GAMES CULTURES

Activity 1: *Green Game Jam*

University students, B.A. and M.A. levels

★★☆ Intermediate

1,5 - 2 hours

10-20 participants, divided into 3-4 teams

Foundational knowledge in the field of environmental humanities and game jam cultures

Sources assigned for reading before the session

CONTEXT

Game jams are increasingly becoming not just spaces for practising technical and practical skills, but also environments that foster innovative ideas and reflect on pressing societal issues. One of the core attributes that make game jams such powerful tools for learning and creativity is that they offer clear creative constraints (for example, the theme), providing a structure that empowers the creative process. Organising a game jam can also be a creative and learning experience, as the organiser must consider what constraints to set for their intended participant experience. As such, it can be a useful experience for students to try on the role of a game jam organiser themselves.

This activity is inspired by the experience of organising environmentally themed game jams. It prepares students to critically engage with ecological topics, and reflect on their integration into games and game creation events.

Examples of environmental game jams that inspired this activity:
https://itch.io/jam/spring-game-jam-matfyz-2024 (Greening Games)
https://nasg.tlu.ee/nasg-un-jam-2024-main/

TASK

This activity involves generating

SUMMARY

This activity simulates early stages of organising a game jam dedicated to environmental issues. Students have to come up with a game jam format, theme and, following the Global Game jam formula, with a set of relevant diversifiers. In this way, they develop a deeper understanding of how environmental issues can be integrated into game design and game creation events. At the same time, the students are encouraged to be reflective towards the unsustainability of the traditional 48-hour game jam timeline.

PREPARATION

If students have no previous experience with game jam cultures, they should familiarise themselves with recommended resources. It is a good idea to provide paper and/or whiteboards (or digital equivalents) for teams to map their ideas.

Assigned reading:

Kultima, A. 2015. "Defining Game Jam". Proceedings of the 10th International Conference on the Foundations of Digital Games. June 22-25, 2015, Pacific Grove, CA, USA.
https://globalgamejam.org

LEARNING OUTCOMES

- Students will develop a basic understanding of game jam culture,
- Students will collaboratively showcase a game jam concept,
- Students will learn how game cultures can intersect with activism.

Step 1 *Introduction (15 minutes + 30 minutes joint brainstorming in groups)*

Instruct students regarding the task ahead. One possibility is to play students from the previous year's Global Game Jam theme announcement video.

In groups, students come up with their proposals for the theme and format of the game jam. The theme shouldn't be longer than a sentence but it can also be an image, a sound or some different concise message.

Optionally, they can also discuss format options which we can group in following categories:
a) temporal modes of game jams cited in resources (e.g. 48h, week or a month), or it can be a new, innovative formula (e.g. like the 0h gam jam that in fact takes 1 h during the time change from winter to spring time).
b) location and setting, e.g. train, forest, tandem bike,
c) type of interaction, e.g. solo, 4 ppl groups,
d) output, digital game, card game, board game, concept, any of the above.

Step 2 *Theme and format discussion (30 minutes)*

Students share their proposals in the form of an elevator pitch or slide deck. Optionally, they could select one main theme on which they continue to work together, for example by voting.

Next they brainstorm diversifiers for the group themes or selected main theme.

Step 3 *Brainstorming the diversifiers in teams (30 minutes)*

The following questions should help students conceptualise potential diversifiers:

- Is it a game for one player or multiple players? If it's a multiplayer game, do the players cooperate, compete against each other, or both?

- What does the player do in the game? What verbs describe their basic actions? Does the game keep track of any numbers related to these actions? (E.g., score, amount of gold, health points, etc.)

- What is the player's goal in the game? What do they need to do in order to win? What are the ways in which they can lose?

- Does the game contain a story? What is it about? How does the story align with the player's actions and goals in the game?

- What local environmental issue does the game address? What broader environmental problem does the local issue relate to? (E.g., deforestation, light pollution, loss of biodiversity, etc.)

- How is the issue represented in the game?

- What impact does the game seek to have on the player? Is it to raise awareness about a little-known issue, or to encourage players to take specific action, or to change their everyday behaviour, etc.?

Step 4 *Discussing the final game jam concept (15 - 30 minutes)*

Students present their game jam ideas in the form of an elevator pitch or slide deck. Next, they discuss their proposal, for which section we suggest following questions:

- How does the game jam engage with climate action?

- How does the game raise awareness of climate action?

- How does the game jam support environmental and biospheric values?

Credits & Acknowledgements