Playing Place

Board Games, Popular Culture, Space

edited by Chad Randl and D. Medina Lasansky

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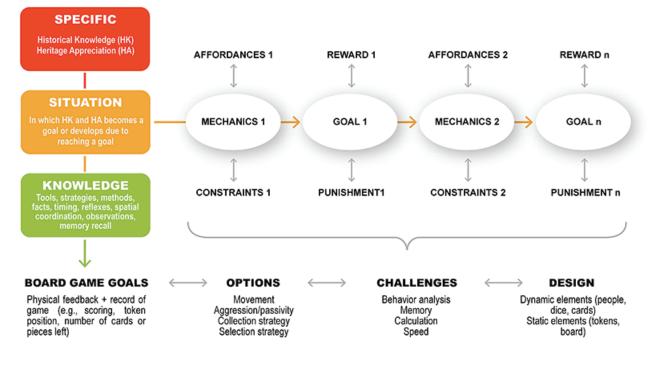
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Workshopping Board Games for Space, Place, and Culture

Erik Champion and Juan Hiriart



Game design schema for history and heritage-related games.

Conveying built heritage values and historical knowledge through board game design may seem an odd decision. Communicating space, place, and culture through play is challenge enough for a medium inherently incapable of evoking the direct experience of inhabitation and of architecture as a spatial art. Board games are engaging, social, quick to make, and fast to learn, intuitive or nuanced. From the complex to the spontaneous, board games can be effective, visceral tools for cultural immersion, challenging cultural assumptions and preconceptions, encouraging discussion and collaboration between players, and provoking insight and enjoyment with simple props or intricate rules. Our experience hosting participative design workshops with historians, archaeologists, and heritage professionals has provided insights into how board games may contribute to efforts to instill heritage values among various contexts and audiences. In small groups of three to four people, participants determine the design decisions, discussing and solving problems that often arise in an iterative process where historical research, game design, and play testing both blend and butt heads.

Participants define the game's core subject and theme, identifying "the cultural, historical, or archaeological facts and interpretations of the site or model that are significant, hidden or otherwise appropriate, engaging or transformative to explore."¹ We provided the minimum scaffolding necessary for sparking ideas without imposing our own views, while noting that the creation of engaging play environments requires an underlying structure. Without this structure, participants risk replicating existing game genres with repetitive mechanics, fail to incorporate increasing complexity and challenges, or become frustrated with the task of communicating historical information or heritage appreciation. Shallow imitation may result in both a bad learning experience and an unengaging game.

The schematic in figure 8.4 explains the design components of history and heritage-based games. It emphasizes focusing on the specific cultural significance and specific type of knowledge learned, ensuring that mechanics change game states at meaningful points of the gameplay, and providing an increasingly challenging reward system to prevent eventual boredom. Varying affordances and constraints also help ensure that challenges are dynamic and engaging.

For example, in a two-day workshop at the University of York (UK), a team of archaeologists, academics, and heritage professionals developed a board game prototype set in early medieval Britain. The design goals were to communicate how people inhabited the landscape, and the challenges of everyday life, based on existing data from the archaeological site of West Stow in Suffolk. The game needed to convey historical as well as cultural information about the period but also be engaging and fun. The historical board game challenged players to make a living from the land, facing typical problems that medieval farmers had to solve in the village of West Stow.



To determine the game subject, a simple card-sorting exercise defining "substantive concepts" helps minimize the risk that participants "rush" into a discussion of game mechanics without clearly understanding links between goals, gameplay, and rewards.² For this game, players drew rough sketches on rectangular pieces of cardboard; a modular board represented the terrain and quickly set available resources. Core game mechanics were defined by quantitative systems determining the rules and boundaries for the players' actions and specific challenges.

The resulting representation communicated spatial ideas reasonably well but did not fully evoke a sense of place. A sense of inhabitation could only be achieved by turning players into dwellers on the board, leveraging the game resources to endure the harsh conditions of medieval Britain.

Taking turns, each player had to decide the best strategy to survive through scarcity: where to build a house, when to plant crops, how much food to save

Codesign of Digitally Mediated Experiences at a workshop conducted at the University of York in 2019.



for winter. In this way, the acts of moving around and adding or removing tokens from the board symbolically communicated spatial relationships as well as the logics of production and reproduction from everyday life. Representative tasks such as foraging, threshing grain, and plowing the land were added to the player's repertoire, and their successful outcome was conditioned by strategy and timing as well as by pure chance (sometimes stuff just goes wrong). Testing sessions prompted interest-

The 2020 Space, Place, People and Culture Symposium held at Curtin University in Perth, Australia. ing debates among participants. They declared the primary focus on survival mechanics was problematic. The social complexity and deeply religious beliefs of early medieval life were often in conflict with individual survival.

Instead of oversimplified distinctions between right and wrong, facilitating players' decisions and interactions prompt interesting dilemmas and questions. Figure 8.6 shows a game prototype designed to expose the evils of colonialism that risked anchoring the mechanics of colonialism in the gameplay but led to fascinating debates on how colonialism could, should, or should not factor in game design.

How can literary descriptions of the past be "blocked" onto physical (or digital) game elements, and the varying accuracy of historical information be converted to the transactional and rule-based essence of gameplay? Could an appreciation and awareness of heritage (its value, uniqueness, formation, impact, and engagement by society) be conveyed via games? Heritage is not just the what, but also the how: how it is preserved and communicated from generation to generation. And the ways in which games can convey historical processes (the how) are typically through metonymical representation rather than through ritual immersion or contextually situated role playing. Perhaps the highest historical value of this sort of engagement resides not so much in the accurate replication and reenactment of modeled historical experiences but in the reflections and rich debates that games trigger.

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Figure 8.3: Courtesy of Troy Innocent.

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Figure 8.5: Courtesy of Juan Hiriart.

Figure 8.6: Courtesy of Juan Hiriart.

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Figure 8.8: Courtesy of Michael (mbrna Czech Mate).

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Figure 8.12: Courtesy of Quilian Riano / DSGN AGNC; Teddy Cruz and Cesar Fabela / Estudio Teddy Cruz; and Landscape Architect Simon Bussiere and Bussiere's 2011 Ball State Landscape Architecture Studio.

Figure 8.13: Courtesy of Noah Simblist.

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Figure 9.4: Courtesy of Bob Poniatowski.

Figure 10.1: Courtesy of the Strong, Rochester, New York.

Notes

Introduction

1 Milton Bradley's epigraph comes from "Games and Amusements," *Good Housekeeping* 22, no. 1 (1896): 14.

2 Regarding short-form essays, our format was influenced by the website *Platform* (www. platformspace.net), which confirms that provocative and scholarly questions can be addressed in 1,000 words often as well as in 10,000 words.

3 "Rich's Wonderful World of Toys: Perfect Blend of Elegance and Self-Service," *Toy and Hobby World* 4, no. 22 (November 21, 1966): 23.

4 "Games: Past Go and Accelerating," Toys and Novelties, July 1970, 38–44.

5 Jonathan Kay, "The Invasion of the German Board Games," *The Atlantic*, January 21, 2018, accessed August 24, 2021, https://www.theatlantic.com/business/archive/2018/01/german-board-games-catan/550826/. See also Stewart Woods, *Eurogames: The Design, Culture and Play of Modern European Board Games* (Jefferson, NC: McFarland, 2012).

6 Alexis Soloski, "Trapped at Home? Board Game On!" New York Times, April 30, 2020, accessed September 8, 2021, https://www.nytimes.com/2020/04/30/arts/ board-games-soothing-virus.html; Stu Woo and Denise Roland, "How Do Doctors Treating Coronavirus Relax? By Playing the Game 'Pandemic,'" Wall Street Journal, June 28, 2020, accessed September 6, 2021, https://www.wsj.com/articles/how-do-doctors-treating -coronavirus-relax-by-playing-the-game-pandemic-11593369385.

7 See, e.g., essays in Wiebe E. Bijker, Thomas P. Hughes, and Trevor J. Pinch, eds., *The Social Construction of Technological Systems: New Directions in the Sociology and History of Technology* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1987).

8 The board game classifications used here are not all-encompassing, universally understood, or as clear-cut as their descriptions may suggest, but they help make sense of an otherwise overwhelming range of board game forms. Numerous other types and categories (party, Ameritrash, worker placement) are folded into the three outlined earlier. The terms and descriptions for "staple" and "promotional" games come from "Games: Past Go and Accelerating," *Toys and Novelties*, July 1970, 38–44.

9 Because of their popularity, they are also the most common subjects of mass-market books. See the works by Phil Orbanes, Mary Pilon, Tristan Donovan, and others in the bibliography.

10 Woods, Eurogames, 117.

11 Johan Huizinga, *Homo Ludens: A Study of the Play Element in Culture* (London: Maurice Temple Smith, 1970). For debates about the existence and nature of the Magic Circle, see Mia Consalvo, "There Is No Magic Circle," *Games and Culture* 4, no. 4 (2009): 408–417; Jaakko Stenros, "In Defense of a Magic Circle: The Social, Mental and Cultural Boundaries of Play," *Transactions of the Digital Games Research Association* 1, no. 2 (2014): 147–185;

and Joshua Daniel-Wariya, "Rhetorical Strategy and Creative Methodology: Revisiting Homo Ludens," Games and Culture 14, no. 6 (2019): 622–638.

12 Alex Lehnerer, Grand Urban Rules (Rotterdam: 010 Publishers, 2009), 6.

13 Dolores Hayden calls place "one of the trickiest words in the human language, a suitcase so overfilled one can never shut the lid." Dolores Hayden, *The Power of Place: Urban Landscapes as Public History* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1997), 15.

14 Yi-Fu Tuan, Space and Place: The Perspective of Experience (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1977), 54.

15 Jonathan Sime has written that place is an especially useful concept to bridge disciplinary boundaries and bring both people and the physical environment more prominently into focus. Referring to the fact that architects focus too much on form while diminishing human factors, and environmental psychologists focus too much on human factors without considering form, Sime says, "It is this imbalance in emphasis and a gap in knowledge between subject domains which the concept of 'place' can hopefully help to redress." Jonathan D. Sime, "Creating Places or Designing Spaces?" *Journal of Environmental Psychology* 6 (1986): 50.

16 Garry Crawford, "Is It in the Game? Reconsidering Play Spaces, Game Definitions, Theming, and Sports Videogames," *Games and Culture* 10, no. 6 (2015): 571.

17 Greg Aleknevicus, "German Games Are Fraudulent," *Games Journal*, August 2004, accessed September 6, 2021, http://www.thegamesjournal.com/articles/Fraudulent.shtml. As designed objects, games are also subject to debate about utility and usability—of component, board layouts, box size, and so on. What some appreciate as enriching "chrome," others consider superfluous, excessive complication. See Shannon Appelcline, "Shannon's List of Do's and Don't's for Game Component Design," *Gone Gaming*, December 8, 2005, accessed September 6, 2021, http://boredgamegeeks.blogspot.com/2005/12/shannons-list-of-dos-and-donts-for_08.html.

18 Philip Orbanes, "The Board Game Market: A Personal Viewpoint," unpublished manuscript, March 25, 1976, Philip E. Orbanes Papers, Brian Sutton-Smith Library and Archives of Play, the Strong, box 2, fol. 5, p. 13.

19 Woods, *Eurogames*, 109. The author notes that "although theme might be considered arbitrary in analyzing the behavior of a game system, it is an important element in terms of both marketing and player experience. For a publisher, theme is an important factor in attracting the target audience to purchase a particular title, while for players it functions to draw them into the fictional world of the game and thus enhance the player's experience."

20 Matthew Leacock, email message to Chad Randl, April 2, 2022.

21 The Parker Brothers game, featuring product placements with Westinghouse appliances, bears some similarities to the computer game franchise *The Sims*, first introduced in 2000.

22 Welcome to game box, Blue Cocker Games, 2018. The "Welcome to" series has since expanded to include Welcome to New Las Vegas (2020) and Welcome to the Moon (2021).

23 See, e.g., Philip Orbanes, Monopoly: The World's Most Famous Game—and How It Got That Way (Cambridge, MA: Da Capo Press, 2006). Magie is the focus of Mary Pilon, The Monopolists: Obsession, Fury, and the Scandal behind the World's Favorite Board Game (New York: Bloomsbury, 2015); and David Parlett, "Lizzie Magie: America's First Lady of Games," Board Game Studies Journal 13, no. 1 (2019): 99–109.

24 Karl Nyren, "Making Your Own Monopoly," *Library Journal* 111, no. 10 (1986): 41. The article noted that such ventures were possible because Parker Brothers' original copyright had expired.

25 Playing Place contributor Diana Garvin has undertaken research on this game.

26 "Monopoly Game Made in the Theresienstadt Ghetto in 1943," Yad Vashem, accessed May 1, 2022, https://www.yadvashem.org/artifacts/museum/monopol.html.

27 Acquire game box, 1971 edition, 3M Corporation, Saint Paul, Minnesota; courtesy of the Strong, Rochester, New York.

28 Bruce Whitehill, Games: American Boxed Games and Their Makers, 1822–1992 (Radnor, PA: Wallace-Homestead, 1992), 9.

29 The original game was set in Buffalo, New York. Other versions included "St. Louis' Great Blizzard" and equivalents for Providence, Boston, Milwaukee, Rochester, Chicago, and possibly others.

30 Drawing on recent work in memory studies and using railway-themed games as a model, Jason Begy has written about how games can "objectify" shared memories and how their analysis can reveal the way different media forms and simulations help shape a "subjective cultural understanding of the past, an understanding that is often formed without the supervision of historians." Jason Begy, "Board Games and the Construction of Cultural Memory," *Games and Culture* 12, nos. 7–8 (2015): 718–738.

31 The list of lesser-known construction sets that followed these examples is extensive and includes American Plastic Bricks by Elgo, Riviton, and Kenner's Girder and Panel Building Set. Construction and architectural toys have long been a source of interest to architectural historians, especially when they contribute to architectural origin stories like the young Frank Lloyd Wright's formative play with Froebel wood blocks. See, e.g., Robert Vale and Brenda Vale, Architecture on the Carpet: The Curious Tale of Construction Toys and the Genesis of Modern Buildings (New York: Thames & Hudson, 2013); and Tamar Zinguer, Architecture in Play: Intimations of Modernism in Architectural Toys (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2015).

32 Ian Bogost, *How to Do Things with Videogames* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2011), 129.

33 Orbanes, "The Board Game Market," p. 5.

34 Bogost, How to Do Things, 77.

35 Trevor Bender designed the scenario, titled "Virus Crisis." A free e-book edition was offered on the *C3i* website, accessed September 6, 2021, https://www.c3iopscenter. com/pages/wargame-room-store/#!/COVID-19-A-Pandemic-Scenario-C3i-eBook-Edition /p/185408244/category=33205167; link inactive as of November 3, 2022.

36 The field of cultural memory studies, established in the 1980s, examines how the past is reconstructed and interpreted in the present by a range of audiences and communities. It is less concerned with fact than with mythologies and the formulation of contemporary understandings of the past or contemporary viewpoints and conditions shaped through a shared use of historical mythologies. As Jason Begy has argued, cultural memory depends on communication and contemporary media. Jason Begy, "Board Games and the Construction of Cultural Memory," *Games and Culture* 12, nos. 7–8 (2015): 718–738.

37 For a recent media studies-based examination of board games, see Paul Booth, *Board Games as Media* (New York: Bloomsbury, 2021).

38 Jeremy Antley, "Games and Historical Narratives," *Journal of Digital Humanities* 1, no. 2 (2012): 40.

39 Pat Harrigan and Matthew G. Kirschenbaum, "Editors' Introduction," in *Zones of Control: Perspectives on Wargaming*, ed. Pat Harrigan and Matthew G. Kirschenbaum (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2016), xviii.

40 Linda N. Groat and Marta Brković Dodig, eds., The Routledge Companion to Games in Architecture and Urban Planning: Tools for Design, Teaching, and Research (New York: Routledge, 2020).

41 Maurice Suckling, "Board with Meaning: Reflections on Game Design and Historiography," CEA Critic 79, no. 1 (2017): 119.

42 Suckling, "Board with Meaning," 111.

43 Suckling, 111.

44 Maurice Suckling and Jeremy Antley have noted how the immensely popular board game, *Twilight Struggle* (2005), for example, leaves unchallenged many basic (Western) assumptions about the Cold War. Suckling, "Board with Meaning," 113; Jeremy Antley, "Going beyond the Textual in History," *Journal of Digital Humanities* 1, no. 2 (2012): 57–63.

45 Joshua Daniel-Wariya, "Rhetorical Strategy and Creative Methodology: Revisiting *Homo Ludens*," *Games and Culture* 14, no. 6 (2019): 626.

46 Wargamers, particularly those who play complex, multihour (or multiday) detailed simulations, refer to themselves as "grognards," a Napoleonic-era French term for old soldiers. See the Consimworld.com website and its forums as well as essays in Harrigan and Kirschenbaum, *Zones of Control*.

47 Amy Kurzweil and Ellis Rosen, "The Hidden Moral Lessons in Your Favorite Childhood Games," *New Yorker*, September 28, 2018.

48 Samantha Grossman, "You Have to Play a Board Game Before You Can Get a Driver's License in Sierra Leone," *Time*, October 21, 2013, accessed August 2, 2021, https://newsfeed.time.com/2013/10/21/you-have-to-play-a-board-game-before-you-can-get-a-drivers-license-in-sierra-leone/.

49 John T. Edmunds, "The Urban Renewal 'Game': A New Teaching Aid," HUD Challenge (October 1972): 18–19.

50 Milton Bradley, "Games and Amusements," Good Housekeeping 22, no. 1 (1896): 16.

51 Game rule book, Public Assistance.

52 According to one such publication, "Some psychologists have announced that men, after all, are just oversized boys, but still retaining the boy's likes and dislikes, including a definite preference for toys. . . In arranging store displays, this should be kept in mind and those items of particular appeal to men should be placed where they are sure to be seen." W. R. Harrison, "I'm in Love with a Wonderful Guy," *Playthings* 68, no. 8 (1950): 105. Concerns about the "boy-man" who refuses to grow up continue to the present. One marker of the boyman's supposed immaturity is his enduring desire to play games, especially video games; see Gary S. Cross, *Men to Boys: The Making of Modern Immaturity* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2008).

53 Today Eurogames consistently list the game's designer on the box top (the majority are still male). For recent scholarship on identity, subjectivity, and board games, see Terri Toles Patkin, Who's in the Game? Identity and Intersectionality in Classic Board Games (Jefferson, NC: McFarland, 2020). For a period perspective on the male toy-buying consumer, see Harrison, "I'm in Love with a Wonderful Guy," 105.

54 Game board and component print files were available for free download from the publisher's website, accessed September 6, 2021, https://www.daysofwonder.com/tickettoride/en/stay-at-home/.

Player TV: Board Games in TV Land

1 Susan Stewart, On Longing: Narratives of the Miniature, the Gigantic, the Souvenir, the Collection (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1984), 68.

2 Michel de Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life*, trans. Steven Rendall (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984).

3 Meaghan Morse, "An Ontology of Everyday Distraction: The Freeway, the Mall, and Television," in *Logics of Television*, ed. Patricia Mellencamp (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1990), 193–221.

4 Gaston Bachelard, "Miniature," in *The Poetics of Space* (Boston: Beacon, 1964), 148–182; Stewart, *On Longing*, 1984.

Scrabble and the Image of the (Out-of-Work) Architect

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Hanging Out at the Food Court with Electronic Mall Madness

1 Interestingly, 1989 was the same year that construction began on the Mall of America (six miles from Southdale Center and still the largest indoor shopping center in the United States).

2 An initial iteration in 1988, *Mall Madness*, lacked the elaborate detail of succeeding editions. Small changes were made between the 1989 and 2004 versions, such as the

introduction of the food court and food tokens. The game was reimplemented in 2008 and 2011 with a licensed Hannah Montana theme and then a pet shop theme, respectively.

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Chad Randl (right) playing (and likely losing) *Chutes and Ladders* with a childhood friend ca. 1975.

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