THE ATLAS GAME

DOCUMENTATION AND DESIGNER'S NOTES

ATLAS – A MAP FOR FUTURE SERVICE CO-DEVELOPMENT

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INTRODUCTION

The ATLAS game is a board game for learning about service co-development, and for planning service co-development projects. The ATLAS game is used by a team of three to six players with the assistance of a facilitator, often a project team preparing for a service project, in selecting service co-development methods. The ATLAS game was designed in the ATLAS research project in Aalto University in 2012-2014. The aim of the ATLAS project was to develop a map of service co-development methods, applying different theoretical starting points, and covering different service contexts, based on the empirical research from the 13 service co-development projects that were researched by the research partners.

The ATLAS game was originally conceptualized as a literal map that would visualize different service co-development tools and methods, and their relationships as a conceptual landscape. The map was intended for selecting appropriate service co-development methods for any service project that would want to incorporate a co-development approach. However, the researchers identified that to fully leverage the wide array of contingencies service co-development projects exhibited. In order to bring forward a map that would allow for the co-development of service projects and learning about the contingencies of different co-development methods, the first version of the ATLAS game was created.

PLAYING THE GAME

The ATLAS game is intended to be played in groups of three to six players who represent diverse professional backgrounds and who have some awareness of service design, planning, engineering and project-based work. The game is intended to be played with one or two facilitators, who, if needed, guide the players with the game rules, guide the discussion with additional questions and take care of the use of time. In practice, players experienced in service co-development and familiar with each other can play the game without designated facilitators.

The ATLAS game is played by taking turns in revealing hexagonal game tiles that have questions printed on them, discussing the questions until a consensus between the players has been achieved, and placing the answered tiles onto a table to form a continuous form. Before beginning to play the game, the players are given, or they otherwise

agree, on a particular case that they will play in. The case usually consists of a real or imaginary service project that has one or more strategic objectives and operates in a defined geographical or organizational area. The objective of the game is to form a project plan outline for the service project the players are planning by revealing and answering the question tiles in the game.

At the beginning of the game the players fill in a player sheet in which they briefly outline their typical or preferred project role, their past experience with service co-development and related areas, and their personal objectives for the game. The players then share this information in order to familiarize each other on their backgrounds and expectations for the game.

Once the player sheets have been filled in and shared, the play begins by placing the first tile on the table: a green *Motivation for co-creation* tile. The chosen motivation tile represents a lens into why the particular project might choose to incorporate service co-development methods. The ATLAS game includes a number of motivation tiles that are not mutually exclusive, but the players are encouraged to only focus on one per game and potentially play the game again from the point of view of a different motivation if necessary.

Once the first tile has been placed at the center of the playing area, typically a tabletop or a game board with hexagon shapes, the player who starts the game chooses a tile type and reveals a tile. The four categories of tiles played during the game are *Project definition*, *Participants*, *Methods & tools*, and *Challenges*. The first three categories contain question tiles related to that particular element of a service co-development project, while the Challenge categories are quick surges of ideation in which the rhythm of the game can be altered if a player feels that the game is slowing down or more ideas are needed. There is no "correct" order to play the tiles in, so players are encouraged to use their own judgment in which order to play tiles from different categories.

Participant tiles are complemented with *Persona cards* which are used to identify key participants for the project. The persona cards can be from any source but they should allow for surprising connections to be made between the project and its potential participants by including a wide

selection of ages, gender, ethnicities and backgrounds. Participant tiles that ask the players to select new participants always ask to draw a number of persona cards and select one or two the most relevant personas for the project.

Methods & tools tiles are complemented with **Methods & tools cards**. Methods & tools cards briefly describe different service co-development methods that were used in service research projects studied in the ATLAS project in Aalto University. Methods & tools cards are used in a similar manner to Persona cards, to provide the players with suggestions about which methods they might select for their project and let them choose the most appropriate ones.

The game is played until the allocated time runs out – the tiles will probably last however long you want to play. At the end of the game the players should have time, at least 15 to 20 minutes, to reflect on what they have accomplished during the game and summarize the results of the game with the help of wrapping up questions presented on the **End tile** for each of the four categories.

UTILIZING THE GAME

The ATLAS game can be used for many purposes, such as creating service project drafts, creating shared goals among project personnel, gather ideas for project execution, considering potential stakeholders to involve, mapping a service design space and many others. The ATLAS game helps players reach these goals by providing the players with a shared object: the project that the players plan during the game, which also acts as the shared goal of the players.

Discussion within the ATLAS game is structured by the turn order: each turn begins with the next player choosing and revealing a tile, followed by discussion regarding the question, and ending with the answer being written down and placed on the table. While the discussions should be as collaborative as possible, each player takes a turn in deciding where to direct the discussion when they choose the category of tiles they will reveal a tile from. It is also advised to have the player whose turn it is to write the answer down to distribute the authority of summarizing what has been discussed.

As the game progresses, the players form a "map" out of the individual tiles and their attached answers. The ability to see a visual representation of the discussion and an encouragement to explicate new ideas to be added into that representation is the most important role of the physical ATLAS game material. Likewise, the physical Persona and Method & tools cards are available to the players as physical signposts of their collaboration.

EXPLORING THE GAME

This section discusses the different components of the ATLAS game in detail, including their use, design intention and relevant research. This section is especially recommended for people intending to facilitate the ATLAS game in the future.

The ATLAS game is played with a case which is typically introduced in the form of a *case description*. The case description is a written or spoken text which acts as the briefing for the players: what, where, when, how, why. The case context can be as loose or vague as you want, but it should establish for the players a sense of place and time in order for the players to relate to the case and allow them to judge how their previous experience relates to this particular case. In situation where the game is used for ongoing cases, the players should entertain possibilities beyond what is currently thought possible within the project In order to allow players less familiar with the details of the case to fully participate.

The **player sheet** filled in the beginning of the game acts as a primer: players are encouraged to be reflective about what applicable knowledge and experience they have regarding the game subject area and therefore are more ready to share their knowledge when the game progresses to revealing question tiles. Writing and sharing personal game objectives such as desired learning outcomes asks the player to set goals for their learning and take a proactive attitude toward reaching those goals.

All of the items on the player sheet are intended to be shared as a structured introduction by having each player read aloud their player sheet for the other players.

The **Motivation for co-creation tile** selected at the beginning of the game acts as the shared objective of the players, combing the goal of the project presented in the case context description with the motivation tile selected by the players for that particular game. It is important to separate the often practical goal of the service project in the case description (e.g. creating an efficient public transit system) from the reason one would use service co-development methods instead of conducting a purely expert-developed project (e.g. wanting to change the planning office into a more user-oriented way of working).

The Motivation for co-creation tiles are examples from cases analyzed in the ATLAS research project and as such players may very well think of many other possible motivations for their project.

Project definition tiles present questions regarding the project itself, separate from the co-development aspects of the project. By answering the question in these tiles, the players form a shared understanding of the scope and timescale of the project, and identify opportunities and constraints of the project. While some questions may feel trivial if that particular aspect of the project has been decided before the game or on an earlier turn, answers to

Project definition cards are often related to all other aspects of the project, making a shared understanding on them crucial for collaboratively creating a project plan.
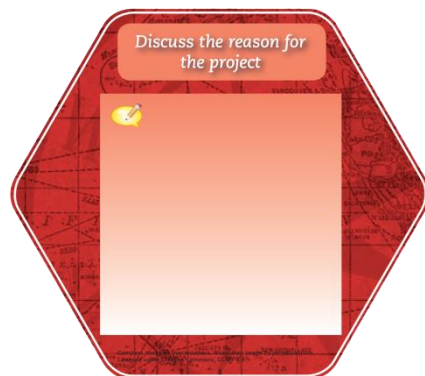
Participant tiles help the players reach an understanding on what participation means for their project, which participants they need in their project, and how the service co-development process appears from the point of view of the participants. Participant tiles also include questions in which the players are asked to draw five random **Persona cards** and select one or two the most important to involve.

Each Persona card represents a group of potential participants, never a single person. Persona cards act as triggering material that helps the players to come up with relevant participant groups, from which the players collaboratively choose the most important ones. The Persona cards that have been selected remain on the table and help the players in answering further questions about the project, and select methods that will be relevant with the selected participants.

Discuss the reason for the project

How can stakeholders contribute to the project?

- user experiences
- political support
- contextual knowledge
- critical voices
- creativity
- other

Methods & tools tiles are used to select appropriate service co-development methods and address the implications of the methods in terms of data, documentation and results. Method & tools tiles are played with **Methods & tools cards** which detail individual methods the players can choose to include in their project. Like with Persona cards, Methods & tools cards are drawn in a larger set of three and only one is selected as the most relevant for the project and the intended participants.

When selecting the most relevant methods it is important that while most methods can be used both in large workshop events and in smaller, more personal participatory activities, the players should always address why a co-development method fits their particular project with their intended participants, and what challenges employing a particular method might bring up.

Challenge tiles differ from the other question tiles in two ways: they combine subject matters from the other three question tile categories and the questions are not answered through discussion but instead by independently coming up with a large number of answers in two minutes. After the allocated time is up, the players read aloud their ideas and form some summary as an answer to the tile. The players may address each idea independently or they can be left for future turns.

Challenge tiles are a great way to energize discussion by providing all players with a chance to formulate new ideas and bring them into the game.

The **End tile** is only played when the time for playing the question cards is up. The End tile is not placed on the board, but instead it acts as a bridge between the knowledge transfer and ideation within the game, and the reality outside the game. The End tile presents four questions related to the four tile categories played during the game, with the exception of the motivation tile, and two reflection questions about the players and how to develop the learnings of the game further.

When answering these questions, the players should explore the hexagon "map" they have created during the game to find the answers to the End tile. Revisiting the final layout of the map often brings up new points of view when presented in the final context.

Wrapping up

Read the questions, choose the 3 – 4 most important cards related to them and write a summary.

What is the goal of the project?

Who should be involved as participants?

What methods and tools will be used?

What lessons should be taken into account?

Bonus task

Reflect within your team:
- How has my role evolved through the game play?
- How could we develop today's learnings further?