Visualization plays an important role in transportation planning. It communicates plans and policies that impact transport users. With increasing urbanization trends, cities are fast becoming large transit-oriented places. Transportation planning is a multi-disciplinary trade-off of space with other transport modes. Visualizations are often used in early stages to depict the idea to various audiences, and in later stages to contribute to public engagement. Major decisions are often based on visualizations, especially when new or important infrastructure is put in place or on people’s behavior and quality of life. Therefore, real-world models thatinka believable environment allow a deeper understanding of the scenarios and allow testing of new policies and regulations in a controlled setting. Therefore, a virtual environment allows new applications for research, for example to study the perception and measure her/his interaction with the vehicle and the road.

Recently, a few research groups also developed cycling simulators. These simulators are very popular in research studies, in the planning process and in public engagement. What are the potential use cases of Virtual Reality in transportation research and planning? What is the added value of VR and how does it impact the added value of VR and identify the relevant factors related to the perception and interaction value of VR, as we proposed with the Bicycle Simulator on World Park(ing) Day, September 16, 2016.

We generated 200 choice renderings of street design scenarios with the camera positioned at the eye-level of a cyclist, which we will use in a visual-stimulus survey to study how differences between two renderings are valued by participants. Depending on the outcome, we will refine the experimental design and conduct a VR-based interactive serious game. In this way, we will contribute to the understanding of built environment influences on cycling and pedestrian behavior. As an immersive virtual environment becomes a more searchable methodology, the potential applications are fast expanding beyond traditional gaming industries. Transportation planning, as we have illustrated, is one such domain. While the use of immersive environments is not a new concept, the application of VR and related technologies have the potential to revolutionize the way we understand the added value of VR and identify the relevant factors related to the perception and interaction value of VR, as we proposed with the Bicycle Simulator on World Park(ing) Day, September 16, 2016.

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In any field of application, it will be important to clearly demonstrate how VR applications can add existing methodological gaps or lead to more functional and efficient study designs. To be able to do so, careful attention needs to be given to the design process, which should include the added value of VR and identify the relevant factors related to the perception and interaction value of VR, as we proposed with the Bicycle Simulator on World Park(ing) Day, September 16, 2016.

We also see much potential for the use of VR in research beyond the presented case studies. For example, VR-based interactive serious games can provide feedback on the trade-offs faced in the planning process and help to better understand the decision-making process. We also believe that VR has the potential to revolutionize the way we understand the added value of VR and identify the relevant factors related to the perception and interaction value of VR, as we proposed with the Bicycle Simulator on World Park(ing) Day, September 16, 2016.

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