The Next Five Years scenario planning session and game.

The Next Five Years is a group strategy game played over two sessions. In the first session players will invent a place, decide the major events that are going to happen there over the next five years, and describe the political actors that will rise to the challenge of those events. In the second session, each group of players will tackle the challenges created by another group, deciding how the people of a place will act when faced with events that change their world.

Summary of Game Rules

The game is played over five turns lasting ten minutes each, with each turn representing a period of one year. Each group of players will need an MC (Master of Ceremonies) assigned to them who will begin each turn by describing the situation the players are faced with. During a turn, players may select any two resources from the list they have been given and give each a separate task to complete. Players may choose to give both of their resources the same task if they have only one task they wish to carry out. This will increase the chance of success. A task is anything that could be considered a single project, for example organising a strike, fielding candidates in an election or setting up a squatted social centre. The MCs may ask players to elaborate on the specifics of a task the players have set for a resource if they feel it necessary to understand how it will work. Once players have described their tasks the MC will decide how difficult each task would be to complete and assign an appropriate dice roll modifier, ranging from -2 to +2. An additional modifier of +2 is then added if players only gave their resources one task to complete. Players then roll two six-sided dice for each task they are attempting to complete. If the combined roll after the dice roll modifier has been taken into account is 0-6, the task fails. On a 7-9 it succeeds but there have been some unforeseen consequences. On a result of 10+ the task was an unqualified success. At the end of the fifth turn the game ends, and players will discover what has happened to their locality after five years of interventions.

Designing the Scenario

A group of players, to be called Designers from now on, assisted by one or more MCs, will design a scenario to be played by a different group of players. Players can participate in one or both sessions as they please. A scenario comprises three elements: a locality, a series of 5 events, and a list of resources.

Location

Scale

The first thing to decide is what scale to play the game on. There are 4 we recommend:

Village - population approximately 2'000

Town - population approximately 20'000

City - population approximately 800'000

County - population approximately 1500'000

When selecting the scale, remember that you will need to include eight resources for players to use within this scale. They are traditionally groups (and are detailed further in the Resources section below) but at the village scale could conceivably be individual people. However, it's important to pick a scale that you can work with; don't select village if you think you'll struggle to come up with enough resources and events for a small locality. The scale we have used most in the past is city, so if you're unsure that one is a safe bet. Alternative scales can be used if the Designers and the MC agree they would work and be something the players of the game would find straightforward to use.

Location

Then come up with a short description for the area, for example "a northern English market town" or "a city on the south coast of Wales". The description should not be too detailed, giving space for the players and MC of the game to flesh it out as they play.

Events

To design the five events, Designers should first discuss what they believe the significant events of the next five years might be in the locality they have decided on and then place those events under one of three headings: Economic, Environmental and Political. The Designers will then select one event from each category that they would like to use in their game and place them in the order they would like those events to occur. These events will then be turns 1, 3 and 5 of the game. Designers should then think about what kind of event might link the event in turn 1 and the event in turn 3. This event will become turn 2. Then they should consider the same thing for the events in turns 3 and 5, coming up with a linking event which will become turn 4. To decide on these events Designers should consider questions such as "what do these events have in common?" and "what would I expect to happen in between these two events?"

It is important that when deciding on the events Designers remember that they are intended to be played in a game. Therefore, events should be presented in a way which makes taking some kind of action in response to them feel feasible. The job of Designers is to tell a story about how they think the world might be over the coming years, but that story is a collaboration with a group of people they will not meet. They need to make it as easy on their unknown collaborators as they can. Sometimes it can be fun to present players with an event that is a red herring, sending them off on a tangent that obscures the really big developments. Sometimes it's better to stick strictly to a theme and make everything clearly related, a linear journey that emphasises one particular way things may be. It depends what kind of story the Designers think they want to tell.

Resources

Once the events have been decided upon, Designers must then decide the eight resources the players of their game will use to confront the challenges they have designed. Traditionally each resource is a distinct group, for example a militant group of Deliveroo workers or a network of pay-as-you-feel cafes. In a previous version of the game one of the most creatively-used resources was a hackspace. Examples of past resources we have used are included below, as well as the rules for how players use the resources to play the game. What is most important for Designers to remember is that these are the tools those who play the

game will use to interact with the world. To that end, the resources should be things other people won't have to think too hard about how to use. The resources should be grounded in reality, but that does not mean they all absolutely must represent groups that exist right now. It can often be easier for players to think how to use a resource if it is more generic than specific. For example, if players are given a renters' union as a resource that can often be easier to play with than if they were given the London Renters' Union or Acorn. If Designers are convinced a new group that is not readily in evidence at the moment will become significant over the next five years, possibly as a natural consequence of the events they have designed, then they should feel free to include them in the game. Remember to stay grounded though, a new group should be more like a new eco-socialist political party based in the North West than a werewolf militia on the moon (fun as that would be).

Once the eight resources have been selected players then go through the resources and assign each one a strength and a weakness. These should be things the resource is either good or bad at doing, not just general characteristics. For example, "well-organised" would not be a good strength, since it doesn't tell us what that resource is good at doing. "Direct Action" is a good strength, since it clearly indicates what kind of activities the group would be successful at carrying out. Try to avoid making the strengths and weaknesses too limited. For example, "sabotaging fox hunts" would be too unlikely to be relevant as either a strength or weakness. You want to give the players of your game options with these aspects of your resources by providing prompts to how they could be used, not leave them floundering because the description is too vague or hyper-specific to be useful.

MC Instructions

The role of the MC in the game is to clarify rules, keep time, decide on dice roll modifiers (see below) for tasks and provide the players with an environment that enables them to tell their own stories. The MC should not be trying to push players down a singular path, or come into the game with a preconceived idea of which resources players should use or the events they should include. Instead, the MC should always be striving to open options up for players and reward unexpected and original approaches. Always remember that this is a game, not a scenario planning exercise. There's not really a wrong way to go about it, and how you think any given approach would play out in the real world isn't always relevant. Your job is to flesh out the world the players are working with, and to gently guide them towards trying new things and exploring interesting ideas.

Designing the Game

In the design session do your best to help them in designing events and resources that you think another group of players will actually enjoy playing. Don't be afraid to suggest they should revise an idea if they think it will be difficult for others to tackle, and explain your reasoning. It's also reasonable to warn them if you think an event they are designing or a resource they want to include would be difficult for you to understand how to play with. An MC will need to understand these events and resources, and if they can't the game won't work.

Playing the Game

During each turn, after answering any queries players have and describing the scenario, the MC should keep track of the time and let players know when their ten minutes is nearly up so they can finalise their tasks. If players finish their deliberations before the ten minutes end feel free to end the turn early. Once the time is up the MC should ask players to describe their tasks, asking for additional details if they feel they are needed either to understand how the tasks would affect the city or simply to paint a clearer and more entertaining picture. "The Renters' Union holds a demonstration" is a task, but more questions should be asked if that's all players give. Where is the demonstration held? What kind of tactics are used? What are its demands (if any)?

 Dice Roll Modifiers

 Once the tasks are clear to the MC they must decide what the chances of success for the action are and assign an appropriate dice roll modifier, ranging from -2 for an extremely difficult task to +2 for a task that seems virtually guaranteed to succeed. Each resource will have a strength and a weakness, which will help you to determine which modifier to give by indicating what that group is bad or good at doing. To give MCs a clearer idea of what modifier to apply we've provided some examples and further explanation of the kind of difficulty each modifier should represent and what factors should be taken into consideration in addition to the resources' given strength and weakness when applying it:

- -2 - This modifier represents a task that is incredibly difficult to succeed at. Some tasks would inherently be this difficult no matter the circumstances, i.e. attempting to overthrow the government or declaring the city to be an independent state. Other tasks would be given this modifier if they are extremely out of character for the resource attempting them or there should have been more preparation before the attempt was made i.e. the branch of Momentum suddenly splitting from Labour to take up insurrectionist anarchism or the pay-as-you-feel cafes organising an attack on a fascist meeting.
- -1 - A difficult task or one that is unusual for a particular resource to take on would be given this modifier. Difficult tasks would include most illegal or physically dangerous activities (unless the group seemed particularly well-suited to them or had made excellent preparations in previous turns) as well as anything that requires the mass mobilisation of a large percentage of the city's populace (unless circumstances in the game make it clear this is likely to happen). Examples of groups taking on tasks that would be well outside their normal activities could include the hack space providing catering for a festival or the art gallery organising a protest camp.
- 0 - If the MC thinks there are no factors that would make the task more likely to succeed than fail then this modifier should be applied. This could mean a difficult task the resource is well-equipped to take on, such as the renters' union trying to defeat evictions on a housing estate, or a relatively straightforward task that's out of character for a resource, like the Deliveroo Riders organising a demonstration on an issue unrelated to precarious work. If an MC is in doubt which modifier to select it's usually safest to default to this option.
- +1 - If a resource is taking on a task it's well-suited to, has made excellent preparations for or simply isn't that hard then apply this modifier. Examples could include the anti-racist group organising a demonstration against police brutality or the

Pay-As-You-Feel cafes delivering leaflets on a housing estate opposing potential evictions.

- + 2 - This modifier should be reserved for when a resource is taking on a task that seems sure to succeed. Generally this would mean a resource attempting something that falls well within its day-to-day operations, such as the Women's Assembly organising a public meeting or the Renters' Union running a stall in the city centre giving out information on housing struggles. The modifier could also be applied if a resource has put substantial effort into a difficult task, such as the Anti-Fracking group setting up a protest camp they have been using their turns to organise for the previous three rounds.
- An additional modifier of +2 is also applied whenever players use both of their resources to carry out one single task instead of one task for each resource as is the norm. This is applied on top of the modifier for difficulty and does not replace it. Therefore, a task the MC thinks has a difficulty of -2 would end up with a modifier of 0 while a task with a modifier of +2 would receive a final modifier of +4.

Consequences

Once the roll has been made and the modifiers applied, the MC needs to check whether the result is a failure, partial success or unqualified success. On a result of 0-6 whatever task the resource was attempting completely fails. A result of 7-9 is a partial success, meaning the resource did achieve its aims but there was an unexpected negative consequence. If a result of 10 or above is achieved the task has been an unqualified success. Once the MC knows the kind of results the players achieved they need to bring those results to life by describing what happens. If a task was an unqualified success players should be given a positive consequence of their actions that is connected to the task they set their resource. You can find a list of examples of positive consequences below, as well as a list of negative consequences to be used when a task has failed. If a task achieves partial success then players should be given one positive and one negative consequence, though the negative consequence should be something that has less impact than the positive.

- Some examples of positive consequences for players are:
    - Expand a resource – Tell the players one of their resources has grown significantly in number. For example, the housing action group could swell in size to number the vast majority of the estate's residents. This can be useful to avoid players spending too many tasks on recruitment, and allow them to get onto something more interesting.
    - Give a resource more power – One resource can be given something they control which would be available in subsequent turns. For example, the Momentum group could take decisive control of the city council after a snap election. A good tactic for when you think players should have a bit more to work with and need to see some concrete gains from their actions.
    - Change the mood in the city – The general feeling in the local area should come up after most tasks, but to reward players the MC could say that a majority of the populace are now firmly in favour of a particular tactic or resource. For example, after a successful task that involved the anti-racist group blocking a road blockades will now be supported by a majority of drivers who encounter them. Useful when you think players should be encouraged to pursue an interesting direction.

- o Strengthen a connection – This can be between two (or more) resources or between resources and other groups or organisations. This is particularly useful to encourage players to continue down an interesting route they've taken, or to give a little direction to players who are struggling for ideas. For example, the Deliveroo riders could now have an excellent relationship with a national network of Uber drivers. A good way to get players to explore collaboration.
  - o Remove a problem – Something the players were working to create or prevent resolves in their favour. For example, superb strike work by the union results in employers promising unequivocally that they will not make anyone redundant. Can be used to reward players or to get them out of wasting too much time on something you know to be a bit of a red herring.

- • Some examples of negative consequences for players are:
  - o Reduce a resource – A resource can get smaller in size, perhaps due to inactivity, burnout or drifting away from its original purpose. For example, the anti-fracking group might lose members if it's used exclusively for activism with little clear connection to environmentalism. Handy for getting players to stop using the same resources and try something new.
  - o Destroy a resource – Take a resource out of the game, either for a set number of turns or permanently. For example, the Momentum group might break up due to conflict with local Labour councillors and all the real action being in extra-parliamentary politics. Use this to get rid of dead wood, to throw your players an interesting twist or push back against them if they've gone a bit off the deep end and set a ridiculously overly-ambitious task.
  - o Change the mood in the city – As before in the positive column, but this time it takes a turn for the worse. For example, a massive free party held by local musicians backfires and turns local opinion against them after fights break out. This is good for getting people to try a different tactic.
  - o Destroy or weaken a connection – Two groups might fall out, or lose touch due to not working together enough. For example, the pay-as-you-feel cafes had developed a good relationship with a group of small farmers, but the relationship is in danger of breaking down after no plans were made to exploit it. A way to gently (or not so gently) encourage players to utilise connections, or to throw some interesting tension that needs to be resolved into the path of a group of players who've had things a little too smooth.

The Scribe

The role of the Scribe can be taken on by either the MC or one of the other players, though we strongly recommend the MC carries it out. It is only used in the second session. The job of the Scribe is to take notes on the scenario and events the MC describes, what tasks each group of players sets its resources, whether they succeed or fail and the changes in each city described by the MC. It's best to display these notes in a way that can be seen by everyone participating, so players and the MC have a reference to remind them of what happened on previous turns. Once a game is over the notes can also allow participants to reflect on what went well and what didn't, compare their choices and have a record of the changes they made to their cities.

List of possible example resources at city level.

- Women's Assembly originally formed around the International Women's Strike and now taking action on a variety of feminist issues in the city

- A newly-formed Renters' Union primarily based on a council estate, they are inexperienced but very motivated

- Deliveroo riders who engaged in a successful campaign against their local manager and who have unionised with a grassroots union

- A migrant worker-led union who have been active for a few years, largely among workers in the logistics sector

- A medium sized transport workers union.

- Pay-as-you feel cafes that are situated throughout the city. They are financially solvent and very popular locally

- Hack space that has been working on providing technical support for social justice projects as well as running skillshares

- A local anti-racist group that has been active in the city for some time. They have organised several well-publicised and effective actions against deportations and police brutality.

- Several small venues run by politically engaged artists and musicians, including a gig venue, art gallery and studio space

- A Local branch of Momentum: they have a fairly diverse and reasonably large membership from most areas of the city and have had a mixed relationship with the city's Labour politicians, backing some and coming into serious conflict with others

- An anti-fracking group that has been opposing efforts to begin fracking operations in an area close to the city, they are well organised and have extensive links to national and international environmentalist groups

- A youth led climate activist group which emerged out of a series of school walks for climate action.

- An active university workers union

- A reasonably well organised student political group (a result of previous campus focused struggles, reasonable number of members).