

Serious games are no child's play

Imagine yourself sitting round a TouchTable with a number of professionals. On the table you see a building site, where subsidence has been worse than expected. Each of you, from contractor to local councillor, has their own role to play. How do you solve the problem, and ensure good communication?

Just like real life. That is the beauty of sophisticated computer-supported games. They are used for training and communication, to make abstract situations understandable and to transfer knowledge. At Deltares, a special team is developing games addressing a range of issues. Like the National Flood Committee game released in 2010. The players are water managers in a flood situation, who have to resolve issues by negotiating with the mayor and other partners in the flood protection system. Serious games are the perfect way to learn crisis management.

■ INFORMATION

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Sustainable Delta

Marjolijn Haasnoot, water management and environmental modelling consultant, is involved in a project exploring different versions of the future to support strategic water management. "A game has been developed for this project, Sustainable Delta, to help both players and researchers understand how to set out a sustainable water management policy. It's a combination of a board game and a computer model. Two teams of 'water managers' are confronted with realistic problems, like reduced navigability as a result of climate change. Each team proposes policies, which they have to negotiate

to arrive at socially sustainable policies. The computer model calculates and visualises the short-term implications, providing input for policy adjustments. After three or four rounds the game takes you a little further into the future, and there's enough material for an interesting evaluation. From several gaming sessions with SustainableDelta we learnt that people tend to respond to short-term problems, despite their intention to anticipate long-term processes."

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