

# WORKSHOP: AN EXPERIMENT OF REFLECTION ON DESIGN GAME QUALITIES AND CONTROVERSIES

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## ABSTRACT

How do various design games format and stage different collaborative inquiry, learning and reflection? At this hands-on workshop, we will collaboratively explore, relate and meta-reflect upon how different design (and learning) games can form part of experimental, co-design (research) processes and practice. Some shared playing of mainly analogue games brought by the workshop organizers and participants will provide the basis for engaging in a game-inspired experiment of collaboratively relating and reflecting upon qualities and controversies of different design games. This reflection experiment will be shaped around predefined and emerging topics.

## INTRODUCTION

Games have been played and researched for long (e.g. Caillois 1961, Zimmerman & Salen 2004). ‘Serious games’ and ‘learning games’ are increasingly used in work contexts among various stakeholders (e.g. Susi et al. 2007, Salen 2008), and ‘design games’ have been an integral part of participatory design for various purposes for more than thirty years (e.g. Ehn 1988). Design games have been and still are used as a valuable, playful and/or critical way to work, which opens up the design process for stakeholders outside the traditional design team. Thus design games are a particular genre of

formatting design dialogues among various stakeholders (Brandt et al. 2008). In general the definition of games varies and are often context specific (Zimmermann & Salen 2004). Most descriptions of design games used as part of co-design (research) processes and practices, however, seldom include competing with the other players. Design games are about staging participation through rules and tangible game pieces that guide the design moves (Brandt 2006). According to Vaajakallio (2012) design games for co-design have three main qualities in common. ‘First they create a common design language, second they promote a creative and explorative attitude, and third the games facilitate the players in envisioning and enacting what could be’ (Vaajakallio 2012, p. 100). Further, some advocate for designing and using generic design games (e.g. Habraken et.al. 1987) while others argue for the importance of contextualising part of the game materials (e.g. Vaajakallio 2012, Brandt 2011). This relates to Eriksen’s work (2012) on *material matters in co-designing*, in which she suggests to view some participating materials in a co-design situation as having the role of ‘formats of collaboration’ others as ‘content material’. Yet, generally, design games can be used to highlight the exploratory, imaginative, dialogical and sometimes also the empathic aspects of co-design.

## REFLECTING ON DESIGN GAMES

The purpose of this workshop is collaboratively to explore, relate and reflect upon how different kinds of design and learning games can form part of experimental, co-design (research) processes and practice. As an experiment the participants will reflect upon various topics related to design games while playing different games. The aim is to be more knowledgeable about the qualities of various games as well as the controversies that are sought for or (intentionally) hidden for different reasons. The reflection experiment will be shaped around both topics

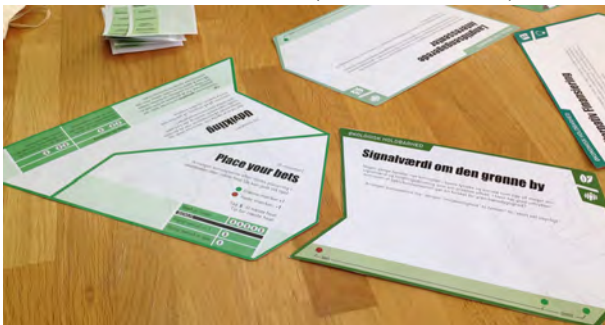
predefined by the workshop organisers and emerging topics defined by the participants on the day.

## REFLECTIVE TOPICS

Based on previous experiences and research by the organizers, predefined topics to be addresses are for instance: How do design games relate to other kind of co-design approaches? What are the game mechanics and qualities of games when exploring possible futures? What controversies and ecologies are favoured by various games? What are the controversies or ecologies that should have more attention when designing future games? What are gained/lost by designing and playing generic games versus contextualised games for specific purposes? How can we get a better understanding of the qualities of various game formats, rules of the game and game materials? How can game players take (more) ownership to both designing games and using the results after game playing? What are the qualities of excellent 'game facilitation'? How can these qualities be taught to students or other people?

## THREE OF THE GAMES TO BE PLAYED

### GRÖNTSPEL/ GREENGAME (WORKING TITLE)



This analogue 'learning' game is about challenging, relating and developing different ideas/concepts intended to support a more sustainable development in a specific area of a city. What the game does is stage a dialogue of challenging these ideas/concepts with different social, ecological and economically sustainable questions /'issues'. With its triangular shape, the game is modular, and a part of playing is to negotiate and choose for example which 'issues' to focus on. The game includes various 'game mechanics' such as a time glass, personal tokens to bet/argue with, a score-card, etc.

The game is being developed within the Interreg 'Urban Transition' project (2011-2014) and 'GröntSpel' sub-project together with a game design company and various public employees from Danish and Swedish municipalities. A final prototype will be available at the workshop.

### EXPLORING CONTINENTS OF CO-DEVELOPMENT

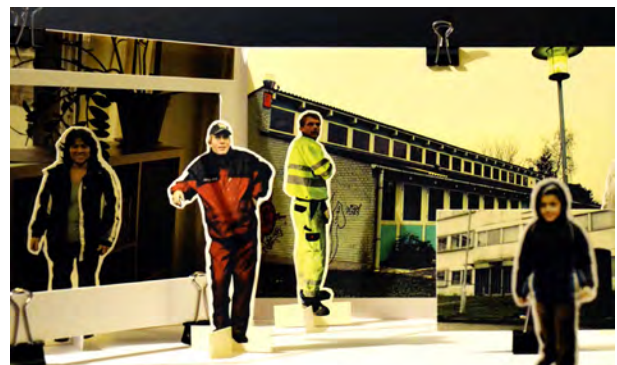
This design or 'learning' game is about creating common understanding in an organisation to build more collaborative and user / stakeholder oriented service development projects and processes.



The game board is inspired by an Atlas world map but with 'continents of co-development' that players explore and reflect according to sets of playing cards and game pieces. The game is still under development and at the workshop, players will also engage in the second round of iteration of game design. The experiences from the workshop will be utilised in the further game design.

The game is developed in 'Atlas: a map for future service co-development' -project (2012-2014) that is collaboration between three research groups from Aalto University in Finland. The project aims at analysing, testing and co-developing a map of collaborative methods for service development, design, and innovation.

### REFRAMING WASTE



Reframing Waste is an example of a design game that facilitates participation and dialogue about how to promote better waste sorting in apartment buildings. The game materials in Reframing Waste are based on a research project on recycling and waste handling. The project is presented as part of a design anthropological innovation model in 'Rehearsing the Future' (2010). Parts of the game materials point to future possibilities. In a playful way Reframing Waste opens up for co-analysis of existing practices, and in the end of the game the players will have produced representations of one or more future visions.

## PROGRAMME OF THE DAY

The workshop will be full-day and divided into two main parts. The *morning* will primarily be devoted to exploring and reflecting on design games and learning games through playing them. The workshop participants will be divided into groups of 4-6 people. Each group

will play (part of) two games provided by the organisers. Game reflections are evoked for example through reflection cards that are to be drawn and reflected upon in parallel with the game playing. The morning session will end with sharing reflections in plenum, documenting and clustering topics.

In the *afternoon* new groups will be formed based on the interests of the participants. Possibly inspired by the reflective topics listed above, each group will start with formulating questions to be addressed. These questions guide reflections on game playing in the afternoon session. Participants are encouraged to bring games that can be played in the afternoon (see preparations below). Also during the afternoon, intertwined with playing, various co-designed game mechanics will guide reflections. The afternoon session will end with a discussion in plenum including further use of the workshop insights. The meta-reflections on design games are staged as a hands-on experiment of both individual and collaborative reflection.

Except for an initial workshop introduction, the workshop will not include standard paper presentations but consist of hands-on game playing and reflections.

## INTENDED PARTICIPANTS

Intended participants are: (co-) design researchers, other researchers studying people and their relations while playing (serious) games, design/learning game developers, others with practical experiences of staging collaboration and involvement e.g. with games and others curious about the topic. We aim for a mixed group of people representing several game approaches, all in order to facilitate multidisciplinary debate.

## PREPARATION AND SIGN-UP BY PARTICIPANTS

There are three different ways to prepare and sign up for the workshop. If you want to bring a game to be played you need to submit a 2-page paper presenting the game in both text and images including an example of how it has been used. Include also practicalities of playing (time, number of people, preparations, etc.), why you want the game to be played and which topics you find most relevant to explore during the workshop. As time is short we cannot promise that the games will be played in their full length. Adjustments may be needed. The workshop organisers may need to limit the amount of games that are actually played at the workshop; however, in this case, all the games will be introduced briefly.

If you have experiences with designing and/or playing design games, but do not want to bring a game, we will encourage you to submit a 1-2 page paper presenting previous experiences and reflections on these, thus also revealing what you would find most important to reflect upon during the workshop. Relating to one or more of the reflective topics above is suggested.

The last possibility is to attend the workshop without prior submission, but pre-signup is needed.

Deadline for paper-submissions and signing up without paper: May 21<sup>st</sup>. Send email to: Mette Agger Eriksen; [mette.agger@mah.se](mailto:mette.agger@mah.se). Date of notification: June 1<sup>st</sup>.. Accepted papers will be shared after notification.

Number of participants: 10-20 persons. If there is a need to limit the number of participants, those with prior submissions will be prioritized. Another criteria is to become a multidisciplinary group of people.

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