

Playful methods for Inclusive Cities

Games as an adaptation to the time frames of participatory urbanism

urbanismo táctico
placemaking
urbanismo participativo
tactical urbanism
placemaking
participatory urbanism

Las intervenciones urbanas transitorias en ciudades intermedias de crecimiento acelerado en Latinoamérica han adquirido un nuevo significado como experimentos comunitarios previos a proyectos de mayor envergadura, especialmente en la medida que el movimiento denominado como 'urbanismo táctico' ha ido creciendo e influyendo en la política pública. Los largos tiempos de planeamiento e implementación de los proyectos tradicionales, así como las complejidades de la transformación socio-cultural en estas ciudades son -en parte- responsables por este fenómeno. En un escenario donde suelen ser consultoras privadas las que implementan los procesos de participación ciudadana y donde los métodos se han demostrado anticuados debido a su complejidad y sesgo ideológico, se ha trabajado de manera alternativa en una aproximación lúdica y abierta en el contexto del ramo de 'Urbanismo 1' en la Universidad Católica del Norte en Antofagasta, en Chile. Partiendo de la base que cada comunidad tiene sus ritmos y tiempos propios, el ejercicio aborda este proyecto de manera explícitamente lúdica y simplificada, con diversos grupos que proponen juegos de rol que apuntan a definir un programa arquitectónico que calce con las particulares demandas de la comunidad y siempre en sus tiempos disponibles. Los grupos diseñan y prueban mejoras metodológicas y prácticas en relación a los juegos de rol que ya se usan en el trabajo comunitario de la región, con el objetivo de simplificar procesos, atraer nuevos participantes, llegar a conclusiones más representativas y de esta forma abordar tanto la complejidad como el sesgo ideológico tradicionalmente asociados a las intervenciones urbanas tradicionales y sus procesos participativos. Este trabajo se realiza a la luz de la experiencia práctica ganada por las instituciones públicas en el trabajo comunitario en la misma región de Antofagasta, como parte del Programa 'Quiero mi Barrio' del Ministerio de Vivienda y Urbanismo (MINVU).

Transitory urban interventions in Latin America's fast-growing intermediate cities have taken on new relevance as community-led experiments preceding major urban initiatives, especially to the extent that the movement known as 'tactical urbanism' grows and influences public policy. The intricacies of these cities' socio-cultural transformations, along with the lengthily planning and execution deadlines for common projects, are mainly responsible for this shift. While traditional participatory methods for dealing with these kinds of interventions are usually implemented by private consultants and reveal outdated practices due to their lack of citizen appeal, complexity, and ideological bias, an alternative ludic and open approach is being developed within a course at the School of Architecture, Universidad Católica del Norte in Antofagasta, Chile. The main exercise, which focuses on a small urban tactical urbanism project, acknowledges that each community operates on its own temporal rhythm, translating into daily routines and rhythms. Hence, the exercise approaches this hypothetical urban project in an explicitly simple and playful way. Several groups suggest using role-playing games to develop an architectural program that suits their specific community demands at their available time. To achieve this, the groups designed and tested methodological and practical improvements to the role-playing games already in use in the region's community work. The goal is to simplify procedures, attract new participants, achieve more representative outcomes, and address the complexity and ideological problems associated with traditional urban interventions and their participatory approach. This work aligns with the author's practical experience gained in the region's urban community initiatives through various public institutions, as part of "Quiero mi Barrio", the program from the Chilean Ministry of Housing and Urbanism.

Intveen, Hans¹

¹ School of Architecture, Universidad Católica del Norte, Antofagasta, Chile.
hans.intveen@ce.ucn.cl

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1. INTRODUCTION

1.1. 'Light' urbanism as a space to play

'Light' or transitory urban interventions have developed their own identity in contemporary urban planning, as indicated by various names such as tactical urbanism, placemaking, urban prototyping, and planning by doing, to name just a few. Their strength lies precisely in their ephemeral nature, as they attempt to activate processes of change in specific locations at minimal cost and within a short timeframe, all under the broader umbrella of 'urban acupuncture.' In Latin America, numerous initiatives, including 'ciudad emergente'¹ (Fig.1) and others, have embraced this approach for community work — lighter, less expensive, and faster.²

Yet adopting these civil society methods into existing public policy in an environment where participatory design and experimentation are typically not possible appears to be the key problem in the local urban context. This is particularly true considering that public programs in Chile frequently use private consultants to carry out urban interventions using their own sophisticated techniques that are not always based on first-hand understanding of the community.

Tactical urbanism has evolved into a practical and valuable urban laboratory for implementing optimal social practices. Its versatility allows for the testing of new inclusive methods that integrate gender, territorial equity, and citizenship

issues (Ricardi, 2018; 75-76), and even playfulness. However, the challenge lies in integrating these civil society methods into existing public policy, especially in an environment where participatory design and experimentation are often impractical within the local urban context.

1.2. The exhaustion of the community assembly or the need for 'lightness' scenario

In the context of rapid interventions in urban settings, community assembly has become an outdated method. Frequently, these assemblies are designed with a predetermined outcome in mind, where those who 'shout the loudest' take centre stage, making the results challenging to systematize. Moreover, traditional community organizations in the country have, for decades, struggled to 'make themselves heard' by authorities (Tapia, Leterier, Boyco, 2018) and have often been subject to political instrumentalization.

In Chile, the 'Neighbourhood Union' is the key organization dealing with initiatives aiming at public interventions, whether they are ephemeral or permanent. However, these organizations have faced only partial functionality in recent times, exacerbated by the impact of the pandemic. When initiatives materialize and participatory decision-making is required, the situation becomes

even more complicated. For example, in most municipalities, these organizations are not recognized as part of territorial planning; instead, they are primarily seen as a mechanism for clientelism (Costa and others, 2017; 12-13).

Furthermore, the current law regulating participation methods (SEGEOB, 2011) mandated the establishment of 'Civil Society Councils'³, bringing together all neighbourhood unions and other organizations within a territorial area. However, the competency of this council are imprecise, and their decisions are not mandatory. Consequently, the entire participatory structure has been in question for several years, as indicated in the conclusions of the 'participatory consultation process' conducted in 2016 (Rebolledo, 2016; 53-55). The primary aim of this process was to propose changes to the law, revealing a consensus on one key point: community decisions must be binding.

The main objective of this exploratory study is to investigate potential designs through play within the context of an urban ephemeral project, specifically aiming to render community decisions binding in a playful manner. This exploration is guided by specific conditions: simplicity and transience. Simplicity is essential because current participatory sessions are often brief, scheduled at inconvenient hours, and attended by a diverse audience. Therefore, it is imperative to avoid further complicating matters. Transience is equally crucial due to the growing scarcity of time. Additionally, the

concept of transience aligns with the idea of play, allowing for quick replication, even on an individual basis — a flexibility that other methodologies often lack.

This study is based on academic work undertaken during the 'Urbanism 1' course at the *Universidad Católica del Norte* (UCN) and is closely connected to the author's involvement in the "*Quiero mi barrio*" (I Love my neighbourhood) program under the Chilean Ministry of Housing and Urbanism (MINVU). Consequently, it constitutes an exploratory study with the potential for practical validation in local urban interventions. The objective of this exercise is to explore innovative and simplified community approach methods, grounded in playfulness, to facilitate representative urban interventions that instil a sense of ownership within communities.

The premiss here is that playfulness can genuinely play a role in shaping public policy, and this assertion is made seriously. Essentially, following the rules of play puts everyone in the game. If playing games can yield significant benefits for individuals, why can't they be harnessed to address community issues and enhance organizational integrity?

2. GAMES AND GAMING IN THE URBAN CONTEXT

It has been well-documented that adults who have a propensity for play tend to lead more active lives and exhibit better stress management skills (Magnuson, Barnett, 2013). Some studies even suggest that adults with a 'playful' disposition enjoy a longer life expectancy, with an average increase of ten years (Gordon, 2014). The benefits of play extend to various aspects of life, including cognitive skills, mental stability, adaptability, and creative thinking, among others. Apparently, a playful approach to problem-solving is intrinsic to both physical and emotional well-being (Proyer et al., 2018).

Simultaneously, community work often encounters inertia that impedes the assimilation of new forms of participation. The primary objective of this study is to pursue a practical research path that offers possible solutions to these challenges. Games play a pivotal role in this endeavour by incorporating elements of fun, chance, and the unexpected. Moreover, they produce less biased outcomes due to the inherent uncertainty they introduce. This transformation of the process into an enjoyable method of addressing contingent urban issues can be seen as a way of exploring 'alternative ways of being in the world' (Woodyer, 2012; 320). It also serves as a means of spatially taking ownership of the city, as demonstrated by recent developments in augmented reality games (Dillon, 2021; 20-23).

In this context, establishing a clear definition of 'game' is crucial, considering the various interpretations that exist and the wide range of the concept (Zosch and others, 2018; 3-5). To arrive at a utilitarian definition, we identify common elements spanning historical to contemporary perspectives.

One enduring aspect of play, recognized from Plato to the present day, is its role in preparing individuals for 'adulthood.' Rousseau and Vygotsky shared this belief, emphasizing how play fosters cognitive and emotional development while enhancing problem-solving abilities. Karl Groos elaborated on this fundamental concept in his work, 'The Play of Man' (Groos, 2020), where he described play as a phenomenon that precedes 'serious' life experiences. Groos categorized play based on observations of animals, identifying various types, including games of experimentation, locomotion, hunting, conflict, architecture, sexuality, nourishment, imitation, and curiosity. These early insights laid the foundation for what naturalist Irenaus Eibl Eibesfeldt termed 'an experimental dialogue with the environment' (cited by Martínez, 2008; 13-14).

The 20th century witnessed attempts at more synthesized categorizations of games, notably by Johan Huizinga (1972) in 'Homo Ludens' and Roger Caillois (1986) in 'Man, Play, and Games.' Huizinga divided games into three categories: strategy, skill, and luck. In contrast, Caillois included the same two categories, chance (alea) and skill (agôn), and introduced two additional categories: vertigo games (Ilinx) and imitation games (mimicry).

Instead of delving into scholarly definitions, this exercise centres on identifying common elements shared among various definitions of 'game.' These commonalities often include characteristics such as voluntary participation, the presence of roles and rules, and the existence of challenges or problems to overcome. Additionally, games typically involve a sense of pleasure or fun, coupled with a willingness to experiment with the environment.

Given the nature of this work, we choose to emphasize one recurring characteristic: problem-solving. Several contemporary definitions align with this emphasis, defining games as 'a system in which players engage in an artificial conflict, defined by rules, that results in a quantifiable outcome' (Salen, Zimmerman, 2003). This definition closely mirrors what occurs in a participatory session, where a conflict or challenge is addressed through defined rules to achieve an outcome. The primary distinction is that 'fun' is not explicitly included in this definition.

To address this aspect, we turn to Schell's exploration in his book 'The Art of Game Design', where he fascinatingly delves into definitions from various fields and eventually arrives at a simple yet truly elegant definition that we can use as a reference: 'A game is a problem-solving activity, approached with a playful attitude' (Schell, 2008; 36-37).

It is precisely this playful approach to problem-solving that sets games apart and forms the core focus of this exercise.



Fig. 1 - Diverse projects with a tactical approach by "Ciudad Emergente" (emerging city) initiative: a) Barrio Lastarria, Chile; b) Danlí, Honduras / Source: www.ciudademergente.org

3. TESTING A SOCIAL PARTICIPATION METHOD

3.1. To Participate is to Transform: the experience of *Quiero mi Barrio Program*

The primary goal of this study is to complement existing methods of community participation, considering how the various conceptions of this methodology can function, whether as instrumental or transformative (Nelson, Wright, 1995). In simpler terms, participation can be seen as a means to an end or as an end in itself. In this context, what makes 'playing games' an interesting activity is that participation — the key element of the game — is inherently transformative, serving as an end in itself.

In this scenario, the community members transform into more than just participants striving to enhance the 'transparency, effectiveness, and efficiency' of public policies, as advocated by local laws such as the OGUC (2022).⁴ Instead, they assume the roles of investigator, constructor, and problem solver, emerging as a proactive protagonist in the process.

Rather than persisting in endless work sessions, we propose adding

joy to this problem-solving strategy as a fundamental component. Numerous investigations suggest that integrating joy is desirable for cognitive purposes (Zosch et al., 2018; 7-8). As Schell proposes, 'work and play... become equivalent to servitude and freedom' (Schell, 2008), and certainly, no method can be successful in servitude. Games also serve as metaphors; they can either model reality (Wundt, 2013)⁵ or dramatize it (Spencer, 1910), or even act as a prior rehearsal (Groos, 2020).⁶ In all cases, there exists a meaningful connection to reality, echoing Huizinga's assertion that 'every game has meaning' (Huizinga, 1972).

In our endeavour to establish a connection with reality through group dynamics, we draw inspiration from the *Quiero mi barrio* program executed by the local representatives of the Ministry of Housing and Urban Development. While this program primarily focuses on traditional medium-scale urban projects, it has progressively integrated playful methodologies into the design of public spaces. Within this framework, the program collaborates with communities on smaller-scale, ephemeral neighbourhood projects, employing various forms of 'role-playing games' using methods outlined in the Ministry's participation methodological guide (MINVU, 2007). Additionally, it draws on institutional publications such as 'Human Dimension in Public Space,'

created in collaboration with the renowned Gehl's urbanism office (MINVU, PNUD, 2017).

All these tactics can be traced back to Caillouis' concept of 'imitation' games and have been consistently employed to introduce 'playful' methods into participatory meetings. In practice, these meetings adhere to Stevens' principles (Stevens, 2007) that 'fun follows form, fun follows function,' playfully echoing Louis Sullivan's famous quote. In essence, the approach can be summarized as follows: If it's fun, it works, and people will embrace it as their own game.

As an illustration, in 'Villa Florida', a well-established neighbourhood in the central area of Antofagasta, community members were encouraged to assume the 'role' of an architectural office (Fig. 2). Their assignment involved designing a proposal model, which was then tested in a real-world setting. This example showcases a minimal yet effective level of abstraction, given the close resemblance of the environment to reality. The degree of abstraction becomes more pronounced in 'Villa Jorge Alessandri', a large-scale urban rehabilitation project, located also in Antofagasta (Fig. 3). In this setting, community engagement still involves group modelling, but the context is distinct: a gridded board with no direct reference to the real scenario. Unlike 'Villa Florida,'

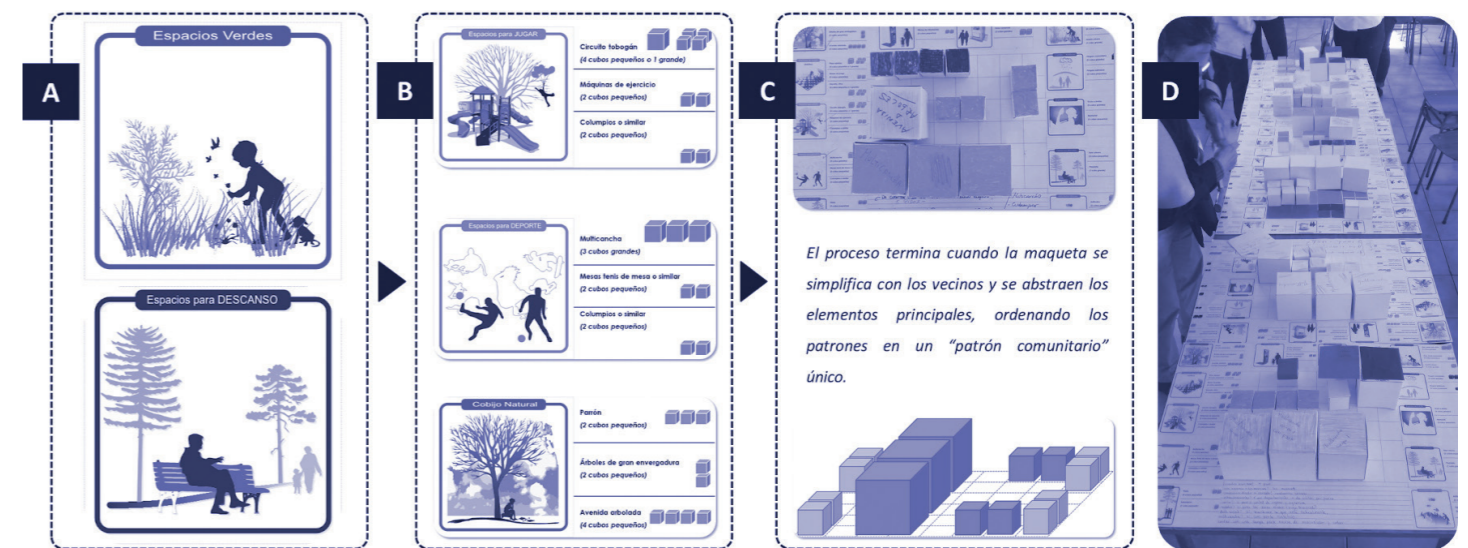


Fig. 3 - Participatory process in 'Villa Jorge Alessandri': a) First level of abstraction, zones; b) second level of specification, elements; c) consolidation of proposals; d) Result of group work / Source: (Intveen, 2018).

where participants worked with entirely figurative elements such as streetlights, benches, and awnings, 'Villa Jorge Alessandri' introduces a different approach. Instead of figurative elements, participants are presented with cubes that symbolize spatial situations. Notably, these cubes are crafted in proportion to the cost they would entail in the actual project. In other words, the larger the number of cubes used in the model, the higher the cost of the project.

Comparing these cases provides practical insights as they both culminate in a similar outcome: the development of an architectural program that truly addresses the community's needs. The methodologies employed in both instances are analogous: working collaboratively as a group, creating a model, presenting it publicly during a plenary session, and then consolidating and systematizing the information. The key distinction lies in the nature of the information these processes yield.

In the first case, the results closely mirror reality. The model comprises iconic elements that faithfully represent what one would typically find in a public space, such as benches, swings, pergolas, and so forth. However, this methodology has a drawback: given the multitude of alternatives, there is a tendency to overdesign spaces. This can pose a significant challenge when translating the program into an

actual project, as many of these elements may need to be omitted during the construction phase.

In contrast, in the second case, a deliberate effort is made toward abstraction and proportionality to address this issue. While abstraction enhances the rationality of the proposal, it introduces an unintended side effect: it distances the model from reality. For instance, a cube represents a bench rather than being one.

The practical experience derived from these cases sets the stage for our challenge: within a spectrum spanning from complete abstraction, for instance, as seen in an Excel spreadsheet, to a model faithfully replicating reality, where can playful methods be effectively integrated?

3.2. General context, study goals and rules

Academia offers an interesting 'playground' for renewing community participation strategies. In the initial phase of our study, the game experience was exclusively tested with students from an urbanism course at *Universidad Católica del Norte*, within a highly controlled environment—a class consisting of 40 students organized into 8 groups of 5 students each. While this testing may not fully capture the intricacies of a public urban project, it serves as a vital first step.

Simplicity is a frequently invoked term, yet it is seldom translated into practice, and the exclusion of a designer's preconceived ideas is an even more elusive goal. In Chile, various games developed by urban think tanks for urbanistic purposes encounter challenges on both the fronts of complexity and ideology, both of which are equally significant. Take, for instance, games like 'CREATE XXI: cities for this century' from Chile's CEDEUS⁷, a prominent urban think tank involving multiple universities. These games often grapple with a complexity problem evident when a comprehensive instruction manual is needed. Such an approach clashes with the essence of a community-oriented process. Complex terms like 'urban segregation' and 'extractivism' can make topics seem distant and overly abstract for the general public.

The ideology issue is more nuanced, lurking behind the rules and game dynamics. These games seem to have been designed to guide participants toward anticipated outcomes. For example, a 'solution card' explicitly establishes that 'proximity city' is the correct response to the 'long-distance travels' challenge card. While proximity is a desirable goal, the card leaves little room for participants to draw their own conclusions, let alone have 'fun.'

Now, the socio-spatial environment becomes pivotal in understanding the rationale behind

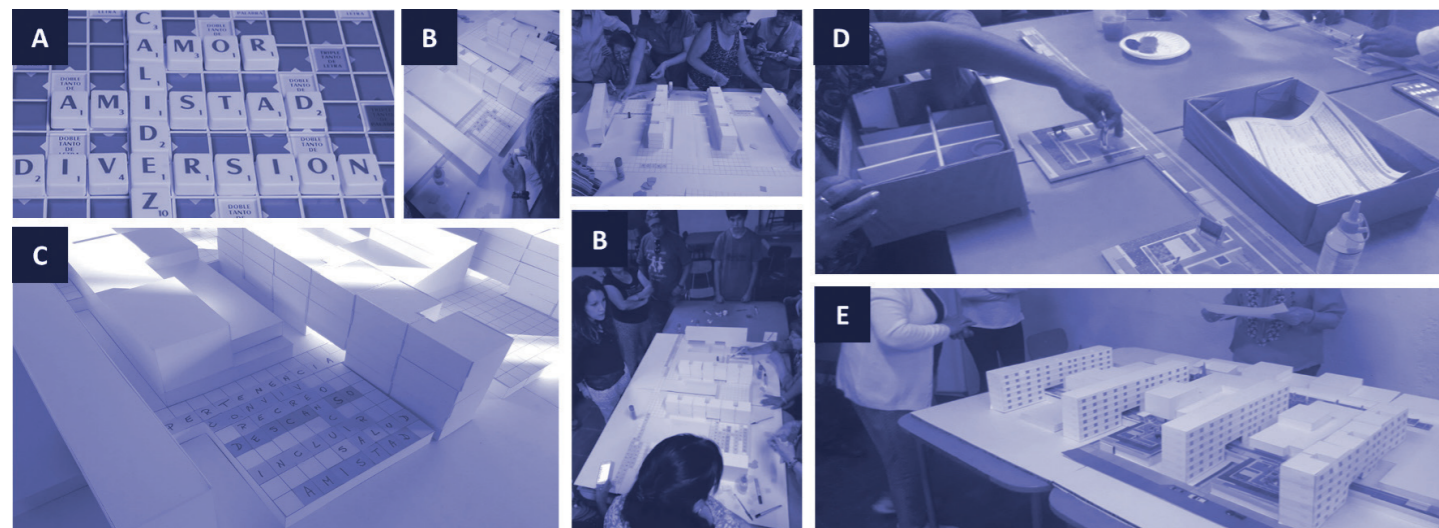


Fig. 2 - Participatory process in 'Villa Florida' neighbourhood: a) Concept "alphabet soup" to name spaces; b) Group work; c) First stage results; d) Second stage, model work; e) Group presentation of the proposals / Source: Villa Florida's neighbourhood Master Plan, MINVU.

addressing implementation issues. In the northern part of Chile, there is a noticeable rise in the number of informal settlements and deteriorating urban areas. Despite having a high average income in the national context⁸, substantial disparities persist in this region. In terms of informal settlements, the region ranks third in the number of families residing in them, according to the most recent TECHO Foundation Survey. Notably, there has been a substantial 51% increase in growth between 2020 and 2023.⁹

As a consequence, sociocultural change is widespread in many communities near the settlements where *Quiero mi barrio* program is currently intervening, making it imperative for urban interventions to adapt to these changes. Consequently, numerous transient interventions are anticipated in the coming years while long-term projects are being developed. This is where the study introduces a valuable strategy to address this issue.

To address and minimize the effects of the aforementioned issues, the primary objective of the exercise is to enhance several

crucial game mechanics before undergoing broader public testing. Guided by these principles, the exercise is structured to achieve specific goals:

- Provide an engaging and enjoyable means for the community, rather than the designer, to contribute with feedback.

- Simplify the utilization of role-playing approaches already in use, making them accessible to a broader range of people.

To achieve these goals efficiently within the constraints of time, three simple phases have been established: First, define a transient urban intervention. Second, select an environment, a city, and a specific location within that city. Finally, propose a game that facilitates the identification of community needs.

The game is not constrained by methodological limitations but is instead governed by time constraints, as temporality is essential. To this end, three main rules have been established: the entire process must not exceed 45 minutes, the game rules should be

explainable in two minutes or less, and the overall process must consist of no more than 5 steps.

These time limits are crucial as they are designed to create a brief session that aligns with the time constraints of the mentioned communities. The exercise is grounded in the understanding that nobody has time to spare in lengthy community meetings or workshops. This is not a meeting; it is a game — a close approximation to it.

4. RESULTS

The design results can be organized in two main categories (Table 1):

- Category A: Teams that opted for 'closed' strategies, entirely confined within a board game format. There are two ways to prioritize in this category: 1) by selecting elements and discussing their positions, meaning that nothing is left to chance, and 2) by employing some element that produces an unexpected result, in this case, dice.

- Category B: Teams that selected hybrid methodologies, integrating the game with the surrounding environment. In this category,

there are two ways to deal with the environment: 1) by mixing reality with digital elements, and 2) by exploring and using the environment as a playground.

In general, the team results predominantly align with the concept of mimicking reality. Thus, it could be argued that all the proposals essentially represent various forms of imitation, as the strategy aims to immerse participants in the role of designers.

Among these proposals, board games without random elements (Fig. 4) offer several advantages. They are easier to grasp and play, leaning towards the most 'rational' end of the spectrum among all the presented options. In other words, they closely resemble the reality of decision-making, leading to extended and predictable discussions, such as simple prioritizations (Fig. 5). This closeness to reality may be somewhat



Fig. 4 - Up: Rio de Janeiro group¹⁰ a) Board game with iconic elements; b) Board matrix; c) The final version with the rules and categories / Down: Tokyo group¹¹ d) Board game based on forms and colours that represents "sensations"; e) Representation of the game rules / Source: Urbanism 1 class.

distant from Huizinga's notion of 'irrelevance' in game conception. While this is not inherently negative — it may be necessary for certain audiences — it tends to move further away from the essence of

a game experience and closer to a traditional design process.

In the second case (a.2), a strategic approach and a random element are interwoven: participants move

Category	Sub-category	Description
A. Board games	a.1) Traditional Board Games - Prioritization Without Chance	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • This category comprises the majority of the games (6 out of 8). • The activity takes place within a workshop setting with groups working at separate tables. • The game begins with a board containing various alternatives presented as cards or tokens. • Group discussions revolve around prioritizing these alternatives. • Different levels of abstraction are evident; some participants select concrete elements, while others choose sensations. • Colours and shapes are used for basic semiotic purposes, marking decisions and facilitating subsequent classification. • These games aim to reach a joint result through consensus, with no 'winning' group, emphasizing collective effort.
	a.2) Traditional Board Games - Prioritization With Chance	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Similar to the previous methodology but with the incorporation of chance through dice rolls. • Prioritization occurs indirectly due to the chance element in the game dynamics. • Some level of analysis takes place during token selection. • In these games, there is a winner in each iteration. • The rules of the proposed game can be somewhat complex and may need simplification when multiple iterations occur in a single instance to achieve systematic results.
B. Hybrid games	b.1) Augmented Reality Games	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • In operational terms, these games are similar to mock-ups where participants choose different elements. • Their unique aspect is the incorporation of real-time virtual elements into the game.
	b.2) On-site Game Dynamics	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • An approach where workshop participants act as tokens within a realistic model. • The game is designed to be executed in the same location targeted for intervention.

Table 1 - Categories of games presented / Source: Urbanism 1 class archive.



Fig. 5 - Up: Valdivia group¹² a) Board game based on forms and colours that represents levels of prioritization; b) Prioritization board, final version / Down: London group¹³ a) Board with a parametric border where you can configure the context ; b) Explaining the final version of the game / Source: Urbanism 1 class.

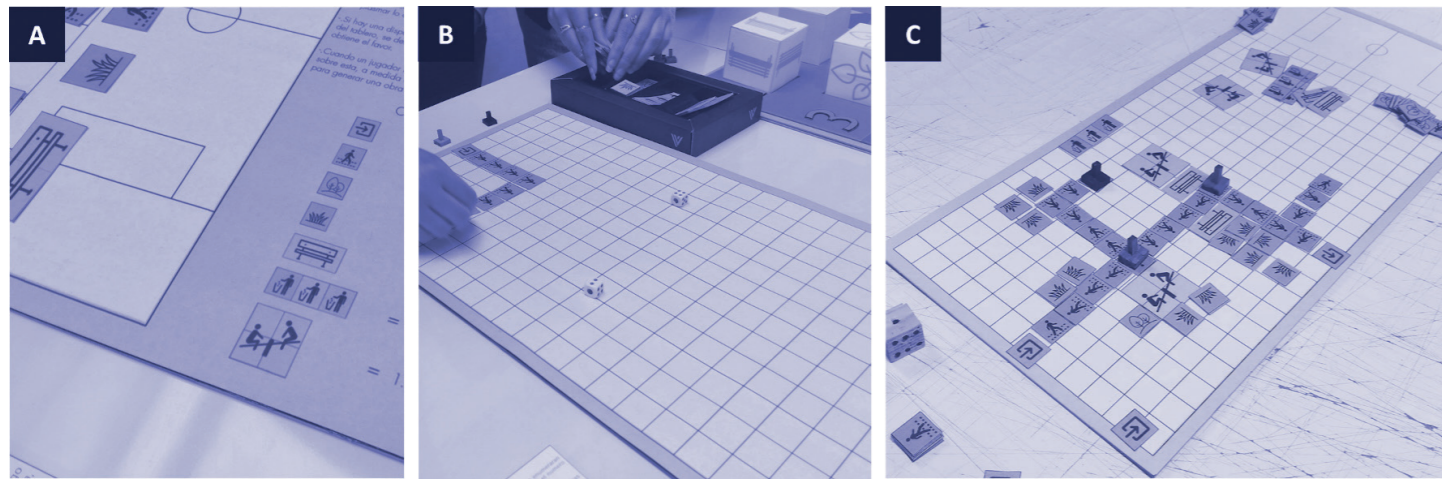


Fig. 6 – Lima group¹⁴, Board game with dice engine: a) Rules and elements for selection; b) Dice mechanics; c) final stage of the game / Source: Urbanism 1 class.

through the game board using random dice numbers (Fig. 6) but make strategic choices when selecting elements. However, in all these cases, the game remains situated in an abstract space — the board — without real contact with the surrounding environment. Despite this, introducing randomness presents a unique challenge for the practical objectives of the exercise: how can you ensure that adequate prioritization is achieved through random selections?

The solution to this challenge appears simpler than it might initially seem and is closely tied to the game's simplicity. The key lies in simplification to enable multiple players: prioritization is achieved through the collective iteration of many participants. To facilitate this, the game must become even simpler and practical for repeated application.

In the final assessment of the process, perhaps the most

intriguing proposals are the hybrid games. These, however, tend to have a lower level of resolution due to their complexity; they are akin to traditional board games but integrated with the surrounding environment. Yet, it is within these hybrid games that the most promising development prospects are presented. The use of the body as a means of making game choices (Fig. 7) is a game in itself: it is inherently engaging and enjoyable (a necessary quality). Although it allows for personal interaction with the urban landscape, it demands a high degree of involvement, complicity, and a charismatic game leader to fully engage the participants.

Among all the proposals, augmented reality (Fig. 8) seems to have the most promising development potential. It effectively blends final design concepts with the urban environment and provides digital support for seamless data integration, facilitating systematization.

However, challenges exist. Foremost among them is the need for close supervision due to the complexity of the game. Additionally, the technology is not yet entirely intuitive for all individuals. Nonetheless, the rapid advancement of software suggests that this issue is likely to be resolved in the near future.

It is important to note that any hybrid technique has an evident limitation: it takes place on-site, making it susceptible to environmental conditions. Factors like rain, for instance, could easily disrupt the workshop. There are elements beyond anyone's control, unlike the easily controlled environment of an indoor space.

It is worth noting that in this initial iteration, there are no games of the 'skill' or 'vertigo' type, which could broaden the methodological spectrum. In participatory urbanism practices, there are always age groups that are challenging to engage, and such games might



Fig. 7 – Medellín group¹⁵ a) Model to explain the method to people; b) Colours and symbols to paint the shirts; c) final stage of the game, quadrants and position / Source: Course students.

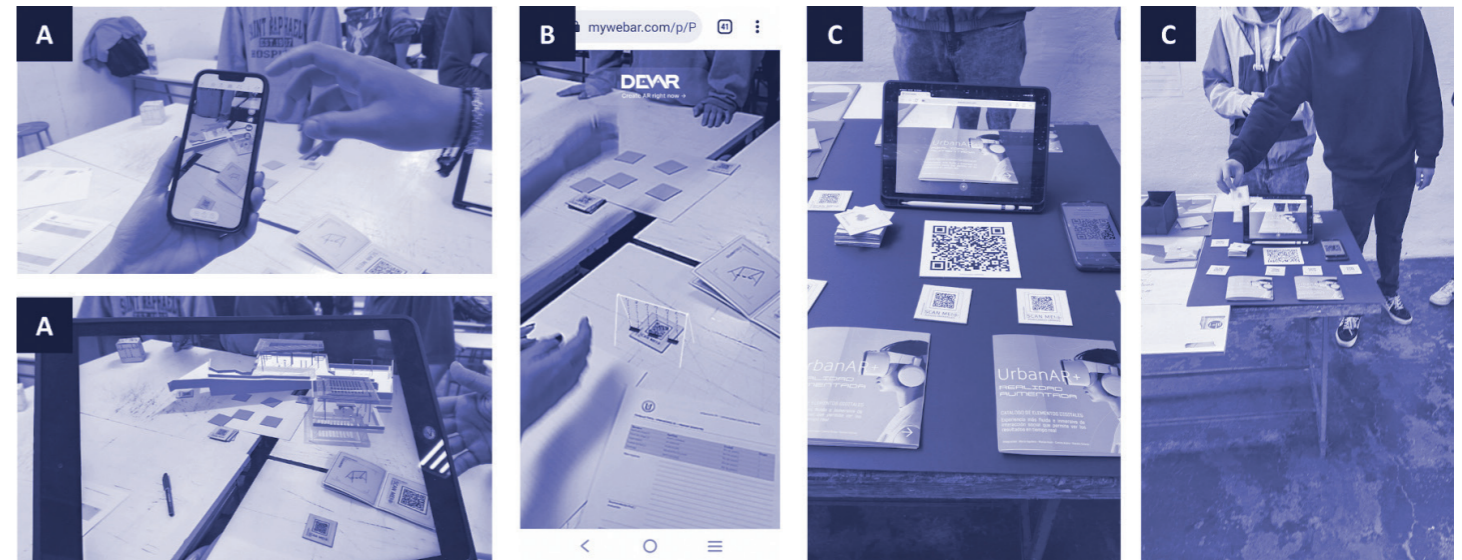


Fig. 8 - Boston group¹⁶, game of augmented reality, model over a public square: a) First test; c) final stage of the game: developed with two apps / Source: Course students.

hold particular appeal for them. For example, sports-related games could play a role, although they are often seen as supplementary entertainment rather than a practical tool. Nevertheless, they have an advantage: the utilization of space, group interaction, and the transformation of the environment into a 'ludic geography,' to use Woodyer's (2012) definition with some liberty, has immense learning potential.

One noteworthy element to consider is the prevalent issue of time management in all these proposals. Despite the teams' efforts to plan rules and game environments to adhere to the given instructions, many of them exceed the exercise's time limit. This situation metaphorically reflects the challenges faced in real-life public projects, where execution time often deviates from the planned timeline. This serves as a reminder that academia also operates within the constraints of the real world.

5. DISCUSSION AND FINAL REMARKS

The conclusions drawn from this initial iteration of the study are preliminary in nature. Instead of providing definitive answers, they serve as a starting point for new questions. The practical application of many of these methodologies in diverse situations is essential for deeper understanding and

refinement. Additionally, it is important to bear in mind that some of these conclusions are influenced by the author's own experience in the region, where similar exercises have been implemented.

5.1. The two big Problems

As mentioned earlier, the final goal of this effort was to refine the existing role games used by *Quiero mi Barrio* program for small and large urban projects in the region under consideration. The underlying problem is that projects are typically developed by consultant teams and university think tanks, which employ sophisticated methods that may not align with the community's expectations regarding time and simplicity. This highlights the importance of finding solutions to the complexity problem. The exercise yielded at least a couple of simple and feasible solutions for implementation. These solutions can be incorporated into the technical requirements of future contracts.

Firstly, addressing the complexity problem involved adopting a practical approach. The most viable solution was to emulate processes that people engage in daily, such as purchasing products and managing a family budget. The game begins with a predefined budget, and the tokens hold value — a straightforward and easily

understandable concept that can be explained at the start of the workshop.

Secondly, many groups attempted to address the ideological problem through a simple method: creating customizable tokens, cards, or even clothes that could incorporate community ideas. In other words, the game should not rely solely on elements provided by the designer — it should be seen as an incomplete product, requiring input and completion from the community.

5.2. There is no one Method, nor one Time

It is evident that each type of game is addressed to a specific audience, and each audience operates within a particular time frame. For example, there are situations where providing a comfortable table for a relaxed conversation makes the most sense, while in others, swift decision-making is crucial, and playtime becomes essential. Some audiences find engagement through physical activity, while others seek surprise or direct interaction with reality. In fact, one of the key conclusions is that there is no one-size-fits-all approach adaptable enough to suit all audiences. This is particularly true for tactical urbanism projects involving diverse communities. Consequently, one of the most

Core skills	Main age group	Play time	Building complexity	Numbers of players
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Physical • Social • Creative • Cognitive • Emotional 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 0-6 • 6-12 • 12-20 • 20-60 • 60 + 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Quick passing by • Few hours play • Long stationary play 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • One or very few components • Multiple components, simple mechanisms • Complex mechanisms, energy needed 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • One person per time • One or multiple persons at the same time • At least two persons needed

Table 2 - Categories to guide the design of recreational spaces / Source: Playful Cities Design Guide, 2003.

challenging aspects of this exercise was gaining a sense of social context — understanding for whom and where the idea is intended. This underscores the importance of calibrating the basic parameters outlined by Stevens (2007) in 'The Ludic City' during the game creation process (Table 2).

A game must possess a sense of uniqueness or 'sense of place' to truly captivate a specific group of individuals. It is essential to tailor the game strategies in a way that resonates with the intended audience.

Moreover, it is not always accurate to assume that more time spent on analysis leads to better conclusions. Quick dynamics offer a level of spontaneity that extended discussions often miss, and this spontaneity should be cherished and preserved.

5.3. The importance of Chance

Chance plays a crucial role in enabling us to arrive at conclusions in a more impartial manner. This became evident during gameplay, where individual games may not necessarily reflect the overall tendency. However, a series of games reveals discernible trends, and repeated iterations highlight dominant options. Certainly, for this process to be effective and yield robust findings, the game must be brief, enabling numerous iterations that allow these patterns to emerge.

5.4. The delicate balance between Reality and Games

It is essential that a game is integrated into reality rather than existing as a separate territory.

This is why a completely virtual experience was avoided. In fact, various virtual experiences were attempted during the pandemic as part of urban projects in Antofagasta, but they did not succeed in truly engaging the public.

Simultaneously, while the proposed game should maintain a metaphorical and functional relationship with reality, it should also achieve a sufficient level of distance from reality to immerse participants in the dynamics, allowing them to step briefly into the 'magic circle' as described by Huizinga — essentially, to be 'in the game.'

The challenge lies in striking the right balance between this necessary distance and active involvement, ensuring that the experience remains a game rather than merely a traditional discussion gathering with 'toys'.

5.5. The "Irrelevance" of games

While a study of this nature may challenge Huizinga's classic notion of "irrelevance" in games, he raises an important point: excessive rationality can hinder enjoyment. So, where does one find that elusive balance? Consider the world of cinema, particularly films that transport us to captivating, yet somehow familiar realms. In this context, one might argue that the primary objective of any game is to achieve what the film industry calls the 'suspension of disbelief.' Essentially, this means that the game's rules are so internally consistent that they allow participants to break through the walls of what's 'relevant' in their daily lives, enabling them to willingly immerse themselves in the game's logic.

Indeed, one of the most challenging aspects of community dynamics is to 'excite' the audience and draw them into the experience. It involves creating a world with sufficient internal consistency that people willingly accept its rules, no matter how fantastical or unconventional they may be. For a brief moment, everything else becomes irrelevant, and we have a world at our disposal with a project to complete and a game to play.

5.6. Final remarks

In summary, a successful playful strategy is achieved when:

- A meeting incorporates simple, coherent, and immersive rules that entertain and transport a community out of their usual reality.
- These rules establish a meaningful relationship with the environment, facilitating the drawing of useful conclusions.
- Participation occurs voluntarily and at suitable times for the meeting attendees.

Based on our previous discussions, the three key factors to consider for future activities are:

- **Time and Inhabitants:** Calibrate the pace and duration of game dynamics to suit the attending audience, testing this calibration in real territories and various contexts.
- **Rules to Engage:** Ensure that the game has simple rules that can be learned and executed within the same meeting. The definition of "simple" should be tested.
- **Surprise (Entertainment):** Incorporate an element of surprise into the method to allow for the emergence of unexpected results. This randomness should serve a purpose, and it is crucial that the group accepts these unexpected conclusions as personal choices.

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NOTES

1. Spanish for 'Emerging City'.
2. Project for Public Spaces / <https://www.pps.org/category/placemaking>
3. Acronym in Spanish: COSOC.
4. OGUC: Urbanism and Building Construction General Ordinance, Chile, according to the last actualization by 2020 Supreme Decree N°42.
5. This edition is a translation by James T. Lamiell from the second edition of 1913 of the classic book 'Psychology's struggle for existence'.
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11. Tokio group, Japan. Members: Gabriela Valdivieso; María Ávalos; Marian Caro; Matías Callejas; Sebastián Vilches.
12. Valdivia group, Chile. Members: Antonia Valenzuela; Francisca Flores; Millaray Coo; Nicolás Odgers; Miguel Fernández; Sebastián Heller.
13. London group, U.K. Members: Edward Jara; Tamara Báez; Sergio Michea; Jesús Sarapura; Tatiana González
14. Lima group, Perú. Members: Carlos González; Francesca Donoso; Eduardo Sierralta; Natasha Román; Nayaret Castillo
15. Medellín group, Colombia. Members: Arturo Caucoto; Karen Cruz; Williams Mollo; Fiorella Alférez; Karla Cutipa
16. Boston group, U.S.A. Members: Camilo Arana; Marco Aguilera; Matías Aedo; Natalia Salazar.