CONTENT GUIDE

Integrating EU civic education into video games

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Chapter 1: Basics of educational game design

1.1 Understanding your audience: Youth demographics and learning preferences

Educational games are a learning tool that combines fun with educational outcomes. Player engagement makes the educational aspect more effective. Whether you are designing a game about history, science, social skills, or civic values, understanding the basics of educational game design will help you create experiences that truly resonate with young people. We hope this guide will help you understand the fundamental principles that make educational games both effective and enjoyable.

Learning style diversity

Young people have different learning preferences. Some are **visual learners** who need to see information represented graphically. Others are **auditory learners** who benefit from narration, sound effects, and musical cues. **Kinesthetic learners** need physical interaction – clicking, dragging, swiping – to internalise concepts. The **most effective educational games offer multiple pathways** to understanding, allowing different types of learners to grasp the same concepts in ways that work for them.

Tips & tricks: Consider that **attention spans and engagement patterns vary widely**. Some players love exploring every corner of a game world, while others want to rush through the main storyline. Some enjoy competition and leaderboards, while others prefer collaborative or solo experiences. Building **flexibility** into your game design – **offering different difficulty levels, play styles, and optional content** – ensures broader appeal.

1.2 Cultural sensitivity and european diversity

Europe is remarkably diverse, encompassing dozens of languages, cultures, religions, and historical experiences. Designing an educational game for a European audience means navigating this rich complexity with care and respect.

Linguistic diversity

Language is the most obvious consideration. The European Union alone has 24 official languages, and that doesn't count regional languages like Catalan, Welsh, or Frisian. While it may not be feasible to translate your game into every language, consider your primary target markets and prioritise accordingly. More importantly, **design your game so that visual communication carries much of the meaning**. Icons, animations, and intuitive interfaces can transcend language barriers.

Tips & tricks: **Avoid idioms, puns or cultural references** that don't translate well. What's funny or meaningful in one language might be confusing or even offensive in another. When text is necessary, **keep it clear and simple**, avoiding unnecessarily complex vocabulary.

Historical sensitivity

Europe's history is complicated, marked by both achievements and tragedies. When your game touches on historical events, research thoroughly and present multiple perspectives where appropriate. Be particularly careful with recent history – events like World War II, the Cold War, and the Yugoslav Wars remain sensitive topics with living survivors and descendants.

Tips & tricks: Avoid presenting any single country or culture as universally good or bad. Instead, focus on **universal human experiences, shared challenges, and common values**. If your game includes historical conflicts, emphasise the human cost of war and the value of peace and cooperation.

Religious and cultural representation

Europe includes Christians, Muslims, Jews, Hindus, Buddhists, secular humanists, and practitioners of many other belief systems. **When representing religion or cultural practices, do so with respect and accuracy**. Consult with people from those communities when possible. Avoid stereotypes or caricatures.

Representation matters enormously to young people. They want to see themselves and their communities in the media they consume. Promoting inclusion and accessibility in educational games can support acceptance, cultural understanding, and openness among players.

> **Tips & tricks: Include diverse characters** in terms of ethnicity, ability, family structure, and background – but do so thoughtfully, making these characters **fully realised individuals rather than token representations**.

Regional differences

Remember that **European countries vary significantly in their social norms**, educational systems, and technological infrastructure. What works in a well-resourced school in Amsterdam might not work in a rural Romanian school.

> **Tips & tricks: Consider accessibility** in terms of device requirements, internet connectivity, and cultural context.

1.3 The psychology of learning through play

Play is not frivolous – it's how humans, especially young humans, naturally learn about the world. Understanding the psychology behind play-based learning will help you design games that genuinely educate rather than just entertain.

The flow state

"Flow" is a mental state where people are fully immersed in an activity, losing track of time and self-consciousness. Flow occurs when challenge and skill are perfectly balanced – the task is neither too easy (leading to boredom) nor too difficult (leading to anxiety) (Csikszentmihalyi, 2008).

Great educational games consistently maintain this balance. They start with **simple challenges that build confidence, then gradually increase difficulty** as players develop skills. They provide **clear goals and immediate feedback**, so players always know what they're trying to achieve and how well they're doing. When players are in flow, learning happens almost effortlessly because they're completely engaged.

The power of failure

In traditional education, **failure often carries negative consequences – bad grades, disappointed parents or social embarrassment. Games flip this script**. In a game, failure is expected, even necessary. Players try something, fail, learn from that failure, and try again with new knowledge.

This creates a **safe space for experimentation and risk-taking**. Players can test hypotheses, explore consequences, and learn through trial and error without real-world stakes. The key is making failure informative rather than punitive. When a player fails, the game should communicate what went wrong and hint at what might work better, encouraging them to try again rather than give up.

Active learning vs. passive reception

People remember about 10% of what they read, 20% of what they hear, but 90% of what they do and experience themselves.

■ Experience   ■ Hearing   ■ Reading
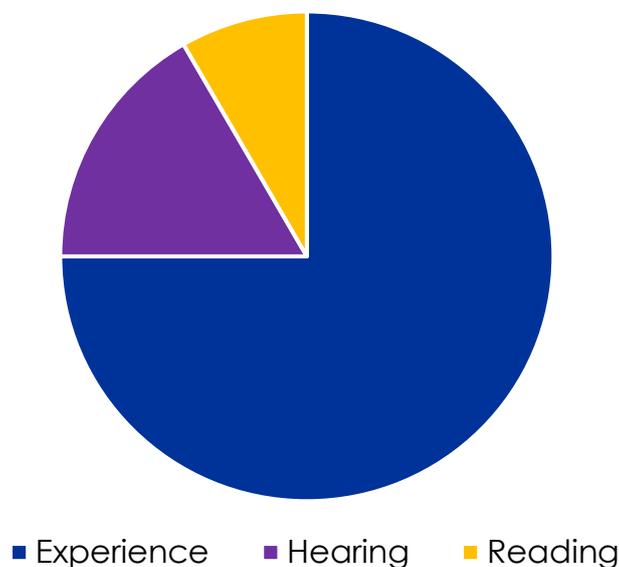
Games are powerful educational tools because they require active participation. Players aren't passively receiving information – they're making decisions, solving problems, and seeing the consequences of their actions.

Emotional engagement

We remember information better when it's connected to emotion. **Games that make players feel something – excitement, curiosity, empathy, accomplishment – create stronger learning outcomes** than those that remain emotionally neutral.

Story is one powerful way to create emotional engagement. When players care about characters or become invested in a narrative, they pay closer attention and remember more. **Challenge creates emotional investment** too – overcoming a difficult obstacle feels genuinely rewarding.

1.4 Motivation systems: Intrinsic vs. extrinsic rewards

Motivation is the engine that drives player engagement and learning. Understanding the difference between intrinsic and extrinsic motivation is crucial for designing educational games that foster genuine learning rather than just behavioural compliance.

Extrinsic motivation: External rewards

Extrinsic motivation comes from outside the activity itself – points, badges, leaderboards, unlockable content, or praise from others. These rewards are the most obvious game mechanics and can be very effective at driving short-term engagement. Youngsters light up when they earn a gold star or level up their character.

However, extrinsic rewards have limitations. Research shows that over-reliance on external rewards can actually undermine intrinsic interest. If players are playing primarily to earn points or unlock achievements, they may stop playing once those rewards are removed or become routine. Worse, they may take **shortcuts that maximise rewards without maximising learning** – rushing through content to collect stars rather than engaging deeply with educational material.

Tips & tricks: Use extrinsic rewards strategically. They work well as signposts marking progress and as initial hooks to engage players. But design them to **support rather than replace deeper engagement**. Make sure the path to rewards requires genuine engagement with learning content, not just repetitive clicking or time investment.

Intrinsic motivation: Internal satisfaction

Intrinsic motivation comes from the activity itself – the pleasure of solving a puzzle, the satisfaction of mastery, curiosity about what happens next, or the enjoyment of creative expression. This is the gold standard for educational games because it creates sustainable engagement and deeper learning.

Tips & tricks: Three key elements foster intrinsic motivation: autonomy, competence, and purpose.

✓ Give players meaningful choices about how they approach challenges (**autonomy**).

✓ Design difficulty curves that allow players to develop genuine skill and feel themselves improving (**competence**).

✓ Connect gameplay to purposes players care about, whether that's helping characters they like, exploring a fascinating world, or expressing their creativity (**purpose**).

Games that tap into intrinsic motivation often feel less "game-like" in the traditional sense – they might not have obvious scoring systems or competitive elements. Instead, they create engaging worlds or systems that are inherently interesting to explore and understand (Pink, 2011).

Finding the balance

The best educational games use both types of motivation in complementary ways. Extrinsic rewards provide structure and positive feedback, particularly for younger children who benefit from clear, external validation. Intrinsic motivation provides depth and sustainability, keeping players engaged long-term and fostering genuine curiosity.

For example: Consider a game teaching environmental science.

➢ Extrinsic rewards might include earning badges for completing lessons or unlocking new animals for a virtual ecosystem.

➢ The intrinsic motivation comes from the fascinating complexity of the ecosystem itself – watching how introducing a predator affects prey populations, seeing how pollution spreads through a food chain, and experimenting with different conservation strategies.

The badges acknowledge progress, but the ecosystem simulation is what makes players want to keep exploring.

1.5 EU values as design pillars

The European Union is built on fundamental values that can serve as powerful organising principles for educational game design. These values aren't just abstract concepts – they **can be translated into concrete game mechanics and narrative choices** that shape how players think and interact (European Commission, 2018).

Human dignity and respect

At its core, human dignity means recognising the inherent worth of every individual. In game design, this translates to **how characters are portrayed and how players are encouraged to interact with them**.

Tips & tricks

✓ Design games where **characters are multidimensional individuals rather than stereotypes** or obstacles.

✓ Show **different perspectives and experiences** as valid and worthy of consideration.

✓ Create gameplay mechanics that **reward empathy and understanding** rather than domination or exploitation.

> **For example:** Instead of a game where players "defeat" opponents, consider one where they negotiate with different stakeholders, each with legitimate concerns and interests. Show the consequences of treating people with respect versus treating them as means to an end.

Equality and non-discrimination

Equality means ensuring everyone has fair access to opportunities regardless of their background. In games, this can be reflected in diverse representation, inclusive design, and gameplay that explores fairness.

Tips & tricks

✓ **Include characters of different identities**, genders, ethnicities, abilities, and backgrounds **in meaningful roles** – as heroes, leaders, experts, and decision-makers, not just as tokens or sidekicks.

✓ **Design gameplay that explores what equality means in practice**: What happens when resources are distributed fairly versus unfairly? How do different systems create or reduce inequality?

✓ **Avoid mechanics that reinforce prejudice, even unintentionally**. For example, if darker-skinned characters are always villains or if female characters are always helpers rather than leaders, players absorb these associations even if they're not explicitly stated (Flanagan, 2009).

Democracy and participation

Democracy is about giving people a voice and agency in decisions that affect them. This value can be deeply embedded in game mechanics through meaningful choice, collective decision-making, and transparency.

Multiplayer games can explore democratic values by giving players opportunities to govern themselves – creating rules, resolving conflicts, and making collective decisions about shared spaces or resources.

Rule of law and justice

The rule of law means that everyone, including those in power, is **accountable to fair, transparent rules**. Games are naturally structured by rules, making them perfect vehicles for exploring what justice means.

Solidarity and cooperation

Solidarity means supporting one another and working together toward common goals. In an age of increasing individualism and competition, games that **foster cooperation and mutual support** are particularly valuable.

Tips & tricks: **Design mechanics that require or reward cooperation rather than just competition.**

- ✓ Create scenarios where players succeed together or fail together.
- ✓ Show how collective action can address problems that individuals can't solve alone.
- ✓ Consider games where players have different abilities or resources and must work together, each contributing what they can.

This teaches both the **value of diversity** – different people bring different strengths – and the **importance of supporting those who need help**.

1.6 Universal archetypes in storytelling

Stories are how humans make sense of the world, and **certain character types or archetypes appear across cultures and throughout history**. Understanding these archetypes can help you **create compelling characters and narratives** that resonate with players while teaching important lessons.

The Learner (player)

The Player is the protagonist, the **character who goes on a journey, faces challenges, and grows through the experience**. In educational games, the player typically takes on the Hero role, making this the most important archetype to understand.

Protagonists aren't born perfect; they develop through struggle. Beginning your game with a character who must learn and grow creates natural opportunities for education – **the player and the character learn together**.

Tips & tricks: **Make your player face meaningful challenges that require the specific knowledge or skills you're teaching.** A player learning about democratic values might navigate political conflicts, learning to balance different interests.

The Guide

The Guide offers direction without dominating. They should **inspire discovery**, not deliver lectures. The best guides **ask questions, encourage exploration, and step back to let the Player discover things themselves**. They provide hints rather than solutions, guidance rather than control.

The Challenger

Obstacles should make learning purposeful – **turn abstract problems into tangible story conflicts** through the villain, antagonist or obstacle the player must overcome.

In educational games, obstacles might represent misconceptions, bad habits, or harmful ideologies. **The player must understand obstacles to transform them or find a way to coexist with them**. This is particularly powerful for games about social issues – showing that people with opposing views are not monsters but humans who can potentially be reached through understanding and dialogue.

The Companion

Companions, friends, and supporters help the players on their journey. They **provide assistance, different skills, emotional support, or comic relief**. In educational games, they can demonstrate diversity, cooperation, and the value of different perspectives.

Diverse characters can model inclusion and cooperation. Show how the **Player benefits from diversity** – problems that seem insurmountable alone become manageable when people work together.

The Catalyst

The Catalyst is a **disruptor who pushes change, sparks creativity, or challenges assumptions**. While sometimes antagonistic, catalysts often end up helping the player by **forcing them to think differently**. Catalyst characters can make educational games more engaging by **adding humour and unpredictability**. They can also model creative problem-solving and critical thinking – questioning assumptions and finding innovative solutions (Campbell, 2008).

Chapter 2: Crafting stories that teach and inspire

2.1 Why stories matter in civic education

Stories, most of the time, are perceived as a part of entertainment; however, it's a common misconception. They can **expand knowledge, express emotion, give contextual information and inspire action**. In civic education, stories help young people see themselves in democratic processes and understand that institutions are built by people for people, not distant powers.

The power of storytelling in civic learning:

◆ **Captures attention:** Young people connect emotionally to emotion before they connect to data or institutions. As Heath and Heath (2007) note, ideas "stick" when they are emotional, concrete, and story-driven - all of which are vital for civic learning.

◆ **Aids memory:** Information placed in a story structure is remembered way better than in plain text.

◆ **Fosters empathy:** When learners follow a character's journey, they experience different perspectives - an essential skill for democracy (Nussbaum, 2010).

EU lawmaking is one civic process that sometimes seems out of reach. A constructive, team-based approach can lead to better results, stronger motivation, and more lasting impact than focusing on individual heroism.

Tips & tricks: Be aware of risks.

✓ **Oversimplification:** Avoid reducing democracy to "heroes and villains." Real civic life is about nuance and negotiation.

✓ **Bias and stereotypes:** Characters and settings should reflect Europe's cultural diversity and encourage critical thinking, not stereotypes.

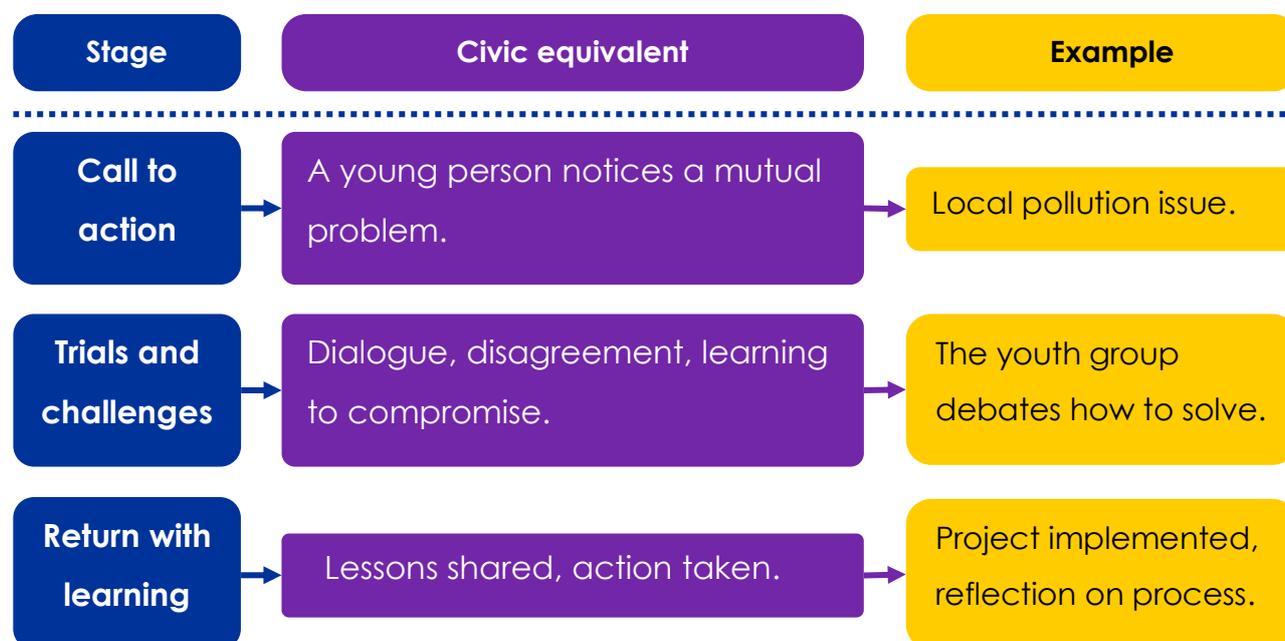> **For example: Encouraging effective storytelling and team effort**
>
> A group of student's campaigns to introduce reusable bottles in their school. Through dialogue and trial, they navigate disagreements, reflecting EU democratic values of cooperation and consensus. This group effort reflects the participatory spirit and shared responsibility described in the Reference Framework of Competences for Democratic Culture (Council of Europe, 2018).

Constructive dialogue and team approach may lead to better results, motivation and overall lasting impact, rather than creating pressure with individual effort.

2.2 The Hero's Journey, reimagined for civic learning

Every great story follows a rhythm - challenge, struggle, discovery, change. The Hero's Journey (by Joseph Campbell) offers a powerful frame for civic storytelling. It helps learners understand that **change begins with a call to action and grows through team effort**.

Mapping the journey to civic life (simplified model)

Stage	Civic equivalent	Example
Call to action	A young person notices a mutual problem.	Local pollution issue.
Trials and challenges	Dialogue, disagreement, learning to compromise.	The youth group debates how to solve.
Return with learning	Lessons shared, action taken.	Project implemented, reflection on process.

It's important to recognise that **citizenship is an ongoing journey, not a one-time or individual act.**

Realistic experiences become teaching moments when framed as part of a hero's civic path. Mythical heroes overcome monsters; democratic heroes overcome apathy, ignorance, and injustice. Stories should inspire, but also ground learners in realistic participation (Nussbaum, 2010).

2.3 Archetypes of democratic storytelling

Every story needs recognisable roles. Archetypes help learners see themselves - and others - as essential parts of a functioning democracy. Below is an adapted summary of the archetypes, which are detailed in **chapter 1.6**.

| **The Protagonist** | Embodies EU values - dignity, equality, solidarity, justice. Often a young person with a civic mission. |

| **The Guide** | Wise mentors, teachers, youth workers, credible media - those guiding others to facts and reflection. |

| **The Companion** | Community builder. Represents collaboration and consensus - showing that teamwork builds solutions. |

| **The Challenger** | Antagonist. Forces of disinformation, exclusion, or apathy - not to create fear, but to provoke dialogue. |

Using conflict constructively

Conflict should clarify values, not create division - it's more of a meaningful discussion, letting to share different perspectives.

For example: A group debates on banning single-use plastics. The conflict is not "good vs. bad," but "how do we balance the environment and convenience for all of us?"

Tips & tricks

- ✓ **Create character cards for each archetype with short backstories**, from where they come from, what their ideas are, and what purpose they serve in the story.
- ✓ **Use role-play activities where learners act out EU debates**, proposing the cards as a starting point.
- ✓ After the story, ask: What motivated each character? Which EU value was represented? How could they have found more consensus?
- ✓ Ensure that activities align with the Council of Europe's (2018) civic competences: **empathy, cooperation and respect for diversity**.

2.4 Symbols and scenarios of the European Union

Symbols carry emotion and connect abstract ideas (unity, diversity, peace) to visual memory. But they work only when used meaningfully in context - it cannot be the decoration; it has to have a **specific purpose tied to the idea.**

Using EU symbols effectively

The flag, motto, anthem, and Europe Day can appear naturally in stories to reinforce unity and shared identity.

For example: In a story where young activists from different EU countries reach an agreement, the EU flag appears as a moment of celebration — not decoration, but symbolism of unity.

Tips & tricks

✓ **Encourage learners to ask**:

  o   What does this symbol mean in this story?

  o   Why is it here?

  o   How does it reflect our shared values?

Such questions help **avoid tokenism and build emotional literacy**.

✓ **Use symbols as learning tools, not decoration**: symbols support learning and shouldn't be used to "push" one-sided messages. Learners should **discover why the symbol matters in the situation**, not just see it everywhere without context.

How to propose scenarios to understand complex topics?

A key piece of advice would be to create a short fictional story that mirrors the EU legislative process, with specific characters and a clear purpose.

For example: **The Eco-Charger Law:** Lina, a 17-year-old student, invents a small charger powered by solar energy. She proposes a law to make eco-chargers mandatory in all EU schools to save some energy.

Story journey:
- ➢ Commission: Experts help her draft a proposal.
- ➢ Parliament: Youth and MEPs debate costs and feasibility.
- ➢ Council: Countries negotiate, finding a balance between innovation and economy.
- ➢ Adoption: The law passes - not perfectly, but democratically.

Learners can explore and trace the process **step-by-step**, understanding how **real laws evolve from ideas.** The process can then be drafted, discussed by potential policymakers, negotiated, and adapted to different contexts.

Tips & tricks
- ✓ **Use fictional yet realistic civic cases** to ensure relevance.
- ✓ Ask learners to **map story events to EU law-making stages**.
- ✓ **Let learners play roles**: Commission, Parliament, Council, Media, Citizens.
- ✓ **Use cards to define the purpose of each character**.

2.5 Practices and tools for storytelling

Beyond creating stories, youth workers can strengthen their impact through **storytelling practices** - structured, creative, and inclusive methods that help to go from ideas to engaging learning experiences. These approaches draw from educational design, media literacy, and creative writing, adapted specifically for the civic learning environment (Robin, 2011).

Story bibles and beat sheets with learning goals

A story bible is a reference document describing the story's characters, settings, and recurring values. In civic education, it ensures coherence between narrative and learning outcomes. Similarly, a beat sheet breaks the story into smaller scenes or "beats," each annotated with a specific learning goal.

Tips & tricks: Color-code each story beat by competency (e.g., empathy, problem-solving, participation).

Integrating interactive and role-play formats

Storytelling becomes transformative when learners can step into the story. Interactive and role-play formats encourage active decision-making and moral reasoning - both vital for civic learning (Smeda et al., 2014).

◆ **Branching narratives:** Learners make choices that alter outcomes, mirroring democratic processes.

◆ **Debate stories:** Characters argue opposing civic positions, supporting perspective-taking.

◆ **Forum theatre:** Participants act out stories and adapt them based on group feedback.

For example: In a story about local environmental reform, participants play citizens, entrepreneurs, and officials negotiating sustainable solutions.

Tips & tricks: After the role-play, hold a reflection circle: "Which arguments changed your view?" - a step shown to deepen civic empathy.

Formative assessment into narratives

Formative assessment can be included in storytelling to **keep learners engaged while verifying their understanding**. Questions and prompts placed within the story maintain flow and help assess comprehension.

Evidence from Robin (2011) shows that **digital storytelling projects where learners predict outcomes or reflect on character motives significantly improve critical thinking and civic reasoning**.

Tips & tricks

- ✓ **Questions may include:**
  - o What rights are at stake here?
  - o What decision would you make if you were in this situation?
  - o How does this reflect democratic values?
- ✓ **Use digital tools** (e.g., polls, assessments, reflections, mood check) **to gather responses live** - an approach that promotes reflection and ownership of learning (Smeda et al., 2014).

Accessibility and inclusion in story design

Inclusive storytelling ensures that **every learner feels represented and can participate meaningfully**. Gonzalez et al. (2023) emphasise that **stories reflecting diverse voices increase identification and engagement**, especially among marginalised youth.

Tips & tricks

- ✓ **Use plain, clear language**.
- ✓ **Offer multiple formats** (text, audio, visual).
- ✓ **Include diverse characters** in terms of gender, ethnicity and socio-economic background.
- ✓ **Provide captions or subtitles** for digital versions.
- ✓ **Co-create stories with your learners**. Involving them ensures that their needs are met, builds ownership and mirrors real civic participation.

Workflow

A structured workflow ensures stories remain educationally focused and inclusive, you can see an example of some steps you can take.

Tips & tricks: Workflow of story creation:

✓ **Concept:** Define the civic theme and learning outcomes.

✓ **Script:** Write scenes, characters, and decisions.

✓ **Storyboard:** Visualise flow and identify reflection moments.

✓ **User test:** Try it with a small youth group.

✓ **Revise:** Integrate feedback and refine clarity.

✓ **Final version:** Add visuals, accessibility, and facilitator notes.

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Chapter 3: Game mechanics and puzzles that build democratic minds

3.1 Representing real civic challenges in a video game

Integrating civic challenges into gameplay allows players to experience citizenship in action rather than merely learning about it. Regardless of the genre, whether adventure, puzzle, platformer or strategy, video games can explore civic education when **the player's actions mirror the tensions of real democratic life** through either the plot, quests, puzzles or mechanics.

Using gameplay as a civic metaphor

Game plots and puzzles can frame civic issues within **symbolic or fictional settings**. All game types can explore these mechanics, such as story-based or point-and-click games, and many genres such as fantasy or science-fiction can mirror civic themes of justice, equality, privacy or free speech through dystopic or hyperbolic settings. The key, regardless of category or context, is to let **choices and consequences reflect real situations and dilemmas**.

For example: Any type or genre of game involving puzzles, tasks or dialogues where the player has to make decisions between:

➢ Freedom of speech and hate speech
➢ Efficiency and fairness
➢ Majority will and minority rights
➢ Accountability and cancel culture
➢ Individual choices and global consequences.

Plots can involve various goals, such as rebuilding a fragmented society after conflict, managing a diverse city, or moderating an online community, to engage players in a scenario that justifies such decision-making.

Designing safe simulations

Game mechanics can easily be used as safe civic simulations as soon as they involve players in **scenarios that represent typical democratic and civic challenges**. Mechanics such as branching dialogues, timed decision-making or moral choice systems invite players to **experiment with complex ethical, political and social questions** in a risk-free space.

For example: A dialogue-based game could challenge players to mediate between protestors and authorities by acknowledging systemic issues and fundamental rights. A puzzle or platform game could involve organising and balancing limited resources to preserve fairness and stability for a group.

Encouraging reflection through feedback

Short debriefs or character reactions can **highlight democratic principles at stake, such as accountability, inclusivity and empathy**. Embedding journals and press, NPC (non-player character) commentaries or post-mission reports helps players connect virtual choices with real-world consequences.

Tips & tricks: To keep players engaged, link every moral or political choice to tangible in-game outcomes (such as trust, public satisfaction, quantifiable success). Players learn best when their actions receive feedback and civic understanding directly shapes their path to victory.

3.2 Enhancing teamwork and debating skills

Civic participation **thrives on collaboration and requires interpersonal skills** to adequately communicate and understand others in order to respond effectively in various societal situations. Games that promote teamwork and argumentation through debate or coordination train players in the core democratic competences of **communication, negotiation, and compromise**. The right mechanics can also foster collective intelligence, empathy and other social skills which are essential for democratic participation.

Fostering collaboration beyond multiplayer modes

Even in single-player games, the mechanics can simulate teamwork through non-player characters (NPCs) who act as allies, advisors or stakeholders. Branching dialogues and quests can require the players to **coordinate perspectives or balance competing priorities**, such as reconciling economic needs with social justice. **Cooperative problem-solving missions**, like rebuilding a town after a crisis or drafting a shared policy, can model how consensus emerges from dialogue in a user-friendly and dynamic manner.

Embedding debate as gameplay

Mechanics inspired by turn-based strategy or debate duels allow players to **build, present and defend arguments, using logic, facts and persuasive tactics and mediating disagreements** or polarising viewpoints to reach consensus, thus practising debating skills in a safe and entertaining context.

For example: In a dialogue-based or simulation game, the player acting as an EU parliament delegate could use evidence, ethics, or emotion to convince others of a proposal. Success depends not on "winning" but on understanding the other's point of view and achieving a balanced outcome that fits the needs of the whole group.

Teaching mediation and compromise

Decision-making systems where **all choices impact group satisfaction or long-term trust** can illustrate the consequences of a definitive choice. Introducing reputation meters, shared objectives or timed votes motivates players to **assess diverse viewpoints and seek the middle ground**. Games can thus reproduce the rhythm of real political debates, where **listening, empathising and reframing are as powerful as speaking, but the specific decisions of a few can have a long-lasting impact on large groups**.

Tips & tricks: Integrate brief reflection prompts or peer discussions after in-game negotiations, helping players identify which communication strategies led to success or deadlock.

3.3 Understanding economic and social systems

Democratic participation also involves understanding **how societies and economies function and have an impact on individuals and communities**. Video games provide a powerful sandbox for exploring these systems and developing **financial literacy and socio-economic awareness through experimentation and cause–and–effect** learning. By managing budgets, allocating resources or responding to shortages or consumption demands, acknowledging social benefits and population dynamics, players can **explore and analyse different economic and financial systems, social systems and societal norms** and experience the complex interdependence between policy choices and everyday life.

Turning abstract systems into tangible experiences

Whether it be in platformers, simulated interfaces or dialogue-based games, mechanics such as resource management, market tycoons or city-building can make **invisible processes, like stocks, taxation, debt or social welfare**, visible, interactive and accessible for diverse players.

For example: Players can be in charge of the economic system of a city and challenged to allocate limited funds among competing needs such as healthcare, education, housing, renewable energy and infrastructure. Each decision affects citizens' satisfaction, economic stability and long-term sustainability, illustrating the balance between equity and efficiency.

Integrating social awareness through narrative

Story-driven missions can **reveal the human impact of financial decisions**, such as policies focused on vulnerable communities, environmental concerns or cultural heritage. NPCs or community groups may react differently depending on how inclusive or short-sighted the player's policies are. Such feedback loops **reinforce empathy and accountability**, showing that numbers represent real people and lives, and capitalistic systems can be applied differently and have varying impacts on societies.

Encouraging systemic thinking

Different types of games can simulate broader economic models, from welfare states to market economies, inviting players to compare results. Puzzles, quests and dialogues can involve **reforming tax systems, managing inflation or ensuring fair distribution of resources**. Success depends not only on profit but also on **fairness, trust and social cohesion**, shifting focus from competition to cooperation and acknowledging the **impact of money on individuals' well-being and societal progress**.

Tips & tricks: In simulation games, use dashboards or visual indicators (citizen happiness, inequality index, debt ratio) to help players track the social consequences of their economic strategies.

3.4 Simulating democratic processes

Democracy is best understood when experienced as a **dynamic system of voting, proportional representation, political debates, policymaking, law approvals and accountability**. Various types of video games can teach about **elections, policymaking, compromise and coalition-building** by letting players act within simulated political environments through organising campaigns, drafting policies, debating laws, collaborating with other representatives or managing diverse constituencies. Whether it be in platforms, dialogues or exploration games, players can experience and grasp **how collective decisions shape societies and how popular opinions and needs should be reflected by leaders' decisions to ensure prosperity**.

Contrasting political systems

Simulations can also expose the fragility of democratic values by allowing players to **experiment with other governance models**. They can explore diverse types of regimes and their impacts, to demonstrate the importance of **transparency, equal representation and fairness**, and justify the principles of democracy and what it protects: dignity, diversity, freedom and equality.

For example:

➢ In a socialist simulation, players manage a cooperative society where resources are shared fairly. They must maintain high social welfare and solidarity while balancing productivity, efficiency, individual ownership, ambition and economic sustainability.

➢ In a federalist simulation, players act as representatives of different regions within a union and must negotiate shared policies such as environmental laws or migration quotas. Players must balance local interests and needs with regional and federal unity, acknowledging that multi-level governance requires negotiation, subsidiarity and mutual respect.

➢ In an authoritarian simulation, players control a governor who leads a nation alone and enforces censorship, surveillance and restricted freedoms. They must acknowledge and tackle how groups of people are not recognised as citizens, protests and dissenting movements are suppressed or abused and severe inequalities develop between classes, infringing on fundamental human rights and societal progress.

➢ In an extreme capitalist simulation, players run a private enterprise competing in a brutal market and must make choices that either prioritise profit or ethical responsibility, affecting the public's access to services and basic needs (healthcare and education) through privatisation. Rapid growth leads to prestige and wealth but neglecting social obligations leads to protests, inequality and ecological collapse.

Tips & tricks: To deepen learning, include "reflection checkpoints" within the game where players must justify their votes or defend their policies or votes before moving forward. This transforms passive play into civic reasoning and makes each quest or task more meaningful.

3.5 Distinguishing fact from misinformation

Civic competence depends not only on voting or debate skills but also on the ability to **discern truth from manipulation**, in order to make fully informed decisions. Games can train **media literacy and fact-checking** by immersing players in complex ecosystems, where facts, opinions, fake news, biased sources, conspiracy theories, misinterpreted data, satire and propaganda intertwine. In doing so, various types of games can let players understand objectivity and subjectivity and experience the **real impact of misinformation on communities and democratic systems**.

Building critical thinking through gameplay

In investigative games or simulated interfaces, mechanics such as information verification quests or evidence-based challenges encourage players to **analyse, cross-check and question data before making decisions**. Strategy or social games can also represent how rumours, defamation campaigns and propaganda spread through networks and the impacts they can have. Tools involved in game design can help players **identify credible or peer-reviewed sources and learn the basics of academic research**.

For example:

➢ Players, acting as journalists or policy advisors, receive conflicting reports. They must use available tools, such as search engines or authenticity scans, to spot doctored images, misleading data and biased or suspicious sources. Success requires comparing multiple perspectives, identifying logical fallacies or suspicious claims and evaluating source credibility.

➢ Players manage a media outlet, social platform or political campaign, balancing engagement and ambition with ethical responsibility and honesty. Publishing sensationalist or unverified content can boost short-term popularity but erode trust and democratic stability in the long run, as visualised through impact or viral meters, trust indices and surveys.

Encouraging reflection and evidence awareness

Integrating fact-checking mini-games or mechanics in various forms of gameplay helps players **recognise manipulation techniques** and understand the need to adequately research and cite credible sources before acting based on perceived facts or assumptions. Reward systems can reinforce analytical behaviour by providing direct positive responses when players **consult peer-reviewed sources, verify data or cite evidence**.

Tips & tricks: Explore source analysis, lateral reading and verification strategies through the gameplay and flow:

- ✓ **Use simple feedback sequences** to help players identify what to focus on when researching credible information, and to explain why certain sources or data are unreliable, inaccurate or misleading. Highlight the difference between objective reporting and emotional framing to make players aware of cognitive bias.

- ✓ **Make verification a playable action:** Let players analyse the data or sources by checking the author, comparing with other sources on the same topic and tracing the claims back to the primary source. Add tools such as switching to other tabs or sources, checking similar coverage, reverse image search engines and context analysis.

- ✓ **Show the consequences of evidence-based data management**: Include a credibility or trust meter to indicate that verifying sources increases trust while sharing unverified content boosts short-term reach but causes long-term harm (spread of misinformation and harmful misconceptions).

3.6 Scenario proposals: Promoting democracy and human rights

Scenario 1: The Citizens' Voices

The country's government has collapsed. Players are appointed to a temporary citizens' council responsible for maintaining stability until new elections can happen. They must draft and negotiate emergency laws and policies that uphold EU values (freedom, equality and respect for human dignity and diversity), while addressing the flaws in existing systems and facing populist pressure, disinformation campaigns and the growing influence of extremist groups and conservative movements.

Mechanics: Debate and voting systems; collaboration, negotiation and compromise; moral-choice dialogues and media monitoring tasks.

Challenge: Balancing majority demands with minority rights; managing public trust amid misinformation; ensuring equality and equity despite pressures.

Learning outcomes: Understanding how democratic governance depends on compromise, fact-based and ethical decision-making and inclusion of marginalised voices to ensure that fundamental rights are respected.

Scenario 2: For My Community

Players are the leaders of a small community that needs rebuilding after a major crisis. They must acknowledge citizens' needs and voices, allocate limited resources to specific sectors and make decisions to ensure all the members of the community can contribute adequately to the group's well-being. Players should realise that all individuals must have equal access to education, healthcare, housing and participation opportunities to be fully functional; they must ensure democracy, inclusion, accessibility, equality and equity, and monitor citizen satisfaction while balancing limited resources.

Mechanics: Budget simulation; well-being and trust indicators; ethical dilemma puzzles.

Challenge: Balancing efficiency with fairness; prioritising policies that sustain collective well-being.

Learning outcomes: Developing systemic thinking, empathy and awareness of how equality and civic participation sustain democratic and socio-economic stability.

Chapter 4: Inclusive design and accessibility

4.1 Purpose and relevance

Inclusive design and accessibility are fundamental principles in creating educational games that reflect equality, participation, and human dignity. Rather than being technical add-ons, they are central to building learning experiences that empower all young people, regardless of their background, ability, or identity.

In the context of **European democratic values**, inclusive design connects directly with key frameworks such as:

◆ **The European Accessibility Act (2023)**

◆ **Universal Design for Learning (UDL) principles**

◆ **Web Content Accessibility Guidelines (WCAG 2.2)**

In practice: Inclusive educational games can:

➢ Remove barriers that limit participation.

➢ Represent diverse experiences and perspectives authentically.

➢ Encourage empathy, understanding, and collaboration among players.

➢ Empower youth to become active participants in their communities.

Inclusive design, therefore, is not only a technical matter – it is a **democratic tool** that promotes engagement, equality, and participation.

4.2 Representing diversity: Avoiding stereotypes and celebrating differences

Representation in games influences how young people **see themselves** and others. If handled carelessly, it can reinforce stereotypes and inequalities. When approached thoughtfully, it celebrates **diversity** and strengthens social cohesion.
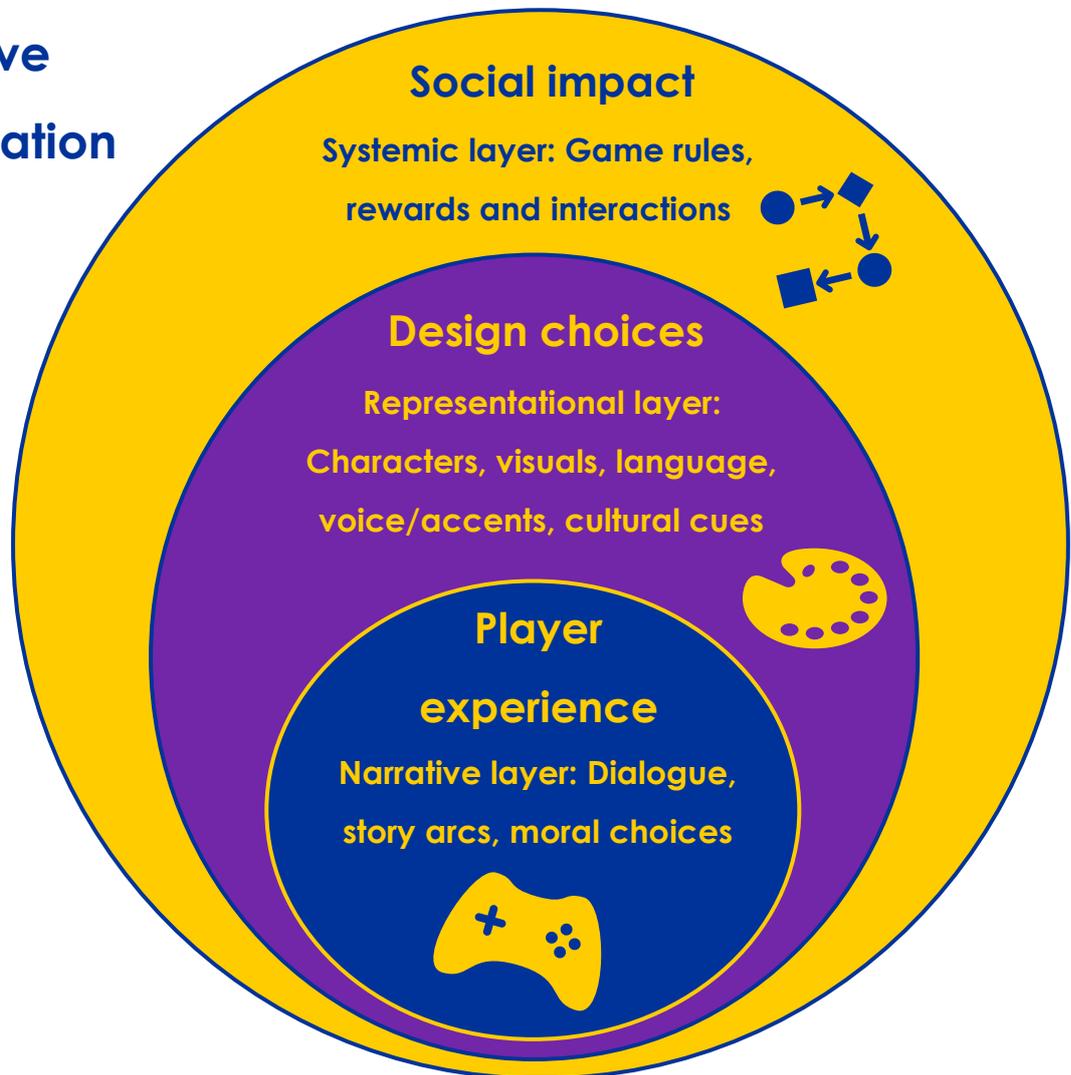
Common stereotypes to avoid:

◆ Simplistic cultural portrayals or clichés.

◆ Gender roles that limit expression or participation.

◆ Absence or misrepresentation of people with disabilities.

◆ Overlooking class, rural, or migration-based diversity.

◆ Misrepresentation of ethnic differences and LGBTIQ+ identities.

Tips & tricks

✓ **Co-design with youth:** Involve young people in creating characters, dialogue, and storylines to ensure authenticity.

✓ **Research local realities:** Reflect the diversity of European youth contexts, including urban, rural, and migrant experiences.

✓ **Use inclusive language:** Avoid gendered, ableist, or culturally biased expressions.

✓ **Develop multidimensional characters:** Show both strengths and vulnerabilities to avoid one-dimensional portrayals.

✓ **Conduct a "representation audit." Ask:** Who is missing? Who might be stereotyped?

✓ **Engage diverse voices** in testing and reviewing prototypes.

✓ **Avoid tokenism:** Inclusion should be natural and embedded, not decorative or symbolic.

Inclusive representation

Social impact

Systemic layer: Game rules, rewards and interactions

Design choices

Representational layer: Characters, visuals, language, voice/accents, cultural cues

Player experience

Narrative layer: Dialogue, story arcs, moral choices

For example:

➢ **Celeste (2018):** A metaphorical story about overcoming anxiety and self-doubt. The game illustrates how perseverance and self-awareness can translate into emotional resilience, showing players that inner struggles are part of growth.

➢ **Before I Forget (2020):** A compassionate portrayal of memory loss. It encourages empathy by allowing players to experience the world through the perspective of someone living with dementia, highlighting the importance of understanding and care.

➢ **My Child Lebensborn (2018):** Exploring empathy and social exclusion through meaningful moral decisions, it challenges players to confront prejudice and reflect on how societal judgment affects individual identity and well-being.

4.3 Accessibility and participation

Accessibility means ensuring that everyone – Including players with physical, cognitive, linguistic, or economic limitations – can fully engage with and enjoy a game. Accessibility and participation go hand in hand: the more accessible a game is, the more democratic its learning potential becomes.

Young people may face **physical barriers** (mobility, sensory, or cognitive limitations), **digital barriers** (lack of devices, poor connectivity), or **socioeconomic barriers** (cost, time, or access to technology). Recognising and addressing these challenges helps youth workers design equitable and engaging learning experiences.

Common barriers to participation:

◆ Complex navigation or unclear instructions

◆ Lack of control, customisation, small text, or low visual contrast

◆ High technological requirements or paid software

◆ Language barriers and limited localisation

◆ Assumptions about players' cognitive abilities or attention span

Tips & tricks

✓ Design with accessibility in mind from the very start, not as an afterthought.

✓ Use **no-code or low-code tools** such as Scratch, GDevelop, Construct, or Bitsy to make creation inclusive and affordable. These platforms lower technical barriers and allow young people and youth workers to become creators, not just consumers, fostering digital inclusion and creative confidence.

✓ Apply **Universal Design for Learning (UDL)** principles: Offer multiple ways to engage, represent, and express ideas.

✓ Include **customisable features**: Font scaling, colour contrast, captions, sound controls, and keyboard remapping.

✓ Ensure that **games run on low-spec devices** and, when possible, offline, reaching youth with limited internet access or older equipment.

✓ Test with **diverse user groups**, including young people with disabilities or limited digital literacy.

✓ Create **inclusive facilitation practices** that make everyone feel heard: Use visual aids, peer mentoring, and discussion rounds to engage youth from varied backgrounds.

✓ Encourage **co-design workshops** where youth contribute to gameplay ideas and accessibility solutions. This process promotes teamwork and shared ownership.

Inclusive facilitation means creating safe, participatory spaces where every player's experience matters. It's not just about designing games for young people, but with them – ensuring that accessibility becomes a shared value, not a technical checkbox.

Check the **Tech guide** for more information about these tools.

➢ **A youth game jam using GDevelop:** Participants from different backgrounds design civic mini-games about their communities. Teams apply accessibility features such as subtitles, high-contrast colours, and simplified navigation, ensuring everyone can play and create together.

➢ **A mobile game for local civic action:** Built in Construct, it uses readable fonts, simple controls, and multilingual text to involve rural and migrant youth in digital participation.

➢ **A classroom adaptation of Scratch projects:** Students remix one another's games to add captions and larger text, learning empathy and inclusion through design choices.

Participatory game development is not only a learning activity – it is an act of **civic engagement**, empowering young people to shape narratives that reflect their experiences and values.

Tips & tricks: Clear steps to follow:

✓ **Identify accessibility needs early:** Consult youth before starting design to understand physical, digital, and linguistic barriers that can limit participation.

✓ **Integrate accessibility features during development:** Add options like adjustable difficulty, contrast modes, subtitles, or flexible controls as default features – not special extras.

✓ **Facilitate inclusive playtesting and reflection:** After gameplay, guide discussions about what worked, what was excluded, and how future versions could improve fairness and inclusion.

4.4 Accessibility guidelines: Ensuring inclusive and user-friendly design

Creating accessible games requires more than adjusting a few technical settings. It means designing from the very beginning with the needs of diverse young people in

mind – including those with visual, auditory, cognitive, linguistic, or motor limitations. The following guidelines provide practical steps to ensure that games and learning experiences remain inclusive, readable, and user-friendly for all.

Tips & tricks: **Core accessibility principles to follow:**

✓ **Use clear, readable fonts:** Prefer sans-serif fonts (e.g., Arial, Verdana, OpenDyslexic) and ensure a minimum readable size across devices.

✓ **Ensure sufficient colour contrast:** Follow WCAG contrast ratios to make text and interface elements visible, for players with low vision or dyslexia.

✓ **Avoid italics and underlining:** These reduce readability; use bold for emphasis instead.

✓ **Use simple, consistent layout structures:** Break content into short paragraphs, use bullet points, and avoid dense text blocks.

✓ **Provide subtitles and/or voiceover:** This supports players with hearing or visual impairments, language barriers, or reduced literacy levels.

✓ **Offer alternative text and descriptions:** Add written or audio descriptions for essential visuals, icons, or narrative scenes.

✓ **Enable interface customisation:** Options such as font scaling, contrast themes, colour modes, and audio controls significantly increase usability.

✓ **Ensure clear and intuitive navigation:** Avoid clutter, ensure predictable menu structures, and provide step-by-step prompts where helpful.

✓ **Apply multiple modes of representation:** Follow Universal Design for Learning (UDL) by combining visuals, text, audio, and interactive elements.

✓ **Test accessibility early and often:** Include young people with disabilities and varied digital literacy levels in playtesting sessions. Their feedback should guide iterative improvements.

Accessibility strengthens participation and equity. When players can **easily read text, follow instructions, and interact with content regardless of their abilities or devices,** they are free to focus on creativity, collaboration, and civic engagement. Embedding accessibility throughout design – not as a late add-on – ensures fairer learning outcomes and a more inclusive experience for all.

4.5 Scenario proposal: Democracy Builders

As a practical illustration of the principles discussed above, the scenario **"Democracy Builders"** demonstrates how **youth participation** and **accessibility** can be integrated into educational game design. It provides youth workers with a hands-on model to facilitate learning about democracy, collaboration, and inclusion in an engaging and adaptable way.

Theme: Participatory democracy

Target group: Youth aged 15–25

Platform: Browser / Mobile (or offline with printed cards)

Duration: 90–120 minutes

Group size: 10–25 participants

Genre: Collaborative simulation / narrative puzzle

Participants act as members of a Youth Council tasked with improving a fictional European city, learning to balance diverse perspectives and make fair, inclusive choices.

Aim: Help young people experience how inclusion, dialogue, and shared responsibility shape democratic decision-making.

Learning objectives:

✦ Understand the principles of **participatory democracy** and inclusive collaboration.

✦ Practice **teamwork, negotiation, and empathy** through role-based decision-making.

✦ Recognise **accessibility and inclusion** as civic and democratic values.

Workshop overview

Youth are divided into small youth council groups, each representing different community perspectives (e.g., rural youth, migrant background, young person with disability). Together, they must allocate limited resources to address city challenges (for instance: access to culture, public transport, or digital inclusion). Through

debate, voting, and compromise, they experience the complexity of collective decision-making and the importance of inclusion.

Facilitation steps

1. **Introduction:** Present the purpose of the activity and assign roles to ensure diversity of viewpoints.
2. **Game phase:** Groups use a digital or paper-based version of Democracy Builders to discuss and decide on community priorities.
3. **Reflection:** After the gameplay, facilitate group discussion on fairness, inclusion, and real-world parallels ("Whose voice was missing?" "How did compromise feel?").
4. **Connection to reality:** Present local or EU initiatives for youth participation (e.g., European Youth Portal, Solidarity Corps).

Key features

✦ Adjustable interface (contrast, subtitles, font scaling).
✦ Storylines showing multiple viewpoints and negotiation.
✦ Rewards for inclusive and collaborative decision-making.
✦ Optional offline adaptation with printed cards or group role-play.

Expected outcomes

✦ Strengthened understanding of **democratic collaboration and shared responsibility**.
✦ Increased empathy and appreciation for diverse experiences.
✦ Enhanced awareness of **real civic engagement opportunities**.
✦ Empowerment to take inclusive action in their own communities.

As an educational model, "Democracy Builders" demonstrates that inclusive game design can serve as a powerful tool for civic learning. It bridges digital creativity and democratic engagement, reinforcing the importance of accessibility and equity in youth participation.

Chapter 5: From play to participation: Designing games with democratic impact

5.1 The power of play

Educational games are increasingly recognised as **powerful tools for democratic participation and civic engagement**, especially among young people. Unlike traditional learning methods, games provide **interactive, experiential environments** where players can explore complex ideas, experiment with decisions, and witness the consequences of their actions in a safe, structured space.

In the context of **European values, democracy, and active citizenship**, well-designed games can do far more than simply deliver information. They can:

◆ **Immerse players in meaningful scenarios** that mirror real societal challenges.
◆ **Encourage critical reflection** on individual and collective choices.
◆ **Foster collaboration and dialogue**, key elements of democratic life.
◆ **Build transferable skills**, such as problem-solving, critical thinking, empathy, and digital literacy.

For youth workers and educators, educational games represent a **unique opportunity to make civic education tangible and engaging**. By placing players in situations where they must navigate democratic processes, negotiate with others, or manage resources ethically, games can turn abstract concepts, like freedom of expression, digital rights, or environmental responsibility. into lived experiences.

In addition, the rise of **accessible, non-coding game creation tools** allows youth workers, educators, and young people themselves to become **creators**, not just consumers. This participatory approach aligns perfectly with democratic values: giving young people **agency**, **voice**, and **a role in shaping narratives**.

This final chapter explores how to design educational games that have a **democratic impact**. It focuses on 4 interconnected dimensions:

◆ **Balancing learning and engagement**, to ensure games are both meaningful and enjoyable.

◆ **Ethics and responsibility**, including privacy, inclusion, and digital rights.

◆ **Connecting virtual experiences to real-world action**, so that learning extends beyond gameplay.

◆ **Evaluating impact**, to measure and improve both educational and civic outcomes over time.

By integrating these principles, youth workers can design or facilitate games that **not only educate but also empower**, turning gameplay into a tool for **active, informed, and participatory citizenship**.

5.2 Balancing learning and engagement

Creating a game that is both **educationally meaningful** and **enjoyable to play** is one of the greatest challenges in civic game design. If the educational content dominates, players may lose interest. If the game is only entertaining, the learning objectives might be lost. Achieving this balance requires intentional design choices.

In practice: Key principles:

➢ **Define clear learning objectives** from the start: What democratic concepts or skills should players gain?

➢ **Integrate the learning into the mechanics**, not just narrative or text. For example, a game about digital citizenship could require players to identify misinformation through gameplay rather than a quiz at the end.

➢ **Match the game mechanics to the learning goals:** A debate game should use choice-based or role-playing mechanics; a sustainability game may use resource management.

➢ **Keep the cognitive load appropriate** for the target age group. Youth games should avoid overly complex instructions.

For example: A game on EU decision-making can place players in the roles of MEPs who must negotiate laws. The educational content (how EU laws are passed) is embedded in the mechanics (debating, forming coalitions), not just explained through text.

For democratic impact, educational content should **flow through the gameplay**, not sit around it. Well-integrated design keeps players engaged and turns learning into an active experience.

The following illustration compares **two different approaches** to combining learning and gameplay. On the **left ("Do")**, learning is naturally embedded within the game mechanics; players gain knowledge by playing, making choices, and solving challenges. On the **right ("Don't")**, learning is separated from the gameplay, often delivered as static information before or after the game.

DO

Gameplay + learning

DON'T

Gameplay → learning
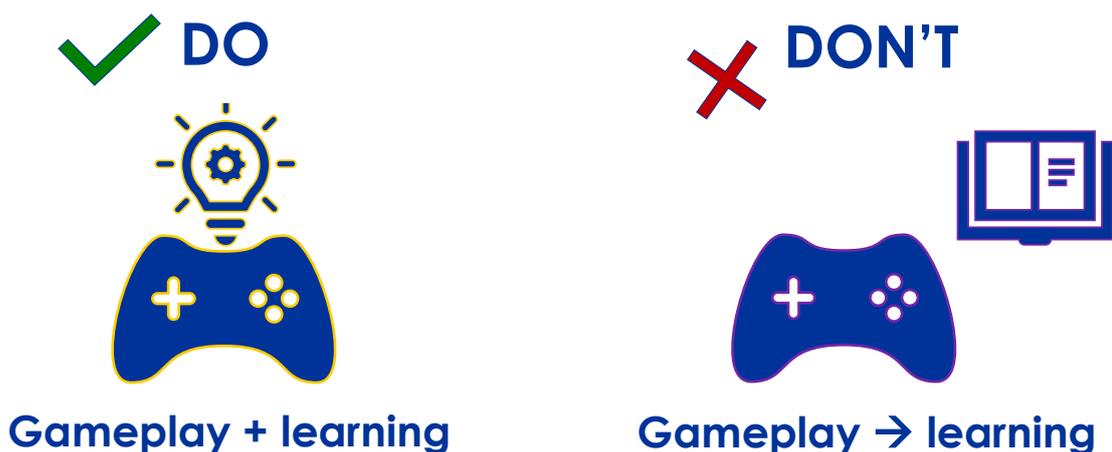
5.3 Ethics and responsibility in game design

Designing civic and educational games involves **ethical considerations**, especially when working with youth. This includes how data is handled, how inclusive the design is, and how respectful the content is of players' rights and identities.

Tips & tricks: **Data collection and privacy:**

✓ Collect **only essential data** (e.g., anonymous game progress) and avoid personal information whenever possible.

✓ Be **transparent** about what data is collected and why.

✓ Follow **GDPR guidelines** strictly for any data stored or shared.

✓ Avoid external plug-ins or third-party trackers that could compromise privacy.

Inclusive design principles

◆ **Representation matters:** Include diverse characters, names, and perspectives to reflect real EU societies.

◆ **Accessibility** should be built in from the start:

✦ High-contrast visuals and readable fonts.

✦ Subtitles or audio alternatives.

✦ Adjustable difficulty levels.

✦ Clear instructions and consistent UI.

You can find more information about inclusive design in **Chapter 4**.

Respect for digital rights

Model ethical behaviour **within the game**: for example, by rewarding respectful online communication or flagging harmful actions.

For example: **Possible ethical dilemmas or learning scenarios:**

➢ **Freedom of speech vs. hate speech:** A player moderating a fictional social network must decide whether to remove a controversial post. The choice affects public trust and civic dialogue, highlighting the balance between free expression and community well-being.

➢ **Misinformation and responsibility:** In a news simulation, players can choose to fact-check or share trending stories. Choosing accuracy over popularity builds credibility and demonstrates the civic importance of truthfulness in digital participation.

➢ **Privacy and data ethics:** Players acting as "digital citizens" might face the decision to use personal data to improve a city's services, but at the cost of citizens' privacy. Such scenarios promote awareness of **GDPR principles** and data protection as democratic safeguards.

➢ **Bias and inclusion:** A game could feature diverse characters and challenge players to make inclusive choices in leadership, media representation, or policymaking. This raises awareness about **algorithmic bias**, stereotypes, and equitable participation online.

Tips & tricks

✓ Consult national/EU privacy guidelines before any data collection.

✓ Incorporate UNESCO digital literacy principles to teach responsible participation.

✓ Co-create characters or scenarios with youth to ensure representation feels authentic.

✓ Test your game with diverse groups, including youth with disabilities or different cultural backgrounds.

Ethical game design principles

Privacy

Inclusion

Digital rights

Representation

5.4 From virtual worlds to real-world action

Educational games should not exist in isolation. Their **true democratic impact** comes when they **inspire players to act in real life,** to vote, participate in civic initiatives, protect the environment, or critically assess information.

Tips & tricks: **Connecting gameplay to reality:**

✓ Include **debriefing moments** after key in-game events to reflect on real-world parallels.

✓ Offer **discussion prompts or activities** for educators and youth workers to use post-game.

✓ Provide **links to real initiatives**, EU platforms, or opportunities (e.g., European Solidarity Corps, Youth Portal).

✓ Encourage **role transfer**: If players took on the role of policymakers, challenge them to propose real actions in their community.

✓ Provide a **"take it further" section** at the end of the game with real opportunities for civic action.

✓ Encourage youth workers to run **post-game workshops** linking gameplay to democratic realities.

✓ Use game results as starting points for **projects, campaigns, or discussions**.

For example:

➢ For **digital citizenship**, a game could simulate social media debates, then invite players to analyse real online content and create a code of conduct.

➢ For **environmental and social responsibility**, a resource management game could end with a challenge to develop an eco-action plan in their school or community.

5.5 Evaluating and improving impact

To ensure educational games are effective, designers and youth workers must think about **impact measurement** from the beginning. Evaluation is not just about proving success, it's about improving the experience.

Why evaluation matters

◆ It ensures that learning objectives are met.

◆ It helps adapt games for different contexts.

◆ It builds evidence to support funding and future use.

Practical evaluation methods

◆ **Pre- and post-activity surveys** to measure knowledge, attitudes, or skills.

◆ **Observation** during gameplay to assess engagement and collaboration.

◆ **Reflection journals** or group discussions after play sessions.

◆ **Analytics dashboards** (if appropriate) to track in-game choices or progress, while respecting privacy.

For example: Based on the **content fiches** developed by our partnership, you could design a **hybrid scenario** combining digital citizenship and environmental/social responsibility:

➢ Players navigate a fictional city where they must address misinformation campaigns about green policies.

➢ They debate, design campaigns, and implement eco-actions, learning both about **responsible digital behaviour** and **environmental impact**.

➢ The game concludes with a real-life action plan workshop led by youth workers.

Tips & tricks: **Player feedback integration:**

✓ **Collect feedback regularly** through short, accessible forms or discussions.

✓ Incorporate feedback into **iterative design cycles**.

✓ Involve young players as **co-designers**, not just testers.

✓ Keep evaluations **short and youth friendly**.

✓ Use evaluation results to refine both **content** (accuracy, relevance) and **mechanics** (engagement).

✓ **Share evaluation results** with all participants to create a culture of mutual learning and improvement.

PLAY

IMPROVE

REFLECT
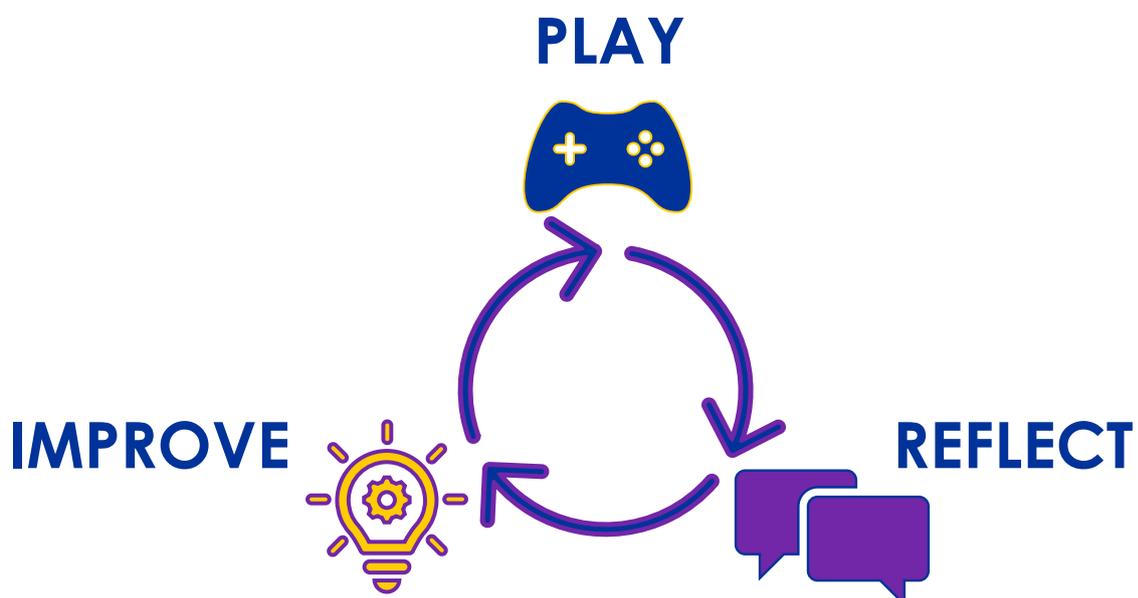
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