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ESS 365 - Global Climate Justice

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Global Climate Justice Final Project Essay: Learning Through Play

Climate change is one of the biggest challenges of our time, and it is not something that affects everyone equally. The more we have learned in this class, the more we have realized how deeply unfair the impacts of climate change tend to be. Entire communities —often the ones contributing the least to the problem— face higher rates of displacement, livelihood loss, environmental destruction, and countless other inequities. These injustices can often feel overwhelming, especially when comprehensive solutions are out of reach. This is why we decided to create *Climate Justice: The Path to Sustainability and Equity*, a board game designed to make these complex issues more understandable and engaging for young people. We wanted to take what we have been learning in class and turn it into something that can reach people in a new way: through a medium that is educational, fun, and accessible.

Why We Chose This Topic

Educational games are an effective way for people to learn without feeling pressured. They are interactive, allowing the players to experiment and make decisions, which feels much more personal than simply reading a textbook or watching a video. When we thought about how heavy the topics in this class are —displacement, food insecurity, environmental racism, etc.— we realized that these issues can often seem abstract and distant, especially for youth. Our motivation for choosing this topic was to create something that brings these issues to life in a way that people can understand and relate to, even if they don't have a background in climate studies. We also wanted to make this game because we saw many young people wanting to get involved in climate action but not knowing where to start. A board game felt like a good way to introduce people to these topics in a way that isn't overwhelming. It's also a way to spark curiosity and show that climate justice isn't just about science but also about people, communities, and fairness.

What We Wanted to Achieve

The goal of the game is to educate and inspire players to think critically about climate justice issues while having fun at the same time. The target audience is middle and high school students, but it could also work for anyone new to climate justice-related topics. The game is designed to help players:

1. Understand Real-World Problems: Each module in the game focuses on issues like water scarcity, health inequities, or environmental racism, using real-world case studies to make these problems relatable.
2. Think Systematically: The game mechanics encourage players to see how different issues are interconnected. Addressing water scarcity may also impact food security or displacement.
3. Feel Empowered to Act: By showing how different solutions can be implemented, the game emphasizes that change is possible, even when the problems seem overwhelming.

We also wanted the game to spark conversations. By playing with friends or family, we hope that people start discussing these issues with others in a more approachable and organic way. We hope that the game can plant the seeds for more significant actions down the line.

How It Connects to Class Concepts

This class has covered many important topics shaping our approach to the game. Each game module reflects a theme we discussed, using case studies to ground the issues in real-life examples. Here's how some of the key concepts from the course show up in the game:

1. Displacement of Climate Refugees: Our focus was on Vanuatu, where rising sea levels threaten to displace entire communities. Players understand the severity of the situation for many people in vulnerable communities.
2. Environmental Racism: Louisiana's "Cancer Alley," another part of the game, explores how marginalized communities are disproportionately affected by pollution and industrial activity.

3. Health Inequities: Uganda's health challenges due to climate change, such as heat-related illnesses and increased disease outbreaks, are becoming more serious. Therefore, players must address the issue by strengthening healthcare systems in vulnerable areas.
4. Food and Water Security: We researched case studies in Somalia and South Africa to address drought, agricultural disruption, and water shortages. Players learn about investing in sustainable practices and equitably distributing resources.
5. Intergenerational Justice: The game also highlights youth-led climate action, like lawsuits in the European Union.

These case studies reflect what we have learned in class and emphasize that climate justice is more than the environment; it's about fairness, equity, and systemic change.

What We Learned From This Project

This project taught us so much, not just about the topics but also about the process of creating something collaborative and interactive. First, we realized how hard it is to simplify complex issues without losing their depth. Climate justice is such a broad topic, and it was challenging to break it down into scenarios that are easy to understand while still being meaningful. We had to keep asking ourselves, "What's the main takeaway here?"

We learned how interconnected all these issues are. For example, addressing water scarcity often involves energy solutions, food security, and health policies. Figuring out how to represent these connections in the game mechanics was tricky but also eye-opening. It reminded us that real-world solutions need to be just as interconnected. Working on the game also showed us the importance of creativity in climate advocacy. We have previously thought of activism as engaging in protests or promoting certain policies, but this project made us realize that creative tools like games can be just as powerful. We can use a game format to reach people who might not engage with traditional activism — especially younger audiences.

Finally, this project was a lesson in teamwork. Every time we tested the game, we received new feedback that improved it. Seeing how an idea could evolve into something that worked was exciting. It also reminded us that climate action is a team effort, and different perspectives strengthen solutions.

Conclusion

Climate Justice: The Path to Sustainability and Equity is more than a class project. It is ultimately an effort to make large, overwhelming issues feel more manageable and relatable. The board game uses real-world case studies to teach players about climate justice in a way that is engaging and accessible, especially for young people who might feel disconnected from or hopeless about these topics. Creating the board game taught us about the power of education, the interconnectedness of climate issues, and the importance of creativity in activism.

Reflecting on this project, we are hopeful about the potential for justice-centered climate action. If a simple board game encourages people to think more critically about climate justice and discuss potential solutions, it could inspire action. This project has also shown us that education and advocacy do not have to look the same for everyone; sometimes, it can look like sitting around a table, rolling dice, and imagining a better world.