

Videogames for Social Impact

Playtest Report

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1. The prototype

The objective of our prototype was to simulate the bus driving conditions in the old bus system (which still operates) of Bogotá. As documentaries like *Ciro Guerra's La Guerra del centavo* have shown, but also in our experience as citizens of Bogotá, these bus drivers tend to be quite reckless. They go faster than allowed and may not stop at traffic lights or stop signs; they quite often over load the bus, and they stop to pick up passengers in any place of the street, including the fast lanes. They compete with other bus drivers so they may get aggressive; they sometimes go too slow if they get a heads up that a competing bus has already passed by a few minutes ago; or too fast if no competing bus has passed by in a while. In short, and as Guerra's documentary shows, bus drivers in Bogotá are involved in big percentage of the daily accidents in the city. However, we believe that it's the way the system is organized –and the harsh working conditions for the bus drivers– that ultimately causes them to have to be reckless.

Therefore, in our prototype people play a bus driver. They must compete with the other players for passengers and will be able to be reckless if they wish; which will have, however a price to pay. The objective was that the game would be also difficult and that the players would have a tough time coming up with the money to pay the bus owner and still have something for them. In May 12th, 2018, we brought our board game prototype to class, which was played by four people, three of them outsiders and one of them from our own group. The following script with the instructions was read aloud:

2. The script

Objective

The objective is to have the most quantity of money at the end of the game.

Summary

In this game you play a bus driver in Bogotá. Since your earnings depend on the number of passengers that you pick up, you will have to compete with other drivers for a limited number of passengers, and hope to have enough money to pay the bus owner at the end of the day.

The game will end after 30 minutes of play or until a player has gone through the entire board three times.

Game setup

- For 2-3 players, everyone must start from Exit Point 1
- For 4 players, 2 will start at exit 1 and 2 will start at exit 2
- The red, fuchsia and yellow cards must be placed in the center of the board.

Start of the game

- Each player will be dealt three yellow cards
- A dice will be thrown to determine the order of play.

The turns

- At the beginning of the turn, the player must decide if he/she remains in the lane in which he/she is or if he/she wants to change lanes. After throwing the dice, it is not allowed to change lanes anymore. After throwing the dice, the player must advance the number of tiles which it indicates, be it in the fast lane or the slow lane. The player will pick up all passengers that are in the tiles that he/she goes by, as long as he/she is on the slow lane and the number of passengers is visible. After picking them up, the player must cover the number on the board with one of the small squares provided. If the player goes by a tile in which the number of passengers is covered, he/she must uncover it, but will not pick up any passenger.
- The player will also be able to play 1 yellow card per turn, at the moment he/she desires. Once he/she plays a yellow card, he/she will have to throw the dice again (except for the “2 fast, 2 furious” card). If the number thrown meets the condition indicated in the lower part of the card, then the player has to draw a red card, which will have effect immediately.

The cards

- Yellow cards: These cards allow you to have certain advantages. However, being a reckless driver is dangerous, so it may end up costing more to you if you're not lucky.

- Red cards: These will indicate whether your dangerous actions had bad consequences for you.
- Pink cards: These are events. A player must draw one when landed on an event tile.

Special places

- Traffic light: miss one turn
- Pothole: miss one turn
- Accident: miss one turn
- Checkpoints: there are two on the board. Each time a player passes by, he/she must pay \$50 to the bus owner. The player will also take yellow cards until a maximum of three.

3. The playtesters

Our playtesters were: Juliana (J), 25, avid gamer, favorite games include RPGs, first and third person adventure games. Elder (E), 39, occasional gamer, favorite games include The Legend of Zelda, Bayonetta, and the Mario series. (3) Humberto (H), regular gamer, likes to play mostly games from the 80's and 90's. (4) Azyria (didn't provide written feedback).

4. The feedback

General questions: J, E, and H (who was also a designer) had various responses to these questions. Only J reported that the game dragged at some time, and also commented that there seemed to be no reward to having outside of not being in debt. For E, on the contrary, the most exciting moment of the game was to be in debt and struggling for money, while for J the most exciting moment consisted when other players benefited her. They all agreed that the game was fun and that it was timewise alright.

Formal elements: J described the conflict of the game as "to be able to pay your bills but trying to not be a shitty driver and failing, so realizing that it is almost impossible" which we think is pretty close to the reason we wanted to create this prototype. They all agreed that the objective was clear at all times and had a clear understanding of the different moves they could make and of the risk entailed in driving recklessly. J hoped there could be a more satisfying reward other than "not being in debt" and E hoped for a more balanced system of rewards. H thought there were too many "lose a turn" spaces.

Dramatic elements: Both J and E agreed that the game's premise was very appealing, and that they could feel a dramatic climax as the game progressed, specially as debt seemed to keep rising for almost everyone. J considered that a story to the game was not necessary. E and H suggested that maybe there could be story bits added to the game.

Procedures and rules: J, E, and H agreed that rules and procedures were easy to understand and readily available. E suggested that a narrative could be added to explain the context of the game, specially for non native players. J suggested a better starting mechanics, as well as a better bills mechanic, since there seemed to be too much time lost counting the bills all the time. H suggested to make a better version of the game board.

End of session: J, E, and H agreed that the game was fun and were all willing to buy it. E and H thought its appeal was mainly the risk and the strategy to win passengers from the others. To make it better, E suggested to be clearer about the legal/illegal, correct/incorrect dynamics of public transport. E and J also suggested to make the rewards system a little more balanced. H suggested to give the players more freedom.

5. Reflections

We think we were able to recreate to some degree the conditions of bus drivers in Bogotá under the old bus system. Players did need to use the yellow cards (which were the risky driving moves), and to think strategically to beat the other players. Although we used a dice to control movement, we implemented some mechanics to make it less about luck. Players had to make a decision as to which lane they chose, and risky moves also had a probability of, for example, causing an accident. Although the playtesters sometimes expressed frustration at the game being difficult in that you rarely came out of debt, we think this frustration may be necessary to keep it in track with the real objective of our game, which is to bring forward the nasty conditions of an outdated system. However, J's suggestion that there should be more rewards than just not being in debt must be considered seriously. We could also balance the numbers in the game to make the player less burdened by debt.

It is important to point out that all players could feel some type of distress because of the debt that was one of the main points of the game: Allowing players to feel the problems of a

normal day of a bus driver. The game may drag at some point, because players aren't really able to progress in any way. We think the two-lane idea was a nice addition to an otherwise typical organization of a bus game. We are glad all our playtesters had fun as well as frustration.

6. Images



