

Chapter 6

Sociological (Re)search Games: What, Why, and How to Decide, by Playing Within a Study

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ABSTRACT

A Research Game is a new genre of serious game, which allows everyone to do research while playing. It is illustrated here via a case study of sociological research using a Sociological (Re)search Game, conducted in an art museum. As for a summary of the content structure, the chapter includes: firstly, an introduction, that informs about the history of this game main pre-projects and versions, in three inter-connected phases; secondly, a section establishes some foundations for development of a Sociological (Re)search Game; and three other sections discuss what regards the decision process when playing the game and, at the same time, researching: ‘what to decide,’ including the core contents and its subjacent story within the game; ‘why to decide,’ which introduces the player to some basic sociological knowledge, mainly some ideas on art processes within a museum, where the game action occurs; and ‘how to decide,’ which guides the player to learn some simple methods, in order to better play, but also to learn how to research within a scientific sociological project.

INTRODUCTION

The project presented in this text aims to demonstrate the potential of digital and serious games as a research methodological tool, within a variety of fields including social sciences, where there is currently a lack of literature or game development. Therefore, this chapter seeks to develop a widespread reflection on serious games, within a critical posture (Flanagan, 2000). And to show practical tools for education, training and researching in the fields of social and cultural processes, e.g., via Sociological (Re)search Games. This initiative targets universities, corporations, and cultural institutions, such as museums or galleries, in order to promote and support decision making within knowledge transfer and sharing among cultural staff and its publics.

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Sociological (Re)search Games

Figure 1. Research Game's prototype, alpha version, 2014 Interface with a table of contents in the left (Pedro Andrade games collection)



A Gaming Journey for Researtainment (Research + Entertainment)

The Sociological Research Game is a work in progress, and has three core development phases:

1. The first one was presented in a text already published. This is the history of a project for developing specific genres of serious games. Here, the author introduces the Sociological (Re)search Game's predecessors, which are: the *Sociological Game* created in 2004 through the authoring software Flash and programmed via Action Script (Andrade, 2015); the *Trichotomies Game*, made in 2009-10, where users consulted images of Joana Vasconcelos artworks and articulate three keywords that define and relate them, at museum Coleção Berardo, in a 2010 art exhibition (Andrade, 2011); and the *Research Game*, constructed in 2014 (Andrade, 2021). Figure 1 depicts the game's main interface, with some credits and a rolling Table of Contents in the left.
2. The second phase of the project is shown in the actual book chapter, which covers a Sociological (Re)search Game's *prototype*, developed since 2014. This is a meta-genre that synthesizes its predecessors: the *Sociological Game*, the *Trichotomies Game* and the *Research Game*. It is still in Alpha Phase, meaning that the game programming is not concluded, and its main purposes can only be achieved and observed in the final development phase. The present text includes a detailed presentation of the game provisory content, core activation phases and interactive elements. This is contextualized by some sociological theory and methodology, but only the basis needed for the player to make decisions, when playing a game that represents a social process.
3. In a third phase, the author is developing a final game within *Unity* and other softwares. The ultimate aim is to deliver a serious game that may be used as a good practices pillar for social and cultural *decision-making capabilities*, in several professional and entertainment areas, that will be even more explicit in this third stage.

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