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Special Issue

Democracy Dies Playfully. (Anti-)Democratic Ideas in and Around Video Games

edited by

Eugen Pfister, Tobias Winnerling and Felix Zimmermann

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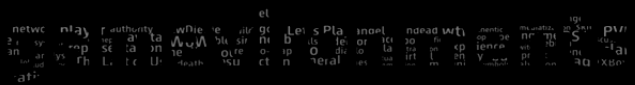

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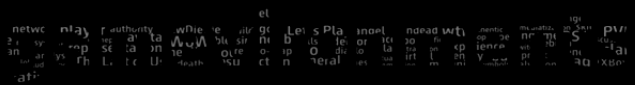

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Code of Resistance. On the Potential of Digital Games and Game Jams for Civic Education

Michael Laumer and Marcel Kabaum

Abstract
Some digital games deal with politics and democracy and are appropriate for civic education. Schools that want to include these games in their curriculum do not have to rely on commercial products alone, but can also use other easily available games and simple tools. Often these are even created by young people in game jams. Five freely available games from the game jam #ResistJam in 2017 will be examined for civic gaming experiences and their political content using didactic models, to discuss their possible integration into the classroom.

Keywords: Game Jam, Gaming Experience, Civic Education, Learning Democracy, Learning Politics, Serious Playing, gamevironments

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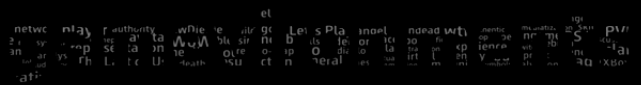
In Germany digital games have just recently been understood as a cultural asset (Zimmermann 2017), but their significance has since been unusually quickly accepted by education policy. The critical use of and reflection upon digital games has been identified as a (small) part of school education (KMK 2017, 19). Nevertheless, they do not receive the attention or regard that schools give other forms of cultural education such as literature or movies, though games have an equally important role in the worlds of children and youth (cf., Boelmann 2015, 13, Schlegel and Schöffmann 2015, 9, Geisler 2016, 9). With increasing age, the amount of users of digital games goes up and peaks at over 90% in the age range of 12- to 15-year-olds (mpfs 2018, 87–88, mpfs 2019, 58–59). When digital games are the subject of discussion at school, or



teaching units on digital games are developed, they largely deal with the "question of addiction or violence potential of games"[i] or reflect aspects of violence alone (Boelmann 2015, 149, Jöckel 2018, 9).

This article highlights the potential of digital games for education with a focus on civic educational approaches, because, after all, "civic education should be embedded in contexts that are of particular interest to students" (Detjen et al. 2012, 108). The German Federal Agency for Civic Education, for example, has been hosting game jams since 2016.[ii] Furthermore, digital games provide an opportunity for action-oriented methods in school (Detjen et al. 2012, 109). For this, five digital games will be analyzed, which were created on a game jam in 2017 named #ResistJam. The leading theme of this event was to "resist oppressive authoritarianism in all its forms" (#ResistJam 2017), which has been incorporated into more than 200 digital games developed within this game jam.

Game jams are hardly discussed theoretically, even among game studies research.[iii] Therefore, this article is intended to be a contribution to the discussion within game studies as well as to the advancement of civic education in schools. On the one hand, it will illustrate the potential of digital games with regard to the discussion of civic educational approaches. On the other hand, the cultural value of digital games beyond gameplay will be expounded.

This article reviews five digital games according to their political intentions and discusses the potential of these games for use in civic education at school. First, the importance of democracy for the German education system will be briefly described, followed by an introduction to civic education in Germany. Then we will discuss the possibilities, which digital games offer for civic education in general. Because the

analyzed games were created on a game jam with political intent, both the concept game jam and the #ResistJam *2017* will be explained. After the presentation of the theoretical basics, five different #ResistJam games will be analyzed in terms of their political intentions and interpretations). A conclusion will summarize the main arguments.

Democracy in German Schools

After World War II there were initiatives to democratize the school system in Germany. This was mainly because the Allies considered youth an essential part of the democratization of defeated Germany (Detjen 2014). As civic education was not introduced as a subject in West German schools until the 1970s, it was still a long way off. At first, civic education was only done in secondary schools. In the 1990s, a few years after German reunification, "an increased focus on participation or respectively democracy in the scientific and conceptual debate on various educational institutions" took place again (Coelen 2010, 37). Occasionally, participation is even understood as a synonym for democracy (ibid.). But as the school cannot be a state "on a small scale" (Reinhardt 2010, 89), schools should "create spaces of experience in which democratic involvement and the chance to take part become visible and tangible" (ibid.), without being dependent on any "dogma of democracy" (Schlegel and Schöffmann 2015, 3).[iv] This is supplemented by civic education in the curriculum, because doing and experience alone do not bridge the gap between one's own life-world and the political system (Massing 2004a, 133, Massing 2011, 86).

In fact, this intention does not always succeed. Research on teaching practice reveals a "culture of disregard for civic education" (Hedtke 2018): Civic education is neglected as a subject or as curriculum in German schools. In addition, the democratic

structures within school cultures, i.e. involvement, decision making and collaboration, often reveal control and limitation. Pupils can mostly participate only up to a certain limit predefined by the organization (Budde 2010, 387, Coelen 2010, 46, Massing 2007, 20–21). Participation is also often expected from the pupils, so that the school can present itself to the public as a 'democratic school' for example. In this way, however, participation then becomes a task usually performed in class (Budde 2010, 387). Professionals must be aware of this in order to avoid the emergence of "pseudo- or fake participation" (Reinhardt 2010, 90), in which children are "dependents on the [...] mercy of adults" (Sturzenhecker and Richter 2010, 113).

This brief section illustrates that a system of political order and its implementation in educational institutions are characterized mainly by disparities in implementation (Massing 2007, 29–30). As a consequence, educational institutions are facing the challenge of creating political spaces in which (individual) values can be cultivated, or values, which are already taught, can be reflected upon and impart knowledge that exceeds these spaces. There are two common models, called *learning democracy* and *learning politics*[v] (Himmelmann 2010, 19, Massing 2011, 69, Massing 2004a), which will be described in the following. In the later analysis of the games, these models will be referred to again to discuss the possibilities of civic education with games developed during the #ResistJam.

Learning Democracy, Learning Politics

As mentioned above, for schools in Germany we can roughly distinguish two popular approaches in educational contexts: (I) learning democracy as a more activity-oriented approach in which democratic actions are practiced, such as participation in school, for example through student committees; (II) learning politics as a more curriculum-oriented approach that focuses on knowledge of political topics,

structures and concepts in order to be able to judge and act politically. Learning democracy and learning politics are sometimes treated oversimplified as a pair of opposites, "which unfortunately sometimes obscures the fundamental similarities and bridges between the different concepts" (Himmelmann 2010, 19). These approaches are basic for our analysis, so they are presented in general terms below.

The concept of learning democracy (Himmelmann 2004, 2017) is based on the works of John Dewey, especially *Democracy and Education* (Himmelmann 2004, 10–11, 2017, 25–26), and comprises three dimensions of democracy. Democracy as (i) a form of government with the general aspects of popular sovereignty and the rule of law, separation and exclusive legitimate exercise of powers, and parliamentary representation and procedures. It is guided by the principle of majority rule and the protection of minorities, as well as human and civil rights. These contents are aimed at secondary schools and are related to the other dimensions in terms of argumentation and of a didactic stage model. The dimension of democracy as (ii) a form of society addresses curricular themes for primary and secondary schools with the following aspects: pluralism, non-state and peaceful conflict resolution, market economy, civil society and a free and diverse public. The dimension of democracy as (iii) a way of life is especially relevant to primary schools and stands for fairness, non-violence, tolerance, self-fulfillment, diversity of opportunities, solidarity and self-organization.

In German educational policy, these three dimensions of democracy – a form of government, a form of society, and a way of life – are the condition for "strengthening the commitment of teachers, experts, and pupils to democratic development at school and in society" (KMK 2018, 6). This also ensures that

democracy as a form of government must always be re-established through the participation of children and youths in a democratic way of life and form of society (Coelen 2010, 38).

Himmelmann (2004, 2) underlines the aspect of social learning as particularly important and sees approaches such as *civic education* (USA), *education for democratic citizenship* (UK) or *éducation à la citoyenneté* (FR) as models. Massing (2011, 86) in turn also acknowledges the importance of social learning and refers to already existing concepts of political didactics such as categorical and action-oriented teaching, but points out that social learning without a political dimension cannot generate any understanding of politics. "Learning democracy makes sense only as learning politics" (Massing 2011, 97), because the central goal is, in his view, a growth in political awareness. This includes the conscious acceptance of basic democratic values and leads to political judgment and political capacity to act on one's own account (Massing 2004b, 26).

Massing's concept (2007, 31–32) of learning politics focuses on the learning process itself and is founded on political didactics. It is adaptable to all school forms and derived from the dominant categories of political science; that is, polity, policy, and politics[vi] (Massing 2007, 33). He (ibid.) argues that these dimensions are the starting point for reflections on political phenomena. In order to integrate learning about democracy, he suggests supplementing the dimensions of the political with a "basic normative concept of the common good" (ibid.). Massing (ibid.) refers to polity with the categories "power, rule, state, law, etc.," to policy with the categories "work, war, peace, etc.," to politics with the categories "democracy, participation, representation, conflict, interest and identity" and to common good with the categories "freedom, equality, justice, solidarity, etc." This combination of polity, politics, policy, and the

common good makes it possible to “understand the existing political order,” to “criticize political reality by its immanent standards” and to “discuss the ways and necessity of further developing the democratic system” (ibid.). This establishes the common ground between learning democracy and learning politics.

Massing’s approach influenced a collaboratively developed approach to political didactics (Weißeno et al. 2010), which operates with the dimensions ‘order’, ‘decision’, and ‘common good’ and is closely related to the three dimensions of the political (polity, policy, politics) (Massing 2011, 231). The dimensions of order, decision, and common good are again classified into subcategories that can be interlinked with one another depending on the topic. The dimension order includes the categories democracy, separation of powers, fundamental rights, rule of law, representation, and state. The dimension decision includes the categories interest groups, mass media, public, opposition, elections, etc. And among others, the categories of freedom, justice, equality, human dignity, and security are linked to the dimension common good.

With the description of the didactic models the next sections discuss the extent to which digital games are suitable for civic education and what opportunities they offer. We will refer to the work of Lenhart, Dean, Middaugh, Macgill, Evans, and Vitak, (2008), who have studied teaching characteristics to identify those that encourage social and political engagement. They compiled a list of civil society activities in and with digital games, which were defined as “civic gaming experiences” (Lenhart et al. 2008, 41):

- “helping or guiding other players;
- playing games where one learns about a problem in society;
- playing games that explore a social issue the player cares about;

- playing a game where the player has to think about moral or ethical issues;
- playing a game where the player helps make decisions about how a community, city or nation should be run;
- organizing game groups or guilds" (ibid.).

In addition, they interviewed 1,102 US-American youths aged 12 to 17 years about their gaming experiences and their political interests, of which two results are significant. First, it could be shown that digital games that are played together with others in person are related to articulated interest in politics (Lenhart et al. 2008, 45). Secondly, many more young people have access to civic gaming experiences than to the existing offers in educational institutions, which in the United States are more likely taken up by "higher-income, higher-achieving, and white students" (Lenhart et al. 2008, 47). According to an initial consideration, digital games open up more access to areas of civic education and, due to their widespread distribution (mpfs 2018, mpfs 2019), belong to the fields in which young people in early adolescence "display a higher subject-specific self-concept" (Detjen et al. 2012, 103).

Hence, the current state of research on the significance of digital games for civic educational approaches will first be presented, then the context of the analyzed games will be explored (game jam) and finally the games will be analyzed with regard to the approaches presented in this section.

How to Play?

Geisler (2016) summarizes different approaches for the use of digital games for educational purposes. *Learning Games* primarily aim to impart knowledge. *Serious Games* follow a didactic concept that does not, however, exploit the possibilities of

digital games: The main focus here is on the playing experience and in the best case, the player should be able to reflect this in the game alone. *Expressive and Persuasive Games* take a playful approach which pays little or no attention to the players or to the accessibility of the content, but focuses on provocation and on dealing with the topic itself. To remove the binding to certain genres the method *Serious Playing* puts all digital games in the focus of attention and is not limited to *Educational* or *Serious Games*. It has hardly been used so far and puts special demands on teachers. But when they tackle this challenge "they act close to the life world of children and youths" and can "stimulate reflection on their own usage of media" (Geisler 2016, 9).

Boelmann's study (2015) on literary understanding with narrative computer games, which can be classified as *Serious Playing*, indicates content that can be associated with civic education. In the digital game *Ceville* (2009), for example, players attend a court case and are asked for their personal judgment. In the story of *Warcraft 3: Reign of Chaos* (2002), as another example, the question of good intentions in times of war is investigated (Boelmann 2015, 158 and 175).

An approach to show ideologically influenced simplifications and their possible modes of operation (Pfister 2018, 13) is the implementation of a compulsory "debriefing phase" for the educational use of digital games (Motyka 2017, 240). The *Creative Gaming Initiative*, founded in 2007, highlights the fact that most commercially successful games do not negotiate social or political issues (Hedrich and Schwinge 2019, 40). But because digital games exist within a framework of social values, as the initiative states on its website, norms and moral concepts can be made visible by manipulating, modifying, and ignoring the rules of the game.[vii] Through changes of perspective, reflection, and a practice-oriented transfer of what has been learned, "opportunities should be created to understand seemingly unchangeable

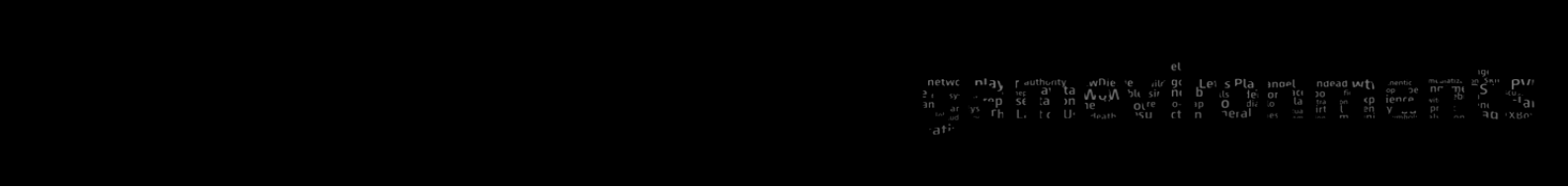
systems and to change them through the knowledge acquired" (ibid.). The pedagogical processes resulting from this can be described in four guidelines: (i) ignoring rules of the game, (ii) making virtual reality real, (iii) using games as toys and toolboxes, and (iv) rethinking games (Hedrich and Schwinge 2019, 42).

The *Creative Gaming Initiative* also brings this activity-oriented approach to schools in the form of workshops and helps children to develop digital games according to these principles. Even if they are not referred to as such by the initiative, this type of game programming can be called a game jam. Such opportunities are also made possible on a broader level in the annual play festivals for all interested parties.[viii] Game jams will be described in the following section.

Game Jams and the #ResistJam 2017

Game jams are usually used to create digital games on a specific topic, which is a characteristic of *Expressive and Persuasive Games*. During a game jam, mostly people who are frequently engaged in game development come together for about 3 to 7 days (online and offline) and develop games on their own or in teams. The results are usually available for free, require low computer resources and rarely take more than fifteen minutes of playing time.

The first documented game jam is the *0th Indie Game Jam*[ix] in 2002 at Oakland (US-CA). The event was primarily addressed to video game developers and was intended to enable innovation and experimentation (Chen 2017, 14). Soon after, the first virtual Game Jam *Ludum Dare Zero* took place. With the theme *indirect interaction*, the organizers focused on game mechanics and interaction possibilities. The annual *Global Game Jam*, launched in 2009 with 1,650 participants, impressively



demonstrates the creative potential of game jams, when in February 2020 a total of 48,753 participants developed 9,601 digital games in three days.[x]

The digital games analyzed in this article come from the game jam #ResistJam, which took place from 3 to 11 March 2017. It was organized via the platform https://itch.io/jams.[xi] The given theme was to develop games that "resist oppressive authoritarianism in all its forms" (#ResistJam 2017). Besides this explicitly political topic, there were other special features of the event: While the topics at game jams are announced with rather late notice to avoid advantages through pre-work, the organizers of #ResistJam dispensed with that norm. The aim was to create an inclusive environment to give opportunities to people who have no experience in programming or developing digital games or are otherwise disadvantaged. In a nine-day workshop before the main event, tools and central aspects of game development were presented and knowledge about the basics of game design was imparted.[xii]

A total of 208 games were developed by 884 participants. Five of these games are analyzed in the following about their potentials for civic education and how far they do fulfill the claim of the #ResistJam to transport values of modern society in a ludic way (#ResistJam 2017).

Analysis of Selected Games from #ResistJam 2017

The games analyzed here were selected from amongst all that were submitted to the #ResistJam.[xiii] All 208 game pages and game descriptions were examined. First the 208 games were grouped together based on similarities in description and theme. From this first systematization, a randomly determined one third was played to get a range of games as wide as possible. Five subjects arose inductively from the exploration of the games: fake news, prevented participation, discrimination, gaining

majorities, and demonstrations. These subjects can be connected to the didactic models of civic education explained in the part *Learning Democracy, Learning Politics*. Fake news is directly connected to decision (Massing 2011, 232) and indirectly to democracy as a form of society (Himmelmann 2004, 8); prevented participation is directly connected to democracy as a form of society (ibid.) and to politics (Massing 2007, 33); discrimination is directly connected to democracy as a way of life (Himmelmann 2004, 18) and common good (Massing 2007, 33, Weißeno et al. 2010, 193); gaining majorities directly to democracy as a form of government (ibid.), to politics (Massing 2007, 33) and to order (Weißeno et al. 2010, 191 and 193). The last subject, demonstration, is directly linked to order (Weißeno et al., 193), polity and politics (Massing 2007, 33) and democracy as a form of government (Himmelmann 2004, 18).

Based on the most reviews and highest ratings by users one game was selected from each category, which is supplemented by comparable games in the overview. For each of the games examined in this article, a longplay has been produced by the authors to complement the studies. Each longplay shows the authors playing the respective game up to the end of the game in a video.

Title and subject	Developers	Similar games from *#ResistJam 2017*
FakeBook (subject: Fake News)	Renan Vieira (Brazil) and Pedro Antunes (Brazil)	Facts and Figures ; NC News, with Tom Vandercar ; Content Control ; Fake News ; ROAR ; ReMoop ; Rogue Account ; Effbee ; Tyrant Simulator 2017
(Illegal) Alien (subject: prevented participation, discrimination)	Amyoeba [alias] (Canada)	Bluebird ; Squeeze Inc. ; Refugee Trail ; Paint the Sky Golden ; On the Other Side ; An Employee ; Meet the Monsta ; Puppet ; Through Water and Walls
The Cat In The Hijab (subject: discrimination)	Andrew Wang (USA)	Like Civilized People ; Blazehag Road ; The Other
Catalyst (subject: gaining majorities)	Eric Howard (USA) and Christian Masse (USA)	Shhh ; Disrupt ; Rise Up ; Bleat The Wolf ; Protest Tycoon 2017 ; Feline Freedom Fighters ; Satyagraha ; Impedance ; … with LOVE ; If Not Now, When? ; O For Oppression ; Be The Change ; Resistance ; Resistance Jelly ; Jackie and the Meanstalk ; Flight of the Valkyrie ; Trouble in Shape Town
Freedom Through A Lens (subject: demonstration)	Nicholas Staracek (Canada), Nic Lyness (Australia) and Zoe Lovatt (Australia)	Role for Resistance ; 4 Confessions ; In the Heart of the Islands, the Red Earth ; The Protester ; The Lights Were Off ; A phone is all you need ; Police de sale caractere ; proTest; The March

Table 1. Selection of games from #ResistJam 2017.

In regard to the civic gaming experiences of Lenhart et al. (2008, 41), the games examined can be roughly characterized in a systematic overview:

	FakeBook	***(Illegal) Alien***	***The Cat in the Hijab***	***Catalyst***	***Freedom Through A Lens***
helping or guiding other players	no	no	no	no	no
playing games where one learns about a problem in society	yes	yes	yes	no	yes
playing a game where the player has to think about moral or ethical issues	yes	yes	yes	no	yes
playing a game where the player helps make decisions about how a community, city or nation should be run	no	no	yes	no	yes
organizing game groups or guilds	no	no	no	no	no

Table 2. Overview of civic gaming experiences of the analyzed games.

The characteristics *helping or guiding* as well as *organizing game groups* are not contained in the games themselves, but can be experienced performatively during a game jam (Chen 2017, 16). The characteristic *playing games that explore a social issue the player cares about* remains unanswered, because we didn't interview any players.

The games are all analyzed in the following way: after a short summary and a description of the game play based on the long plays, the game contents are described and interpreted. With reference to the civic gaming experiences of Lenhart et al. (2008, 41) the games are then examined in relation to Himmelmann and Massing (see part *Learning Democracy, Learning Politics*) for their potential for civic education.

FakeBook

The game *FakeBook* (2017), created by Renan Vieira and Pedro Antunes (Brazil) can be played in English or Portuguese. It is described by the developers on the itch.io page of the game as follows: "In 2016, the top 20 fake news [articles] got more shares than the top 20 real news. This is a game about resisting conformism and blind acceptance of the majority's opinion. And also, about fake news and funny true stories" (Vieira and Antunes 2017).[xiv]

A smartphone in portrait format is shown in the center of the screen. The player can operate it by mouse or touch input. Beyond the displayed smartphone there are no control elements or interaction possibilities. On the one hand, this reduces and focuses the player's attention; on the other, it shows how tiny the space can be in which a reality is constructed. The closeness to the social media platform *Facebook*, already suggested by the title, is underlined by the choice of colors and icons. After the start via a play button, a *FakeBook*-timeline opens, which constantly displays news that has to be classified as *true* or *fake*. Every new message is accompanied by a true/fake-ratio calculated from all the answers of players who played the game online. Thus, the content of the news message is linked to an analysis among all previous players. It is the player's choice to follow the trends or not.

The player starts with having ten followers, which will increase or decrease if the news is correctly interpreted as true or fake. The faster the answer is given, the higher is the possible number of additional followers. The number of followers decreases if no inputs are given within a certain time (2:02 min of the longplay, Laumer 2020a), which can be interpreted as an indication of the demanding features of social media.

Followers are like a currency and the game ends when no more followers are left. The maximum number of followers during a game is counted as score and compared to the high scores of other players.

The displayed messages in *FakeBook* are from actual news sites, boulevard sites and websites whose business model is based on spreading false information. This can be identified by a link to the respective website that originally published the displayed news. Thus, there is a direct reference to the formation of public opinion and aspects of political myths. This is, for example, when false reports and conspiracy stories are normalized through constant repetition through sharing in social networks and their gain in persuasive power, as Pfister (2018, 7–8) described. *FakeBook* thus explores the sharing of posts in social networks for forming opinions and conflicts with the *like* and *follow* mechanisms.

With regard to the characterizations according to Lenhart et al. (2008, 41) the game refers to *learning about a problem in society* and *the player has to think about moral or ethical issues*. Democracy as a form of society includes a free and diverse public space (Himmelmann 2004), which can be destabilized by mechanisms like those illustrated in *FakeBook*. This happens when the distinction between journalistic news and fake news becomes increasingly difficult to make due to a uniform presentation and due to the standardization of the presentation. This also affects a free formation of opinion. Applying Massing's concept (2007, further Weißeno et al. 2010), the game refers to the dimensions decision and common good because fake news is based on a conscious deception. The handling of the information presented and the estimation relates to players individually. Both questions and the process of the additional game procedures underline the game's approach of critically reviewing information and news in order to form one's own opinion. This is illustrated by two exemplary game

runs, where once all of the answers were based on the majority evaluation (4:37 min of the longplay, Laumer 2020a) and once exclusively on the minority (5:06 min of the longplay, Laumer 2020a). Both runs ended after a few seconds with zero followers. The game thus illustrates how democratic opinion formation depends on one's own critical view and positioning.

(Illegal) Alien

Created by a person with the alias Amyoeba (Canada) the English language game is described on itch.io by the developer as: "Just a little alien trying to make pizza and keep living on a very strange planet" (Amyoeba 2017).[xv]

The game begins with the escape of a green alien, which leads to a crash landing on a foreign planet. To survive on the new planet, the character has to raise money for special food. From the statement of an inhabitant, "Dude let's get pizza" (0:16 min of the longplay, Laumer 2020b), the idea arises to develop a *pizza machine* from the materials of the broken spaceship and to sell pizzas. The game is shown in side view and the alien can be controlled left and right, can jump and carry parts of the spaceship to build the new machine. At the bottom of the screen a countdown is displayed; the player only has 120 seconds to build the machine. The game challenge is set by the inhabitants of the planet, who want to prevent reaching the game goal by using lethal force. These attacks are combined with insults like "@!'$ Aliens," "stealing our tax money," or "killing our culture," which are commented upon by the character, e.g. "Why do they hate me?" (3:08 min of the longplay, Laumer 2020b). On the statement: "Go back to your planet," the alien answers "I can't" (3:16 min of the longplay, Laumer 2020b) while being permanently under attack. The trajectory of the deadly shots is displayed shortly before impact so that there is a chance to avoid them. The challenge is very tough and it takes many attempts to complete it. This

allows the player to experience the obstacles and multiple pressures that the alien faces. This is underlined by insinuations about the figure of the refugee alien, such as the increase in crime on the planet, drug smuggling as well as the introduction of diseases or other faiths. With the completion of the pizza machine a last insinuation is made about the alien: “Taking all our jobs ...” (5:33 min of the longplay, Laumer 2020b).

The game illustrates the analogy to experiences of refugees in two ways: On the one hand, the analogy is established by depicting typical prejudices against immigration (increase in crime, transformation of the respective national culture, loss of jobs). On the other hand, the game carries out the analogy by telling the story primarily from the mechanics of the play, unlike the other games: Frequent failure is an essential part of the game experience and an important component of the narrative about escape and xenophobia. This collective experience is shown by the death of the alien in the event of failure, which faded over directly to the next crashing spaceship and the next refugee (0:41, 1:15, 1:50, 2:20, 3:42 min of the longplay, Laumer 2020b). Thus, the player’s new attempt is not necessarily represented as a new attempt of the killed character, but as the attempt of the next fled character that is on the run. From this point of view only *one* fled alien will *succeed* in arriving on the foreign planet or foreign culture and many more will be prevented from doing so.

Similar to *Fakebook* this game refers to two characterizations according to Lenhart et al. (2008, 41): *learning about a problem in society* and *the player has to think about moral or ethical issues*. The gameplay itself confronts players with rejection and stress and thus not only tells of failure, but also makes failure tangible. The game allows the players to address the characteristics of flight, such as refusal in other societies and lack of recognition. Thus, it combines the dimensions politics/decision (especially the

categories conflicts and identity) and policy (especially the categories work and war) with the question of the connection between refugees and the common good (Massing 2007, further Weißeno et al. 2010). The game asks for tolerance as well as renunciation of violence and thus, in relation to Himmelmann's concept, directly ties in with the dimension of democracy as a way of life. This is linked to the dimension of democracy as a form of government in the thematization of human and civil rights (Himmelmann 2004).

In contrast to the other games, which demand commitment and transform it into empowerment, *(Illegal) Alien* (2017) works with experiences of powerlessness and denies recognition to the players. Although players become unerring in dealing with the game the longer it is played, the game does not allow the player to *win* because the rejection does not stop. The final quote from the natives, "taking all our jobs" (5:33 min of the longplay, Laumer 2020b), thus represents a tragic point in the absolute argumentation of rejection and challenges in such an environment. In this sense, *(Illegal) Alien* creates a playful way of making political content experienceable without becoming normative.

The Cat In The Hijab

Created by Andrew Wang (USA), the game is based on dialogues, written in English, Portuguese and French, that offer players various ways of interaction. Wang describes the game on itch.io this way: "A cat wearing a hijab (a headscarf) boards the subway on her daily commute. What interactions await her over the course of her commute, and how does she react to them?" (Wang 2017).[xvi]

The player controls an upright walking cartoon cat in a subway that is filled with other randomly generated cats. The subway ride is divided in three acts. In every act, players can move through the wagon and get involved in conflicts. These are influenced by the players' decisions. The first act depicts a xenophobic verbal attack. The hijab-wearing cat is accused of being a terrorist and is verbally abused (0:15 min of the longplay, Laumer 2020c). Through the dialogue options, it is possible to react calmly, confrontationally, or not at all. Either way, however, no resolution of the conflict between the player and the attacker can be accomplished; only the length of the conversation differs with the selected dialogue options. As soon as this first conversation – or confrontation – is over, the subway stops, passengers get on and off, and the second act begins.

Again the cat in the hijab is addressed by another cat. This time the motive is a cultural misunderstanding and a self-righteous, infantilizing treatment of the character by another cat. He or she expresses his or her commiseration because he or she thinks that the character has to wear the hijab against her will (1:51 min of the longplay, Laumer 2020c). For him or her, the hijab is a sign of oppression and without being asked, he or she reminds the cat that wearing a hijab is not an obligation in that country. This dialogue can also be held calmly, confrontationally or not at all. In contrast to the first act, however, the dialogue is more up for discussion, insofar as it is possible to achieve a common ground in the positions of both dialogue partners. After a further stop of the subway, the third act follows with a transition.

The game character has taken a seat and a situation arises in which another cat in the subway is insulted because of its appearance. Now the cat in the hijab and the player together observe a situation similar to what previously happened to them. It is possible to intervene, but not necessary to do so. If the player enters into the

dialogue, he or she can speak with the offending cat or with the cat that is being insulted. The interaction possibilities even allow the player to support the attacker.

In its opportunities for dialogue and solutions, the game becomes more varied from act to act. In the first act, the length of the conversation can be manipulated, but not the prejudices of the offending cat. In the second act, it is possible to steer the conversation in such a way to intervene on the other cat's position and its effects. The third act surprisingly changes the perspective. The cat and the player are being turned into bystanders – among many – who can observe the same situation indifferently, who can help the attacked person or, regardless of the self-experienced discrimination, attack the other person because of the player's own prejudices.

Compared to *Fakebook* and *(Illegal) Alien*, *The Cat in the Hijab* (2017) expands the possibilities to encourage social and political engagement: besides the characteristics *learning about a problem in society* and *the player has to think about moral or ethical issues*, *the player helps make decisions about how a community, city or nation should be run* also applies here. Furthermore, the game demonstrates the importance of each individual's actions. Within the subway there is no solidarity and no interest in interaction. The player has the chance to resolve this state in the third act of the play, but does not have to do so. This is a constitutive characteristic of democracy: The importance of the individual and his action, but also the right to refuse democratic participation. Both forms of acting are legitimate in a democratic sense (Reichenbach 2016). The game shows more clearly than the others the significance of democracy as a form of society (Himmelmann 2004), in which democracy is only established through one's own actions, as *doing democracy*. Related to Massing, *The Cat In The Hijab* demonstrates how the common good can be discussed with the categories of freedom, equality, solidarity and safety (Massing 2007, further Weißeno et al. 2010).

The game itself does not take a position on what *the right* practice is; it shows different ways of acting. Which way of doing is legitimate for the individual players can lead to a discussion in a classroom. It is precisely this discourse that is democratic and constitutes the democratically legitimate possibility of civic education and the formation of opinion.

Catalyst

The English-language game *Catalyst* (2017) was created by Eric Howard and Christian Masse (USA) and described by them on itch.io as follows: "Recruit others in the cause. The more people you have fighting back, the stronger your message is. Appeal to your fellow humans to have them join the fight" (Howard and Masse 2017).[xvii]

Catalyst's monochrome game world represents a settlement, which is divided into five sections. The character can be moved in all directions using a keyboard or a gamepad. Barriers, in form of fences, gates, or walls, at first prevent access to new sections. The game's goal is to keep an undefined "darkness" from "taking over" the settlement (0:17 min of the longplay, Laumer 2020d). This can be achieved if the other people of the settlement have been convinced to follow the protagonist. All together, they are strong enough to overcome the barriers and push back the darkness.

Players can encourage others to join the fight against the darkness by addressing them individually in the right way ("make your appeal"). The game mechanic of this appeal is divided into three horizontal bars with the symbols brain, heart and scales. By pressing a key, a moving pendulum has to be stopped in the highlighted area of each bar. If it is done successfully, the characters around the player follow. If the appeal does not succeed, the characters are confused and can be addressed again a

few seconds later. The characters who can be addressed have a small question mark over their heads. This is apparently to show their indecision and the question mark changes into an exclamation mark when they join the growing group following the player.

Darkness intrudes the settlement at regular intervals. When this darkness encounters the player, a bar is displayed – similar to the appeal bars – which is filled and can be pushed back by pressing a key quickly and repeatedly (1:25 min of the longplay, Laumer 2020d). The larger the group that follows the player through *convincing*, the more successfully the darkness can be pushed back. Once all barriers have been passed and the darkness is pushed back the last time in the final section, the game ends with the hint that the darkness will return. If the player is pushed out of the settlement by the darkness, the game ends with the message: "The darkness took over and those who spoke out have been removed" (2:52 min of the longplay, Laumer 2020d).

With regard to the characterizations according to Lenhart et al. (2008, 41) the game refers to none of the civic gaming experiences. Although the game has been assigned to the subject *gaining majorities* (Table 1), it does not address a specific problem in society, because in the game everybody can be convinced. *Catalyst* does not present moral or ethical issues and does not confront players with decisions about how a community, city or nation should be run. However, for civic education, it offers an ambiguity that none of the other games has because it shows how an idea with good intentions can turn into the opposite.

At the beginning of the game, other characters stand up to three people at a time, but as the game progresses, there are larger groups in the settlement (6:42 min of

the longplay, Laumer 2020d). Even large groups are not able to act together and are dependent on the player's action to convince them to follow. The question marks above their heads suggest disorientation. The three levels of an *appeal* – brain (most likely a symbol for facts and as a rhetorical appeal to logos), heart (most likely a symbol for emotions and as a rhetorical appeal to pathos) and scales (most likely a symbol for justice and as a rhetorical appeal to ethos) – are always different in intensity, but suggest a linguistic variance only, not a diversity of content. Thus, the focus is not on the questions of others, negotiating positions, but rather on the target-oriented convincing of a single person or a group. In this way, *Catalyst* can easily turn into a playable conspiracy theory. The paratext of the #ResistJam, to *resist oppressive authoritarianism in all its forms*, can also be understood here in such a way that, for example, the majority support of immigration is understood as a form of authoritarianism.

In this game, *darkness* remains an unlimited projection surface for any content or policy that is perceived as a danger and must be fended off. If the aim is merely to achieve the right *appeal* to all people, a culture of consensus-oriented debate is prevented and a pluralistic society disappears. The practices of the *right appeal* are strongly reminiscent of those of populists. In this way, the game *itself* shows the opposite of democracy as a way of life (Himmelmann 2004). However, one can also argue that the resistance in the game defends the non-negotiable achievements of democracy. Thus, *Catalyst* can also be seen as a playable version of Article 20 of the German Constitution, which grants citizens a right of resistance whenever there are attempts to destroy the constitutional democratic and social order, and no possible alternative solution protects the democratic institutions of power. This refers to the

aspects power and rule of the dimensions democracy as a form of government (Himmelmann 2004), polity (Massing 2007), and order (Weißeno et al. 2010) and their significance for democracy as a form of society, way of life, and the common good.

Due to the ambiguity in the game, pairs of opposites are suitable for dealing with *Catalyst*, since the game wants to convey cooperation, but shows dependence. If the player projects his or her own values which he or she wants to see defended into the game, they create a like-minded resistance group whose only characteristic is strength. It is precisely this conviction of *all* the characters that contradicts a pluralistic conception of society, which can be analyzed in the context of democracy as a form of society (Himmelmann 2004), politics (Massing 2007), and decision (Weißeno et al. 2010).

Freedom Through A Lens

Created by Nicholas Staracek (Canada), Nic Lyness (Australia) and Zoe Lovatt (Australia), the English-language game is described by the creators on itch.io as follows: "Freedom Through A Lens is a photography exploration game [...] abiding to the Freedom of Press diversifier, in that the game showcases press and journalism through game play" (Staracek, Lyness and Lovatt 2017).[xviii]

The player takes on the role of a reporter for a newspaper article. For this report, the player attends a demonstration against a new law where participants can be interviewed and might be photographed. *Freedom Through A Lens* (2017) is played in the first person perspective, so the player finds himself directly in the demonstration. The controls are based on the established input system of first-person action games. Players move between numerous people, most of whom are drawn in a similar way. The player gets to know her or his fellow citizens and deal with their motives as well

as their convictions. To do this, the game features six characters with whom the player can interact to interview them and take photos for the article. These characters are placed in such a way that the player explores the complete area during gameplay. Before entering the demonstration, the player gets involved in a dialogue about the right to one's own image, the need for permission to photograph people and the privacy of the people photographed.

The young girl Mia is standing off the sidewalk (1:15 min of the longplay, Laumer 2020e). In contrast to the later figures she is difficult to recognize at first sight. That matters because this situation can be interpreted as an intentional depiction that refers to the difficult situation of underage people to be heard politically. In that sense Mia says: "Most people just walk past" (2:00 min of the longplay, Laumer 2020e). Later the young character Troy can be contacted (6:51 min of the longplay, Laumer 2020e), who, according to his own statement, came to the demonstration by chance because he was nearby and curious about the event. He does not have an own opinion for the interview, but he is interested to learn more about the reason for the demonstration. The character Roger repeats the slogan of his protest poster, "Hear the voices of the people" (4:07 min of the longplay, Laumer 2020e). During the interview he is asked by the player to give his opinion on this (generalized) statement. Claire is a young mother who only went for a walk because her little child could not sleep (5:10 min of the longplay, Laumer 2020e). Like Troy, she has no opinion, and does not want to comment further. The older Joseph is also a reserved character. He is skeptical about whether he is free to express his opinion. Asked in particular about the demonstration, he says cynically that most of the people there would not even know what it was all about (8:37 min of the longplay, Laumer 2020e). The character Patrice is a young woman who has already been the victim of discrimination due to gender and skin color. Besides Mia, she is another protester who describes situations

of powerlessness (10:25 min of the longplay, Laumer 2020e). By talking to the characters, collecting information, and taking photos, the player gets an overview of the event and is able to write the article and thus achieve the goal of the game. From the pictures of the four people who agreed to be photographed, three can be chosen to illustrate the article. The virtual visit of the demonstration can only be shown in the newspaper by a new media construction.

Similar to *The Cat in the Hijab,* this game refers to three characterizations according to Lenhart et al. (2008, 41): *learning about a problem in society*, *the player has to think about moral or ethical issues* and *make decisions about how a community, city or nation should be run*. *Freedom Through A Lens* indicates a broad spectrum of society, which is made up of different views, opportunities for co-determination and political beliefs. In reference to Himmelmann (2004) the portrayed free and diverse society, the implied pluralism and the involvement of civil society refer to democracy as a form of society. Democracy as a way of life is exemplified in the aspects of cooperation, solidarity and self-realization in the figures Mia, Roger and Patrice. Nevertheless, the pluralistic view of society is also evident when characters are allowed to be ignorant and disinterested. The game deals with freedom and civil rights, such as the freedom of assembly, which can be assigned to the dimension of democracy as a form of government. In the sense of Massing (2007) and Weißeno et al. (2010), it is also appropriate to find connecting points for all dimensions: the power structures belong to the dimension of polity and order; the contents of a new law and the argumentation of the characters to policy and decision. The conflict as cause for the demonstration, the demonstration itself and the conflict of interests among the demonstrators (in particular Joseph, Patrice and Roger) belong to the dimension politics, decision and common good.

The game is especially characterized by the representation of the individual figures who are more or less accidentally at the demonstration. This reveals two essential characteristics of democratic power relations: The negotiation of arguments and of the common good as well as the refusal or rejection of participation therein. Thus, *Freedom Through A Lens* incorporates the negotiation process within democratic relations and is ideal for discussions in school and for dialog with an upcoming generation.

Conclusion

As major challenges for the use of digital games in civic education, Motyka (2017, 239–240) summarized the "choice of games," "learners without gaming experience," "a high degree of skepticism on the part of teachers" and "inadequate computer equipment in schools." Commercial digital games, which are primarily considered for use in the classroom, are generally expensive and often require high quality computer equipment or expensive console hardware. This cannot be fully compensated by the use of let's plays and longplays because students miss the experience of actually playing the games.

With this in mind, games from game jams should be considered as an addition to commercial games in civic education because the path to an immediate gaming experience is less of a hurdle. Important organizational features are the low to non-existent costs, the monothematic orientations of game jams, which can help to facilitate selection and short playing times, which in turn facilitates complete playing experiences within a school lesson. Low hardware requirements and the ability to run the digital games without installation and administration rights are particularly striking technical features. Games from game jams could also appeal to "learners

without gaming experience" (Motyka 2017, 239–240) due to their highly focused game concepts and reduced possibilities for data input. In this way, game jam games can lead into production and activity-oriented phases that go beyond reception and even realize changes within the game. Of course, there is always a need for a didactic embedding of the material, such as here in contexts of civic education.

Five selected game jam projects were investigated for civic gaming experiences (Lenhart et al. 2008) and the respective political dimensions of the games were analyzed with reference to Himmelmann's (2004) concept of learning democracy and Massing's concept of learning politics (2007, 31–32, Weißeno et al. 2010). All these digital games had a political theme and were developed at the #ResistJam 2017. The games – especially *The Cat In The Hijab*, *Catalyst*, and *Freedom Through A Lens* – offer great potential for civic education and discussions with youths. *FakeBook* and *(Illegal) Alien* offer connections to opinion formation and to the challenges of global and pluralistic societies, as well as to recent nationalistic tendencies worldwide. *The Cat In The Hijab* addresses questions on the dimension of democracy as a form of society, in which democracy is only established through one's own actions, by *doing democracy*. *Freedom Through A Lens* shows, both on the dimension of democracy as a way of life and in a form of government, the challenges of negotiating opinions and political activity in a democracy. *Catalyst* offers a remarkable ambiguity: The game pursues an important political activity in which a sense of community has to be created in order to gain strength for defense. At the same time, democratic forms of negotiating of positions are thereby left behind in favor of target-oriented convincing. If the aim is merely to achieve the right *appeal* to all people, a culture of consensus-oriented debate is subverted and a pluralistic society vanishes. Thus, perhaps even better than all the other analyzed games, *Catalyst* offers opportunity to discuss the possibilities and limits of democratic forms of acting in class.

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[i] All non-English quotations were translated by the authors.
[ii] See https://game-jam.bpb.de.
[iii] According to a survey conducted by Rudolf Inderst in 2017 on research of (German-speaking) game studies, at these times there were no projects dealing with the games or communities of game jams, see http://tinyurl.com/gamestudies42.
[iv] Values shall be constructed, not given.
[v] Demokratie-Lernen und Politik-Lernen.
[vi] Polity describes that politics take place within a regulatory framework. Policy expresses that politics is about the realization of certain content-related ideas or the solution of social problems and politics expresses the activity-oriented aspect of politics, which often manifests itself in conflictual processes (Weißeno et al. 2010, 33).
[vii] See http://www.creative-gaming.eu.
[viii] See https://playfestival.de.
[ix] Computer scientists usually count from zero.
[x] See https://globalgamejam.org/history.
[xi] As of October 2, 2020, 106,658 games were created during game jams on this platform.
[xii] Workshops available via https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCKlWkBKbZn6BuvpPq2g05cA/videos.
[xiii] See all entries under https://itch.io/jam/resistjam/entries.
[xiv] The game can be downloaded here: https://renanvieira.itch.io/fakebook. A longplay of the authors of this article can be found here: https://vimeo.com/439194686.
[xv] The game can be downloaded here: https://amyoeba.itch.io/alien. A longplay of the authors of this

article can be found here: https://vimeo.com/436567035.

[xvi] The game can be downloaded here: https://andyman404.itch.io/the-cat-in-the-hijab. A longplay of the authors of this article can be found here: https://vimeo.com/436564904.

[xvii] The game can be downloaded here: https://lucregames.itch.io/catalyst. A longplay of the authors of this article can be found here: https://vimeo.com/436565500.

[xviii] The game can be downloaded here: https://nicholas-staracek.itch.io/freedom-through-a-lens. A longplay of the authors of this article can be found here: https://vimeo.com/439194876.