



GAMES CULTURES

Activity 2: Local Action Game Concept



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



Intermediate



2 hours



10-20 students, divided into 3-4 teams



Foundational knowledge of environmental humanities and game culture studies.



Sources assigned for reading before the session

CONTEXT

There is a growing need to support local climate action and policies, if we want to reach the Paris Climate Agreement goals. In Europe, cities and municipalities are in fact leading the local climate action implementation and for that reason rising awareness in that area is of utter importance. Supporting local activism students engage with actionable climate goals..

This activity is inspired by the discussion during the *Green Games: (Un)Sustainability of Digital Play* panel at the 14th DiGRA conference in Kraków that took place on July 8th, 2022. The panel was organised by the members of the Greening Games team together with our collaborators from the Nordic Alliance for Sustainability in Games.

SUMMARY

This activity simulates early stages of a game jam when the team is brainstorming ideas for the prototype to be developed. The students choose a real climate action that is of a local concern in the area where the educational institution is based. During the activity they come up with ideas for a game that will raise awareness about the selected problem affecting their community. In order to streamline the activity, we recommend for the game concepts to be rooted in the tactics presented in the IGDA Environmental Game Design Playbook.

PREPARATION

Prior to this session, arrange with the students to choose the local environmental issue to be addressed. Alternatively, the lecturer can choose the topical action for them.

If possible it might be beneficial to contact a representative of a local ecological group to discuss what challenges they are facing at the moment and what is the most urgent action in the physical proximity of the educational institution. While the exercise is theoretical in nature, it could potentially raise awareness of an actual climate action - if only among participating students.

Additionally, the students can be introduced to different levels of environmental action, from multilateralism and international policy shaping (UN SDG goals, European Environment Agency), to the national adaptation policies (ministerial and municipal strategies) and local non-governmental and grassroots actions (e.g. local chapters of Extinction Rebellion). The Sustainability focused lectured deck, as well as Raessens (2018), are viable homework reading.

Assigned readings:

Raessens, J. (2018). *Ecogames: Playing to save the planet*. In *Cultural Sustainability* (pp. 232-246). Routledge.

<https://sdgs.un.org/goals>

<https://climate-adapt.eea.europa.eu/en/countries-regions/countries>

<https://rebellion.global/>

LEARNING OUTCOMES

- Students will develop the ability to connect game ideas with local topics,
- Students will collaboratively showcase a game idea that conveys a an ecological message,
- Students will be introduced to different levels of environmental action.



Step 1 *Introduction to the local environmental problem (15 minutes presentation + 15 minutes discussion)*

The students are introduced to the selected local environmental issue. It might be valuable to follow up with a discussion on previous attempts to raise awareness, raise funds or otherwise save the issue.

Example 1 *Gamified approach to the invasive species in the Helsinki metropolitan area*

Helsinki and Espoo - among 30 other municipalities across Finland and Sweden - are using Crowdsorsa, a mobile game designed in Tampere, to engage their citizens with an important environmental issue,

The campaign is aimed at combating garden lupines (purple flowers in the picture) which are a problematic Invasive Alien Species (IAS) in Finland, and as such it helps fulfil national targets related to the Sustainable Development Goal 15.8 (IAS prevention),

Participants use Crowdsorsa to film hot spots of garden lupines - before and after the removal - and mark their activity on a map; for this volunteer work they can be rewarded up to 25 cents per square metre of space controlled,

This is already the second year in a row that the residents of Helsinki and Espoo are using the game to fight against invasive species and I am looking forward to see accumulated data on the long-term effectiveness of such method of protecting local biodiversity.

Example 2 *Walden, a game*

“Walden, a game is an exploratory narrative and open world simulation of the life of American philosopher Henry David Thoreau during his experiment in self-reliant living at Walden Pond. The game begins in the summer of 1845 when Thoreau moved to the Pond and built his cabin there.”

<https://www.waldengame.com>

The game recreates the real historical ecosystem of the Walden Pond (Concord, Massachusetts), and uses it as a point of departure for a deeper reflection on the relationship humans have with nature.

Example 3 *End of the World Begins in Kurtna*

<https://papers.academic-conferences.org/index.php/ecgbl/article/view/511/711>

Step 2 Team Formation and brainstorming (45 minutes)

Students form small teams and generate game concepts using the **IGDA Environmental Game Design Playbook**. We recommend to especially focus on: real-world tactics and locality tactics.

The following questions should help students conceptualise the game idea:

- 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 3 *Presentation and Discussion (30-45 minutes)*

Students present their game concepts in a form of an elevator pitch. Later they discuss their proposal, we suggest following questions:

- How does the game engage with the local climate action?
- How does the game represent the local ecosystem?
- How does the game raise awareness for the local climate action?
- How does the game support environmental values?

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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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