

Drop the PPTs and pull out the board game: an educational tool to bring the 2030 Agenda to life

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At the 2017 edition of the “Managing Global Governance (MGG) Academy” —a training programme held at the German Development Institute which brings together participants from the Global South and Europe to engage in a solution-oriented dialogue about global challenges in the framework of the 2030 Agenda— five participants (Adi Yudanto, Diego Zubillaga Rodríguez, Flávia Alfenas, Rafael Andrezo and Refilwe Nkomo) were assigned to develop a tool —or toolbox— that would aid educators and trainers to get people engage with the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and contribute to close the gap between knowledge and action to advance this global agenda.

As we noticed during our time at the MGG Academy, many educators struggle to socialize and raise awareness about sustainability issues – and even when awareness was high, action was often absent; a phenomenon that is not exclusive to trainings and education environments, but also present in policy-making, the private sector, and society at large. According to the Sustainable Development Goals Report of 2019,¹ for instance, tackling climate change is the most urgent area of action of the global agenda. Yet, four years after signing the 2030 Agenda and the Paris Agreement on Climate Change, governments across the globe are not only reluctant to fulfil modest environmental commitments, but are also falling short in their pledges to move in this direction.²

In this sense, underlying our task —which was to deal with a shortcoming in education and training— led to a broader question: How do we achieve behavioral change? In other words, how do people start to behave differently? what motivates people to become ‘change-makers’? and what are the tools or practices that are most helpful to reach behavioral change? All these questions relate to the intrinsic difficulty of teaching the SDGs —an endeavor which is far more complex than other teaching experiences, since learning is not focused on knowledge acquisition or in obtaining an academic

¹ “The Sustainable Development Goals Report 2019”, United Nations, 2019.

² In Mexico, for example, government plans to reactivate the national oil industry do not augur any harmony between environmental protection and economic growth. In Indonesia new coal energy plants are being opened, and in Germany reducing greenhouse gas emissions in the transport sector remains a substantial challenge. (“Mexicano López Obrador aspira a terminar con importaciones de gasolina en tres años”, *Reuters*, July 7, 2018; Brad Dennis & Chris Mooney, “Countries made only modest climate-change promises in Paris. They’re falling short anyway”, *The Washington Post*, February 19, 2018).

qualification,³ but on empowering people to act. A task already challenging given the low levels of awareness about the SDGs (in a survey across 24 countries, for instance, only 1% of the population reported to know the SDGs “very well”).⁴

To address this broad dilemma, we initially had to limit the scope of the challenge and identify if most learning difficulties were either associated with (1) raising awareness, (2) generating knowledge or (3) translating knowledge into action.

Using an open-questionnaire we interviewed people working in the United Nations’ SDG Action Campaign, activists attending the COP 23 Climate Conference in Bonn, Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit (GIZ) staff working at the 2030 Agenda Initiative project in Mexico, members of the ESD Expert Net, specialist from Engagement Global, trainers at the German Development Institute, people working at the Centre on Sustainable Consumption and Production (CSCP), and professors from the Joint Vienna Institute.

The central question guiding the interviews of the project "SDGs and Behavioral Change: Moving Towards Action" was: how to achieve behavioral change? Thus, we were interested in knowing what the driving forces of change are, as well as the elements that inhibit it. To use a metaphor, we wanted to know what makes someone standing at the margins of a protest get involved.

To address the challenge of reaching behavioral change, we decided to strictly focus on the educational stimulus that could contribute to this end. In *The Behavioral Change Wheel*, Susan Michie, Lue Atkins & Robert West highlight that education and training are two key elements that explain behavioral change: education provides the opportunity for change to occur, while training raises motivation.⁵

After collecting and analyzing the inputs of the interviews and pairing that information with documental research on behavioral change, we decided to focus on personal, rather than institutional change, since most of our findings were centered on individual engagement. The preliminary results of this process suggested the following:

- In order to provide a complete approach to teaching the SDGs, it was necessary to contemplate elements associated with (1) raising awareness, (2) generating knowledge and (3) translating knowledge into action.
- There is an overall consensus that there is no silver bullet to achieve behavioral change. What is clear, however, is that there are several elements which can improve socialization, appropriation, and activation processes related to teaching and learning.
- Two main drivers that lead people from simple awareness towards action are pain and inspiration; in other words, intense personal experiences as well as inspiring ideas, beliefs and role models are important ingredients to bring about behavioral

³ Tatjana Reiber, MGG Academy—German Development Institute, Interview, July 23, 2019.

⁴ “Glocalities: Towards 2030 Without Poverty”, 2016, <https://www.glocalities.com/reports/towards-2030-without-poverty?chronoform=Whitepaper-Poverty&event=submit>.

⁵ Susan Michie, Lou Atkins & Robert West, *The Behavioral Change Wheel, A Guide to Designing Interventions* (London: Silverback Publishing, 2014).

- change.
- Self-reflection is the first step that makes people engage in action.
 - Interactive methodologies have better reception and outcomes in trainings and education for sustainable development – a finding which extends to other areas of teaching and training.
 - Storytelling is a powerful tool to instigate behavioral change, as it facilitates the connection between personal stories and broader local, regional or global phenomena. Simultaneously, resorting to storytelling gives individual agency by placing personal experiences at the center of development narratives.

The story of one activist who we interviewed illustrates some of these findings, such as the role of pain as a core driver of change and the relevance of interaction as a way to address bigger challenges through collective action:

Ryan Camero is a visual artist and activist engaged in the fight against water privatization in the United States of America. While growing up in the state of California, he was exposed to a context of gang culture, addiction, and violence which had a profound impact in his family dynamic. As a result of this pain, he decided to 'do something opposite to the chaos' and got involved with community organizing. By learning about the over-exploitation of San Joaquin River, Ryan became active in activism, and joined a climate movement for protecting rivers and water justice. Nowadays, he is involved in environmental "artivism" and is organizing artistic demonstrations in different locations, one of them organizing around the Global Climate Action Summit of 2018 in San Francisco.

Based on these findings, our group started designing a tangible tool that could capture and integrate the learnings from our research. First, we identified a simple framework that described the optimal process of learning and activation, which we structured in three parts:

1. Reflection: it consists in a process of introspection aimed at developing and structuring one's own life-story, focusing on identifying motivations and one's potential role in achieving the SDGs.
2. Interaction: this phase consists in looking out and reaching to friends, family, work colleagues and other stakeholders. This stage is about exchanging ideas, finding shared interests, concerns, identifying sources of similar and different challenges, as well as developing solutions to address some of these issues in an individual or collective fashion.
3. Action: this stage consists in realizing the importance of individual actions for a community and at a global scale as well as in implementing those solutions.

This three-step sequence would later allow us to design a tool-box prototype, named the Bookinho (Portuguese for notebook), structured in three-parts; each of them corresponding to the reflection, interaction, and action approach. For the first section of the Bookinho —devoted to reflection— we designed several storytelling and identity mapping exercises as tools for individual and communal identity construction. This part also allows people to outline their personal interest and possible areas of action. One important element underlying this part of the Bookinho was that by finding problems that

interest individuals, we can all become problem-solvers. In the interaction part, we invite people to play a board-game, named Sustainable Ideas Game (SIG), aimed at brainstorming possible actions to tackle global challenges, while at the same time linking them to personal interests. The final section —dedicated to action— urges participants to put hands to work by using the ideas developed during the game. To do so, we provide a simple guide to develop a prototype based on a design-thinking approach.

After many iterations of this prototype and some samples with small groups of participants, we decided to focus in the second part of the workshop concept, i.e. the board-game.

Sustainable Ideas Game

Sustainable Ideas Game is a life-size board game designed to encourage personal and community-based action in the implementation of the 2030 Agenda. This part of the Bookinho also draws from the framework of reflection, interaction, and action. Thus, being personal introspection pivotal to this approach, we designed a game that would allow people to connect their personal thoughts, experiences, and knowledge on SDGs with other people in their communities, and that would encourage players to generate local solutions.

As a fully interactive and immersive experience, the players are the tokens of the game. Therefore, they must be the ones moving on the board-game in order to gain points. The board of the game consists of a de-constructed set of 23 individual boxes which are laid and arranged circularly on the ground, but that do not need to follow any order. Of the total boxes, 17 correspond to the SDGs, while the rest of them represent different challenges which the players will have to engage with, if they fall on one of them. In the middle of the circle, two sets of cards are laid: Reality Check and Community Challenge.

To start a round of the game, all players must roll the two dices and move the same number of spaces. The core idea of the game is to develop feasible solutions to concrete sustainability questions. Thus, as players rotate around the board, they will encounter different challenges related to the 2030 Agenda which they will have to address through creative solutions.

If they land on an SDG, players will have to convey an idea about how they can advance that particular goal. In this case, it is important to either refer to SDG targets and indicators or to elaborate a solution that directly or indirectly relates to the SDG. Given that the game is designed under the premise that people can draw conclusions about how their daily lives relate to the SDGs and therefore come up with creative solutions, the game encourages the use of indicators and targets to facilitate the brain-storming process by serving as a general, but simple guide to start reflecting.

Since the goal of the experience is to encourage players to jump from awareness to tangible action, all of the ideas and projects that are developed in this interaction will be assessed by the rest of the players. This way, players will gain points based on their peers' assessment regarding the feasibility and quality of their ideas. This part of the game is intended to build cooperation between the participants, not competition. To assess the proposed practical ideas, each peer must ask a question to the examined party, based on the S.M.A.R.T.S. criteria (Specific, Measurable, Attainable, Relevant, Time-Bound and Sustainable); for example, is the idea relevant in terms of reaching the goal? Can the

benefits of the idea be measured and achieved within a specific time-frame? Would that idea have an individual impact, a community impact or a broader outreach? and any other inquiries that may deepen the understanding about the implementation of the idea.

During each round, participants might also fall on one of the following boxes, which will ask them to perform different tasks:

Reality Check: if a player falls on this box, that person will have to take one Reality Check card, drawn from the Reality Check deck. These cards provide random scenarios —related to one or more SDGs— that can make a player gain or lose points.

Community Challenge: if a player falls on this box, that person will have to take one Community Challenge card from the respective deck. These cards provide a question, sentence or order which will demand a particular action from one or more players. Completion of the challenge is rewarded with points.

Busted: if a player falls on this box, they will be challenged to share a personal bad habit, which they wish to change, related to a SDGs. Completion of the challenge is rewarded with points.

Hero's Tale: when a player falls on this box, they have the opportunity to share their own story or the story of anyone who inspires them who is working to advance the 2030 Agenda. For instance, Victor Ochen is a prominent African activist and Nobel nominee who has been doing a heroic movement on the SDG 16 “Peace, justice and strong institutions”, by dismantling armed groups. If you share a story, you will gain points based on the number of players in the game.

No Action doesn't help: this box was specifically designed to convey a sense of inaction in relation to the pressing sustainability challenges we all encounter. For that reason, if a player falls on this box, they won't have to develop an idea nor realize any activity. They will, on the contrary, spend that round inactive and with no possibility to gain points; they will, however, have the opportunity to join any other player in their tasks.

As it can be appreciated from the different tasks and activities that the game requires, SIG combines storytelling dynamics, strategic brainstorming, individual self-reflection, group-interaction, and the possibility to share personal stories (which might be related to pain or inspiration) in a pro-positive environment. These elements have allowed the game to have high levels of acceptance among different audiences, as well as the following positive outcomes:

- It reverses conventional top-down learning processes by stimulating localization of the SDGs and horizontal joined knowledge generation.
- It enhances the appropriation of the SDGs through a methodology that interweaves personal and familiar situations and experiences with the implementation of a global development agenda.

- It provides a platform where people can use their agency to become change-makers and also helps them realize that they can come up with their own solutions to advance the SDGs.
- It replaces traditional teaching and learning techniques —lectures, Power Point Presentations (PPTs), and one-way methodologies in which the direction of the information is from instructor to the audience— for an interactive/participatory approach.
- Although PPTs are a useful tool for teaching, the use of this resource has become more intensive and, in many cases, excessive. One consequence is that learning processes often become boring, dull, repetitive and ineffective. As José Ramón Gamo, Director of the Masters Program in Educational Neuroscience at The Rey Juan Carlos University, suggests “the brain requires excitement to learn”.⁶ Thus the use of game-based and participatory methodologies are key components to maximize and ensure the effects of an educational experience. For that reason, we see great potential in resorting to gamification, storytelling and interaction as central elements in pedagogy and delivery methods —especially in the field of education and training of the 2030 Agenda.
- The game has also facilitated the activation of many people. From August to October 2018 several workshops were conducted in eleven Mexican federal entities as part of the joined project between GIZ and United Nations Volunteers, “Volunteering for the SDGs”. As a result, 864 people were mobilized to develop 65 volunteering activities in the country.
- SIG has also proven to be a versatile tool in different contexts and across groups with different professional backgrounds and ages. As of July 2019, SIG has been played by professionals in the field of sustainable development (2018’s Global Festival of Action for Sustainable Development, 2018’s MGG Academy, 2018’s United Nations’ Summer Academy), by young potential volunteers and civil society organizations (workshop series “Volunteering for the SDGs”), by young activist in Qatar (Empower Conference 2019. Youth: A Catalyst for Peace and Dialogue for Development), and by children (Städtisches Siebengebirgsgymnasium Bad Honnef). The versatility of this tool is therefore an encouraging element to expand the resonance of the game to very diverse contexts and to reach people with or without prior knowledge of the 2030 Agenda.
- An additional important feature of the game is its ability to stimulate project-development and solutions, individually as well as collectively. The nature of either one of these outcomes ultimately depends of the particular inputs of the players – or of whether the game is played in groups or individually.
- One final element that contributes to making this approach action-oriented is the use of a demanding evaluation criteria (SMARTS) for the process of idea-

⁶ “El cerebro necesita emocionarse para aprender”, *El País*, July 18, 2016.

development. Such feature allows participants to develop feasible ideas that can be implemented.

Conclusions

Achieving behavioral change—that is transforming individual and collective actions—is by far one of the most challenging tasks that education and training encounter. But despite the difficulties, particular methodologies and tools, such as SIG and the Bookinho, can greatly facilitate this task by fostering excitement, interaction and by placing personal experiences at the center of learning processes.

The purpose of this paper is to showcase the educational tool Sustainable Ideas Game as a good practice in the field of education and training for sustainable development. By combining components of storytelling, gamification, social interaction and project prototyping, this novel and inexpensive methodology has shown positive outcomes in bridging the gap between awareness and action in the implementation of the 2030 Agenda. Some of the key positive results include: reversing top-down learning processes, improving the appropriation and understanding of the SDGs, developing tangible solutions to sustainability challenges, and empowering local actors to implement the 2030 Agenda.

To “drop the PPTs and pull out the board game” is an invitation for trainers, educators and anyone seeking to implement the 2030 Agenda to resort to unconventional, fun and interactive methodologies focused on triggering action. By “dropping the PPTs” this paper is not suggesting abandoning traditional teaching tools, but rather to reduce their excessive use and to complement them with more engaging methodologies.

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