Policy Insight Briefing

GREAT

Executive Summary

This policy brief, the inaugural edition from the GREAT project, introduces initial insights from two innovative approaches aimed at leveraging games to promote social engagement and facilitate dialogue between citizens and policymakers. The GREAT project, in collaboration with global and national stakeholders like the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), Urban Gorillas Cyprus, or the Austrian Klimafonds is conducting a series of case studies focused on climate change.

Introduction

The GREAT (Games Realising Effective & Affective Transformation) Project explores the potential of games to foster social engagement and enhance dialogue between citizens and policymakers. A programme of practical case studies is underway, fostering citizen engagement and in the democratic process, with a focus on climate change policy priorities. Games culture is ubiquitous, and games are now this preeminent entertainment media globally, but their potential for interaction between citizens and policymakers has not yet been explored. The GREAT case studies leverage innovative engagement strategies to investigate how games-based activities can enable citizens to express their views on social and policy dilemmas. This initiative is supported by UK Research and Innovation and the EU's Horizon Europe program.

Methods

GREAT deploys technologies and methodologies that create new communication channels between citizens and policymakers, generating actionable insights for policy makers while respecting ethics and data privacy. This is achieved through co-designed, scalable interventions tested in real-world conditions, engaging audiences that can be difficult to reach using more established methodologies. Two principal approaches are investigated:

- Firstly, dilemma-based serious games are used to generate in-depth qualitative insights from a relatively small, moderated group of participants.
- Secondly, questions for players are embedded in high profile games, enabling quantitative data to be obtained from very large numbers of respondents, who can be engaged at global, national or district level.

Throughout the project, we employ participatory methods, involving key audiences, including policy stakeholders, in the design, prototyping, and research phases. Authentic input, interaction, and collaboration are crucial, with continuous feedback and optimization. With our citizen science approach, we go beyond mere consultation, uncovering implicit knowledge through varying degrees of participation, from consultation to empowerment.

While the focus of GREAT is on the global challenges of sustainability and climate change the project methodologies are both scalable and transferable to other issues.

Example case: Green jobs
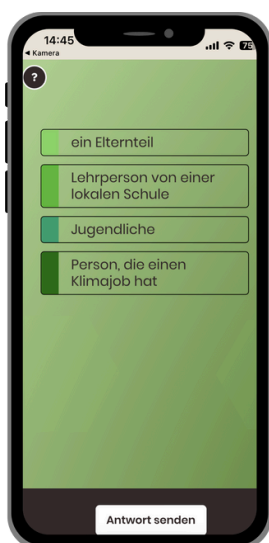
In Austria, schools were invited to implement a dilemma game on the issues of green jobs for young adults aged 15+. During a two-hour moderated intervention, students were asked to step into the role of policy agents and create a communication strategy to motivate young people to choose a career in green jobs. In addition, the communication should pay attention to gender inclusiveness. Results were discussed with a climate agency responsible for implementing such a strategy. With the insights from the dilemma game, they were able to identify additional motivational factors and launched a communication strategy on green jobs for schools.

Example case: UNDP

In an exploratory case study, the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and GREAT partners explored methods and approaches to engage the global community in climate change policy discussions.

A set of questions to engage players in the climate change debate were posted to global players of the game SMITE, a free to play third person Multiplayer Online Battle Arena digital game, between December 2023 and March 2024. With the results from almost 3.000 engaged global players, UNDP is entering the next phase of consultation and is developing their approach for further including climate topics in online games.

Insights for policy dialogue

The GREAT project research case studies provide several insights for policy development, participatory engagement, and dialogue about climate change.

There is great potential for participatory engagement to enhance the development of game-based tools for climate change.

The potential of game-based approaches for engagement in climate action is confirmed. Two levels of dialogue are identified:
- As direct interactions, for example in conversations between stakeholders during case study activities that include co-design and data interpretation.
- As exchanges of information between policy makers and citizens, mediated by game-based activities.

It is important that policy stakeholders (1) have clearly defined needs for public consultation, or willingness to collaborate in identifying them, and (2) are available to participate in designing and interpreting the intervention.

For participatory actions requiring efforts from citizens, compensations should be considered; there is a risk of imbalance if researchers and policy makers are acting during their paid working hours while citizens would be expected to participate on a voluntary basis.

Transforming participants' concerns into the game-based approach was difficult with limited commitment from the policy stakeholder side and the citizens.

Managing expectations and timing is crucial and should be negotiated right at the beginning of the proposed activities.

Large numbers of players can be reached by collaborating with large-scale successful commercial games.

Both the large-scale embedding of questions in commercial games, and intensive interactions in moderated dilemma games offer opportunities for consultation, collaboration and co-creation with stakeholders.

There is a risk of researchers biases or expectations conditioning the results, which can be addressed by strong collaboration from participants in the inquiry.

Data sprints can be very valuable instruments to engage with citizens on relevant aspects. They can be conversation openers that help to trigger interesting discussions on specific data sets or research results. However, this requires thorough preparation and visualization to be effective.

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Further information

Partners

DIPF Leibniz Institute for Research and Information in Education, Germany

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Frederick University, Cyprus

University of Bolton, England

Sphaira Innovation Ltd (PlanetPlay), England

Associate Partners

Northwest University, South Africa

Beijing Normal University, China

Project details	Publications
https://www.greatproject.gg/	https://zenodo.org/communities/101094766/records?q=&l=list&p=1&s=10&sort=newest