

Using games to promote participatory environmental governance

Supporting Multi-Stakeholder Participation Processes: A Serious Game Application for Watershed Management in Colombia is an article written by Camilo Gonzalez et al. in 2024 in the review *Water*. Through an experiment based on a serious game on the stakes of water management in the Campoalegre river basin in Colombia, this article shows that this tool enables an easier participation of many different actors to the environmental governance. Three key points in it have caught the attention of “La Fabrique Écologique” :

#1 Serious games are defined as playful activities that allow for an immersive learning and promote engagement from their participants, often calling for using negotiation and mediation skills. Serious games in particular enable this kind of learning both for their players and their game masters. Indeed, the latter does gather information through the testimonies from the former.

In the game studied in this article, the goal is to find together the best achievable water management policy through an exhaustive study of the effects that each one of these could have on all the stakeholders of the Campoalegre river basin in Colombia. After the game, all the players have learned much about the environmental, economic and social stakes of this region, as well as policies and public actors involved in the management of this basin.

#2 Divergences between different stakeholders of a project often stem from a limited vision of the impacts of their own decisions. Serious games allow to better understand the whole range of effects from these decisions, and they promote concertation between all the stakeholders.

By playing the game, the players gradually come to understand the relationships and interconnexions between the stakes of everyone and their own actions. The game enable them to clearly visualize and experience how some policy helping such or such stakeholder could have as side-effects on the others. By the end of the game, the authors have noticed that the players are much more apt to take decisions that take

into account the interests of all the stakeholders, to reach compromises, whereas at the beginning they all were much more prone to defend solely their own interests.

#3 Finally, serious games help different stakeholders to actively take part to governance. This article shows this through the results from a serious game on water management in a Colombian region. The players felt more involved in the decision-making process, because they were able to better understand all its intricacies.

Their testimonies and their feedback on the game can also be used to implement more efficient and more equitable social and environmental policies: this is a valuable asset for policy-making. In the end, this serious game helped to better take into account all the stakeholders from the river basin, so as to set up a just and sustainable planification.

Serious Games in France

Serious games are used more and more in France, mainly in the corporate world, in order to create professional trainings that boost teambuilding. But actors in the ecological field are now also starting to use them.

La Fresque du Climat is the most famous example of it: the NGO has created several workshops to raise awareness on climate stakes in a playful and easily accessible way. The public sector, however, has not yet used serious games, and La Fresque du Climat does not apply them as participatory governance tools, as recommended by this article.

Pauline Bureau's opinion, vice-chair at LFE

*Far from being naive, so-called 'serious games' are real tools for participatory governance.
Water storage, lithium mines, highways : the list of projects that would benefit from using them is endless!*