ways that digital platforms may augment one's experiences in and of a physical locale. This presentation will discuss how GPS-based treasure-hunt games such as geocaching and Munzee influence the ways hobbyists see their physical surroundings not only during their time playing the game, but in their everyday lives even when they are not actively pursuing their hobby. The paper draws on participant observations as well as interviews with hobbyists to describe how digital games can augment people's perceptions and understandings of their immediate surroundings even when not in the midst of game-play. The presentation will give specific examples of the ways in which hobbyists started seeing their environment in a new light after becoming avid players of such games appreciating nuances of both the urban landscape as well as remote areas and natural elements.

Eszter HARGITTAI, (Ph.D. Sociology, Princeton University) is Associate Professor of Communication Studies at Northwestern University where she heads the Web Use Project. She is also Fellow at Harvard's Berkman Center for Internet & Society where she spent the 2008/09 year in residence. Her research focuses on the social implications of people's digital media uses with a particular interest in how people's Web-use skills influence the ways in which they incorporate the Internet into their lives. One of her current projects (with Ethan Zuckerman, MIT) focuses on the implications of GPS-based games for learning and civic engagement. E-mail: eszter@northwestern.edu.

