

Troubled Lands: A Sustainability Game

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<http://www.workingexamples.org/example/show/696>

(Note there are 28 slides in the full presentation)

Troubled Lands is an open source, 30-minute educational game about sustainability for ages 13 to Adult. It is a simple to learn yet morally provocative social dilemma game that requires players to address competing motivations of self-preservation and group loyalty as players need to apply moral reasoning to address inequalities and conflicts of interests. Many sustainability themes including communal negotiation, governance, inequality, power, and the tragedy of the commons are present in the game.

www.troubledlands.com

Seed

Tell us about your idea or project. What's your vision?

This project aims to develop a sustainability game in which players are likely to engage in moral debate as a result of inequality and conflicts of interests among the players.

What problem are you trying to solve and why does it matter?

Our design problem - How can we make a game that captures:

1. the emotional pull between personal need and desire to help others;
2. inequality;
3. how in real life some, all, or none could fail or succeed;
4. the way real people have goals they must meet that are independent from other players' goals;
5. how real people and nations share common pool resources;
6. how no one knows for certain exactly how much the environment may be pushed before collapse.

This problem matters because from ecological-political debates to local conflicts, life is filled with cooperative situations—situations that are not fully collaborative nor competitive—in which people must negotiate competing interests and apply moral reasoning to address interpersonal conflicts and issues like sustainability, personal security, and inequality.

What are your goals and how will you know if you've achieved them?

Our product aims to bring out moral discussion by capturing the experience of competing motivations. If you have ever wanted to help someone, e.g. wanted to take the time to help a friend but felt the need to attend to your own work, you know this experience of conflicting motivations. This is not only experienced by everyday people, it is also experience by politicians who must decide between personal/local and group interests.

We want to leave players feeling that tension, and to force them to make tough choices as they balance the drive to help others with the drive to promote their own interests. Therefore, a success indicator for this project is that players should find it difficult to decide how to treat one another.

How can our community support you? (e.g. expertise, resources, feedback, etc.)

If this problem interests you, contact tom.fennewald@gmail.com, and get a copy of the game or share it with teachers who can use this in their classrooms or in your research. The game is free.

Sprout

Tell us about your process and how your idea is evolving throughout the project.

The game started off under the name *The Farmers*. This project has undergone at least 20 versions with multiple social dilemma game and collective action game offshoots and prototypes. The farming theme has stuck but the rules are refined.

What are some of your initial concepts or designs? We'd love to see them.

Figures of two of the previous versions are in the presentation above.

Have your initial concepts/designs changed? Why have they changed? Show us how they're being refined and iterated.

Several minor elements of the game have been simplified to reduce confusion during play. But the core of the game remains intact. Specifically, some people got confused with the finer points and we have simplified things down.

Instead of rotating order on who goes first now it's a fixed order; the original rules had simultaneous play, but there is no more making simultaneous choices face down - now its just taking turns sequentially (that's what people did in practice); players didn't know if they could take the same action several times because actions were printed on cards - now they don't have cards but a permanent chart of choices; a free point option didn't forcing players to make tough choices, so now no more free point option. Also 12 rounds was enough for players to get the concepts, so now it's 12 rounds instead of 15, people got mixed up on a rule that stated 2 people need to work to fix

the land so now one person can repair the land. The game still yields the same learning goals and basic player experience but 75% of the FAQs and stumbling points are eliminated.

How might your project scale to provide greater impact?

We are developing support materials for secondary and university level classrooms in collaboration with teachers and professors. We are also planning to translate into French, Spanish, Chinese and other languages.

Bloom

Tell us about some of your successes. What can the WEx community learn from them?

Working on the paper prototype and publishing on the work even while in development has helped push the project forward.

So what's next? How are you making sure your work reaches people and is adopted?

We are in the process of developing an online game and publishing more about the project - please contact us for details.

Progress

Game Available for Free

Tom Fennewald

Oct 25, 2014

Downloadable print and play game available. Email tom.fennewald@gmail.com for materials.