

Gamification 4 Inclusion

Game description Czech Republic

“Romeo & Juliet of Holešovice”

Pedagogical aspects

The main and the forefront aspects approached in this game are prejudices and inter-group relations. Our departing position was based on the fact that Roma are negatively perceived in the Czech society¹ and that is what we would like to talk more about with young people. As straightforward talk about prejudices against Roma could trigger rebuff of the topic we chose to approach the issue through building an imaginary society but with taking into account the real-life prejudices Roma face. But, as reflective sessions which take place after the game showed, the game enables exploration of prejudices and minority-experiences in general. We perceive it as a positive fact as it therefore becomes relatable to wider audience.

In the first part of the game we do actually build and enhance stereotypical views of what “the others” are which brings into play not only prejudices as such but also the ways our surroundings, the society in which we live, (mis)lead us how to perceive “the other”. Thus the game brings in also wider notion of critical thinking as the players gradually realize the

¹ Annual survey of the Public Opinion Research Centre investigates Czech public attitudes to various ethnic groups living in the Czech Republic. Roma are regularly the ethnic group which Czechs find the least sympathetic. For more details see https://cvvm.soc.cas.cz/media/com_form2content/documents/c2/a4905/f9/ov190415.pdf.

manipulation and find out that they need (and want) to think about the others on their own, not through the lenses of animosity but through their own experience and with their own mind.

Besides the most important and obvious pedagogical aspects there are smaller ones present in the game. Such as media literacy – the game is played concurrently by two teams which are from two opposed groups and receive different information and are differently treated by the actors depending of their group belonging. One such difference are media articles describing a certain situation which the players receive in the beginning of the game and which include conflicting information and perspectives. But the players learn about the different descriptions of the same event only in the end and when they confront the two versions a space opens to talk about media and the necessity of critical approach to information.

Other not-so-obvious aspects include cooperation which is for the players first necessary to move through the game in the split groups and finally for all the players together to get to the finale. Going into more practical area, the players also get to strengthen their map-reading and space-orientation skills as they travel from one game site to another.

The pedagogical aspects materialize after the game itself is over and the players meet together for a reflective session. The session is short, maximum 30 minutes, and besides giving space to the players to talk about their feelings and experience we explore with them more in details the prejudices' processes that took place and relate them to real-life situations. This consists of asking them what they thought about the other game group in the first part of the game, how they perceive them now, when and why did that change happen and if they can find real-life parallels. The mechanisms of telling and motivating the players to dislike people from the other group are also explored and put into real-life parallel. In the end we discuss what helps us in real life to overcome prejudices.

Short storyline

The story is loosely based on that of Romeo and Juliet's. It starts with two young people from two antagonist groups gone missing and the players getting the assignment to find them. As the game thematizes strained relations between two different groups (physically different by bigger noses/ears which the players receive in the beginning and wear them throughout the game), players are divided in two groups and their respective storylines differ. So the information received by the players in the beginning of the game talks only about one missing person and as the game progresses they find out about the other one.

One group of players become friends (with big ears) from a gym who are searching for a friend named Tomáš who did not show up for some time. They know that he was in some kind of troubles because of a fight that happened in the music club he was working in but that's it. They gradually find out about Tomáš's relationship with a big-nosed Hanka and their wedding.

The second group is playing Hanka's friends (with big noses) from a music group who should play at a concert soon and that's why they should try to find Hanka who did not show up for rehearsals lately. They know that she was going regularly to a club and that her brother got into a fight there. They also gradually find about her relationship with Tomáš and their wedding.

Our story's finale starts with the two groups' meeting in front of Hanka's mother's apartment and through inspiring reconciliation of the girl's mother with the rare marriage of her daughter the players succeed in contacting the couple.

Structure of the game

In order to explain a little bit more in details the game and its storyline we will now describe the progress of the game from the perspectives of the two game-groups.

Group with big ears/friends of Tomáš

Friends of Tomáš meet because their friend is missing and they want to find out what has happened. He was lately having problems after he was involved in a fight in Cross Club where he was working. His phone is off and he wasn't seen around his flat for some time. The decision is made to find out more about the fight in the club as it seems like the only possible step to make.

The bartender is a nice person and is open to talk. Players learn that the fight was started by those with the big noses who are very aggressive and not to be trusted. They also learn that Tomáš was meeting a girl with a big nose in the club and that it wouldn't be a surprise if something has happened to him because of her; none of them was seen in the club since the fight. The bartender's brother shows up when the bartender goes away and it turns out he was friend with both Tomáš and the girl, Hanka. He found Hanka's agenda in the bar after the fight. There are plenty entries, the players are told to take pictures of them so that they can explore them later; the last one is with an address.

The address leads to the town hall, the register office. The lady is reserved but the players learn that Hanka and Tomáš have married. With a bit of luck and handiness they secretly look in the registrar's folder and copy Hanka's address.

The players find a construction site at the address and as they hesitate what to do next they are verbally attacked by a construction worker (with a big nose). They don't learn anything but experience being targeted for being people with big ears. Then the construction worker abruptly leaves and a

girl who was observing them asks what they are doing in this neighborhood. Asked about Hanka, the girl gives an address at which her family is staying.

The players arrive to the building where Hanka's family is living but Hanka's mother does not want to talk with them and they argue.

Group with big noses/friends of Hanka

Friends of Hanka from the music band meet because their friend is missing and they want to find out what has happened. She has changed after the fight in the Cross Club in which her brother took part, kind of secretive, not talking much with her friends. And now her phone is off, she did not show up for rehearsals and the band should play at a concert next week. No one knows where Hanka lives and it seems that the only possible step to make now is to find out more about the fight in the club.

The bartender yells at the players from the moment they enter the bar. They are told that they are not welcomed there because they are aggressive, dirty drug users who never work and so on. They don't really learn anything but upon leaving the bar they are approached by the bartender's little brother and it turns out he was friend with Hanka. He found Hanka's agenda in the bar after the fight. There are plenty entries, the players are told to take pictures of them so that they can explore them later; the last one is with an address.

The address leads to the town hall, the register office. The lady is reserved and condescended toward them but the players succeed to learn that Hanka has married Tomáš, a guy with big ears. After some difficulties the registrar also tells the players where Hanka's family is staying.

During the tram ride to Hanka's place the players meet a man with a big nose who chats with them about the ways the people with big ears are.

Upon arriving to the building where Hanka's family should be living they see a group of people with big ears.

Alliance/the two groups together

Meeting the other group means questioning, arguing, confronting the different information and versions of the events the two groups have. After shorter or longer period of time the players decide to approach Hanka's mother together. The facilitators can help the players, remind them what their goal is and suggest bigger-group cooperation by putting the right questions; but they have to keep their presence low until the end of the game.

Hanka's mother is not willing to accept new information, most notably the fact that the couple has married. She is very much prejudicial towards the people with big ears. As the conversation evolves she guides the players to confront the concurrent information and put together all the facts and recreate the most accurate version of what has happened.

When the discussion nears to a dead end – there's nothing more to discover and the mother is not willing to take action, Hanka's sister Sára comes to the scene. She confirms what the players know and admits of having been in contact with Hanka after her disappearance. She suggests that the mother contacts Hanka through a messaging app. The players have to convince the mother to do so and finally the mother asks them for help in formulating the message.

That's when a conversation with Hanka begins. Sára is writing the messages only when the whole group agrees on the content. This conversation leads to disclosure of a video message that Hanka and Tomáš have recorded for Sára. The whole group is invited upstairs to see the message together with the mother.

In the video message Hanka and Tomáš explain why they have run away and express their wish to return to a more tolerant society. They encourage the players to record a message in order to make them believe it will be safe for them

to return. In response to sending the players' video message Hanka and Tomáš apologize for their abrupt escape and problems it may have caused and promise to stay in touch. The relieved mother thanks the players and stresses the importance of what they have done.

In order to underline the successful end of the game, the present actors and facilitators start clapping their hands to thank the players and all the other actors come in as well.

The players are then invited for a follow-up reflective session to another room.

Game mechanics

The game is a theatrical one, based on situations into which the players come and which are led by actors. The situations are based very much on the actors' improvisations. The actors know who they are (personal characteristics, place in the story and game, to which group they belong etc.), how they feel in that moment and what should they tell or not to tell to the players. Besides that it's very much on the actors and the players how the conversations evolve. But there's one basic rule the actors are following – they have to be secretive and somehow play around with the players, not giving them the info for free (the actors also know what is the trigger that makes them give information to the players).

The game is composed of two main lines through which we are trying to talk about prejudices. The first one is rational – the players receive and process information. The second line is emotional, build upon personal experience through interaction with the actors. The actors treat the players according to which group (big noses/ears) they belong to and their behavior can run from helpful, sympathetic, neutral and unfavorable to hateful.

We have also identified three main aspects which we consider crucial for such a game to succeed and to which we were aspiring in our game. These are:

- immersion, i.e. the players should dive into the game-world, become their characters and live the story;
- experiencing the treated issue (in our case prejudices) from different perspectives as a precondition to a fruitful discussion on the issue;
- simple but going to the point reflective session.

Conditions enabling immersion consist mainly of creating an interesting story, elaborated settings and the fact that the facilitators and the actors are taking care that everybody keeps acting in their respective roles throughout the game.

By experiencing prejudices from different perspectives we mean enabling the players to stand on different sides throughout the game. This leads to a more complex awareness of the issue and is a good starting point for a follow-up discussion. We have identified three main relations:

- the issue as the topic of the game, as topic of the story, or, *it is happening to someone else, I am observing it*;
- the issue as something directly affecting the players, or, *I am the target, I suffer*;
- and the issue as something the players are spreading and co-creating, or, *I am the perpetrator*.

The follow-up reflective session is the key part as this is the part in which experience is sorted out, verbalized, discussed and put in relation to the non-imaginary, real world and life. It is the moment when a seed of change can be planted and an issue can be consciously discussed. At the same time it is happening after a playful time and a format of discussion can easily become uninteresting for the (often tired) players. Therefore we think it is important not to lengthen it too much and pick up the core questions related to the topic we want to address. At the beginning we leave some space for the players to ventilate the strongest emotions but we are cutting short questions and comments related to the details of the game. The questions asked during the session are:

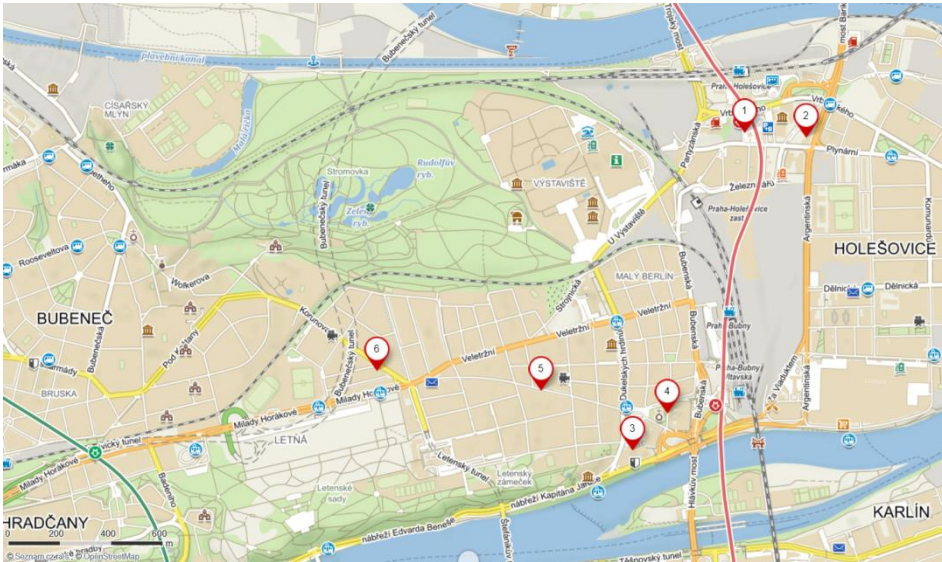
- what did you think about the others (people with big-noses/ears) in the beginning?
- what do you think about them now?
- when and why did your view of the other group change?
- can you give some examples of similar phenomenon from real-life situations?
- how to prevent and react to such situations - as observers, targets or perpetrators?

It is not evident for the players to tell about how they have perceived the out-group; they tend to say that they were fine with everybody since the beginning. This is not true as the facilitators are there with the players and they hear what the players say. We are therefore planning to add an episode after the scene at the music club in which the players will be approached by a local TV journalist. The journalist will ask questions about what do they think about the out-group and record the answers of the players. The questions would be simple, e.g.: “what do you think about the people with big noses/ears?” and “what would you recommend to our spectators to do when you meet them?”

Game locations

The venues of the game are an important factor in successfully immersing the players into the game-world. Though we have created an imaginary society in the game, we chose to play in realistic environment. The players meet facilitators next to a metro station (#1 on the map below) and first clues lead them to a nearby music club (2) where they experience the first scene. The next stop is in an office of the town hall (3). Then one group experience a situation on the street (4) and the other meets an actor during their tram ride (5). The final scene takes place in front of a building (6) and in an apartmentish space where Hanka’s family lives. The reflective part is set in a top-floor gallery of the same building .The players have to deal with

map-reading and use public transportation to get from one game-spot to the other.



Actors & characters

The game team has consisted of people from 12 to 40+ years old with various personal and professional background – amateur actors, gaming enthusiasts, human rights activists, a social assistant, and a journalist both of Roma and non-Roma origin. The whole team has collaborated on the creation and preparation of the game with a big help of a theatre director.

We have created 8 characters for the game, 6 of which are acting in the respective scenes and 2 act as facilitators for the players. Following the logic of our game-world, part of the characters are people with big noses and part with big ears; the actors all wear big noses or ears disguises. Facilitators' characters are connected to the initial story: one is a big-nosed friend of Hanka and is a musician; the other is a big-eared friend of Tomáš and spends his free-time in a gym. The other characters include:

- a big-eared bartender who hates the big-nosed people and is secretly in love with Tomáš;
- her more open-minded little brother who misses Tomáš and Hanka as maybe only true friends he has found so far;
- a deeply judgmental but trying to be politically correct big-eared municipal officer;
- a big-eared people hating big-nosed construction worker;
- Hanka's sister Sára whose main drive is sadness caused by her sister leaving because of inter-group hate
- and Hanka's mother with deeply embedded stereotypes about the others who is hurt by a perceived treason of her daughter.

Tools & gadgets

The game is quite a simple one gadget-wise as it's based mainly on the actors' performances. Nevertheless we have created and used some.

The most important gadgets are the noses and ears disguises which are distributed during ***the introductory phase*** at the meeting point near the metro station. By putting the disguises on the players enter our game world and become characters in our story.



Pictures of the nose and ears disguises taken at the meeting point and the club venue.

Content-wise the players build their characters with the help of role cards. Those include following information:

- the roles in the group of friends – ranges from organizing trips to football matches, being a colleague at work or what are their favorite exercises in the gym for the big-ears group, i.e. Tomáš's friends; what instruments they play and what's their role in the everyday life of their music band for the big-noses group, i.e. Hanka's friends;
- their relationship with Tomáš/Hanka and short stories about their missing friend;
- an experience with or a judgement of the antagonist group;
- a partial information on the situation – e.g. one player went to look for Tomáš in his flat, one player was once with Hanka in the music club etc.

Prejudices about the out-group are scattered through the above described pieces of information in forms of different remarks, pertinently used adjectives etc.

One player in each group receives with their role two articles from a local newspaper. One of them describes the fight between Tomáš and Hanka's brother in the music club (which thus leads the players to the idea of going there) and the other describes the other group in a very prejudicial way (each group receives articles written from the perspective of the game-group they now belong to). The articles include pictures of Tomáš/Hanka so that the players can have a more concrete idea about who they are looking for and thus relate more easily to the story. The articles are dated so they are as well a clue as to the time-frame of the story. See the two different media outputs below.

Each group receives game money and is told that nothing really depends on them but it may be useful (the players

usually use the money to buy drinks in the bar and to bribe the municipal officer).

One of the players in each group – those whose characters went to the music club before - also receives a map of the surrounding location.

At the music club the actors prepare drinks which can be bought by the players and most importantly an agenda which, the players are told in the end of this situation, the bartender's little brother found in the bar after the fight (fight which is described in the articles above and which is the starting point for conversation the players have with the bartender). The agenda belongs to Hanka and contains different notes such as rehearsals with her music band, going out with friends, meeting with Tomáš and other entries not connected to the game (being there only to create authenticity). The last entry in the agenda contains time and address of a meeting. A map with which help the players can get to the location is inserted in the agenda.

At the municipal office our actor uses a folder with marriage forms into which the players look to find Hanka's address when the actor /municipal officer/ goes to answer a phone-call. Besides that the players receive a map with which help they find the next location.

At the address where Hanka should be living the players find a **construction site**. Our actor needs for this scene only a reflexive vest or alternatively a helmet to look like a construction worker.

Actors at the last venue, **the place where Hanka's family actually live**, need mobile phones connected to internet and with a messaging app installed as part of this situation consists in exchanging messages with Hanka (the conversation is managed by the actor playing Hanka's sister on one side and by another actor hidden upstairs who writes the messages as Hanka). The messaging ends with Hanka telling her sister that she has already explained herself in a video message and that

Hanka's sister should show it to the friends. The players are thus invited upstairs and showed Hanka and Tomáš's message (<https://drive.google.com/open?id=1g-WiaabN91iW-zaHdobVDVjLzYfl83sq>). The message motivates the players to record one in return and that's when a camera or laptop is needed to record it.

Target group

The game is targeted on young people circa between 12 – 18 years. Younger players tend to experience stronger the story and dive into it, the older ones play more rationally but on the other hand they are therefore able to think more about the topic, are more involved in the serious part of the program.

Time frame

The game takes approximately two hours to play. The follow-up reflective session lasts half-an-hour.

Feedback from the players

The feedback from the players was overall very positive. They said they have enjoyed the game stressing the venues and the travel between them as an interesting part. They said that the story was thrilling enough to keep their attention throughout the game and that it was fun to put together all the details so that the whole story can emerge.

As for experiencing standing on different sides of the issue, the players have mostly indicated that being the target of prejudices was their strongest experience during the game. As mentioned above, they were mostly denying their perpetrators' moments. The being observer part, i.e. seeing and apprehending the events was the least interesting for the players and the part to which majority reactions seemed as

expressed in a learned, pattern matter – e.g. a very common reaction was: “*we shouldn’t treat people based on their appearance*”. It is nevertheless important to keep all the angles present as it enables creation of a more critical and complex image and discussion of the issue.

When talking about reactions to real-life prejudice the players stressed the importance of personal contact and getting to know each other on individual level, awareness of common characteristics and yearnings and the related openness to the others.

To conclude

It was not always an easy and straightforward path to put together all the pieces so that the whole makes sense and is fun to play but it was an important experience for the creating and acting team. The principle of creating the game since the beginning with the actual actors proved valuable as every team-member could co-create its character and the respective situation. As a result each actor felt comfortable in their role and thus was able to act authentically and improvise meaningfully. It also enhanced every member’s responsibility to the play making them show the best of them. And last but not least, all the creative and acting team members have been enjoying the game as well.

This material has been based on the work of the Open Society's project team – Soňa Černá, Miroslav Hejduk, Hedviga Hejduková, Soňa Kalejová, Ester Lomová, Veronika Kratochvílová, Adam Rut, Martin Skopalík, Branislav Štepita.

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