

UDC 316.7:379.8:794

Lytovchenko, A., & Polianychka, M. (2026). Social practice of board games during forced isolation. *Sociological Studios*, 1(28), 20–29. <https://doi.org/10.17721/2306-3971-2026-01-22-22>

Social practice of board games during forced isolation

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This article examines board games as a specific social practice in conditions of forced isolation (drawing on the cases of the COVID-19 pandemic and the full-scale Russian invasion of Ukraine). The relevance of the study is conditioned by the growing role of board games in contemporary forms of leisure, communication, and social interaction, as well as by their insufficient sociological conceptualization in the Ukrainian scholarly field. The theoretical and methodological framework draws on the approaches of J. Huizinga, R. Caillois, P. Yonnet, P. Bourdieu, and A. Giddens, enabling the treatment of play as both a cultural phenomenon and a structured social practice. The study proposes an original typology of board games built on the balance between the agonial principle and other play principles. The empirical basis comprises a pilot online survey of 150 respondents in Ukraine, aimed at identifying the characteristics of engagement with board games, their social functions, and changes in practice across different periods of forced isolation. The results indicate a strengthening of the role of board games as an instrument of socialization, maintenance of communication, and escapism – especially in conditions of crisis social transformation. The conclusion is drawn that board games in contemporary Ukrainian society constitute a dynamic social practice combining leisure, communicative, and identificatory functions, and that their role grows significantly in conditions of social tension and forced isolation.

DOI: 10.17721/2306-3971-2026-01-22-22

Received: May 05, 2026

1st Revision: May 25, 2026

Accepted: June 25, 2026

Keywords: board games, social practice, forced isolation, sociology of game, social interactions

Литовченко Артем, Полянничка Максим. Соціальна практика настільних ігор в умовах вимушеної ізоляції. Статтю присвячено соціологічному аналізу настільних ігор, в межах якого вони розглядаються як специфічна комплексна поліфункціональна соціальна практика в умовах вимушеної ізоляції (на прикладі пандемії COVID-19 та повномасштабного російського вторгнення в Україну). Актуальність дослідження зумовлена зростанням ролі настільних ігор у сучасних формах дозвілля, комунікації та соціальної взаємодії, а також недостатньою їх соціологічною концептуалізацією в українському науковому полі. Теоретико-методологічну основу роботи становлять підходи Й. Гейзинґи, Р. Кайюа, П. Йонне, П. Бурд'є та Е. Гідденса, що дозволяють розглядати гру як культурний феномен і водночас як структуровану соціальну практику. На підставі узагальнення теоретичних підходів у статті запропоновано авторську типологію настільних ігор, побудовану на співвідношенні агонального та інших ігрових принципів. Емпіричну базу становить пілотне онлайн-опитування 150 респондентів в Україні, спрямоване на виявлення особливостей залученості до настільних ігор, їхніх соціальних функцій та змін у практиках у різні періоди вимушеної ізоляції. Отримані результати свідчать про посилення ролі настільних ігор як інструменту соціалізації, підтримки комунікації та ескапізму, особливо в умовах кризових соціальних трансформацій. Зроблено висновок про те, що настільні ігри в сучасному українському суспільстві виступають динамічною соціальною практикою, яка поєднує дозвілєві, комунікативні та ідентифікаційні функції, а їхня роль суттєво зростає в умовах соціальної напруги та вимушеної ізоляції.

Ключові слова: настільні ігри, соціальна практика, вимушена ізоляція, соціологія гри, соціальні взаємодії.

INTRODUCTION

Research relevance

The focus of this paper is board games as a unique sociocultural practice that combines elements of leisure, communication, learning, and symbolic interaction. In recent decades, board games have moved beyond simple entertainment, becoming a platform for socialization, transmission of norms and values, modelling of social scenarios, and reflection of social order structures such as competition, cooperation, power, and strategic thinking. From a sociological perspective, board games are interesting because they both represent and influence players' perceptions of the world: through rules, roles, narratives, and game mechanics, they can reproduce or critically examine social hierarchies, gender roles, and racial or class distinctions. The popularity of board games across different age, professional, and cultural groups makes them a relevant object of sociological analysis focused on contemporary forms of communicative interaction, informal education, collective identity, and so on. The study of board games allows for the analysis of how norms are institutionalized, how narratives are ideologically structured, and how participants interact within structured play environments. It is also useful for understanding changes in leisure practices, informal learning, and the growing influence of gamification in everyday life.

Thus, the relevance of this topic stems from the widespread prevalence of board games in contemporary societies. At the same time, against the backdrop of their growing commercial and cultural popularity, board games remain "invisible" to sociological reflection even as demand for them increases during periods of forced isolation. The ontological dimension of the problem is that board games, despite the perception common in digital society that they are archaic, fulfil contemporary social functions; the epistemological dimension, accordingly, lies in the indeterminacy of these functions and a certain "concealment" of board games from the sociological gaze, owing to a mechanistic focus on digital and networked entertainment analogues.

Review of Recent Research and Publications

Research on board games in the Ukrainian scholarly field is concentrated primarily on their educational functions (for example, in the context of child development or speech therapy) (Zarutska & Zhylenko, 2021; Turishcheva, Dorozhko & Malykhina, 2023), while other functions are either excluded from consideration or oversimplified. It is also common in Ukrainian research to view board games as one of the oldest forms of entertainment, originating in early civilizations and carrying significant cultural content. Board games have been examined in the context of Kyivan Rus (Khamayko, 2021), yet studies of contemporary board games are virtually absent. More exceptional are studies of board games as a commercial sector (Karpi, 2022) or detailed analyses of the production process (Yeskova, 2024). Sociological studies of board games are practically absent in Ukrainian academic discourse.

Foreign research in this field offers a broader range of variation, yet similarly retains a focus on educational functions or the commercial sphere. A distinctive feature of recent foreign studies is the emergence of a medical perspective on board games – their application as a method of rehabilitation and psychological work (Gauthier et al., 2018; Ogershok & Cottrell, 2004). Sociological and cultural studies constitute a minority, yet the topic continues to develop, drawing in part on the foundational scholarly works of R. Caillois and J. Huizinga.

Research Aim

Based on the foregoing, we consider the aim of this article to be the sociological conceptualization of board games as a contemporary social practice in conditions of forced isolation, accompanied by a typology of board games and an empirical illustration of the proposed typology's applicability.

The theoretical and methodological framework of the study draws on the works of Johan Huizinga, Roger Caillois, and Paul Yonnet regarding play as a specific social activity; social practices are examined through the ideas of Anthony Giddens and Pierre Bourdieu.

1. THEORY AND METHODOLOGY

1.1. Sociological Conceptualization of Games

A foundational point of departure for the study of games as a social phenomenon was the work of Johan Huizinga, who in his classical text *Homo Ludens* (Huizinga, 1950) advanced the thesis that play is a fundamental element of culture and social life. Unlike his predecessors, Huizinga did not regard play as

entertainment or as a deviation from serious activity, but argued that it performs important social, cultural, and cognitive functions and is a generative factor of human culture – a primary source of social norms and of entirely serious forms of social interaction. The defining influence of play on the formation of art is evident; no less significant is play's role in the emergence of legal proceedings and political order.

For Huizinga, play is always an act of free choice: its basis is the desire to play, and compulsion is contrary to the nature of play (Skubina, 2024). Equally important to the nature of play is its abstraction from the real world: the play-space, which must be defined and recognized by all players, has internally determined boundaries (determined by the game itself); the play-process is likewise internally bounded in time. For Huizinga, it is play practices accustom human beings to an awareness of social conventions, allow humanity to create new meanings, establish norms of conduct, and form social relations.

Yet it is precisely this understanding of play that becomes the object of critical reflection by other scholars. Roger Caillois points to the importance of gambling and other variations of play that bring no benefit to the individual and do not help actualize their creativity. In such variations, the very purpose of play is negated, since what matters is not the process but the desire for victory and material gain. Caillois disaggregates the motivation of play, distinguishing athletes, coaches, croupiers, and others whose very presence violates one of the key features of play for Huizinga – voluntariness. What distinguishes these figures from players is the purpose of play (Caillois calls them "workers of play"): their primary concern is material gain (earnings), not the enjoyment of play, and they may play without any desire for meaningful self-realization through the process (Caillois, 2001).

Nevertheless, Caillois (2001) agrees with Huizinga on the significance of self-defined play rules and especially play conventions: the play dimension has its own laws and constraints, and one who ignores them – the spoilsport – cannot be a participant. Caillois offers the example of an adult who intrudes upon children's play by explaining that what a child holds is not a sword but a stick, thereby destroying the play dimension.

Caillois divides play practices into four main types: *agon*, *alea*, *mimicry*, and *ilinx*. The first is grounded in rivalry and competition for a result superior to that of the opponent (sports games). The second is based on chance and luck (lotteries, roulette). The third involves transformation and theatricality (role-playing games, masquerades). The fourth, finally, consists of vertigo-games aimed at altering sensation (swings, carousels, etc.). Board games most frequently correspond to the first two types; the third is closer to tabletop role-playing games, which fall outside our subject matter, while the fourth is entirely unrelated to the topic under study.

With the growing complexity of societies toward the urbanized and industrial, play loses the sacredness it possessed in archaic societies and becomes play for play's sake, acquiring an industrial-economic character. At this point, in Caillois's view, free and creative play ceases to exist (Brock, 2016). However, the crucial thesis of Caillois is the impossibility of reducing play to a single function: play can be disciplinary, liberatory, fatalistic, aggressive, or integrative depending on context. It is in this that play's reflection of the social order is embodied: play shows how society regulates freedom, organizes hierarchy, and shapes attitudes toward risk.

For his part, Paul Yonnet sees play as a "producer" of identity and the player as a social actor. Yonnet interprets play as socially oriented action (in M. Weber's sense) – as a stage on which the individual's social identity is formed, presented, and tested (in Caillois's classification, this is close to *mimicry*). This concerns not merely the enactment of certain roles (as in theatre), but the interaction of the individual with normative conceptions of gender, class, corporeality, and ethnicity (Yonnet, 1985). We would call this "self-knowledge through the image of the other," and consider this understanding most pertinent in the specific context of board games, since unlike sports games they create a multitude of situations and images that the individual can try on.

Under this logic, play is not – as Caillois wrote – a space of freedom, but a space of experimentation with identity (though this does not negate freedom). For example, in a sports game the body is displayed as an object of strength, discipline, and effort. In board games, the object of strength becomes intellectual capital and strategic thinking, whereas in sports it is the body, and in games of fashion it is cultural refinement. Play thus performs the role of a social mirror in which the individual must "recognize themselves" in a given role or function. At the same time, Yonnet (1985) sees play as an instrument of the

symbolic integration of individuals into society: through participation in the rituals of play, a person "enters" into social relations, recognizes norms, and accepts rules; play incorporates the individual into the structure of power and conceptions of the "normal." In Paul Yonnet's framework, play appears as a secularized form of ritual: play practices are the psychosocial solace of modern persons, who no longer have access to the traditional mechanisms of symbolic support.

Thus, all three scholars regarded play not merely as a form of entertainment, but as an important social phenomenon of reflecting and projecting reality through the imposition of spatial, temporal, and functional constraints. Play is a way of knowing oneself through the projection of a bounded competitive field that is equally and clearly recognized by all parties, wherein no party can violate the rules of the play-world's existence but only upholds existing orders and wins or loses within them. According to Caillois, play must be voluntary; it must be bounded through the delineation of a specific play-space, a defined time (a clearly determined beginning and end), and a distinct dimension (separateness from reality); it must have rules; and it must engage participants primarily in the process rather than in material gain. The focus of this study is limited to board games that satisfy these criteria, excluding tabletop role-playing games, which may lack a bounded field and constitute a separate large topic requiring both a different theoretical-methodological framework and different empirical methods. By the same logic, gambling must be excluded from the analysis; instances where a player effectively becomes a worker and approaches play as labour or professional competition are rare and may be considered exceptions.

1.2. Typology of Board Games

Drawing on the concepts reviewed above, we have identified five principal types of board games that differ significantly in the balance between *Agon* and *Alea*.

Cooperative games presuppose collaboration and interconnection among players and joint effort to achieve victory. This type has the lowest degree of *Agon*, but does not eliminate it, since such games often involve the distribution of responsibilities and contributions to victory, which still produces competition and rivalry even within a single team.

Classic games were invented many centuries ago and continue to hold relevance today (chess, backgammon, draughts, card games, etc.). They are heavily shaped by *Agon* and are built around it; without the competitive element, these games are impossible, and no space is left for indeterminacy. This type is "pure *Agon*" in Caillois's sense (and, to a lesser extent, Huizinga's).

Party games fall outside the classification of any of the scholars we have considered, since play involves a nearly unlimited number of parties, blurring the boundaries of the game. Moreover, such games may have loosely defined rules concerning constraints, conclusion, and even the key conditions of play. Whether these are games at all is an open question; yet there are features by which party games satisfy the criteria for games: separateness from the real world and the conventionality of game events, as well as the absence of direct impact on reality. Notably, party games often introduce the *ilinx* we otherwise deny to board games – adding conditions of alcoholic intoxication or other in-game interventions that induce a sense of vertigo. This makes party games a unique type worthy of separate study. As for *Agon*, in party games it often serves as a motivation for action and the development of events in play, but loses significance in the course of the game: determining a winner or loser is not a key or even important concern for the players.

Hidden-role games are another type not examined by the classical theorists, and one that, though to a lesser degree, also partially blurs the principles of play's existence. Hidden-role games have the greatest potential for combining athletic game practices with board games. They presuppose a strict division into two asymmetric teams with opposing objectives (reflecting the clear influence of ancient "hunting games") – to eliminate or expose the opponents. The best-known representative of this type is *Mafia*; the competitive element in these games is not merely important but defining, in a sense "classical," since competition pits two opposing sides against each other all the way to an unambiguous victory. This type of board game draws not only on *Agon* and *on Alea* but also, at its foundation, on *Mimicry*, though transformation is not central to the process of play.

Competitive (every-player-for-themselves) games. We have given this type a general name that encompasses numerous genres of board games and requires further specification. Here we include all games that: (a) do not belong to any of the preceding types; (b) have clearly defined rules and conditions, including the victory of one (and only one) player or the defeat of the others; and (c) involve two or more, but a limited maximum of, opposing parties. We see an obvious *Agon* in such games; however, unlike the

competitive element in Classic games and Hidden-role games, in Competitive games *Agon* takes a different form. It is adapted to contemporary realities and therefore lacks the "pure" confrontation in the sense of Huizinga and Caillois. Nevertheless, *Agon* remains the key element and principal driving force; without it, competitive games would be impossible. The key differences from other types lie in the fact that this "modernized" *Agon* is not directed at confrontation between specific participants but focuses on a struggle "against all." Furthermore, it does not prescribe or restrict interaction and cooperation between players; while it sometimes encourages such cooperation, it does so not in the spirit of assistance but solely for achieving personal advantage and final victory over others (including one's "allies"). It is this type becomes the logical and natural continuation of "classical" *Agon*, rendered more complex and updated.

1.3. Games as Social Practice

Regarding the concept of social practice, we draw on the approaches of Pierre Bourdieu and Anthony Giddens. In Bourdieu's framework, practices are generated by the habitus, which is itself a product of history – and it is history that practices can either reproduce or transform (Bourdieu, 1977). Yet habitus generates practices only when it interacts with a specific field that sets the coordinates of the possible. The hysteresis effect (the temporal gap between a change in field conditions and the corresponding transformation of habitus) can produce disorientation and frustration, or conversely open up space for innovative practices. Social practice in Bourdieu, then, is neither an automatic response to external stimuli nor the result of conscious planning, but rather a dynamic relationship between structured schemes of perception (sedimented in the individual through experience) and the structure of possibilities that confronts the individual in a concrete field (Bourdieu, 2003). Practice is the product of a complex, multilayered, and at times even conflictual interaction between these two levels of social reality – a product formed at the intersection of habitus, field, and capital, the latter being equally central to Bourdieu's theory. An individual's actions in any given field are always the result of the "application" of habitus to the concrete structure of that field. Bourdieu's approach, with attention to embodied schemes of action (that is, to habitus), to struggles within social fields, and to the strategic use of resources (cultural, social, symbolic) in interaction, enables us to view board games as a structurally inflected, deeply social practice that, in periods of isolation, may take on new forms, meanings, and functions (including the function of preserving social ties, emotional comfort, and the restoration of routines, or conversely of escapism and flight from reality, both of which speak to the complex social nature of play).

Within Giddens's theory of structuration, social practices are not merely repetitive patterns of behaviour but appear as forms of action realized through the interrelation of structural properties (norms, rules, resources) and everyday routines, which in their multiplicity and variability constitute "social systems." Practice is thus simultaneously both the result and the condition of the existence of social order (Giddens, 1984) – a dynamic combination of the agentive and the structural, in which every individual action (even one that appears insignificant) has the potential to reproduce or transform broader social structures. Applying this approach to the analysis of board games in conditions of social crisis or isolation allows for a sociological "grasp" not merely of individual behaviour but of deeper processes of social ordering. Equally productive in this regard is the idea of duality: the rules of the game – a "microstructure" – function both as a constraint and as a necessary resource for play (without rules there is no game at all). By participating in play, players each time reproduce, confirm, or even rethink the game itself as a social structure. Through the lens of Giddens's concept, board games may be seen as a space of micro-social modelling of structuration: individuals constantly interact within given conditions that may change, be renegotiated, or even violated – and in so doing create experience that reflects far broader social processes. Ultimately, the board game becomes not merely a form of leisure but an instance of non-deterministic structuring of social action, its embeddedness in context without unambiguous determination by it, its profound sociality in its very repetition despite an apparent initial insignificance.

Thus, the combination of Huizinga's, Caillois's, and Yonnet's approaches allows us to view play as an important element in the formation of human culture – one that simultaneously reflects and drives changes in social processes through routine action; to move away from a casual evaluative treatment of play as mere entertainment with exclusively positive effects; and to provide grounds for a classification of games suited to the tasks of sociological analysis, particularly of board games. The application of Bourdieu's and Giddens's approaches makes it possible to define play not merely as a culture-generating social phenomenon, but above all as a continuously reproduced social practice.

1.4. Research design

We conducted a pilot quantitative online survey as part of an original study of board games in conditions of forced isolation. At this stage we were interested in a general picture of board game perceptions without focusing on the personal experience of this practice (and accordingly without recourse to qualitative methodology). At the same time, we were not interested in the place of board games in public opinion generally, but in perception of the practice "from within," by those engaged in it on a (relatively) regular basis. The instrument included indicators of self-assessed changes in this perception compared to the pre-isolation (pre-pandemic) period; however, we consider respondent self-assessment insufficient for valid conclusions on this specific question. The primary aim of the empirical stage was therefore to characterize the current state of the social practice of board games in conditions of forced isolation; comparative and other dynamic analyses are considered prospective tasks.

The survey was conducted via Google Forms between May 15, 2025 and May 22, 2025. The target population comprised Ukrainian citizens aged 18 and over who are aware of board games and play them no less frequently than once every few months (screening for this criterion was applied at the outset of the survey). In total, 150 respondents participated. Since we focused on a specific sub-group, we effectively conducted the survey within a "cluster" using purposive sampling: respondents were recruited by distributing the online survey among members of open communities related to board games. By open communities we mean Telegram and Instagram communities formed around particular directions of board gaming – groups dedicated to finding company for a board game session, as well as groups administered in connection with specific events, festivals, game libraries, cafés, or anti-café (meaning that those sampled already had prior understanding of and context for board games). Since we applied only a screening filter, which cannot ensure sample representativeness, we consider our study pilot in nature and its function primarily illustrative. Nonetheless, we obtained data that provide grounds for preliminary answers to questions about which population groups favour board games, which types are most popular, and what role conditions of forced isolation have played in the dynamics of the board game sphere.

To ensure anonymity and confidentiality, we took the following steps. 1) The survey form did not collect email addresses or require signing in to a Google account. We also disabled sending a copy of the response to respondents so that the form would not ask for an email address. At the beginning of the survey, we informed respondents about anonymity and confidentiality before conducting the survey. 2) We minimized open-ended questions to avoid accidental entry of personal data, did not include fields for entering phone numbers, exact addresses, passport details, email addresses, and did not collect indirect identifiers (such as an exact date of birth). 3) We shared the link to the form in private, end-to-end encrypted chats and recommended completing the form in a private browser tab. We also did not use any tracking tools (Google Forms does not disclose the IP address to the researcher, even if it performs technical logging). 5) Only the study organizers had access to the response table; We did not generate or provide links for viewing or editing. After completing response collection, we downloaded the data to a secure file and removed technical metadata (timestamps) from the downloaded table. We removed the survey form and response table from the internet. 6) We checked the responses to the single open-ended question and found no inadvertently entered personal data.

Since the survey topic is not sensitive (it does not cover political, medical, or intimate matters), we believe these measures are sufficient to ensure anonymity and confidentiality.

2. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The gender distribution of respondents is not typical of Ukrainian society – 44 % women and 56 % men. The sample employed was not designed to ensure representativeness on this parameter; this result may therefore be explained either as a sampling artefact or as a reflection of the specific community under study, likely conditioned by its subcultural character. However, the male predominance in the sample is not of sufficient statistical significance to assert that men play board games predominantly.

2.1. Demographic characteristics

The age distribution demonstrates an unambiguous dominance of young people: 81 % of respondents are between 18 and 34 years old. This distribution is expected, though it may characterize not the community of "board gamers" as a whole but specifically the segment represented in open online groups.

However, the stereotype of board game interest being predominantly a "student" phenomenon was refuted: students account for only a third of respondents, while more than half are in full-time employment.

2.2. Frequency, partners and game functions

Half of respondents consider themselves to play board games regularly; 83 % play at least once a month, and 7 % play nearly every day. Respondents are also engaged in the board game market: 86 % have purchased board games for themselves rather than merely playing them; 62 % have purchased board games as a gift. Only 8 % of respondents have never purchased board games. This speaks not merely to a leisure practice but also to a consumer practice. Engagement with it is stable: 48% of respondents have been familiar with board games for more than 10 years, and a further 48% have known about board games for between 2 and 10 years.

We focused a number of questions on respondents' perceptions of board games in different contexts and on the social significance of games. Among all respondents, 88 % chose the option of playing board games with friends; 51 % play with family; 42 % play with a romantic partner; and 27 % play with strangers or casual acquaintances. Only 17 % selected "I play independently." This distribution confirms the intuitive assumption about the function of board games as an instrument of interpersonal communication, primarily among people who are already acquainted or close. Yet solo play should not be considered marginal, as shown by the distribution of responses to the next question about perceptions of board games. An absolute majority of respondents (83 %) chose "as a way to spend time with friends," somewhat fewer (67 %) "with people close to me," yet 60% perceive board games "as a personal hobby" (one percentage point more than those who perceive them as "entertainment in a large group"). This indirectly attests to the "individually personal" potential of board games. In an additional follow-up question about the personal significance of board games, near-universal majorities (97 % and 92 % respectively) selected entertainment and communicative functions. The educational function proved notably lower in popularity yet still in demand (54 % – "learning for children," 38 % – "learning for myself (new situations and social roles)"). There are grounds, however, to return to the "individually personal" significance of board games, since 57 % of respondents (more than in the case of educational functions) see them as an opportunity for escapism. The aesthetic function is also sufficiently popular – 42 % and 19 % (as collectibles and as decorative objects respectively).

These results indicate that the functional scope and social place of board games are by no means limited to entertainment: the range and significance of other functions is notable and, in some respects, even contradictory (the communicative function, which rivals the entertainment function in importance, is additionally complemented by the popular function of escapism).

2.3. Demand for Agon in games

A separate and important question in the study was to confirm or refute the significance of Agon – the competitive element in board games – to which we have returned repeatedly throughout this paper. To address this, it was important to understand which types of games respondents play most often. The largest share (83 %) of respondents usually plays Competitive games, pointing to the greatest demand for the "contemporary" form – since all other types have noticeably lower popularity: Cooperative games (the lowest degree of Agon) at 56 %, party games (a particular form of Agon) at 49 %, hidden-role games (athletic Agon) at 46 %, and classic games ("pure" Agon) at 43 %.

The fact that 56 % of respondents chose cooperative games does not allow us to assert an exclusive demand for Agon in board gaming and serves as a reminder of the other functions of board games beyond the competitive one.

2.4. A retrospective assessment of gaming practices at different stages of isolation

We paid particular attention to what board game practices were like under forced isolation during the pandemic and wartime. Karpil (2022) notes an increase in interest in board games during the quarantine restrictions of COVID-19, owing to a shortage of human communication under such conditions. Our data support the view that quarantine restrictions negatively affected the social function of board games. The proportion of respondents who reported having met new people through board games at least a few times varies across periods: approximately 49 % before quarantine restrictions, 37 % during COVID-19 isolation, and 67 % during the full-scale Russian invasion. Accordingly, we observe a decline in social interaction during the COVID-19 isolation period, followed by a pronounced increase during the full-scale invasion.

These events produce opposing effects in large part owing to their chronological succession: the isolation and shortage of communication under the threat of the virus were compensated by a striving for communication in the crisis conditions of the full-scale invasion. The nature of the threat also differs between the two periods of isolation, which may also affect the data: the threat to life during military operations was not directly linked to social contact, as it was during the pandemic; on the contrary, expanding social ties could save lives.

Respondents' retrospective self-assessment of their interest in the board game sphere also differs across periods. COVID restrictions had a positive effect on the level of interest, though not as pronounced as described by Karpil. The full-scale invasion, however, dramatically spurred a growth in interest, as can be seen from mean scores: prior to forced isolation – 2.85; during COVID-19 – 3.13; during the full-scale invasion – 3.92.

Respondents assessed the influence of the proposed factors on the dynamics of their interest in board games differently (see Table 1).

Table 1

Respondents' assessment of the influence of various factors on the dynamics of interest in board games (% to all respondents)

Factor	Negative / Rather negative	No effect	Positive / Rather positive
Necessity of staying at home	6	45	49
Distance from friends and loved ones	38	38	25
Change of activity (work/study)	21	57	22
Desire to socialize and communicate	4	22	74
Impossibility of active leisure (during quarantine)	6	46	48
Development of Ukrainian localizations	6	40	54
Availability of online board game services	8	48	54
Curfew	23	61	16
Financial capacity	22	42	36
Accessibility of games	11	23	66
Power outages	13	39	48
Stress from external circumstances	19	42	39
Level of interest among friends and loved ones	4	15	81

Source: made by the authors based on their own research.

The factors most frequently identified as having a positive influence were the desire to socialize and communicate (74 %), the accessibility of board games (66 %), and the level of interest among friends and loved ones (81 %). The development of Ukrainian localizations (55 %) and the availability of online board game services (54 %) also exerted a predominantly positive, if smaller, effect.

Respondents rated the overall impact of isolation conditions (quarantine restrictions combined with wartime conditions) at an average of 3.38 on a five-point scale, confirming that forced isolation did have an effect, though not so strong as to characterize it as exceptional: it is unquestionably one of the significant factors, but far from the only one.

CONCLUSIONS AND RESEARCH PROSPECTS

Our data thus demonstrate that the social practice of board games in Ukraine is not yet fully formed and continues to develop in the crisis conditions that have driven growth in public interest in board games. Where quarantine restrictions compelled respondents to reduce the number of their social ties and interactions in order to preserve their health – creating an unfulfilled demand for communication – the full-scale invasion "inverted" the scale of risk and stripped the refusal of social contact of its rationale, thereby releasing the pent-up demand and prompting people to seek out new social practices. The chronological succession of these crisis phenomena produced a unique situation in which an acute demand for new social practices arose in society, one of which became the practice of board games.

Based on the results of synthesizing and elaborating the theoretical positions of J. Huizinga, R. Caillois, and P. Yonnet, we have developed an original comprehensive definition of the board game as a particular type of play activity characterized by a clearly defined physical space and conditions grounded in agonial confrontation among all participants. Combining this definition with the ideas of Pierre Bourdieu and Anthony Giddens on social practice provided us with a sufficient foundation for the subsequent empirical analysis of board games as a specific social practice in conditions of forced isolation, which we carried out in a quantitative study of 150 Ukrainians, aged 18 and over.

The results of this analysis are primarily illustrative, yet permit the following observations.

The board game sphere did indeed grow during the period of quarantine isolation, as noted in other authors' studies. But this growth proved less significant than that observed in wartime, when the social practice of board games served as a vehicle for communication with loved ones, friends, and even strangers – communication that was in extreme demand as a foundation of mutual support and vital solidarity.

The conditions of forced isolation were compounded by other factors that drove the overall growth of the board game sphere in the 2020s; among these factors are the delayed development of the sector, the prolonged influence of a Russian market monopolist, and low public awareness of the subject.

Board games as a social practice in conditions of forced isolation in Ukraine acquired unique sociocultural characteristics specific to Ukrainian society. Quarantine isolation created a situation in which the need for communication and interaction could not be satisfied owing to the direct risk to health; the full-scale invasion exerted the opposite effect, shifting the scale of priorities and risks – when the threat to life became constant and could no longer be contained within a "safe zone" through isolation. The board game sphere became one of those ready to offer a solution for meeting the acute need for social communication.

Of course, the short-term dynamics of the board game sphere's development is far from the only direction for sociological research on this promising topic. The multi-layered nature of this social practice and the polyphony of its functions and meanings lend sociological appeal to questions such as the influence of board games on the social-group construction and internal dynamics of the status-role structure of small and medium social groups; the specifics of consumer practices in the board game sphere; the subcultural potential and place of board games in mass culture; and more. These questions constitute the research horizon of board game studies in sociology.

FUNDING

This study was carried out as part of the project "The Third Mission of Ukrainian Universities in the International Context of Integration Processes Amid Wartime and Post-War Challenges" (Project No 0126U003613 is founded by National Research Foundation of Ukraine, 2026-2028; manager – D. Boiko).

CONFLICT OF INTERESTS

The author declares no conflict of interest.

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