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A TREE OF LIFE



EduLARP - educational role-play game

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OVERVIEW

BRIEF INTRODUCTION TO THE GAME

The environmental educational role-playing game (EduLarp) "The Tree of Life" introduces the principle of ecological balance and the impact of overconsumption on the environment.

Players take on the role of characters who live in the fictional Tree of Life ecosystem and are a vital part of it. The characters belong to 5 different groups, 2-6 players in each group. Each group has its own place of residence (ecological niche) and role in the overall ecosystem of the tree.

The central issue of the game is the change in the living environment and the balance of the ecosystem - the conditions for the tree and its inhabitants have worsened drastically, and the players must understand how their actions have affected it and how to restore the well-being of the tree and all of its inhabitants.

The tree creatures have come together for a big meeting to discuss what has caused the tree leaves to dry up, why there is not enough the sweet nectar they consume, why are the fruits rotting, and why are stinky fungi growing on the tree trunk. Life for everybody has gotten worse.

What's the matter? Who needs to solve the problem? What should be the contribution of each group to improve the situation?

Participants will experience that:

- everything in an ecosystem is interconnected and small changes can have big effects;
- when the ecosystem is out of balance, it affects everyone's life;
- not everything in the world is equal and not everyone consumes resources in equal amounts.

The game draws the participants' attention to **ecological balance, overconsumption and social inequality**. The aim is to lead the participants to think about achieving balance through **sustainable development goals**, addressing among other things **the possibilities of community gardens and the use of resources and overconsumption**.



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GENERAL INFORMATION

- **Target group:** 14 - 30-year-olds
- **Number of players:** 10 - 30 (5 groups of 2-6 members)
- **Duration:** 3 hours
- **Topics covered:**
 1. The balance of ecosystems
 2. Resource allocation and interdependence
 3. Overconsumption
 4. Social inequality

REQUIRED TOOLS

- **classroom** where each group can sit together (around a table or just in a circle) and move around easily and also form a larger common discussion circle
- Game materials (official print or self-printed): **group cards, tree diagram, tree message, suggestion sheets**
- **Writing tools**
- **Phone or computer and if wanted then also a speaker for the bird sound** (you can use whatever you like)



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GAME SCHEME (separate file for printing: Appendix 3)



- 1) Participants meeting
- 2) Introduction EduLarp
- 3) Warm-up games
- 4) Agreements
- 5) Topic introduction



- 1) Overview of the game
- 2) Division into characters
- 3) Introduction of groups

- 1) The Great Meeting
- 2) Group discussions
- 3) Making promises
- 4) Epilogue



- 1) Getting out the role
- 2) Sharing circle
- 3) Thematic discussion



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SCENARIO AND CHARACTERS

BACKGROUND (separate file for printing: Appendix 1)

Once there was a big and powerful tree. The tree had already grown for 500 years, its roots went deep into the ground and its branches spread out high into the sky. This tree was like a small world, an ecosystem - among its leaves, on the bark, and elsewhere, various creatures lived. The inhabitants of the tree took care of the tree and the tree took care of the creatures, giving them food and drink and shelter.

The creatures living in the tree are different - bark creatures live on the trunk, root creatures in the soil, fruit creatures inside the fruits, leaf creatures in leaves – some are sun creatures and some shade creatures. All habitants of the tree have their own tasks and activities in taking care of the tree. In return they consume the tree's resources, nectar and fruits.

The tree itself is also alive and communicates with its inhabitants, singing from time to time songs in the rustle of leaves, either just to cheer up the residents or to convey its moods and wishes.

The creatures are happy and friendly, their lives have been good. The tree has borne enough fruit and there has also been leaf nectar for everyone. The creatures often organize parties and festivals. They invite each other to visit and share good food and drinks. Everyone has their own beautiful home either between the leaves, in the fruit, on the bark or under the roots. Prosperity and abundance have accompanied several generations.

But lately something has been wrong, and life has gotten significantly worse. The sap moving inside the tree has a bad smell and smelly mushrooms have formed on the trunk, there is not as much sweet nectar as before, the fruits rot and fall off, the leaves have also started to dry and shrivel up, offering no more protection from sun and rain.

The creatures are not happy, their bellies are not full, it is too hot or too cold, there is not enough nectar to party. The creatures have become unfriendly towards each other, everyone thinks that someone else is to blame for the situation. The tree's songs have become sad, the tree is also obviously sick.

Something must be done, and the tree creatures have come together for a great meeting to discuss what's wrong and how to make life good again.





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DESCRIPTIONS OF GROUPS (separate file for printing: Appendix 2)

Bark Creature



Fruit Creature



Shade Creature



Root Creature



Sun Creature





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GROUP 1

ROOT CREATURES

Root Creatures live between the tree's roots, and their life so far has been nice and good. It has been quite shady and damp between the tree roots. The Root Creatures help supply the tree with water and other necessary substances from the soil, keeping the root canals clean and free of blockages. Thanks to the nutrients and water obtained from the soil through the roots, the Tree is able to provide delicious fruit and the sweet nectar to all its inhabitants.



Something is wrong lately!

The Root Creatures have noticed that the water that flows up the root canals has a bad smell and is muddy. The smell spreads everywhere and is beginning to disturb everyday life.

Why is the water smelly and muddy?

The Root Creatures have also noticed that lately there have been a lot of dried leaves and fruit falling down from the Tree. Especially the fruits are shriveled and rotting, and perhaps this dead fruit is then leaking substances into the soil, which then flow back into the tree with groundwater.

What would help?

The Root Creatures have discussed among themselves that if the Fruit Creatures took better care of the fruits, they would not rot and fall off the Tree, preventing the bad substances getting into the soil as well. Maybe the Fruit Creatures shouldn't hollow out so many fruits for making their houses, leaving some just for nectar gathering, so the fruits would be healthier.



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GROUP 2

BARK CREATURES

Bark Creatures live in the cracks of tree bark and their task is to keep the bark clean. This was not a very difficult task in the old days, because the rain washed the dust off and they didn't have to do much else. There was enough time for parties in the company of other tree creatures, and to just have fun.

Something is wrong lately!

Strange, smelly mushrooms have started to grow on the bark of the Tree, with mycelium getting even into the homes of the Bark Creatures. The Bark Creatures have tried to cut down the mushrooms, but for every cut mushroom, three new ones grow instead. Soon the trunk of the tree will no longer have a mushroom-free surface at all, and Bark Creatures are seriously worried, because then they have to find homes somewhere else.



Why have these mushrooms started to grow?

The Bark Creatures have noticed that the water flowing up from the roots of the tree has had a bad smell recently. The only logical explanation is that there is something wrong with the water being sent up from the roots, and this is also causing the root mushrooms to grow.

What would help?

The Bark Creatures have discussed among themselves that if the Root Creatures did a better job keeping the root canals of the Tree clean, or set up a filtration system, the water would be cleaner and the fungi would disappear.



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GROUP 3

SHADE CREATURES

Shade Creatures live in the shade between the Tree branches, and under the leaves. Their job (same as the Sun Creatures') is to collect the sweet nectar from the leaves and share it with everyone else.

Something is wrong lately!

The Shade Creatures like cool, but lately it has been too hot even in the shade. On sunny days, the temperature rises impossibly high and there is nowhere to hide because many outer leaves have dried up and fell off the Tree entirely.

Why is it so hot?

The Shade Creatures have realized that it is too hot most probably because so many leaves have dried up and fallen down, and there is nothing left to protect them from the sun and heat.

What would help?

The Shade Creatures have discussed among themselves that the leaves shrivel up and dry when too much nectar is harvested. The Shade Creatures themselves haven't started consuming more nectar, so the Sun Creatures must be to blame – they must have become greedy and are draining the leaves of their nectar.





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GROUP 4

SUN CREATURES

Sun Creatures live on the sunny side of the tree canopy and on the leaves. Their job is to collect sweet nectar from the leaves (same as Shade Creatures') and share it with everyone else. The Sun Creatures often organize big parties for all ree inhabitants, with lots of sweet nectar, music and fun games.

Something is wrong lately!

The Sun Creatures like warmth, so even though it has been hotter than usual lately, they are not much disturbed. However, they are affected by the fact that there is less and less sweet leaf nectar nowadays. Leaves only have a few drops of nectar left and then wither and fall off. There's mostly enough to feed everybody, but not enough for parties. And the parties are no fun without the sweet nectar.



Why is there less nectar?

The Sun Creatures have noticed that the Shade Creatures have no shortage of nectar and suspect that they are hoarding the nectar, which leaves less for the leaves on the sunny side. Or, it could be because too little water is being sent up from the roots.

What would help?

The Sun Creatures have discussed among themselves that the Shade Creatures should consume less nectar, so that there would also be enough for the Sun Creatures. And additionally, the Root creatures should send more water upwards.



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GROUP 5

FRUIT CREATURES

The Tree of Life has large and juicy fruits, which are home to Fruit Creatures and also provide sweet nectar for food for all tree inhabitants. Fruits have a strong outer shell and inside them the Fruit Creatures carve wonderful spacious homes. For hundreds of years, each fruit has been inhabited by one Fruit Creature. The nectar collected from the fruits is shared by the Fruit Creatures with all the tree inhabitants, both for daily food and to share on big parties and festivals.



Something is wrong lately!

The life of Fruit Creatures has recently become almost unbearable – the fruits simply dry up or begin to rot, eventually falling off the tree altogether. The Fruit Creatures have had to change their homes or move in with friends, and the amount of nectar has also decreased due to fallen fruits. If it continues at the same pace, soon they will all be homeless and hungry, because the fruits are dying.

Why do fruits dry and rot?

The Fruit Creatures really don't understand what's wrong with the fruits. Since the Bark Creatures are complaining about smelly mushrooms, perhaps their fruit also has some bad disease caused by the bad water sent up by the root dwellers?

What would help?

The Fruit Creatures have discussed among themselves that if the Root Creatures did a better job of taking care of the root canals, for example setting up filtration systems, the water would be cleaner and the fruits healthier.



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ORGANISING THE GAME

Here are the specific steps to successfully complete the apprenticeship. The instructor's preparation regarding the conduct of the game and the specific topics covered in the game should take place in advance (see topic discussion section)

If desired, during preparation and during the game, the game scheme can be used either printed out or on the screen (Appendix 3), where the stages of the game are outlined step by step.

Educational Live Action Role Play (EduLARP, or educational live action role play) is a method in which participants learn about selected topics by impersonating characters in an agreed-upon story and world in order to solve a certain problem or reach goals.

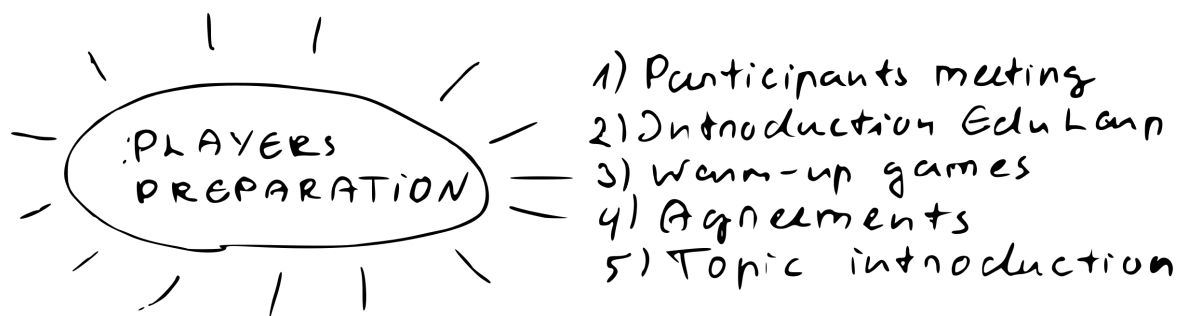


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PLAYER PREPARATION (15 - 30 min):



1) Participants meeting

If there are participants who do not know each other, it is good to get to know each other. In case the time is limited, it is possible to make just a name circle, if there is more time, the participants can introduce themselves using any warm-up game that the host of the game knows.

2) Introduction of a method.

It is good to start with introducing what is edu-larp method. Educational Live Action Role Play (EduLARP, or educational live action role play) is a method in which participants selected topics by impersonating characters in an agreed-upon story and world in order to solve a certain problem or reach goals.

See also the video here: [GoodJobStudios : Learning Through Roleplay : Edularp](#).

If you wish you can also ask participants if they have played any game before. Or just to ask them to try to remember how they were playing in childhood. Most probably many of us have played shop game or police and thief game, etc.

3) Warm-up game

It is recommended to do a warm-up game after the introduction. Simple warm up games also shows the participants the nature of role-playing games:

Ask the participants to move freely around the room. Then the instructor gives instructions in which way everyone should move, and the participants try to change their way of moving according to the instructions. For example: move as a mad scientist, move as a superhero, move as a dinosaur, move as an angry teenager, move as a petulant child, an old evil witch, a prince or princess in a royal procession, a start-up owner in a hurry, etc., etc.



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4) Agreements

Next step is to make agreements that all have to follow during and after the game. For example: game is approached with an open mind, all possible conflicts within the game remain only between the game and the roles, even negative relationships are played without offending each other, etc.

5) Topic introduction

The facilitator has to introduce the topic that will be learned in the game. This game deals with the following topics:

- The balance of ecosystems
- Resource allocation and interdependence
- Overconsumption
- Social inequality

Minimal is that each topic will be read out loudly and ask the students feedback if they understand or not and how they understand the topic. A more in-depth discussion over of the topic should take place before and after the game as part of the school ordinary lesson/class and is not included in the game time.



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INTRODUCTION TO THE GAME (15 - 30 min)



- 1) Overview of the game
- 2) Division into characters
- 3) Introduction of groups

1) Overview of the game

The instructor introduces the players to the background story of the game (page 6) and that all participants play certain groups in the Tree. They have come together for a big meeting, to find a solution to the problems that have arisen.

2) Division into characters, grouping

If there is more time, it is possible to distribute character cards to all players (Appendix 2). Each player gets a card with a his/her character on it. Then, if desired, the participant can decorate, paint and write a name for yourself.

If there is less time, the character cards can be left out and the players can be divided just into the groups (see the next section). In this case, there are no individual roles, only different groups. (*Bonus: through this, participants can be introduced the topics of collective identity among the humans and the animals*).

The instructor divides the participants into five more or less equal groups, using the method of group formation he or she likes.

Options for grouping:

- Players take one role at randomly, which also indicates in which group they belong to
- The instructor gives a specific role that also indicates in which group they belong to
- Coloured slips/playing cards, etc. - participants group according to the chosen colour/suit, etc
- Standing in line and counting to five
- Different grouping games: by pet, by month of birth, by colour of clothes, etc.



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3) Introduction of groups (and characters).

When the participants have taken the seat together in a group, the instructor gives them group descriptions (Appendix 1). There are five groups in the game:

1. Root creatures
2. Bark creatures
3. Shadow creatures
4. Sun creatures
5. Fruit creatures

When you have enough time and the players got role cards and put names for themselves, let the participants to do an introduction in the group, where they show their role card and share what name they have chosen for themselves.

4) Optional: room creation

For a better imagination and for co-creation cooperation exercise can be also a room transformation, if you have enough time: you can make a figure of a tree on the floor with a tape, you can relocate tools and tables etc, to create something like a tree shape visual form for participants. Later you can send different groups to different places on that tree part exactly where these creatures live.



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GAME (45-60 min)

- 1) The Great Meeting
- 2) Group discussions
- 3) Making promises
- 4) Epilogue



1) The Great Meeting (15-20 minutes)

The tree creatures have gathered for a big meeting. All groups get the floor in turn to share what is bad and what they think should change to achieve their better wellbeing. **The discussion** is moderated by the game manager, who is also in the role of a Tree. The Tree can send its message that it has become weak and the creatures are consuming too much. Does anyone have a good solution right now?

Gamemaster/Tree: The Tree interrupts to the discussion only as much as necessary. The Tree says its message: all communities have consumed too much and each of us has to think what kind benefits give up in order to restore a normal life to continue. According to the development of the discussion, the game manager can add information, specify and direct discussion, e.g.:

- If the Tree has no life, also the communities have no life.
- Who and where can reduce or give up their well-being?
- What are they willing to adapt to? What to give up?

In case the discussion is very loud and sharp or not in order, the "talking stick" method can be used to slow down and to make some order in the discussion. You can use a real tree branch, leaf, potted plant, etc. or any other handy object as a baton - the groups get to speak in turn and only the person who is holding the baton speaks. Whoever has finished speaking passes the talking stick to the next person.

Also when the discussion is too noisy gamemaster as a Tree can mention that in the forest there are many birds and as creatures are small, then birds may hear them and they may attack creatures. In that case gamemaster can use a phone or a computer and some bird voice to slow down discussion. It is like a signal that discussion should be slow down.



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2) Group discussions (15-20 minutes)

Tree creatures can discuss in their groups whether and what they are ready to give up or what to change in their activities so that the life of the tree can continue and others will feel also good. Each group prepares one promise that they are ready to do in order for the Tree to be preserved and for the tree to live on.

The game leader distributes **guiding questions to each group for group discussion** (for printing, Appendix 4):

ROOT CREATURES

- 1) Could there be a way to add some vitamins for the Tree into the water?
- 2) Could some kind of a filtering system be implemented?
- 3) Maybe there's nothing to do at all and the problems will solve themselves somehow?
- 4) Would it be possible to go help the Bark Creatures to cut down mushrooms? e) Any other ideas?

BARK CREATURES

- 1) Should we cut down more mushrooms, and faster, and also ask for other Creatures to help?
- 2) Should we try to eat the mushrooms?
- 3) Would it be possible to go help the Root Creatures to purify the water?
- 4) Should we abandon our homes and move to live with another group?
- 5) Any other ideas?

FRUIT CREATURES

- 1) Could we start living in the mushrooms?
- 2) Could several creatures live together in one fruit?
- 3) Could we leave some fruits just for food and not live in them?
- 4) Could we eat less sweet nectar and also party less?
- 5) Any other ideas?

SHADE CREATURES

- 1) Could we give less nectar to the Sun Creatures?
- 2) Could we invite some other residents to live with us, since we seem to have enough nectar to share?
- 3) Why do we have to do anything at all, we haven't hurt anyone?



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- 4) Do we close our doors to everyone else and live in peace ourselves because there is not much wrong for us?
- 5) Any other ideas?

SUN CREATURES

- 1) Can we move to live in the shade, if there's more nectar?
- 2) Could we drink less nectar? Party less?
- 3) Should partying be replaced by meditating? Would we be we happier then?
- 4) What kind of a life would it be without parties?
- 5) Any other ideas?

3) Making promises (15-20 minutes)

Tree creatures gather again in a common circle and each group can share their promises about what they are ready to make for a better life. If desired, the promises can be written on the board or on a sheet of paper.

Depending on players and their ideas the discussion can develop for a confrontation and for a cooperation. Gamemaster can moderate here in case the discussion is very sharp, to embody to a Tree and giving a message that previous life was in harmony and the Tree believes that it can be restored.

It is about cooperation for a common goal. It can also be emphasized that a solution is needed now and immediately. Again, the baton method can be used to give the floor to groups.

Tegu on koostööga ühise eesmärgi nimel. Samuti võib toonitada, et lahendust on vaja nüüd ja kohe. Taas saab kasutada teatepulga meetodit sõna andmiseks gruppidele.

To the instructor: Examples of good solutions that inhabitants of the tree could reach in joint discussions:

- Fruit creatures could live together in one fruit and not waste their resources.
- Fruit creatures could leave some fruits for so-called community use, not for houses, and take care of them together.
- Shade creatures could conclude that others have even less nectar than they do, and share their resources with others.
- Sun creatures could party less and consume less leaf nectar.
- Bark creatures (and why not everyone else) could go help Root creatures.



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- Root creatures could introduce a filtration system.

It is possible that smart players will also come up with other solutions - in this case, the game manager has the freedom to decide what he thinks would work and what not.

4) Epilogue

When all the groups have made promises, and the game leader believes that these promises could improve the situation in the future, the Tree thanks everyone for their promises and ends the game with a small future prediction:

- 1) Thanks to the joint efforts of the tree creatures, it is possible to take care of the fruits in such a way that they do not rot or fall down, which improves the quality of the water the the roots get, also the fungi disappear. Since inhabitants of the tree party less and don't waste as much sweet leaf nectar, the leaves can maintain their freshness and again provide enough shade. The Tree of Life is happy and healthy again, and the creatures of the tree are also adjusting to use less food and party less. They are doing yoga and have innerside calmness.
- 2) If some important agreement was not reached, the tree is healing partially.
- 3) If any serious agreement could be reached, the tree dies with its creatures :(



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DEBRIEF, completion of the game and feedback (45 - 60 min)

Debriefing is an extremely important process where the players gather again as a group. Through debriefing all participants can express and analyse their feelings and emotions about the game in a neutral, safe environment. For many participants, debriefing is important so that they can make their roles heard outside of the game, reveal secrets that didn't come out during the game, or tie up loose ends in the narrative.

In the case of the ledularp, the following work by the game master is also important in connecting the topics discussed in the game with the learning process and topics.



- 1) Getting out the role
- 2) Sharing circle
- 3) Thematic discussion

1) Getting out of the role

It is important to perform a small ritual of exiting the role. This is to make each player feel that they are stepping out of the role and distancing themselves from it, returning to so-called everyday life.

Stepping out of a role reinforces the boundary between the player and the character by distancing oneself from any (primarily) negative qualities or emotions experienced by the character.

Some possibilities:

- **Body shaking** - players shake whole body, so-called throwing off the role. The player takes again his/her normal posture and gait.
- **Music and dance** - the game master plays a piece of music, at the end of which the players come out of the role. Players can dance or sway in rhythm of the music, eyes can be closed if more convenient.
- **Changing the physical location** - changing the room, moving the players from the room where the event or role-playing took place, giving a signal to exit the character. This can also be done by changing the environment, for example turning on the lights, opening the curtains, etc.
- **Nametag removal** - This is a type of ritual activity in which the instructor asks all participants to remove their nametags and replace them with a player's nametag. You can also put the name tag away and say, for example, "I was [character name]". I'm [player name]."
- **Taking off the costume** - if the game uses costumes or symbolic items (hat, character



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figurine, etc.), taking it off and giving it away also helps to get out of the role.

2) Sharing circle

After the game, there is likely to be a lot of excitement in the class, it is definitely worth thanking the participants for playing, and when finished, all together collect or place in the everyday order all the objects and papers related to the game.

For the purpose of initial feedback and self-expression of the participants, it is worth having a joint sharing circle, where everyone answers with one word to a couple of sentences how they feel now or what their first impressions are.

The sharing circle can be very simple, everyone gets a word and a chance to express themselves, or it can also be carried out with the help of some games. For example, as a movement in the room, make the students use scales to answer questions about who experienced and felt what: Was it fair? Are you feeling good/happy? Did you learn anything? It is also important to **give everyone a possibility to say** when moving or making scales.

3) Thematic discussion

When everyone has been able to express their emotions, it is important for the instructor to continue with the topic discussion. Here you can leave a small gap (e.g. a break), but certainly not more than a day.

THEMATIC DISCUSSION

Topics covered in this study through the game:

- 1) The balance of ecosystems
- 2) Resource allocation and interdependence
- 3) Overconsumption
- 4) Social inequality

In the game, it was experienced that all actions are interconnected, even small deviations can have a big impact, not everyone contributes equally to a harmful action, and not everyone experiences negative consequences equally. It also reflects well what is happening in the real world.



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Questions to frame a more meaningful discussion

What happened? What did you learn? How does it relate to the real world? What if...? What could have gone differently. What's next?

What regions of the world can you see similarities with the tree community?

Which human groups contribute little to climate change, but suffer greater consequences? Which groups of people are not yet affected by climate change at all? How does disturbing the ecological balance?

How are environmental problems related to social problems?

What's going on in your community? Does anyone use community gardens, eat less meat, travel by plane less?

What can you do on a daily basis? Consume less (especially single-use and low-quality plastic products), give experiences, not things, recycle, walk, contribute to charity...

Have you done it? Discuss where and how you can take small steps near where you live and within your means.

ADDITIONAL MATERIAL TO DEAL WITH THE TOPIC

- Global imbalances and how to tackle them:
<https://www.oecd.org/about/secretary-general/globalimbalancesandhowtotacklethem.htm>
- Read and find out more in the Sustainable Development Goals:
in Estonian: <https://www.health.ee/page/information-center-topics/sustainable-development-goals/>
In English: <https://sdgs.un.org/goals>
- See and solve the online quiz about sustainable development goals: <https://ctc.ee/quizzes/sustainable-development>
- Ecosystem services and the ecosystem. view and solve the online quiz about the Sustainable Development Goals:
in Estonian: <https://ctc.ee/quizzes/okosystem-services>
in English: <https://ctc.ee/quizzes/ecosystem-services>

When the topics discussed in the game have been discussed with the participants, the student learning process can be considered successfully completed!