

Two Approaches to Solving the Climate Crisis: Comparing *Half-Earth Socialism* and *The Climate Game*

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INTRODUCTION

Games are used to communicate about the climate crisis (e.g., Abraham and Jayemanne 2017; Abraham 2018). I study two such games, *Half-Earth Socialism* (Tseng & Pham, 2022) and *The Climate Game* (Infosys, 2022), and compare how they represent the climate crisis, what effects they present it having and what they argue are the solutions. The perspectives of the games complement each other because they are created from two opposing perspectives, with *Half-Earth Socialism* starting from socialist assumptions and *The Climate Game* being built around the economic liberalism of the publisher, the Financial Times.

HALF-EARTH SOCIALISM

Half-Earth Socialism is a game published simultaneously with a book with the same title (Vettese & Pendergrass, 2022). The book makes an argument about an approach for stopping the climate crisis, and the game simulates that argument. The game starts with the player elected as the first lead planner of the central planning authority after an imagined socialist revolution in 2022.

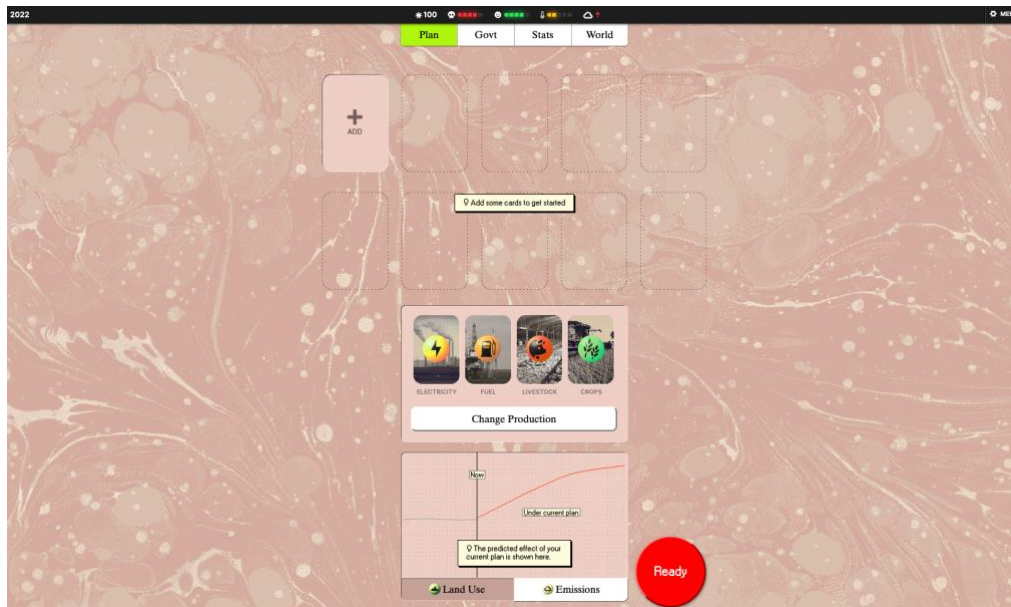


Figure 1: *Half-Earth Socialism* interface.

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The goal is to bring global warming below 1C, reduce the extinction rate and bring total emissions below 0, while also not being voted out of office in the 60 years you have as the lead planner. This is all done by using political capital, which is gained by making popular decisions and achieving the goals given. The game is played by choosing cards representing different climate solutions and by choosing how food, energy and fuel are prioritized between different options.

The game makes a procedural argument (Bogost, 2007) about the way climate crisis can be solved, tying it to a specific political framework. It represents different political views as coalitions that can either help or hinder your goals. The game allows different approaches ranging from building direct air capture infrastructure and colonizing space to suppressing population growth in the global South. However, all these approaches are not equally effective, and some lead to disastrous results – for example, reducing population growth in the South is not an effective solution, since most of CO₂ is created in the global North.

THE CLIMATE GAME

The Climate Game has a similar, centrally governed approach, with the “world leaders” appointing “you the **global minister for future generations** to make the decisions squabbling nations have dodged for decades” (emphasis in original). You are given an adviser, with the possibility of choosing from an activist, entrepreneur, businessman, and politician, their specialty affecting the kinds of suggestions they give.

The Climate Game proceeds linearly, with three rounds of multiple questions, allowing you to make decisions on things like electricity production and investing in new technologies. These choices are paid by “effort points”, a limited resource starting at 100 points, but possibly increasing resulting from the choices made during the game.

All the alternatives given in a question have a correct answer that results in the most effective cutting of CO₂ emissions. There are multiple ways to reach an effective answer to the climate crisis, but only one is presented as the correct one.

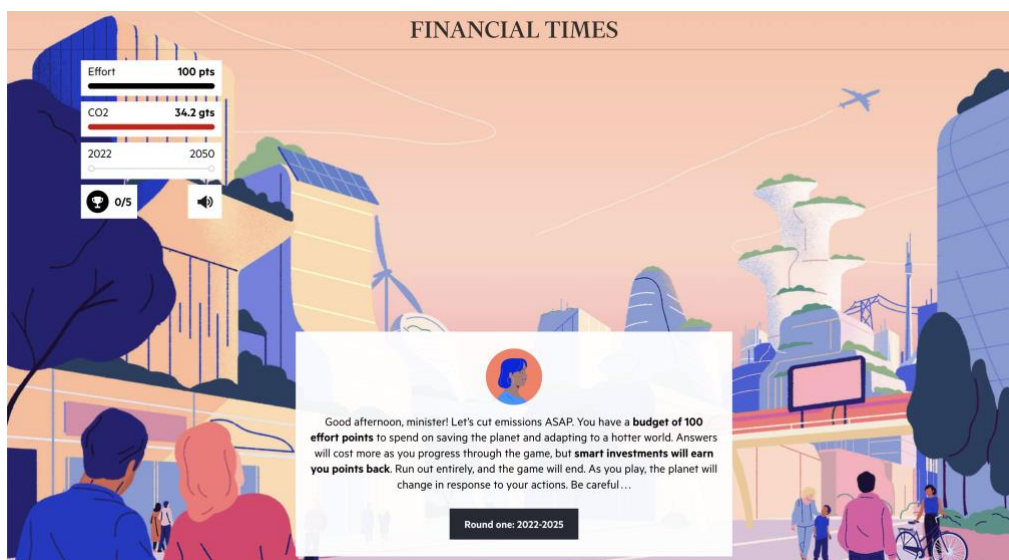


Figure 2: *The Climate Game* interface.

METHODS

I analyze *Half-Earth Socialism* and *The Climate Game* by close playing (Bizzocchi & Tanenbaum, 2011) them through the different approaches allowed, comparing the results (both successes and failures), and looking at the source code of the games (Willumsen, 2016) to see what kind of procedural rhetoric they forward.

CONCLUSIONS

Both *Half-Earth Socialism* and *The Climate Game* agree that the climate crisis is possible to solve and provide alternatives on how to do so. In *Half-Earth Socialism* this is a process of balancing different interests and finding out which solutions are effective. The different approaches are necessarily tied to the political coalitions representing different political ideologies. This makes the choice on how to tackle the climate crisis necessarily a political choice. In comparison, *The Climate Game* presents the available choices not as a balancing act between different ideologies, but as “investments” (cf. Figure 2) that either do or do not work in stopping the climate crisis. These choices are presented as free from political dimensions.

Surprisingly for games coming from different political perspectives, both suggest that an effective solution to the climate crisis requires handing political power to an autocrat with the power to make the decisions nations have not been able to do individually.

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