

AUTONOMIA ALAPITVANY



COMMUNITY DETECTIVITY PLANNING METHODOLOGY

Community Detectivity Planning Methodology

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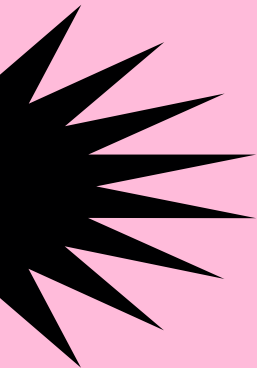
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BACKGROUND



This methodology for planning community detectivity games was produced by Autonomia Foundation and its long-time partner, the Detectivity Center for Creative Education and Experience (Pro Jugendstil Foundation, Young Artists for Culture), in the framework of the Erasmus+ project "Roma Youth Bring Change" (2021-2-HU01-KA210-YOU-000048113).

This methodology can be beneficial for all organisations working on social issues, and especially for those who would like to involve young people not only as participants, but also as game designers and implementers through "community planning".

What is a detective game?

Detective or investigation games are rooted in escape and treasure hunting games.

Participants solve a crime or a mystery. Through traces, encounters, dilemmas and challenges they find a solution for the given issue. Throughout the game, they might have encounters with characters of a story, analyse documents, and overcome logical or even physical challenges. The participants will interact with each other and the facilitators or characters of the game.

The participants will develop many competences through completing their tasks. Detective games are based on "Edutainment", which means that they aim to entertain, while also helping participants to learn about an issue. In a social detective game, for example, we can give them information about social issues or facilitate encounters with the members of a social group. In case of a historic detective game, they can learn a lot about a specific time in history.

The Detectivity Center for Creative Education and Experience has been a pioneer in conducting theatrical investigations with social themes for over 10 years in Hungary. In their portfolio we can find games for children and adults to entertain, convey social knowledge, and impact participants' attitudes. They work with dramatic pedagogy, interactive theatre, film, circus pedagogy and the living library method.

With the support of Autonomía Foundation's and other organisations' thematic expertise, the Detectivity Center developed many workshops on social topics using theatrical investigations. During the production of such games, there is great emphasis on research and building knowledge on the topic. It is crucial to treat the displayed topic and the affected vulnerable groups responsively and from a wide range of viewpoints. Besides, it is important to provide opportunities for the concerned group's members to take part in the games' planning so that they can bring in their own issues, stories and values.

The Autonomia Foundation has been running research, community development and non-formal education projects for vulnerable groups, especially on Roma empowerment, for more than twenty years. It has assisted many young people from vulnerable groups to make a successful career. Moreover, it supported them - as facilitators themselves - to have an influence on what other people think about Roma communities.

Autonomia Foundation and the Detectivity Centre for Creative Education and Experience have conducted many detective games together. Based on this experience, they developed a methodology in the framework of an earlier Erasmus+ project, which was shared with other international partner organisations. This earlier methodology's main focus was on the background and general toolbox of Detective games.

The feedback from our international partners, their practice and our experiences underpinned our belief that these games have a big impact not only on the young participants, but also on the planners and implementers. Moreover, community planning with young people not only strengthens their commitment, but improves the impact and authenticity of the games.

At the same time, community planning is a hard nut to crack. There are two common traps: The first is when the leader has too much influence on the planning process, obstructing cooperation; the other is, when the planning has no confines at all, in which case the game's quality and impact might be affected. It is not easy to find a proper balance when planning a game together with young people. This is why we decided to publish a methodology focusing on this aspect of game development.

The Detectivity Centre has a huge experience in planning games with children. The vast majority of methods used with children can be used in the work with (vulnerable) young adults as well, and during the planning of games focusing on social issues. At the same time, different target groups and more serious topics could be an account for other approaches as well.

In this issue, firstly, we would like to introduce the potential of social detective games and their design process, and the risks that come with them. After that, we are going to introduce the planning process in detail. This section is going to be followed by an introduction of management aspects and tools of community planning. And lastly, we are going to provide some examples to illustrate our argumentation.

We are hoping that we will provide some useful insights. We wish you a pleasant reading!

OPPORTUNITIES AND RISKS OF SOCIAL DETECTIVE GAMES AND COMMUNITY PLANNING

Through gamification, we can convey knowledge and viewpoints to young participants without having to engage in traditional ways of teaching. Since the games incorporate a range of tasks (e.g. logic, verbal, handcraft, musical, interpersonal, visual or locomotive), every participant can find a challenge that they enjoy doing or where they can achieve success.. Here, young people with competencies that are not emphasised in the formal education system can find a reckoning challenge to themselves.

Moreover, in a detective game not one person's performance, but the common success of the investigator group counts.

If one task is too difficult or uninteresting to some group members, it is plausible that other members will scuffle through it.

This way, the group as a whole will not encounter failure; the participants will be able to experience that they can all at one point add something to the group's success.

Different types of assignments offer opportunities to strengthen new competencies. Cooperation skills such as communication, teamwork, and handling conflicts will also improve because of working in groups.

Besides their knowledge, their attitudes can change as well: when they encounter a vulnerable group member during the game, get to know their stories, hardships and values, or when they solve a challenge together.

It is scientifically proven that interpersonal experiences have a much bigger effect on the stereotypes and prejudices concerning a particular group than lexical knowledge. Therefore, it is crucial to provide the opportunity for vulnerable group members and their viewpoints to play a role in the games that focus on their situation.

The aforementioned aspects are true not only for the participants themselves, but also for the young people who take part in the design process of a detective game. Similar to playing the actual game, planning is also a teamwork with challenges that require individual and group answers to overcome. During the planning stage, **cooperation** is just as crucial as in the process of playing. It is important for every participant to feel that their answers and solutions are incorporated in the process. If that doesn't happen, one would not see the final game as their own.

One has to pay attention to emerging conflicts and opposing viewpoints. It is important for planners in the design process to provide opportunities to give and get constant mutual **feedback**, to think in a free and self-reflective way. When someone brings up a critical aspect in connection to another member's idea, it is important to criticize the idea itself, not the person. One has to emphasize that critical feedback and incidental conflicts are matter-of-course parts of mutual planning. But if they become too personal, they can freeze the process.











The participants of the design can work pleasurably and in cooperation only if we provide them a **safe environment**, in which every participant can play their part inside the boundaries of mutually accepted rules. It is important to assure mutual respect, the acceptance of diverging viewpoints, and to encourage participants to step beyond their comfort zone, for example to take part in tasks that seem strange for them at first glimpse. If this framework is not formulated in the beginning, and a trustworthy, safe and productive atmosphere is absent, then we can easily meet a dead end.

As we mentioned before, the **facilitator** of the process can constitute a risk, too: they should not give too much guidance, nor leave the group too much to themselves. For example, it would not be okay to decide on a theme without listening to participants' opinions. It is also not advisable to share too soon, too thoroughly and harshly the facilitator's own ideas. They should also not label participants' ideas. Finally, facilitators should not hold too much responsibility and give themselves too many assignments. They are there to steer the process, not to impose their views on the group.

On the other hand, a laissez-faire approach might guide the facilitator to failures as well. It is important to gradually pass tasks and responsibilities to the participants and not overwhelm them immediately. Do not ask them to take decisions for which they do not have the proper knowledge, maturity, experience, or for which they do not have a detailed enough plan yet. The excited young people mostly tend to skip the step of planning, and take decisions concerning the implementation too early in the process. Or they tend to commit themselves to an emerging first idea without proper knowledge about the topic, available opportunities and ideas. It is important to guide them in proceeding step by step. Only when they have practical knowledge about tools and methods to use in detective games, and when the game's topic, story and target group are clear to them, can we ask them what kind of tasks they would like to include in the game.

In the process of cooperative decision making it can happen that a popular person's idea is accepted very easily by others, as opposed to a more promising, better idea proposed by an unpopular group member with poorer communication skills. In these cases the facilitator has to aid the group with questions that will help them realize new aspects concerning the two ideas. Conscious facilitation and coordination of group processes must not take a backseat. The facilitator should provide space to every emerging proposition by the young people, and support the group in analysing the ideas properly.

Tasks of the facilitator in a community planning process

-  Holistic preparation
-  Getting to know the group's background
-  Taking into account the characteristics of the group
-  Initiating the group to investigation games
-  Increasing the group's sensibility
-  Asking guiding questions
-  Coordinating the process
-  Setting up groups and monitoring the process
-  Persistent mentoring during the process
-  Attending preparation and rehearsal meetings and implementing the game itself

ASPECTS AND TOOLS OF COMMUNITY PLANNING

PERSONAL EXPERIENCE

Before involving young people in developing a detective game, they need to get personal experience on the topic of detective games, and of the issue addressed.

Naturally, they cannot do this through playing the game, as they are supposed to produce it. However, they can experience some tasks of a game - like solving ciphers and opening mechanical puzzles - before we involve them in the first steps of planning.

This makes sense not only because personal experience of success and pleasure can motivate them in their later work, but also because they will get a toolbox that will help them to come up with ideas more easily.

Having fun trying different challenges will also push them to plan diverse tasks when developing their own game.

If they faced frustration when solving a seemingly unsolvable game, and they needed the help of their facilitator, they will think about different grades of difficulty when designing a puzzle, and how they could support the participants of the game in solving it.

It is therefore crucial to reflect and analyse everyone's personal puzzle experience - not only from the participant's perspective, but also from a designer's point of view. At the same time, solving puzzles together can also dynamize the group process.

CREATING A SAFE SPACE AND A COMMON FRAMEWORK

When we start a community planning process, it is important to lay down boundaries or rules that the group can mutually agree on, and inside which the work will be more effective and enjoyable for everyone. You could do this by all signing a “group contract” that will be displayed in the meeting room. While the facilitator can also propose rules, it is important for the group members to come up with suggestions from their own experiences with groups. When you display a poster with the rules in the room, you and the participants can all advert back to them when rules are violated.

This contract alone does not lead to open, co-operative and active teamwork. So in the starting phase of work, it is important to find time for activities through which participants can get to know each other and build a cohesive group. This is also important when participants already know each other from a different context; they can still show new sides of their personalities and develop closer bonds. This is important for example for school classes - they will be able to step out of existing relations and power structures of the school, and can still surprise each other. This can motivate them for the coming teamwork. If we work with young people who do not know each other yet, this phase is even more important.

When planning the game development phase, we should take into account the participants’ age, interests and skills. It is recommended to introduce more difficult tasks, especially those addressing more sensitive topics, step by step. By sharing sensitive personal stories with each other, or getting in physical contact during an activity, participants can experience that others look out for them and take care of them. This can strengthen the connection between participants and create a confidential atmosphere. We must not, however, put participants into such sensitive situations too early into the process. We first have to create an atmosphere where they feel safe to speak about intimate topics, and to be tuned to one another.

Getting acquainted with each other is important not only for the group members, but for the facilitator as well. During ice-breaking activities, they can get information about the participants: their interests, skills, relations to one another. Later, they can build on this information to guide the process. Moreover, they can also share something about themselves that can aid the participants to open up and motivate them to work with the facilitator.

COMING UP WITH TOPICS

Community planning is an exciting process, if it can bring up a range of interesting topics and tools to choose from for the final game. This process needs sufficient time and opportunities for participants to search and collect ideas in a duly multi-coloured way, using a variety of methods.

Using different kinds of methods can stimulate thinking of participants with different frames of minds, and also dynamize the group.

BRAINSTORMING: Ask participants to come up with as many ideas as possible (e.g., for the topic of the game, the type of crime, the motivation of the criminal etc.). Don't dive into the details, and don't qualify any idea! Write down everything on a big poster. No idea is too crazy! The invitation question to collect ideas should be concrete and understood by every participant. The facilitator should communicate that every idea is welcome and incite them to share anything that comes to their mind. Ideas should not be further elaborated or discussed at this time.

Devote 15-20 minutes to collecting ideas. Write down ideas in a simple order or organise them in clusters of connected points. We can also order them, e.g., from the least to the most serious crimes.

Later get back to the collected notes (e.g., vote on them, or ask participants to elaborate some ideas further).

STORYTELLING: Invite group members to share a story connected to the future game's topic – either in plenary or in smaller groups. Participants can tell their own stories or stories they heard about.

Examples for invitation questions are:

- What kind of decisive experience did they make in school?
- When have they experienced discrimination? How did it feel?
- What surprised them lately?

Sharing personal stories in a group can be sensitive. When someone shares their own story, give them positive feedback. Moreover, it can help when facilitators also share their own stories to motivate the participants. In certain situations or on certain topics people share their personal stories or opinions only with difficulty, and it is easier for them to speak about things that “happened to a friend” or that they had read about in the news. These narratives can be just as important in the later design process. Of course, if a participant shares someone else's story, they should have some emotional connection to it.

Not everybody gets inspired by verbal methods. There are people who can more easily get inspired visually (e.g., through drawing), and others who prefer to express themselves through music or acting. Similarly, not everyone gets inspired by reality. Some start to share relevant thoughts rather in connection with a made-up world (like an imaginary country). If participants consider the topics addressed to be too difficult or intimate, we can step out of the conversation about real life, and move towards the imaginary. We can also take a different approach and move the focus to the game's target group and the impact we want to make on them.

Later, we can ask the participants to choose one of the collected ideas, stories and topics and discuss it in more detail. We can also vote and proceed with the two or three ideas that received the most votes. We can also use stories, quotes, practices or drawings of participants in specific tasks of the later game.

INDIVIDUAL VS SMALL GROUP VS PLENARY WORK

It is good to vary individual, small group, and plenary work throughout the whole community planning process.

Some participants may be active and propose many ideas in plenary, while others may remain silent observers. To harvest the ideas of more quiet young people, we can split into small groups or give some time to work on their own.

Moreover, when small groups work in parallel on different tasks, then participants can choose a task depending on their skills and interests. One group, for example, can write a letter while another one draws a poster, and a third rehearses a theatrical scene. At the end, the results of all three will be part of the game.

It is worthwhile to vary the group composition to keep a good group dynamic, and to interchange individual, small group and plenary work. Long plenary sections can be exhausting, and repeated small group or individual work can isolate fractions of the whole group, and in this way impair the group cohesion.

If we want the group to elaborate alternatives or several parallel sections, we can divide into smaller groups. When they finish their task, they can share their results in plenary to reflect on each other's presentations. The parallel work of small groups can help to avoid dead ends. Besides, every group can bring in aspects and ideas that would remain in the shadows in plenary, but are key steps to the later work.

For the most important matters it is important to take decisions with the whole group. The theme, target group, basic story, and focus question have to be agreed in plenary. The decision can be moderated through guiding questions. For example, "Some of you mentioned that the story's setting could be a school, everybody agrees with that?" Most of the time these types of questions evoke agreement from the participants, except when somebody has fundamental objections against the mentioned opportunity.

STEP BY STEP

As we wrote earlier, it is important that participants have an experience with detective games before they start designing one. The same is true for the design. The young people should acquire experience not only as participants, but also as designers. We advise to deepen the discussions step by step, and don't decide right at the beginning how certain details will look like. Before we proceed to design a complex game, it makes sense to first design and facilitate short, simple games for each other.





Detectivity's method is to give participants short test tasks to work out. For example, there can be several exciting tools (e.g. mechanical puzzles, cyphers) that they can incorporate in the game, or one or two instructions (e.g., to include role play). These tasks have an inspirational effect: the examples provide security and guidance for the beginner designers. Without these, the assignment of the design would be too wide and difficult. "Let us design a Detective game!" is not a concrete enough instruction for the young people to start their work – some frames and instructions are needed to support creativity. Starting with a simple game gives participants a feeling of accomplishment. Besides, the participants' feedback on the first tasks gives them ideas for possible upgrades. All of these can motivate the young people to start designing a more complex game. Moreover, certain parts of the test games may even be included in the final game.

During the design of a smaller game, we can prepare other short tasks that can lead the participants to success in half an hour. Besides designing a game or playing it, it could mean to put the participants in dramatic or conflict situations that they have to handle. Handling challenging situations or creating something together can ensure experience of success for a group. These experiences and successes could also be incorporated into the later game, and the consequences drawn from the experience could help the game design, or the facilitation of the final game.

Moving to designing the “big” game, it is not necessary to decide right away what type of crime to solve, or what the focus question will be. Of course you should answer some basic questions at the beginning:

-  The topic
-  The aim of the game
-  The target group
-  The duration
-  The location
-  Desired impact

After laying down this basic framework, but before elaborating on the details and concrete tasks, it is time for creating the game’s world. You can discuss questions such as:

-  What characteristics does the game’s world have?
-  Is it realistic or made up?
-  Is it settled in the past, present or future?
-  What groups, customs and conflicts are determining in this environment?

While the participants create this world, after a while one or several stories, crimes or riddles will emerge that can then be further elaborated.

SETTING THE LIMITS OF THE GAME

We have already mentioned how important it is to decide on the game's framework together with the participants at the beginning of the process. At the same time, the game's limits should also be laid down to prevent frustrations further on and even inspire further idea collection. For example, if we only have the opportunity to play the game with an elementary school's class, the group should know this so that nobody comes up with the idea that their target group should be retired elderly people. If we have financial or infrastructural limits (for example a defined setting or limited budget), then this has to be clear as well.

The Detectivity organisation cares for and disseminates the games on the long run. Therefore these must be financially sustainable – unless you plan an exceptional, one-time game. We should therefore also be aware that not all people who are involved in the beginning will be able to facilitate the game later on. Even when the design process starts with 10 participants, the game should also function with only two facilitators.

CASE STUDY: SUMMER CAMP INVESTIGATION GAME DESIGN






The team of Detectivity provided training during a 5-days long camp in August 2022, which came about through a partnership project between Detectivity, Noha camp from Nógrád, Terény and Autonomía Foundation. Our experiences were that even the young people aged 16-25 prefer to draw their imagined plans. For disadvantaged young people, sometimes drawing was a better base than notes for a presentation.

Creating a common drawing was an important part of the design process, to which the participants could get back during the later thought process. Brainstorming topics, looking for common ground and mapping their imaginary country worked out very well through drawing.

The details of the selected topic were then later refined through a group discussion.

During the summer camp, the common design of the game activated young people who were not very active before. Moreover, they could experience how they become the determined leader of smaller groups, after usually having stayed in the shadows. It showed us that the otherwise quiet participants could define their opinion very starkly in smaller groups. Moreover, we saw that if it comes to moral questions, they are ready to stand up and face the whole group.

The young people used a wide range of skills during the design, and sometimes even acquired new ones. These were, for example:

-  Problem solving skills
-  Creativity
-  Concentration
-  Being helpful, cooperation with group mates
-  Perseverance

Finally, the design process made them think about topics that are usually difficult to talk about.

During the camp we experienced that among the acquired skills, the participants especially developed their concentration skills. Children of disadvantaged backgrounds are often not used to listening for long. Usually, in school it is hard to keep their attention, and teachers need to pause classes with a motion task. However, when the teenagers designed the game, they worked intensely for hours, because they inspired each other.

FINAL THOUGHTS

We hope that with the aid of the above mentioned aspects and tools, you got inspiration to invent investigation games based on community planning, and to use the method of community planning even in other project-based, non-formal educational initiatives!



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