

READY-TO-USE SIMULATION

DEVELOPMENT MONOPOLY

A simulation game on poverty and inequality

An Ansoms

Université Catholique de Louvain, Belgium

Sara Geenen

Universiteit Antwerpen, Belgium

This article has been published by Simulation and Gaming, published online (1 August 2012)

ABSTRACT:

DEVELOPMENT MONOPOLY is a simulation game that makes players experience how power relations influence the agency of different socioeconomic groups, and how this can induce poverty and inequality. Players alter the original rules of the MONOPOLY board game in order that they would more accurately reflect social stratification and inequalities in the context of developing countries. After the game, the players reflect on how the rules could be made more inclusive and pro-poor. In an individual debriefing, they are invited to think about the connections between game dynamics and contemporary evolutions in developing countries. In a final collective debriefing phase, participants discuss the ways in which the simulation experience enhanced their understandings of poverty and inequality.

KEY WORDS: DEVELOPMENT STUDIES, SIMULATION, POVERTY, INEQUALITY, POWER, SOCIAL STRATIFICATION.

Basic Data

Learning objectives: To enhance players' understanding of poverty and inequality dynamics (factual learning). To make players experience how the institutional rules of the game and power relations influence agency of different socioeconomic groups and how this can induce poverty and inequality (socio-emotional learning).

Simulation objective: To accumulate as much wealth as possible (in terms of cash and property).

Debriefing formats: (a) Brainstorming in small groups (phase 3 in the game); (b) Writing an individual reflection paper (phase 4); (c) Group discussion (phase 5).

Target audience: Graduate and post-graduate students and other individuals with an interest in development studies, social sciences, economics, and related disciplines.

Playing time: 1 hour for brainstorming (phase 1); 2 hours for playing the game (phase 2).

Debriefing time: 40 minutes for brainstorming about inclusive and pro-poor rules (phase 3); 1 hour or more for class discussion (phase 5).

Number of players: min. 6, max. 8 per group. Maximum number of groups in case of one facilitator: 6.

Materials/equipment required: one MONOPOLY board + material per group.

This simulation game is based upon the classic MONOPOLY board game (see Grafman, 1978), which may be regarded as an articulation of the ‘American dream’ and associated values: equal opportunities for all and winning through luck, intelligence and perseverance. However, the situation in developing countries suggests that these rules do not necessarily apply. In reality, people are constrained by their social and economic circumstances, and by the formal and informal ‘rules of the game’ that govern societal interactions. Fischer (2008), Coghlan (2004), Ender (2004), Waldner-Haugrud and Kinney (2003) and Jessup (2001) previously made use of a modified version of MONOPOLY to study social stratification and inequality in Western societies. In contrast to these experiences, which focused on the context of developed countries, the MONOPOLY game proposed in this instance has been adapted to approximate to realities in developing countries. Another innovative aspect is that the players are actively involved in designing the rules of the game, as the latter are left open to negotiation and modification in the course of the simulation.

The simulation game begins with in-group discussions on how to modify the original MONOPOLY rules in order that they would better reflect social stratification and inequalities in the context of developing countries. Players are assigned to different socioeconomic groups and invited to play the game by the modified rules. This makes them experience how power relations influence the agency of different socioeconomic groups in society, and how this can induce poverty and inequality.

After the game, the players are asked to reflect on how to make the rules more inclusive. In an individual debriefing phase, participants consider how the game dynamics relate to contemporary evolutions in developing countries. Subsequently, in a concluding collective debriefing, they exchange views on how the simulation experience enhanced their understandings of poverty and inequality dynamics in developing countries.

Facilitator's guide

The simulation should be spread over different sessions.

- **Phase 0: Original game.** A week before the start of the game, you should ask participants whether they are familiar with the traditional version of MONOPOLY. If not, they should be encouraged to play the game in an informal context at least once before the simulation, so as to acquaint themselves with the rules and objectives.
- **Phase 1: New rules.** In a first phase (1 hour), participants brainstorm about how the rules of the original MONOPOLY game can be altered to better reflect social stratification and inequalities within a particular development society. This phase may take place with or without your presence. There are no fixed rules on how decisions should be taken (e.g. by majority or consensus). Each group draws up a modified rule sheet, which they hand to you at the end of the phase. It is important that you should check that the modified rules are not too complex and that they are feasible within a playing context. Certain distributions of starting capital might, for example, hold a danger of immediate bankruptcy of some participants. At this point, you may choose to conduct an ex-ante survey, as provided in annex 1, to gauge players' attitudes towards and understanding of poverty and inequality dynamics.
- **Phase 2: Playing with new rules.** In a second phase (2 hours), each group plays DEVELOPMENT MONOPOLY by their own set of modified rules. At this point, the players are assigned social status (rich, middle class, poor) by the roll of a die. In other words, they do not choose their status. The players may further modify the rules in the course of the game through negotiation. If

negotiation does not result in agreement, the players are left free to sabotage the game. This reflects real-life dynamics, in which societal rules are likewise prone to change, against which some (classes of) citizens may revolt. You should not intervene at this point, but should merely act as an observer moving from one group to the next. At the end of the game, the players add up their assets. You are free to call short breaks during this phase of the game.

- **Phase 3: More inclusive rules.** After the conclusion of phase 2, the players reflect in their respective groups on how to make the rules of game more inclusive. Each group summarises the discussion in a written note that is handed in at the end of phase 3 (40 min).
- **Phase 4: Individual debriefing.** In an individual written debriefing phase, the players reflect on how the game dynamics relate to current evolutions in developing countries. Concurrently with this assignment, you may conduct the ex-post survey provided in annex 2. This survey gauges players' ex-post attitudes towards and understanding of poverty and inequality dynamics.
- **Phase 5: Collective debriefing.** In a final collective debriefing phase (1 hour), the players exchange views on how the simulation enhanced their understanding of poverty and inequality dynamics in developing countries.

Playing the game (phases 2 + 3) requires a sufficiently large space where each group of 6 to 8 players can sit together comfortably around a table.

- Each group should be equipped with a traditional MONOPOLY game board.
- All players are given an explanatory sheet with instructions on how to play the game according to the modified rules
- You give each player an overview sheet to note down their accumulated assets at the end of the game (money amount, names of acquired streets, purchasing value of acquired streets, number of houses and/or hotels in each street, purchasing value of houses/hotels). The total wealth of a player is calculated through the following formula:

$1 * \text{cash} + 2 * \text{purchasing value of all streets} + 4 * \text{purchasing value of houses and hotels}$

Player's guide

This simulation game is based upon the classic MONOPOLY board game. However, you will be called to modify the original MONOPOLY rules in order that they would better reflect social stratification and inequalities in the context of developing countries. You will then be assigned to a particular socioeconomic group and will be invited to play the game by the modified rules. The objective is to accumulate wealth and survive during the game.

Phase 0: Original game.

Players should be familiar with the traditional MONOPOLY board game and its rules. Those who have never played MONOPOLY should familiarise themselves with the rules at least a week before the simulation takes place. The original MONOPOLY game may be regarded as an articulation of the 'American dream' and associated values: equal opportunities for all and winning through luck, intelligence and perseverance. However, experience shows that these rules do not necessarily apply in all environments. In reality, people are constrained by their social and economic circumstances, and by formal and informal 'rules of the game' that govern societal interactions.

Phase 1: New rules.

In this phase, you brainstorm in groups of 6 to 8 about how the rules of the original MONOPOLY game may be altered to better reflect social stratification and **inequalities** within a particular developing country. Starting from the original MONOPOLY rules, each group should try to come to an agreement on appropriate modifications of the rules. The first issue to discuss is how players should be divided into **different socioeconomic groups**. What are the relevant social categories, how many players should there be per category, and how should the starting capital be divided over these different categories? Other possible topics for discussion include:

- Who controls the bank?
- What 'salary' should each socioeconomic group receive on passing 'Go'?
- What are the rules for buying property (streets, houses, hotels)? Should different rules apply for different socioeconomic groups?

- Who can acquire railway stations, the Electric Company and the Water Works?
- What happens if a player lands on the 'Free Parking' square?
- What happens if a player lands on 'Chance' or 'Community Chest'?
- What happens if a player lands on one of the two tax squares?
- When should players go to jail and how can they get out?
- What happens in case of bankruptcy?
- Which, if any, types of charity is allowed?
- Which, if any, types of cooperation is allowed?
- ...

It is important that you should consider the **feasibility** of these rules. They should not be excessively complicated. Players should be able to survive for at least a number of rounds. The modified rules should be summarised in a schematic overview per socio-economic category and handed in to the facilitator at the end of this phase.

Phase 2: Playing by the new rules.

In phase 2, you play DEVELOPMENT MONOPOLY by the **modified rules**. The purpose of the game remains the same: to accumulate as much wealth as possible (in terms of cash and property). Before starting the game, each player is assigned to a particular socioeconomic group by the roll of a die. The higher the number thrown, the higher the socioeconomic status. The game continues until the facilitator calls it to an end (after approximately 2 hours). At the end of the game, you write down your assets (money, streets in your possession, and number of houses / hotels on those streets).

Phase 3: More inclusive rules.

In the next phase, you are required to step out of your assigned roles. You should imagine yourselves as policymakers who wish to design **more inclusive and pro-poor rules of the game**. How to approach this challenge? Which modifications might reduce inequalities and poverty in the society portrayed? In discussing the proposed options, due account should be taken of the 'end game', i.e. the eventual power dynamics between the socioeconomic groups involved. For example, it would be unrealistic to assume that all property could be redistributed in a way that achieves

total equality of wealth. So any policies devised should be realistic and **feasible**. This phase last approximately 40 minutes. Proposals should be summarised in a short note.

Phase 4 and 5: Debriefing.

In the individual and written stage (phase 4), the players reflect upon the relationship between the game dynamics and contemporary evolutions in developing countries. There are neither right nor wrong answers; the purpose of this exercise is merely to encourage players to translate their simulation experiences in an abstract playing environment into a complex reality. Here are some questions players may wish to consider:

- How would you evaluate individual roles and positions in the game?
- How would you evaluate the interactions between players representing different socioeconomic groups and the ways in which this (re)defined the rules of the game?
- How did the game dynamics relate to contemporary evolutions in developing countries?
- Were the more inclusive rules – defined in phase 3 – applicable to real-life contexts?
- How did individual simulation experiences relate to the course content and the literature?

In the collective debriefing phase (phase 5), players exchange ideas on how the simulation experience enhanced their understandings of poverty and inequality dynamics in developing countries. Here are some potential topics for discussion in the final debriefing:

The rules of the game:

- Where the rules uniquely defined or were they interpreted differently by different players?
- Were rules renegotiated in the course of the game?
- Did different categories of players have more or less power in this renegotiation?

- Can inclusive rules be designed to change the course of such games in the real world?
- What conclusions can be drawn about the role of governance and policies?

Game dynamics:

- How did the players interact with each other?
- What were the most memorable moments during play?
- Were the outcomes surprising?

Inequality, poverty and power:

- What was the impact of the players' unequal socioeconomic status?
- How would you define the power relations between different socioeconomic groups?
- Did poorer categories have agency? Did players revolt against the rules of the game? In what ways?
- How did the elites articulate their role?
- Did you perceive forms of solidarity and/or collective action?
- To what extent did the initial polarisation of the players determine their chances in the game?
- Was social mobility possible for poorer and middle-class groups?
- What have you learned about poverty and inequality relations in developing countries?

Depending on the course topic and contents on the one hand and the game dynamics on the other, the facilitator may choose to add additional topics to the ones discussed here. The facilitator may also draw from the players' written debriefing papers (phase 4) to add to the discussion. Furthermore, the findings of the ex-ante survey (prior to phase 2) and the ex-post survey (during phase 4) allows the facilitator to assess the simulation experience, which may be especially useful in the case of larger groups.

Variants

The facilitator may decide to add an additional phase (after phase 2) during which the richest person in the game possesses the power to modify any rule to suit his or her own agenda. This is the phase of 'elite capture'. It should not last too long, but can nonetheless be interesting in that it may insert a new type of dynamics into the game whereby the poorer categories – being confronted with unilaterally imposed rules – decide to revolt.

Acknowledgements

The authors would like to thank all the reviewers for their extremely helpful comments and the participating students for their cooperation and appreciation.

Conflict of interest

The authors declared no conflicts of interest with respect to the authorship and/or publication of this article.

References

- Coghlan, C.L. & Huggins, D.W. (2004). 'That's not fair!': A simulation exercise in social stratification and structural inequality. Teaching Sociology, 32, 177-187.
- Ender, M.G. (2004). Modified Monopoly: Experiencing social class inequality. Academic Exchange Quarterly, 8 (2).
- Fischer, E.M. (2008). USA Stratified Monopoly: A simulation game about social class stratification. Teaching Sociology, 36, 272-282.
- Grafman, B. (1978). Playing Monopoly: The state of the art. A review of the Monopoly Book and 1000 Ways to Win Monopoly Games. Simulation & Gaming: An Interdisciplinary Journal, 9 (2), 245-251.
- Jessup, M.M. (2001). Sociopoly: Life on the boardwalk. Teaching Sociology, 29 (1), 102-109.
- Waldner-Haugrud, L.K. & Kinney, W.J. (2003). Using Monopoly to teach social stratification and inequality. Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the American Sociological Association, Atlanta. Later published as Waldner L.K. and Kinney, W.J. (2003) Playing Monopoly as a Strategy for Teaching

Sociological Ideas on Class Inequality. Sociological Imagination, 40 (2), 111-130.

Bios

An Ansoms is a lecturer in Development Studies at Université Catholique de Louvain (Belgium). She is involved in research on the challenges of rural development and pro-poor growth in land-scarce (post-)conflict environments – particularly Central Africa. She teaches courses on poverty and development issues, in which she integrates various simulation games.

ADDRESS: Université Catholique de Louvain, Place des Doyens 1, PB
L2.01.05, 1348 Louvain-La-Neuve, Belgium;
telephone : +32(0)10473935
e-mail: an.ansoms@uclouvain.be.

Sara Geenen is an assistant at the Institute of Development Policy and Management (University of Antwerp, Belgium). She is working on her PhD in Development Studies on artisanal gold exploitation and informal trade in South Kivu (DRC). She coordinates simulation games in several courses.

ADDRESS: Institute of Development Policy and Management, Universiteit
Antwerpen, Prinsstraat 13, 2000 Antwerpen, Belgium
telephone: +32 (0)32655665
e-mail: sara.geenen@ua.ac.be.

Appendix

Appendix 1. Ex-ante survey

Question 1

Indicate to what extent you agree with the following propositions. These propositions apply to the general context, not to the simulation environment.

	1	2	3	4	5
	Totally disagree	Rather disagree	Neither disagree nor agree	Rather agree	Totally agree
Elites are concerned with the fate of the poor.					
If a poor persons works very hard, he/she will be rewarded (his/her well-being will increase).					
The wider the gap between rich and poor, the less likely the poor are to escape poverty.					
The inequalities between socioeconomic groups in a given country can be reduced through efficient policy measures.					
Upward social mobility is possible for all.					
Elites are concerned with improving poor people's well-being.					
Once poor, it is very difficult to escape poverty.					
Poor people can improve their well-being through collective action.					
The wider the gap between rich and poor, the greater the likelihood that the poor will revolt in a radical or violent way.					
The inequality between socioeconomic groups is largely due to a difference in attitudes.					
Society needs a middle class.					
Poverty can be reduced if government takes efficient policy measures.					
Elites are concerned with reducing the gap between rich and poor.					

The wider the gap between rich and poor, the greater the likelihood that elites will behave in an authoritarian way.					
The inequalities between socioeconomic groups are largely due to unequal power relations.					
Being poor creates a kind of common identity, which results in mutual sympathy.					

Question 2

Rank the following propositions from most important (1) to least important (3). Each ranking number may be used only once.

Proposition	1 to 3
Being poor means lacking the necessary means to attain a viable livelihood.	
Being poor means lacking engagement in remunerating strategies.	
Being poor means lacking the capacity to influence the rules of the game in society.	

Appendix 2. Ex-post survey

Question 1 (see ex-ante survey)

Question 2 (see ex-ante survey)

Question 3

	1	2	3	4	5
	Totally disagree	Rather disagree	Neither disagree nor agree	Rather agree	Totally agree
I found this simulation interesting.					
This simulation helped me to better understand theories and concepts from the course.					
I was happy with the role (socioeconomic group) assigned to me in the simulation.					
Considering my role, I feel I did well in the simulation.					
Considering my role, I feel I accomplished the objectives of the simulation (i.e. maximum					

accumulation of wealth and property)					
My game behaviour was self-centred.					
My game behaviour was cooperative.					
If I were to play the game again, I would adopt different strategies.					
I experienced frustration during the game.					
I experienced pride during the game.					
I feel that I now better understand real societal dynamics.					
I enjoyed participating in the simulation.					