

Spark report

Games as a method for transformative collaborations

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INTERDISCIPLINARY EXCHANGE

Caption: A challenge in unusual collaborations is navigating different perspectives. Unexpected entanglements can be seen as trouble or as opportunities to create new kinds of unusual and exciting interdisciplinary work.

Introduction

A critical challenge for fostering societal transformation is to explore and navigate different worldviews. Games—in particular, multiplayer role-playing games—can open up spaces where participants can actively express and represent how they experience the world, their challenges, and their passions. By stepping into active designer roles and changing the ‘mechanics’ that produce different possible roles, rules, narratives, and worlds, people can expand their collective imagination and agency. However, games are often pre-designed for limited contexts. Can we create something which crosses disciplines, and brings them together?

What did we do in our Spark project?

In our Spark project, we brought together an interdisciplinary team of nine researchers—working at the intersection of technical, social, political, (bio)medical, and humanistic fields—to explore designing a library of game mechanics to support diverse

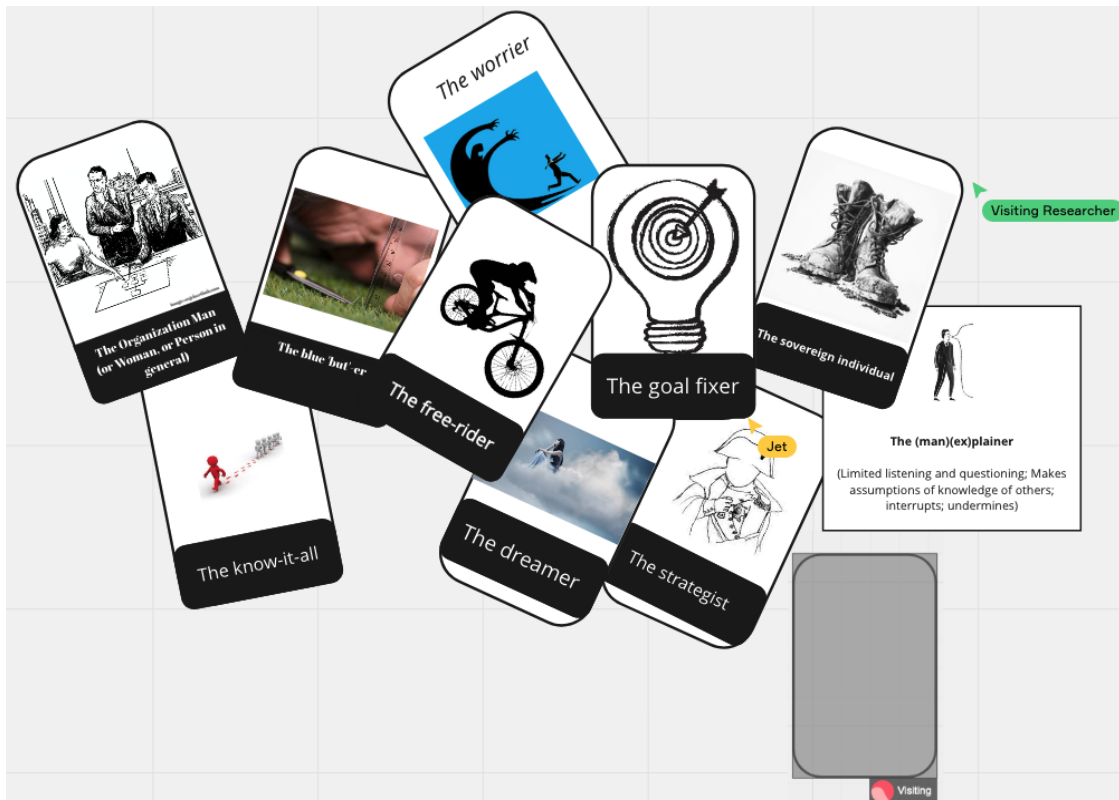
teams to co-design their own gamified approach to navigating emerging tensions and creating novel collaborations for societal transformation.

Each member of the team conducted a focus group related to gaming within their individual networks. Insights from these fed into the organization of a two-day workshop in November 2021, in a hybrid format, with some project members together physically and some online, but all working together online via a Miro board.

The workshop started with everyone sharing games that they found had changed their perspective, or allowed them to explore different worldviews (image 1). Our graphic facilitator, [Elvia Vasconcelos](#), captured moments of the process, to document and form a narrative of our methods and experiences, and we use some of these images here, along with screenshots, to illustrate some highlights of the sessions.

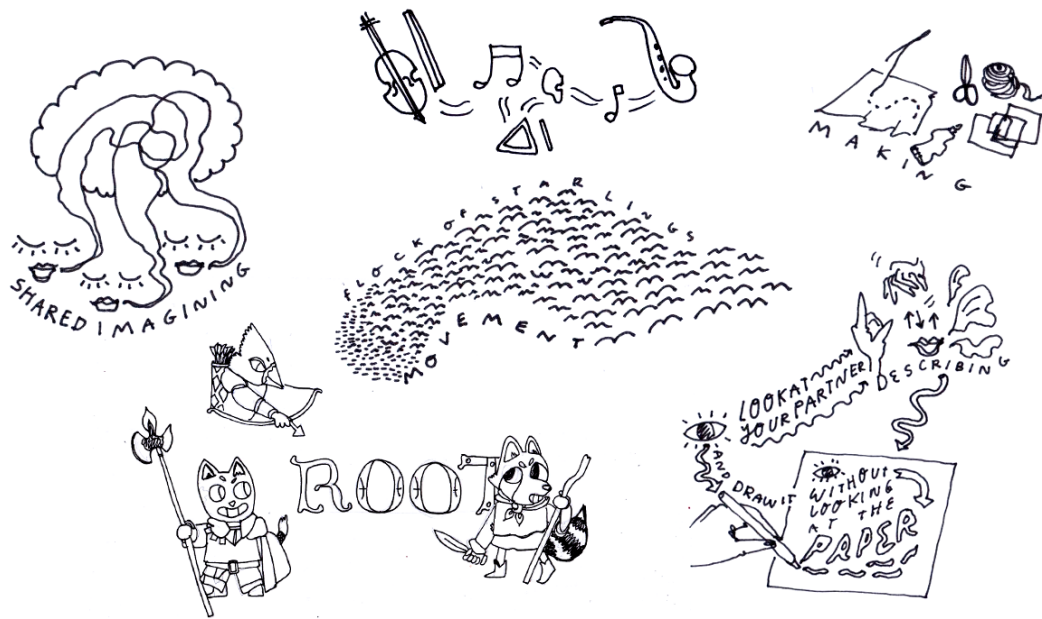


1: The workshop started with everyone sharing games that they found had changed their perspective, or allowed them to explore different worldviews.



2: To understand each other's worldviews and perspectives, we created cards to express roles we found we had struggled with in interdisciplinary and group work, and 'inhabited' them to communicate our values, assumptions and struggles.

Together we identified important ways in which game play can enable shifts in perspectives to open up collaborations and created a preliminary list of games that contribute to various aspects of project development. Elvia beautifully captured this in a graphic illustration, highlighting how we came up with different types of games that support collaboration and project development (image 3).



3: Graphic illustration of how we came up with different types of games that support collaboration and project development.

As the collaboration was online, we used a Miro board to capture our ideas, worldviews and goals. In fact, the Miro board functioned as a kind of game board—or at least a canvas—in itself, allowing us to share ideas and possible priorities and needs, and find the connections between our backgrounds, projects, activities and worldviews.

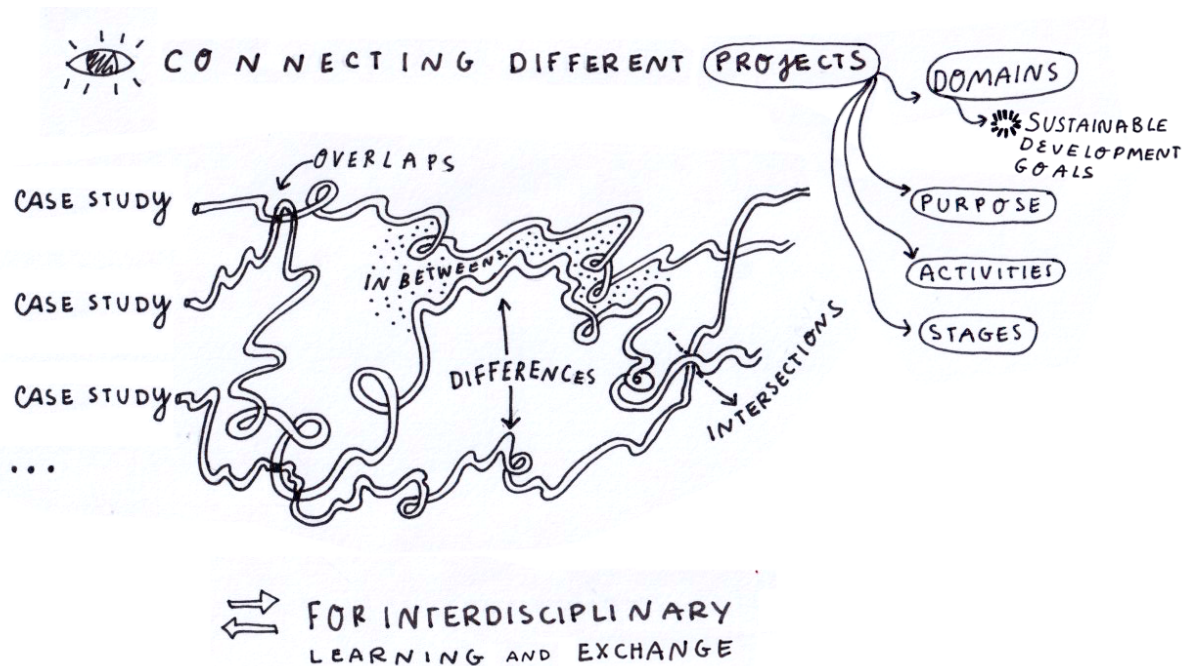


4: A snapshot of a section on our Miro board where we captured different purposes for games that can support interdisciplinary teams based on the input we collected in our focus groups.

What will we do in the future? What did we learn?

We then used these insights to develop a full UCo proposal to engage diverse groups, including new CUCo teams and societal stakeholders. This project, [Playing With The Trouble](#), began in March 2022.

Here, building on the Spark project, our objective is to co-create a toolbox of modular mini-games to support more effective inter and transdisciplinary research—for proposal writing, in on-going projects, and in education. With these mini-games we aim to support ambitious, transformative interdisciplinary teams that seek to take on society’s grand challenges, though the use and application of the mini-games can be widely extended.



5: Connecting projects across modular mini games: we found opportunities for moments for exchange between ongoing projects in very different settings (disciplinary, transdisciplinary, education, etc).

One further reflection: finally, while we had hoped to have an in person workshop for our Spark project, we also realized that the necessity of an online format for the workshop allowed us in some way to mirror collaborations between groups in different places. As such, it provided a useful simulation of the circumstances encountered during collaborations between different disciplines.