Bring Down the Berlin Wall Using Augmented Reality in Minecraft Earth

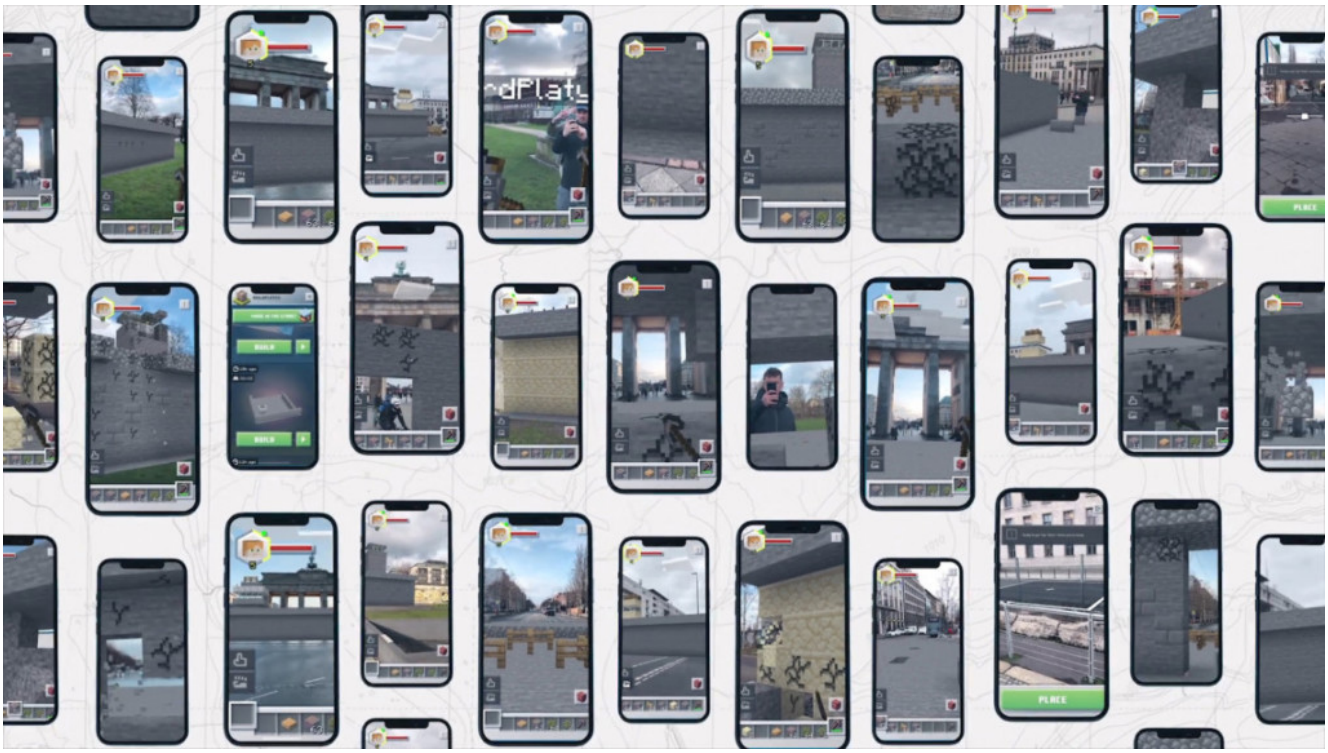
A Berlin museum focused on life in former East Germany is transporting virtual visitors back to a pivotal moment in history through the power of augmented reality and the popular open-world game Minecraft.

The DDR Museum teamed with Vice-owned creative agency Virtue on an educational campaign that allows anyone to build and tear down full-scale segments of the Berlin Wall through Minecraft Earth, an AR app that superimposes the Microsoft-owned game's blocky graphics onto a user's surroundings through their phone camera.

The free set of building blocks consists of three of the wall's most iconic stretches—the Brandenburg Gate, Mauer Park and Checkpoint Charlie—as well as lesson plans that put the interactive elements in their historical context. The creators behind the campaign claim it's the first-ever educational course to include an element inside Minecraft Earth, which is popular with kids of all ages.

"By using a beloved gaming platform, we brought an overlooked piece of history to the attention of a new generation by using AR applications and interactive elements," Emil Asmussen, creative director at Virtue, said in a statement. "Additionally, by expanding the gaming experience into a fully fledged teaching module, we fostered curiosity and critical reflection on the role of border walls in our own times."





The team spent upwards of 300 hours in the game collecting the materials to create a historically accurate rendering of each of the structures, which can be shared through a social feature in the app called Buildplates. The finished products can appear any size from true to life to small enough to fit on a table top depending on the surface on which they are projected.

The campaign was inspired by the fact that 29% of Germans were born after the 1989 fall of the Iron Curtain, the boundary that demarcated the Soviet Eastern bloc from the rest of Europe from World War II until the end of the Cold War, and may have hard time grasping the significance of the moment.

“This is the first time we’re actually able to let people from all over the world tear down the wall,” said Gordon Freiherr von Godin, director at the DDR Museum. “Being an active participant, instead of a spectator, makes a big difference with younger visitors and really catches their attention in a different way.”

[embedded content]
AR has seen a surge in popularity among brands and other organizations looking to stay engaged virtually with their customers during the pandemic. Other agencies have also begun to experiment with Minecraft as an instructional tool: In April, AKQA built a pandemic simulator in the game to teach players about how social distancing measures can help prevent the spread of Covid-19.

While the integration with Minecraft Earth is new, the original Minecraft game has been used for educational purposes before such as recreating the Buddhas of Bamiyan, two monumental statues that stood for thousands of years in Afghanistan before being destroyed by the Taliban in 2001.

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