



GAMES CONTENT

Activity 2: Adding Green Mechanics



Game Development students, B.A. or M.A. level



Intermediate



1 - 2,5 hours (depending on group size)



6-25 participants



Basic understanding of theming vs. gameplay mechanics, foundational knowledge of game design and development scope



A timer for activities

SUMMARY

An interactive workshop where students work to add sustainability messages to existing games by changing or adding new gameplay mechanics.

TASK

Students will take existing games and create new ideas about how real-life sustainability actions could be added to them, and consider the implications for the game's development scope.

PREPARATION

A timer for activities. No further equipment necessary, but it is highly recommended to have a shared screen (e.g. a projector connected to a computer), list making software (e.g. Microsoft Word or Excel) and for students to have access to computers for research and/or note-taking materials.

LEARNING OUTCOMES

Improved appreciation of the opportunities and complexity of including environmentally-aware mechanics in a larger game.

Step 1 Introduce/remind students of theming vs. systemic (5 minutes)

Let students know they will be working with the idea of sustainability theming in games.

Remind them of the distinction between theming and systemic sustainability content:

- 'Theming' – where the aesthetics of the game (visual, narrative, etc.) have environmental/sustainability themes
- 'Systemic' – where a game's core systems operate in ways that relate to sustainability actions
- Typically these either show good practises or act as a warning (utopian v.s dystopian)

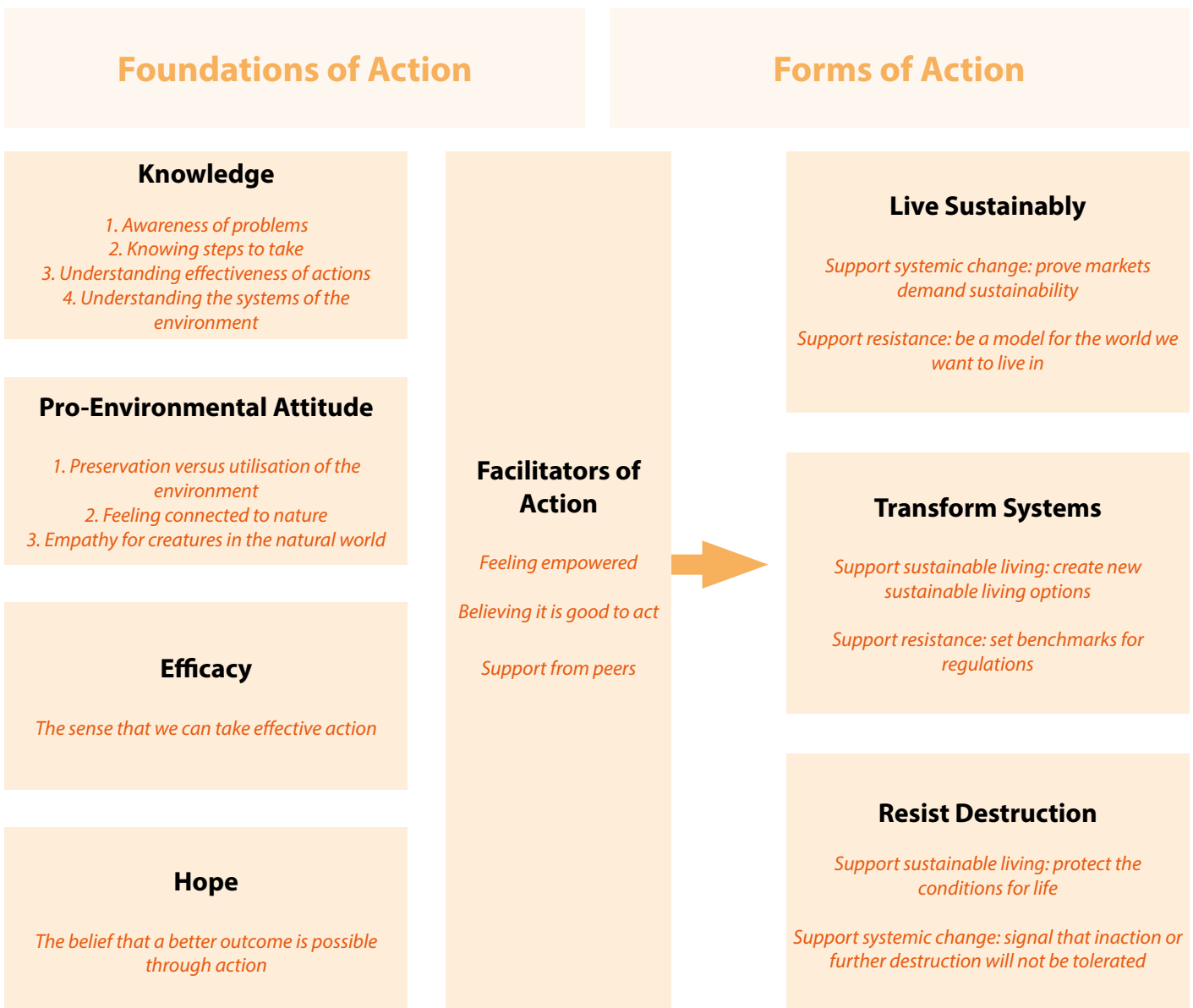
(See Greening Games teaching materials downloads for more information.)

		Pro-environmental themes	
		✓	✗
Pro-environmental systems	✓	Both themes and systems connect with pro-environmental messages	No thematic link Pro-environmental systems are present
	✗	Pro-environmental themes No systemic connection to pro-environmental messages	No significant environmental messaging

Remind/explain that gameplay systems are likely to represent forms of action, i.e. living sustainably, the transformation of unsustainable systems to green(er) alternatives, and resistance actions (e.g. defence of nature or protest).

See 'forms of action' in the diagram below.

Forms of pro-environmental messaging suitable for video games



Step 2 *Ask students to pick a game with minimal sustainability features, and suggest 3 ways to add or improve environmental systems (10 minutes)*

Encourage students to explore multiple options for the game they choose to work with, not just pick the first game that comes to mind.

Tip: put a timer on a screen with a 10 minute countdown.

Students should work alone for this section of the exercise.

Remind them to take note of their 3-or-more options for changes to the gameplay systems, otherwise they will likely forget them during later conversational steps.

This should be done individually. A little quiet conversation will likely occur closer to the time limit and can be used as an indicator of readiness to progress.

If they need further inspiration:

- Remind students they are aiming to change or add gameplay systems, not only the aesthetics.
- They can create positive or negative gameplay actions, e.g. adding a planting mechanic might be positive, or they could change the outcome of an existing mechanic by giving it negative gameplay consequences e.g. hunting a vital creature to extinction.
- Remind them both adding or changing mechanics is possible in this exercise.

Outcome from this step: each student has picked one game, and has a minimum of three options to change it.

Step 3 *As a class, go around the room and collect the names of the games chosen (max. 5 minutes)*

Only get the names – don't ask for the systemic changes yet. There will likely be some fun or thought-provoking choices already, which helps maintain energy levels.

Step 4 *Presenting the game and system (gameplay mechanic) in groups of two to three students (10-20 minutes)*

Using the notes they've made, students get between 5-8 minutes to talk about their game and their choices. Ask them to collectively and quickly agree their favourite systemic change-option per game.

Step 5 *Ask students to pick the favourite of each group that will be presented to the class (max. 5 minutes)*

Tell students they will need to give a very quick explanation of the game for people unfamiliar with it (genre, basic gameplay, typical target audience), and then a clear description of the proposed change in the system.

Break *Drink, exercise, snack (10 minutes)*

Step 6 *Every group presents their game and systemic adjustments in strictly 5 minutes (30-60 minutes)*

Students present the game and the one systemic change to add explicit environmental systems to the game.

Use a timer (on a phone is fine, just turn the sound on, or on a screen). This is usually quite fun!

If you have many groups, limit it to 4 minutes.

Keep a track of the changes on a whiteboard or spreadsheet visible to the students – you can track game name, genre, and type of change (positive/negative actions, sustainable living/social system change/resistance/other) to see if trends appear.

Step 7 *Closing reflections (5-20 minutes)*

Encourage the students to pick their favourite suggestions:

- Which was the most entertaining?
- Which would be most impactful?
- What criteria are they applying to judge 'impact', and what does this say about their own priorities?
- Which would be the easiest to implement?
- Would it change the game's target audience?

Ask if they would include similar mechanics if they were/are working on a game – why would or wouldn't they do this?

Identify any themes in the changes the students suggested, e.g. were they mostly positive or negative?

Final thought: do they think they feel more inspired about the range of options available to include environmentally aware systems in games?

Credits & Acknowledgements

The creation of these resources has been (partially) funded by the ERASMUS+ grant program of the European Union under grant no. 2021-1-DE01-KA220-HED-000029501. Neither the European Commission nor the project's national funding agency DAAD are responsible for the content or liable for any losses or damage resulting of the use of these resources.

The project "Greening Games. Building Higher Education Resources for Sustainable Video Game Production, Design & Critical Game Studies" (2021-2024) supports educators in addressing the interdisciplinary nature of green digital gaming.

More information may be found at: <https://greeningames.eu>.

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Co-funded by
the European Union