PAULO ANTUNES (https://orcid.org/0000-0002-3603-0127)
PhD in Philosophy (FCT fellow: SFRH/BD/116938/2016) by the School of Arts and Humanities of the University of Lisbon (FLUL),
2021. Postdoc fellow for the project PeX: The Public Interest: A Politico-Philosophical Investigation (EXPL/FER-ETC/1226/2021),
hosted by the CEPS, 2023.

"PUBLIC INTEREST" AND THE (POTENTIAL) SOCIAL IMPACT OF BOARD GAMES:
THE ROLE OF THE "STRATEGIC TWIST", DEFINITION AND SCOPE *

PAULO ANTUNES
Centre for Ethics, Politics and Society—CEPS, UMinho (Portugal)

Abstract

Modern board games – precisely after what has been dubbed the "renaissance" of analog games since the publication of *Catan* and the consequent affirmation of the "German games" – have served for a vast reflection in the field of metagame.

In this text it is considered that the effects following what is called "strategic twist" in modern board games, allow reflecting about the dynamics of the field of leisure/ludicity from two aspects: the orientation of games towards strategy; and the strategic character of the transition of/in the milieu.

One must understand how the "twist" can be thought about and what can be thought about the political-philosophical reflections that address the "public interest", and how these two fields can be broadly intertwined.

With this theoretical-societal connection, the aim here is to move on from the role that the "strategic twist" plays in calling the "public interest" attention for the practice of this type of activity (the impact of a new dissemination of games), to the "public interest", that may have reciprocally provided it; and to how something like this "interest" can be treated in the games themselves. Finally, also how some light can be shed on it by the combination and choice of some game mechanics.

The intersection of these two domains also prepares us to talk about serious issues in the future.

*The café [the board game café – why not –] is a place
for assignation and conspiracy, for intellectual debate
and gossip, for the flâneur and the poet or metaphy-
sician at his notebook. It is open to all, yet it is also
a club, a freemasonry of political or artistic-literary
recognition and programmatic presence.*

G. Steiner, 2004.

1. Statement of Claims

Prima facie, the two domains in study may seem strange to
combine: *public interest* is closer to philosophy and politics,
and *board games* are more usually associated to the leisure
and ludic field broadly understood[1]. Although the intention
here at stake is to circumscribe what is meant by a "strate-
gic twist" in board games, especially modern ones, this is still
the right time to revive the former, but only briefly and taken
almost in a common sense (further exploration of the "public
interest" topic will have to be left for other works)[2]. The ludic
field permeates more than just the playing. In fact, it perme-
ates much of what one is as a human being, hence also what
interests to the public.

The vigor with which this sub-genre of leisure – board games
– has risen in the two to three last decades provides the
space to debate, recover, and analyze virtually any area of
the social field, whether through a metagame exercise (in the
sense of starting from the analysis of a game, and then go-
ing beyond the game itself) or a direct analysis of what lies
behind the game's impact. Although games date back 4,000
years, it is only recently that they have begun to expand in

multiple directions as a "universal activity" (Brown & MacCal-
lum-Stewart, 2020, p. 1).

Ludicity, today, is experiencing a much broader opportunity
for dialogue than before, not because of a supposed lack of
its importance in the past, but because it has reached a high
degree of self-understanding, diffusion, and aggregation[3].

For this reason, and for what will be explained below, it is well
understood that ludicity cannot be excluded from a modern
philosophical reflection. Furthermore, the (widely considered)
forum of the "public interest" cannot be left aside from any is-
sue that has such a significant impact. If it is socially impact-
ful, it must be of "public interest" from the outset, or at least
be confronted with it, or some other way of understanding it.

Before any crossover between these two domains, it will be
necessary to address what is meant by a "strategic twist" in
modern board games, and only after these steps it is intended
to extract joint content.

2. "Strategic twist", a tentative definition

For a definition of what can be seen as a "strategic twist" –
as I intend to coin the transition in focus – in modern board
games, it will not be necessary to carry out an exercise in his-
toriography (for a recent historical reading, see Mardon, A. *et
al*, 2020).

For now, this study will only cover what is needed to circum-
scribe the transition from modern board games of a more
classical kind – those usually played during childhood and

passed down from generation to generation for several decades, already associated with an advanced stage of serial production – to current modern games – from the moment that is commonly traced back to the release of Catan (*Settlers of*, 1995), at least insofar as it helped to internationalize this trend –, emphasizing the latter[4]. Therefore, traditional games will not be considered (which already date a few centuries, when not millennia), and neither will be some that are made post-*Catan* but are still clearly (un)inspired by the previous modern lineage.

To this end, one may keep in mind how Woods (2012, p. 5 ff.) defines "board game": *any non-video game that requires a board to play*. This author adds – because it is not obvious – a panoply of sub-genres, such as "card games" – for not only have they grown out of that transition ("twist"), but there are games that, almost exclusively through cards, can recreate what is the living space of a board (e.g., *Abyss*, *Century*, etc.) –, "roleplaying", "wargames", among others[5].

It is true that the impact of the present transition on board gaming consciousness – on the part of players, publishers, designers, etc. –, was not immediate[6], but today – covering the last two decades – there are not many people connected to the milieu, or that know of it, that do not accept, with relative ease, that we are living the "renaissance" of analog games (Carlson, 2013)[7], or, by other epithets, that we are living the "golden age" of modern games (Owen, 2014; Konieczny, 2019, p. 203).

In this text, I will comment on these descriptions and, starting from them, attempt to define what is meant by "strategic twist".

2.1. "Renaissance"

Let's start with the first notion. Regarding "renaissance", one can observe several aspects, but, for the sake of space, the following three are chosen:

The first one is almost tautological: it would not be possible to write or communicate about games the way it is currently done had these not been "reborn". Otherwise, little or nothing would be written, except for what was already popular (e.g., *Chess* manuals, historiography of *Chess* or *Go*, *inter alia*). Therefore, one realizes with some ease that the modern board games "reborn" from games usually associated with children, the elderly, and popular tournaments (*Poker* and similar games). In short, they "reborn" from what were classic/traditional games, or games associated with an "urban tribe" – the "nerd" or "geek" subcultures among others (Woods, 2012, pp. 129-130). Thus, the "new type" of game and its variety, led to a *reborn* of games in the most unusual outlets (such as in the large general retailer, usually averse to allegedly niche sales) and not only in specialized shops[8].

The second aspect appears as a reflection of a wider "renaissance", a kind of "rising from the ashes like a phoenix", that can be found in the re-editions and renovation of past games under more current molds, as well as in the way they assert themselves among the gaming community. The work of the publisher Restoration Games is the most paradigmatic example thereof, but there are more[9].

The third and last aspect of the "renaissance", which could well have been the first or the only one, is the following: a direct analogy with the *Renaissance* of the 14th to 16th centuries[10].

Roughly speaking, for this new vision the references of Classical Antiquity were revalued, religious dogmatism and mysticism were attacked, rationality, science and nature were valued, along the way the human being was dignified, and humanism was born[11]. Comparing with the current case, the "lifestyle game", which only a few classics – *Go*, *Chess*, *Cribbage*, *Bridge*, etc. – succeeded to be, played without stop since they exist and all a player's life, holding the monopoly of tournaments, are matched by today's national and international tournaments of *Catan*, *Carcassonne*, and other modern ones (*vide* World Board-gaming Championships). It can also be noticed – forgive the stretch – that the dogmatism of *Monopoly*, *Risk*, etc., expressed in their stagnant forms (despite the endless variants) or in the constant repetition of their marketing, are being attacked. Nowadays there are more games, new ideas, new mechanics, in some sense more rational: there is less randomness and more control over the game events (we recognize, however, that the mass-market continues to partially ignore what is happening in the hobby). This "renaissance" is also expressed through the dignification, finally, of the human itself – it is not Humanism, but it is about positioning the player in the center, instead of being in front of a game that *plays* the player. It is about a return (*rebirth*) to ludicity, which has not been seen for a long time[12].

The "renaissance" of board games, modern games, is thus described as an expansion of games on offer, under the drumroll of a "new conception" (of *strategy*) and its consequent growth in number and in the quality of the finished product. This was accompanied by a "phoenix" type transformation, since there is a "new reading" for games, otherwise they would be mere re-editions. The "renaissance" of board games is thus described as a broadly revaluation of ludicity.

2.2. "Golden age"

The second notion that needs clarification is that of "golden age". There are several aspects and illustrations, but the main ones are essentially identical to those discussed above. This is because both notions represent the same historical process (of modern board games) and a similar cultural understanding.

In these lines it will be enough to go back to the ancient Greeks (for whom ludic experience was not alien) for whom the idea of a "golden age" concerned the civilization apogee and the eternal glories, periods socially marked by peace, harmony, and prosperity. This can be compared with the current gaming situation, without (too much) exaggeration, as there are a good number of games that came to stay for a long time (about Greek mythology or not). As for peace, harmony, and prosperity... let's accept that games do a good job when they represent them thematically and mechanically.

The "golden age" of gaming is now, and one is not just talking about the revenues it has generated: for an idea, in 2020 this industry was estimated to reach 8 billion (thousand million) the following year (Brown; MacCallum-Stewart, 2020, p. 1; ICv2, 2015), only the pandemic cooled the numbers.

2.3. "Strategic twist"

It is with these questions in mind – through the description of what has been taken as the "renaissance" and "golden age" of games – that I intend to point out a working definition of the "strategic twist" in modern games, which, reversing the order, is at the origin of a "renaissance" and "golden age".

The general conditions of the "twist", initially – when *triggered* at the end of the last millennium –, were not immediately noticeable, but nowadays – over the last two decades –, are already more consciously noticeable, confirmed by several more recent insights and findings.

This "twist" allows one to think the dynamics of this field of leisure/ludicity from two perspectives (conjugating the double sense of the expression): (a) the orientation of the games towards strategy; and (b) the strategic character of the transition in the games milieu. Let us consider them briefly:

Regarding the first, it is well known among board game enthusiasts what *Catan*, and other games, meant to the so called "German-type game", or "Eurogame"[13]. Some aspects can be taken up again, such as the abandoning (or substantially diminishing) of the "Roll/Spin and Move", the long player turns disconnecting the rest of the players from the game, the problematic "Player elimination", the privilege of direct conflict, to take just these few examples. These were replaced by innovative ways to keep everyone involved and invested from start to finish, even actively engaging in another player's turn.

The break with unnecessary randomness and – albeit redundantly expressed – complete arbitrariness, brought up greater levels of control and strategy, not always meaning "zero luck", but always more open options and paths to victory. It is indisputable that these and other traits permeated the generality of the hobby, from the "Ameritrash", to the "card games" and even to the "party games", etc. Such a phenomenon could only come from a "twist to strategy", we believe that only this could have such a *compromise effect*[14].

Concerning the second aspect – related to the strategic nature of the transition in the milieu –, it is intended to show that without this "twist" there would not have been the explosion of publishers, boardgame shops and retailers, boardgame youtubers, boardgame *cafés*, gaming groups, boardgame conventions, boardgame events, etc., that has been witnessed and consolidated in the last two decades (Brown & MacCallum-Stewart, 2020, p. 2). Today the game industry is strategically growing, notably when compared to the past (not to mention crowdfunding platforms or equal gender balance, which represent the most visible side of this aspect, Jarvis, 2022), even if it doesn't always fit the common *ethos*, for the different viewpoints are manifold.

With this "new life", everything was reconfigured. Mainstream games stagnate, and publishers bet on innovative games, new designers, and ways of presenting the modern game[15]. Perhaps the strategy, for a friendly local store, no longer relies solely on selling *Magic* cards. But we are, of course, still far from a scenario where an element of a new modern game is sold on eBay like a *Magic* card signed by the author himself, Richard Garfield, for over 500 thousand dollars… (Demopoulos, 2023). Yet, the board gaming milieu may reach a similar stage, not for the madness of that price, but for the socio-cultural impact.

*

While Kosmos or Klaus Teuber himself (publisher and author of *Catan*), and others that at the same time published innovative games, were certainly not thinking of reviving the ludic, today, there is more awareness of this process. One of the

superficial proofs of that is the fact that the "golden age" of gaming has been spoken about for a few years now. Another is that the new "hype" hasn't stopped surprising people yet. In fact, after (?) the pandemic, many players in the gaming media indicated that the year 2022 was one of the best years ever in new releases and in its quality (cult of the new? I guess not entirely).

Nevertheless, it is important to establish the following about the concept of "twist" (with this caveat: the clarification contains philosophical assumptions that do not fit this type of work): it does not represent a total and absolute cut with the past, along the lines of some "leapfrog" or "epistemological break" as studied in philosophy or science (Futuyma, 2003, pp. 506-508; Bachelard, 1947, p. 19), but rather a "dialectical transition", that is, a movement – which is *revolutionary* although it does not represent a "total rupture" – from something to a distinct quality, without ceasing to carry with it qualities of the previous point, of classical and modern games (Marx, 1962, p. 326-327).

To illustrate this idea, some issues can be highlighted: the line that can be traced since *Acquire*, published in the 1960s; the appeal to massification, although most of the new moderns are still a bit niche it is still a shared ambition; and the continuity of some components, e.g., dice continue to be cast (some of the games being played are as different as *War of the Ring* or *Marco Polo*, among others. But it is also visible that it is no longer done as in *Senet* or *Backgammon*, or in the unconvincing nowadays *Game of Goose*).

Notwithstanding similar cross-links, as far as the poles of this transition are concerned, the connection is not as direct when compared to the events described in an American newspaper, the *Tuscaloosa News*, which, in 1985 (in an article written by Long), reported on the "current board game craze". The living proof was *Trivial Pursuit* (!). This was the game that drew 150,000 people to a tournament, which apparently helped to rescue the tabletop from video games, meaning the video games of the first half of the 1980s (as is well known, *Super Mario* dates precisely from 1985 and *Sonic* from 1991).

Well, those were indeed the golden years… but of *Trivial Pursuit* (the arcades have been decreasing since 1983). Today it is even funny to hear the question with which the article ends: "Is Trivial Pursuit the new Monopoly?", instead, today the question is if the new "hype" is the "new", or if it could be the "new", *Gloomhaven*, *Brass*, *Terraforming Mars*, among many other games of current modern benchmark (and *Monopoly* is practically banned among *serious* – hobby – board gamers).

It is true that none of what was said implies that there is "No More Twist" (as it appears in a pun from one of Helen Beatrix Potter's short stories). On the contrary, nothing guarantees that board games, like any other sociocultural and political factor, do not *twist* again.

It is with this expression – "strategic twist" – that I intend to characterize the current moment of the board game hobby, the transformation of the milieu is nothing new and other authors may give it another designation, but this terminology describes what is behind the real impact: the *strategy*.

As it turns out, nowadays, the term "strategy" does not pertain only to the military. It is used in sports, politics, etc., and it can be understood as an *action plan designed to achieve an overall or long-term goal*. It is, rigorously, in this sense that it applies to the "new" board games and that resonates beyond the gaming tables.

A greater awareness of this – of the role of a "strategic twist" – can also motivate the search for other links, strategies, fruitful for the milieu and reciprocally for the rest of society (even when the mass-market may tend to make it easier to be child-friendly and easier to sell). And perhaps, more importantly, it can make the milieu aware that a *coordinated strategy* will bring even more benefits than the general (and more dispersed) one.

This is where the "public interest" might have something to say.

3. "Public Interest" and the role of the "strategic twist"

Without using the space of our article to extend the various meanings of "public interest" (as stated in the beginning)[16], we will conceive the next two points from a general, almost common-sense notion of it – that it is *in the interest of a majority or of everyone, normally against "private/particular interests"* –, to thus note the following:

(3.1.) the potential reciprocal relationship between the impact of games and the "public interest"; and

(3.2.) the way something like "public interest" can be handled in the games themselves – the game *Timeline: General Interest* will not be the best example, just a coincidence.

3.1. "Public interest" and games, a reciprocal relationship

It is not yet known what "account" of "public interest" can get close to what we defend for ludic activities (certainly, a study for the near future), or what can make it a component of "public interest". But it seems clear that the "strategic twist" of modern board games gave power back to the players in several ways: from the way they started to have greater weight in the game – with the challenging decisions they now had at their disposal –, to the way their demands for this type of gameplay changed the milieu.

A milieu like gaming, a ludic one, is likely to have an impact on society. As has already been suggested, if it has this kind of impact, it must be in the "public interest" (even if what is really of this "interest" is not yet fully grasped).

If "public interest" was not taking gaming into account, now the "interest", assumed has "public", should be concerned with the modern game, with its dimension and how far it can reach (not only because of the millions of euros/dollars it generates, but because of the millions of players already on board and the trends modern gaming creates intergenerationally). The information conveyed by the games, the ideology, the posture on the market – whether environmentalist or something else –, the themes (colonial, sports, etc.), are also deserving a close look.

Without much doubt, the ludic is something that interests individuals as members of the public, since it is in the public that ludic qualities are acquired[17], whether they are more physical, within the scope of fair play, etc. Simulating situations is part of lifelong learning, it is not exclusive to childhood, although it is more prevalent in that age.

Considering the "accounts" of "public interest" (here not really specified), if one does not want to understand the ludic as part of a "unity" between the individual and the means from which the player emerges, at least it seems plausible to accept that the playing – competitive or otherwise – can provide opportunities to put "deliberation" and "procedures" into practice (with a view to the general goals of the game). Whether the social structure is "unitary" or not is not entirely relevant[18].

But it should not be overlooked that, if the game cannot always warrant an equal provision of players/individuals in society (especially if it is a game in which only one must win or accumulate some kind of resources, or victory points), the common sharing of certain "goods" on a par equality – if these are the enjoyment of free time, a playful experience, game conditions, etc. – can also represent the framing of the "common good" minimums.

Finally, regarding an "aggregative" position – the one that considers a society as the *sum* of its individuals –, modern board games highlight the sum of the different interests of the players in terms of the *outcome* of the matches (as it reduces to a narrow sample), whether competitive or cooperative, but perhaps it is their social utility – the summation simulation –that is of most interest to the subject[19].

Even on the surface, there is a reciprocity between what is the role of the "strategic twist", the "boom" that it provided, placing games within the orbit of the "general interest" (although a long way still must be traversed) and the growing "public interest" that also contributed to the "boom" *de facto* (in what is a clear combination of a more philosophical "public interest" tune and one of common sense). Without social space to thrive, the gaming dimension would not have the current impact.

3.2. Theme and mechanical interweaving

The preceding point already sets the tone for this one: how can something like the "public interest" be treated in the games themselves?

In this more speculative proposal, the combination and choice of certain mechanics can shed some light on a theme that deals with a part of what can *interest* everyone in society, and how it can be done, implying with the potential social impact of games (also mechanics must be seen as dynamic or divided into different mechanisms, all demanding player agency to function).

Regarding the mechanics related to the "game structure" – "Cooperative", "Semi-cooperative" and "Competitive games" representing the general offer –, will usually be more easily acceptable to understand the connection with the question under study with a co-op, but a semi co-op can also have a similar effect[20]. However, we shouldn't be surprised if a competitive game does the same, for instance: despite the conflict, something remains as "public interest", e. g., in a game that allows players to level up, so that the possible winner is

not too far away from everyone else, this may result in some sort of redistribution (this is probably the case with the "Catch the leader" mechanic).

Take the case of "Traitor games", games with "Hidden roles": there is normally a "common interest", but there are one or more players who are at the service of their own "private interest", or rather, the role they play.

If one intends to take the issue of "public interest" to the field of economics, there is also a wide mechanical diversity that can allow its combination in different ways, such as "Income", "Trading", "Market", "Negotiation" or "Alliances". But it is also possible to elevate the speculative proposal to other mechanics, for instance:

"Simultaneous action selection", depending on what is intended to be done with the simultaneous action, as players can be required to do it in a certain way – e.g., favoring the "public interest" –;

"Worker placement", which can be understood almost as self-explanatory for the purposes of its reference, because there are several ways to deal with the placement of "workers" and other associated mechanics, such as the "salary", "feeding" or "aging (and death)";

"Action selection restrictions", which are the restrictions and why;

"Roles with asymmetrical information", which are the purposes that lead to asymmetries;

"Communication limits", what really matters if you are limited in communication;

"Action compensation", who is interested in compensation and how; and so on[21].

Let us also look at "Engine building" mechanics, which represent a type of gameplay where players gradually build up a system, usually to generate resources, money, or points[22]. Typically, the *engine* becomes more efficient as the game progresses, leading to a satisfying sense of accomplishment to the player as the *machine* begins to run more and more abundantly. In the end, the tendency of these mechanics can serve to illustrate "progress" or, to link it to philosophical thought, the "idea of progress", thereby recalling how optimistically it was disseminated in Enlightenment: humanity – in this case, the player and what he has at his disposal – is in constant favorable development, only differing in the pace at which it does so[23].

Within the scope of metagame the question is not limited to mechanics, it is also necessary to consider the theme and its possible interweaving with the mechanics. Nevertheless "public interest" can be directly treated as a theme (in a game where politics, community, etc. are the subject, e. g. *City Council*), but it can be indirectly treated too, in other words, in the way players get involved with the game and the theme (even if not remotely related to "public interest") that underlies it.

The intersection of these two domains will be of *interest* because it can also relate to other dynamics in society[24].

4. Closing claims, or the social impact of board games

The social conditions that have allowed the growth of games are related to the general improvement of living conditions, leisure time, among others (especially when compared to other historical periods). However, in history there are breakthroughs and setbacks regarding a desired upward curve of improved conditions, and these, improving or not, are still linked to the socioeconomic contradictions of the historical period in which one lives.

This does not mean that games are going to revolutionize society, or that they are going to limit themselves to portraying the reality process through thematic and/or mechanical means. But it is noteworthy the need for an improvement in production conditions, so that the game as a physical entity leaves a smaller footprint in the environment, so that those involved enjoy the remuneration according to what is produced and today's social needs, so that the prices per game allow its extension to larger social fringes, etc.

Today it is indisputable that modern board games are changing the domain of play in general, that they are increasingly a topic of interest (going well beyond these pages), and that there is a physicality of their own that places them before a far-reaching ludic complexity (Brown; MacCallum-Stewart, 2020, p. 3). This is also why I was intended to rescue this human dimension with the purpose of producing effects that go beyond it, due to the impact it has already had in smaller milieu.

Readers would bear in mind that much of what happens in the hobby of modern games is determined by the fans. Since it is not yet as widespread as part of culture as others, it maintains an environment of participatory democracy, with impact on design, themes and even production (Brown & MacCallum-Stewart, 2020 p. 3), and one doesn't have to go far from this paper to see how this type of sociability has been praised[25].

Perhaps one can take advantage of the current thought to establish a connection with a hypothesis by Steiner (2015, p. 24), particularly when the author discusses Europe and what underlies the European experience: "[s]o long as there are coffeehouses, the 'idea of Europe' will have content".

The idea to retain is that in Europe, or elsewhere (according to us), people, players, when they meet in (gaming) *cafés*, game stores that have space available, bars that accept that people bring games, clubs (associations or groups), or other examples with a less commercial tendency, such as conventions, home gaming events, etc. (Konieczny, 2019, pp. 206-207), will continue to provide opportunities for building a (desirably) critical culture and to be part of the foundations of society itself (particularly if it states the participatory democratic practice, and a collective awareness of the "public interest"). All this could happen especially when people are exposed to moments of simulation of real situations, and even imaginary ones[26], and to personal interaction (face to face, when nowadays is increasingly threatened by one technological and digitized society).

If the popularity of gaming *cafés* has been growing, as some authors reported (Konieczny, 2019, pp. 202-205), this kind of issue may arise soon (it should be noted, however, that we are not considering the social and educational strata from which these players come, which will be another interesting study, if one does not jump to conclusions).

To wrap up the Steinerian idea, and what do we intend with this:

· Europe is made up of coffeehouses, of cafés. These extend from Pessoa's favourite coffeehouse in Lisbon to the Odessa cafés haunted by Isaac Babel's gangsters. They stretch from the Copenhagen cafés which Kierkegaard passed on his concentrated walks to the counters of Palermo. No early or defining cafés in Moscow which is already a suburb of Asia. Very few in England after a brief fashion in the eighteenth century. None in North America outside the gallican outpost of New Orleans. Draw the coffeehouse map and you have one of the essential markers of the "idea of Europe". The café is a place for assignation and conspiracy, for intellectual debate and gossip, for the flâneur and the poet or metaphysician at his notebook. It is open to all, yet it is also a club, a freemasonry of political or artistic-literary recognition and programmatic presence. [...] Those wishing to meet Freud or Karl Kraus, Musil or Carnap, knew precisely in which café to look, at which Stammtisch to take their place. Danton and Robespierre meet one last time at the Procope. When the lights go out in Europe, in August 1914, Jaurès is assassinated in a café. In a Geneva café, Lenin writes his treatise on empirio-criticism and plays chess with Trotsky (Steiner, 2015: 24).

Who really knows if at this moment, there are not people gathered in a *café* capable of shaking up the 21st century or the rest of the millennium (not necessarily as these two amateur chess players shook their time), preferably while playing, instead of *Chess*, a game of *Root*, *Terra Mystica* or another absorbing modern game, which has appeared after the "twist". The transformations of "*homo ludens*" (there are many types of games today: competition, collaboration, expression, problem-solving, entrepreneurship, etc.) must not be far from those that can be found in that which is the true "political animal"[27]. That being said, mankind can live together mainly because of its mutual interdependence, in which specific functions take place (not necessarily static), and that of nature (Aristotle, 2016, p. 3 [1253a 1-10]), but it also must contemplate the role-free time and leisure and playfulness/ludicity, and above all the underlying social relations.

To paraphrase Steiner, so *long as there are boardgame* cafés*, the "idea of Mankind" will have content*. This hyperbolic assumption serves to underline the (strategic) importance that should be given to the type of situations that games represent here, as a reflection of, and in, the social content.

"Public interest" (because linked to common social development) cannot fail to follow the main developments in society and expand its reach, even when this implies a slowdown in development, which does not mean a defense of dwindling development or "egalitarianism", but a sustainable development, and a desirable social balance in sharing conditions and opportunities, including the enjoyment of modern board games[28]. "Public interest", beyond what is normally expected, also needs a *strategy*, ultimately a social "twist". This is also

one of the tasks of a "strategic twist": in addition to enhancing the idea of an action plan designed to achieve an overall or long-term goal, the ludic domain can be used to talk about serious issues.

The die is cast (*alea jacta est*) a long time ago, but there is still a lot to cast.

Endnotes

1   Sometimes they are not even unanimous in their own areas. For example, there are authors who contest the "public interest" in the political field, namely "public choice" theorists. They consider it of little importance for the policies of a government, especially if democratically elected. Such criticism is based on the idea that this "interest" corresponds to an "abstract devotion to the public good" (Tullock, 1984, p. 89).

2   O'Flynn (2010, p. 300) states that the "public interest" debate has been intermittent since the 1970's due to mankind finding itself in a world where people are profoundly different, which makes "public interest" a problematic, possibly dangerous concept, although the author takes his article to mean that there are still good reasons for the persistence of this idea. In our paper we try to give a brief example of this.

3   For instance, in other cultural genres, such as cinema and comics, the "golden age" was in the 20th century, which, apart from other issues, shows that culture does not move at the same pace. See for illustrative purposes: "[w]e must know what is to be looked for in the Greek philosophers or in the philosophy of any specific period, or at least know that in any philosophy we are confronted by one specific stage in the development of thought, and that in it there have come to consciousness only those forms and needs of the spirit which lie within the bounds of that stage. In the spirit of more modern times deeper ideas slumber, and to waken them demands an environment and a present life different from those abstract, vague, and colorless reflections of the ancient world" (Hegel, 1985, pp. 51-52).

4   This text does not ignore the possibly dispersed ancestors of the "twist", such as Sid Jackson's Acquire (1964), but it only intends to highlight when the consequences under study have become widespread.

5   This posture can also be found in other authors, indicating that they use "game" as players normally do (Brown & MacCallum-Stewart, 2020, pp. 4, 8).

6   For example, Putnam (2000, p. 104 ff.), at the beginning of the millennium, hastily predicted the decline of analog, in particular card games, among other things, he even called the book where he exposed it: Bowling alone, pointing to solitude as proof of the foresaw end. The irony (which was even more hastily noted) is that one of the richest and growing fields of analog, and even propitiator of a specific community, is the solo modality, and it's not about Patience or variants of it, but even of modern games exclusively for one player, or multiplayer games with the option of playing solo against the game's AI (artificial intelligence, whether app-assisted or not, has been widely developed to provide better experiences in this game modality, and in gaming in general).

7   Such statement may find echo in the usual good humor of the boardgame youtuber, John Perkins (Actualol, 2023), saying that it is not only about the "renaissance" of games, as it is good to remember that these have been around longer than Christianity...

8   To be more specific, one could speak of a new reborn, since "reborn", as adult games, can already be traced back to the 18th and 19th centuries.

9   A good one is that of Twilight Imperium, an "ameri-monstrosity" that underwent a transformation from the 2nd to the 3rd ed. From a typically "American game", with long individual turns causing boredom and disengagement to the opponents, it turned into a game with "euro" tweaks, such as cards that can always provide some strategy between turns. This event, as is known, catapulted the game into the BoardGameGeek top: the 1st ed. is from 1997, Catan and subsequent phenomena had not yet expanded their influence, the 2nd ed. is from 2000, and then the German-European influence (more strategic) was still only beginning to reach the other side of the Atlantic, only occurring in the 3rd and, of course, in the 4th ed. This can be seen by the ranking, respectively: 4408, 4167, 106 and 5 (Smith apud Carlson, 2013).

10 The reader need not panic, nobody will talk about any boring "Eurogame" repeatedly set in the mercantile scenario of the same centuries, a quite popular mechanical-thematic variant in the so-called "dry Euro" games, hated by many but loved by many others.

11 For an overview of this historical period, and to possibly establish

its own spectrum of analogies, or even to extend it to the "Enlightenment", see Wood, 2012.

12 It is intended to confirm that this situation contrasts with the pessimism with which Huizinga in his acclaimed book denounced the state of mankind that constrained the play(fulness). Recalling, by the way, that he turns out "cultural pessimist" in the 1930s. So, some sorrow and sobriety can be found in his words: "[w]e have seen great nations losing every shred of honour, all sense of humour, the very idea of decency and fair play. This is not the place to investigate the causes, growth and extent of this world-wide bastardization of culture; the entry of half-educated masses into the international traffic of the mind, the relaxation of morals and the hypertrophy of technics undoubtedly play a large part" (Huizinga, 1949, p. 205).

13 The impact of "German games" on the milieu underlies our study, but it is not the exploration of this type of game that is intended to be undertaken here (for this, see Woods, 2012, pp. 79-119; Sousa & Bernardo, 2019; and Mardon et al, 2020, pp. 57-64) or what matters most for the final conjugation.

14 It is no accident that various authors and players in the milieu, including but not limited to the acclaimed boardgame youtuber, Quentin Smith (Shut Up & Sit Down), the freelance writer, Owen Duffy, or Stewart Woods, claim that the gaming boom is due to the intersection of "American" and "European games", which should reflect the "twist" in fact triggered by the latter.

15 An example of a new strategy to think about games, or more simply the commercial side of it, is the game box, how it stands out, or the way the game draws attention at the table, how it is arranged – its table presence –, issues that were not in the mind of more classic matrices (unless they had a strong "toy factor"). This resulted from the boom provided by the games trend that at first sight was not even concerned with more than pastel tones in its graphic art (obviously: "Eurogame type").

16 Other authors are better suited to summarize this politico-philosophical field: Barry, 1967, pp. 173-285; Moroni, 2004; and Santoro & Kumar, 2018, pp. 55-81.

17 For Huizinga (1949, p. 19) the ludic qualities – this can be understood – are what previously prepare an individual for the public.

18 "Unitarian conceptions" usually do not derive the "public interest" from "private interests", nor even from their combination, as "independent interests", but from a comprehensive moral theory that applies to (and unifies) both public and private interests.

19 In the "public interest aggregative account", there is no "public" distinct from private interests that aggregate publicly. If a policy follows the private interest of a majority, then it is in the "public interest".

20 In Game Theory steps have also been taken in the simulation of situations in a scope that can be accepted as semi-cooperative, for the provision of a public good (Filippin & Raimondi, 2018).

21 Other mechanics, although in some cases more generic than others, can also be targeted, including but not limited to: "Action drafting", "Action/event", "Tech trees/tech tracks/tracks bonuses", "Events", "Card play", "Force commitment", "Hidden movement", "Area control", and "Set collection". For all the mentioned game mechanics it is advisable to consult their description in Engelstein; Shalev, 2022, passim.

22 This is a mechanic that has its status recognized, though not in the same way as the others mentioned here, since it depends not on what it is worth on its own, but how other mechanics combine in its favor (Engelstein & Shalev, 2022, pp. 328 and 524).

23 A conviction that is evident in one of the best-known speeches of the time: "Reason has at last recognized the road it must follow and has grasped the thread that will prevent it from going astray. These first truths, these methods spread among all nations, and carried into both worlds, can no longer be annihilated; the human race will no longer see again these alternations of darkness and light, to which it was believed for a long time that nature had eternally condemned it. It is no longer in the power of men to extinguish the torch lit by genius, and a revolution in the globe alone could bring back the darkness" (Condorcet, 1847-1849, p. 390 [translation by the author]).

24 The following example is from a game before the "twist": The Graingrowin' Game – something like the game of growing cereals – in 1982 deserves mention in the pages of a Montreal newspaper, with the purpose of having a game that meant the practice of agriculture "for real" (n.a., 1982). But the truth is that today one can consult Boardgamegeek and realize that it only has 7 ratings and 6 comments, and the substantial difference compared to today is that there are games like Fields of Arle and dozens of other games that are truly expressive and capable of simulating this experience with thematic and mechanical meaning, or simply simulating the most diverse matters that one might want to illuminate. Who has never struggled with the "feeding mechanics" (Agricola, Tzolkin,

etc.) and has not been "obliged" to remember the hardships of living on what the earth or nature gives (or doesn't)?

25 For Rousseau, e.g., the size of the state matters: if it is too large rulers would lose power, and authority, and if it is too small it might attract the greed of the larger ones (1999, p. 81 ff.). The gaming hobby will be at the right size to be able to chalk out a social implementation strategy, to be empowered, and socially empowered, for the purpose of bringing people together, mentally challenging them, and so on.

26 See the terrible timeliness of the acclaimed cooperative game success – Pandemic (2008) – during times of real pandemic.

27 If not at least in a politically demarcated way, at least as a "social animal" (Marx, 1962, pp. 345-346).

28 Not everyone will buy the latest Kickstarter/Gamefound blockbuster, but everyone can relate to some extent to the new ethos of the board game hobby.

29 In order not to make this cataloguing excessive and unnecessarily long, all games that are Uncredited or in Public Domain are reported here: Senet (-3500), Go (-2200), Chess (1475), Cribbage (1630), Game of Goose (1587), Backgammon (1635), Patience (1783), Poker (1810), and Bridge (1925). The "Partlett convention" is used to refer the games, justifying the inversion of the author with the work. Finally, all the games referred can be consulted here: https://boardgamegeek.com/.

Bibliography:

Aristotle (2016). Politics (B. Jowett, Trans). In Jonathan Barnes (Ed.), *Aristotle's Politics. Writings from the Complete Works: Politics. Economics. Constitution of Athens* (pp. 1-225) Princeton University Press.

Bachelard, G. (1947). *La Formation e l'Esprit Scientifique. Contribution à une Psychanalyse de la connaissance objective.* Librairie Philosophique J. Vrin. Originally published in 1938.

Barry, B. (1967). *Political Argument*. Second impression. Routledge & Kegan Paul. Originally published in 1965. n.a.

(1982, September 7). *Board-game is like farming for real*. The Gazette. https://news.google.com/newspapers?nid=1946&dat=19820907&id=p0IwAAAAIBAJ&sjid=BqUFAAAAIBAJ&pg=936,2617779&hl=pt-PT

Brown, D., & MacCallum-Stewart, E. (2020). Introduction. In D. Brown and E. MacCallum-Stewart (Eds.), *Rerolling Boardgames: Essays on Themes, Systems, Experiences and Ideologies* (pp. 1-5). McFarland & Company, Inc., Publishers.

Carlson, C. (2013, August 30). *We are living in a board game renaissance*. Deseret News. https://www.deseret.com/2013/8/30/20524759/we-are-living-in-a-board-game-renaissance

Condorcet, M. de (1847-1849). Discours prononcé dans l'Academie Française, le jeudi 21 Février 1782, a la réception de M. le marquis de Condorcet. In A. C. O'Connor & M. F. Arago (Eds.), *Œuvres de Condorcet* publiées par A. Condorcet O'Connor. *Vol. 1.* (pp. 389-415) Firmin Didot Frères, Libraires. Originally published in 1782.

Demopoulos, A. (2023, March 1). *Magic: the Gathering fans 'heartbroken' as $100,000 worth of cards found in Texas landfill.* The Guardian. https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2023/feb/28/magic-the-gathering-cards-landfill-texas.

Duffy, O. (2014, November 25) Board games' golden age: sociable, brilliant and driven by the internet. *The Guardian.* https://www.theguardian.com/technology/2014/nov/25/board-games-internet-playstation-xbox

Engelstein, G.; Shalev, I. (2022). *Building Blocks of Tabletop Game Design. An Encyclopedia of Mechanisms* (2nd ed.). CRC Press. Originally published in 2019.

Filippin, A. & Raimondi, M. (2018). The Patron Game the Individual Provision of a Public Good. *Games*, *9*(2), 35. https://doi.org/10.3390/g9020035

Futuyma, D. J. (2003). *Evolution*. Sinauer Associates, Inc..

Hegel, G. W. F. (1985). *Introduction to the Lectures on the History of Philosophy* (T. M. Knox and A. V. Miller, Trans.). Clarendon Press. (Original work published 1822)

ICv2 (2015, July 20). *Hobby Games Market Climbs to $880 Million.* ICv2: The Business of Geek Culture. https://icv2.com/articles/markets/view/32102/hobby-games-market-climbs-880-million

Huizinga, J. (1949). *Homo Ludens. A Study of the Play-Element in Culture*. Routledge & Kegan Paul Ltd. Originally published in 1938.

Jarvis, M. (2022, March 2). *Over 100 tabletop games made $500,000 on Kickstarter last year for the first time*. Dicebreaker. https://www.dicebreaker.com/companies/kickstarter/news/kickstarter-tabletop-games-record-2021

Konieczny, P. (2019). Golden Age of Tabletop Gaming: Creation of the Social Capital and Rise of Third Spaces for Tabletop Gaming in the 21st Century. *Polish Sociological Review, 206*(1), 199–216. https://www.jstor.org/stable/26741406

Long, M. (1985, March 10). *The Comeback of Board Games is Breaking Video's Monopoly*. The Tuscaloosa News. https://news.google.com/newspapers?nid=1817&dat=19850310&id=ITodAAAAIBAJ&sjid=8KUEAAAAIBAJ&pg=3292,3445673&hl=pt-PT

Mardon, A., Wiebe, J., Dansereau, P. & Tombrowski, L. (2020). *The History of Board Games*. Golden Meteorite Press.

Marx, K. (1962). *Das Kapital. Kritik der politischen Ökonomie* (Vol. 1, Book 1). MEW. Originally published in 1867.

Moroni, S. (2004). Towards a Reconstruction of the Public Interest Criterion. *Planning Theory*, 3(2), 151-171. https://doi.org/10.1177/1473095204044779

O'Flynn, I. (2010). Deliberating about the Public Interest. *Res Publica*, 16, 299–315. https://doi.org/10.1007/s11158-010-9127-x

Perkins, J. [Actualol] (2023, March 8). 10 Reasons Board Games Are Better Now. [Video]. Youtube. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=AhaylQfzCmo

Putnam, R. D. (2000). *Bowling Alone: The Collapse and Revival of American Community*. Simon and Schuster.

Rousseau, J. J. (1999). *Discourse on Political Economy and The Social Contract*. (C. Betts, Trans.). Oxford University Press. (Original work published 1762)

Santoro, D. & Kumar, M. (2018). *Speaking Truth to Power. A Theory of Whistleblowing*. Springer International Publishing.

Sousa, M., Bernardo, E. (2019). Back in the Game. In: Zagalo, N., Veloso, A., Costa, L., Mealha, Ó. (Eds.), *Videogame Sciences and Arts. VJ 2019. Communications in Computer and Information Science*, (Vol. 1164, pp. 72-85). Springer, Cham. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-37983-4_6

Steiner, G. (2015). *The Idea of Europe. An Essay*. Overlook Duckworth, Peter Mayer Publishers, Inc. Originally published in 2004.

Tullock, G. (1984). A (partial) rehabilitation of the public interest theory. *Public Choice*, *42*(1), 89-99. http://www.jstor.org/stable/30023730

Wood, E. M. (2012). *Liberty and Property. A Social History of Western Political Thought from Renaissance to Enlightenment*. Verso.

Woods, S. (2012). *Eurogames. The Design, Culture and Play of Modern European Board Games*. McFarland & Company, Inc., Publishers.

World Boardgaming Championships (n.d). World Boardgaming Championships. https://www.boardgamers.org/

Gameography[29]:

Abyss (Cathala, B.; Chevallier, C., Bombyx, 2014).

Acquire (Sackson, S., 1964).

Agricola (Rosenberg, U., Lookout Games, 2007 [rev. ed. 2016]).

Brass: Birmingham (Brown, G.; Tolman, M.; Wallace, M., Roxley, 2018).

Carcassonne (Wrede, K.-J., Hans im Glück, 2000).

Catan, Settlers of (Teuber, K., Kosmos 1995).

Century: Spice Road (Matsuuchi, E., Plan B Games, 2017).

City Council (Goldsteen, E., Golden Egg Games, 2013).

Fields of Arle (Rosenberg, U., Feuerland Spiele, 2014).

Gloomhaven (Childres, I., Cephalofair Games, 2017).

Graingrowin' Game, The (Dorosh, M. W., Century Publishing, 1982).

Magic. The Gathering (Garfield, R., Wizards of the Coast, 1993).

Monopoly (Darrow, C. [Magie, E. J. P.], 1935).

Pandemic (Leacock, M., Z-Man Games, 2008).

Risk (Lamorisse, A.; Levin, M. I., 1959).

Root (Wehrle, C., Leder Games, 2018).

Sonic the Hedgehog (Naka, Y.; Ohshima, N.; Yasuhara, H., Sega, 1991).

Super Mario (Miyamoto, S.; Tezuka, T., Nintendo, 1985).

Terra Mystica (Drögemüller, J.; Ostertag, H., Feuerland Spiele, 2012).

Terraforming Mars (Fryxelius, J., FryxGames, 2016).

Timeline: General Interest (Henry, F., Asmodee, 2012).

Trivial Pursuit (Abbott, S.; Haney, C., 1979).

Twilight Imperium (Petersen, C. T., Fantasy Flight Games, 1997 [4th ed. with Beltrami, D. and Konieczka, C., 2017]).

Tzolkin: *The Mayan Calendar* (Luciani, S.; Tascini, D., Czech Games Edition, 2012).

Voyages of Marco Polo, The (Luciani, S.; Tascini, D., Hans im Glück, 2015).

War of the Ring (Di Meglio, R; Maggi, M.; Nepitello, F., Ares Games, 2004 [sd. Ed. 2011]).