Gamification of Restorative Justice Processes: A Conceptual Framework and Practical Application

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Abstract

This paper examines the possibilities and limitations of applying gamification within restorative justice processes, based on the assumption that contemporary interactive models can enhance participants' understanding of conflict, the development of empathy, and reflective engagement. Restorative justice is grounded in dialogue between the offender, the victim, and the community, with the aim of fostering accountability, understanding harm, and repairing damaged relationships. However, its practical implementation is often hindered by participants' limited readiness for perspective-taking, emotional barriers, and the lack of adequate methodological tools for preparation and facilitation. In this context, the paper explores the potential of gamification as an approach that employs game mechanics, such as role-playing, interactive narratives, and decision-making simulations, to stimulate experiential learning and engagement. Through theoretical analysis, the paper identifies key phases of the restorative process, understanding harm, perspective-taking, dialogue, reparation, and reflection, and considers how gamified models might support each of them. Particular attention is given to the role of simulations in fostering empathy and preparing participants for restorative encounters, as well as to the potential of reflective mechanisms to deepen the understanding of conflict consequences. At the same time, the paper highlights significant ethical and methodological limitations, including the risk of trivializing conflict, the psychological sensitivity of participants, and institutional constraints on the implementation of such approaches. In conclusion, gamification cannot be regarded as a substitute for restorative dialogue, but rather as a complementary tool that may enhance specific phases of the process. Its value lies in expanding the space for reflection, perspective, taking, and participant preparation, thereby contributing to the development of contemporary methodological approaches in restorative justice.

Key words: restorative justice, gamification, perspective-taking, empathy, interactive simulations, dialogue, reflection

Introduction

The antinomy of good and evil, punishment and forgiveness, is one of the oldest intellectual themes in the history of humanistic thought. Every society continually attempts to impose order on this moral disorder of human behavior by developing institutions that simultaneously condemn evil and open the possibility of its transformation. Since evil is a persistent constant of human conduct (see: Kant, 2018; Arendt, 2000; Niebuhr, 1943; Ricoeur, 1986), justice can never constitute a final solution to this problem, but rather an enduring social effort to limit and render the consequences of evil intelligible. In this sense, every new method, including the gamification of restorative justice, must be evaluated not by whether it eliminates evil, but by whether it helps people recognize it more clearly and respond to it more effectively.

Retributive justice arose from the elementary need of human communities to defend themselves against those who disrupt their order. Even prior to the emergence of the state, communities had to respond to harm through force, to mark it, condemn it, and restrain its perpetrator in order to protect other members

and signal that certain forms of behavior are unacceptable. In this sense, retributive justice is deeply social, even before it became institutionalized as state law. The state later formalized, monopolized, and rationalized this response, but its roots lie in an earlier communal need to preserve itself against forces that undermine trust and security.

Restorative justice, however, proceeds from a different intuition, equally ancient, yet marginalized in modern law, that a community is threatened not only by the offense itself, but also by what remains after punishment. Punishment may interrupt the offender's actions, but it does not necessarily heal the consequences of the harm introduced into the web of human relationships. Indeed, punishment can sometimes generate new risks: even after formally "repaying their debt," the offender may remain socially excluded, morally fixed in the identity of a criminal, and exposed to prolonged stigma that exceeds the sentence itself. In such cases, society not only protects itself from the offender but also produces conditions under which harm is reproduced through stigma, resentment, self-denial, or renewed violence. It is precisely here that restorative justice emerges. Its function is not to weaken punishment or relativize responsibility, but to intervene in the residue that retributive justice leaves behind. It seeks to protect society from the possibility that the punished individual remains permanently bound to their worst act, while also protecting that individual from the excessive and prolonged effects of punishment once it ceases to serve as a measure of justice and becomes a social destiny. In this sense, restorative justice does not stand in opposition to society; rather, it serves its deeper interests by attempting to prevent punishment from generating new, long-term zones of moral and social risk. In other words, while retributive justice arises from the community's need to protect itself from the offender and reaffirm norms, restorative justice arises from the need to protect the community from what persists after punishment: unhealed harm in relationships, enduring stigma, and the risk that the punished individual remains trapped in the identity of their offense.

Restorative justice does not assume that conflict and violence will disappear from society; instead, it is grounded in the idea that the way societies respond to conflict and violence can transform their consequences. In this context, the question of gamification is not one of technological optimism, but of methodological imagination: whether interactive models can help individuals better understand the consequences of their actions and the experiences of those affected by them. Perhaps this is precisely the greatest value of restorative approaches: they do not attempt to negate the reality of evil, but to develop social procedures through which it can be acknowledged, understood, and, where possible, overcome. If gamification can contribute to this process even modestly, its significance lies not in technological innovation, but in expanding the space for human reflection and responsibility. Accordingly, the question of gamifying restorative justice should not be framed in terms of utopian enthusiasm or skeptical dismissal. It is more realistic to view it as another attempt by contemporary societies to continue the long civilizational search for a balance between justice, responsibility, and the possibility of moral transformation through new methodological instruments.

In recent decades, restorative justice has emerged as a significant alternative to traditional, retributive models of criminal justice[1]. Unlike classical punitive approaches that emphasize sanction and

[1] The contemporary concept of restorative justice has developed over recent decades as an alternative to dominant retributive models of criminal law that emphasize punishment and the institutional response of the state. In restorative approaches, the focus shifts toward repairing harm, fostering dialogue between the victim and the offender, and restoring disrupted social relationships. This approach has been systematically developed by authors such as Howard Zehr, who defines restorative

institutional state response, restorative justice focuses on dialogue among the offender, the victim, and the community, with the aim of assuming responsibility, understanding the harm caused, and repairing disrupted social relationships (Zehr, 2002). This approach is grounded in the assumption that crime represents not merely a violation of legal norms, but above all a disruption of interpersonal relationships and trust within the community. Consequently, restorative practices emphasize communication, acknowledgment of responsibility, and the active participation of all actors in the process of resolving conflict.

The development of restorative justice is closely linked to broader shifts in contemporary legal and social theory that seek to overcome the limitations of traditional punitive systems. Numerous studies indicate that restorative approaches can contribute to reducing recidivism, increasing victim satisfaction, and strengthening social cohesion in the communities where they are applied. Particularly significant are victim–offender mediation programs, restorative conferences, and various dialogical models that enable participants to articulate their experiences and identify ways to repair harm. However, despite the theoretical and normative support restorative justice has received, its practical implementation faces numerous challenges. One key issue is the insufficient willingness of participants to consider the perspective of the other party and to engage actively in dialogue. Offenders often struggle to understand the emotional and social consequences of their actions, while victims may encounter difficulties in articulating their experiences and expectations within restorative encounters. An additional problem is the lack of methodological tools that would enable participants to adequately prepare for restorative processes and to reflect on possible outcomes in a safe environment prior to direct interaction. In this context, contemporary research (Deterding et al., 2011; Olivier, 2019; Tong et al., 2020; Facchino et al., 2025) in the fields of gamification, serious games, and interactive simulations points to their potential for fostering empathy, perspective, taking, emotional engagement, and experiential learning, suggesting that they may serve as supportive tools in the preparatory phases of restorative processes. Gamification involves the application of game mechanics, such as role, playing, interactive narratives, decision simulations, and feedback systems, with the aim of encouraging engagement, reflection, and experiential learning. In education, therapy, and social intervention programs, gamification has already demonstrated effectiveness in promoting empathy, behavioral change, and the development of social skills.

Building on these insights, the question arises whether certain elements of restorative justice can be structured through gamification mechanics. In other words, can principles characteristic of games be used to improve participant preparation, facilitate perspective-taking, and encourage reflection on the consequences of conflict? The aim of this paper is to examine the possibilities of gamifying certain phases of the restorative process by identifying key elements of restorative justice that may be suitable for such an approach. Through an analysis of theoretical insights from restorative justice and game studies, the paper seeks to propose a conceptual framework that may serve as a basis for further research and experimental models of applying gamification in restorative practices.

In this paper, gamification is not considered a substitute for restorative processes, nor a method capable of independently resolving conflicts between victims and offenders. Restorative justice remains fundamentally a social and communicative process grounded in direct dialogue, acknowledgment of

justice as a process oriented toward understanding harm and taking responsibility for its repair, as well as John Braithwaite, who has highlighted the importance of reintegrative approaches in modern justice systems (see: Zehr, 2002; Braithwaite, 2002; Sherman & Strang, 2007).

responsibility, and the possibility of reparation. Gamification is understood here exclusively as a potential auxiliary methodological tool, particularly in the phases of participant preparation, perspective-taking, and reflection on the consequences of conflict. Such an approach aligns with broader trends in contemporary research on interactive media, where digital simulations and narrative scenarios are used as instruments of experiential learning and social reflection, rather than replacements for real-world social processes.

Research Methodology

This paper is based on a qualitative, theoretical, conceptual methodology and belongs to the category of interdisciplinary exploratory research. Its focus is not the empirical testing of an existing standardized model, but the conceptual examination of the possibilities of gamifying certain elements of restorative justice. Given that this topic lies at the intersection of multiple disciplines and remains insufficiently explored in contemporary literature, the methodological approach had to be adapted to this early stage of research development. For this reason, the paper does not proceed from a narrowly defined hypothesis suitable for direct empirical verification, but from a problem, oriented question: whether and to what extent certain phases of restorative justice can be conceptualized and modeled through gamification mechanics without compromising the ethical, legal, and social seriousness of the restorative process.

The methodological foundation of the paper rests primarily on the analysis of relevant scholarly and professional literature from several interconnected fields. The first group of sources includes literature on restorative justice, criminology, and the philosophy of punishment, examining key concepts, objectives, and stages of the restorative process, as well as differences between retributive and restorative responses to crime and social conflict. The second group consists of works in legal philosophy, moral philosophy, and social philosophy, providing deeper insight into issues of guilt, responsibility, evil, punishment, stigma, and the possibility of moral transformation after wrongdoing. The third group comprises contemporary research on gamification, game studies, serious games, and interactive media, particularly studies addressing procedural rhetoric, experiential learning, empathy development, perspective, taking, and the simulation of social processes. The fourth group includes research from the psychology of trauma, empathy, and social cognition, necessary for understanding the psychological foundations of restorative dialogue and assessing the potential role of gamified tools in participant preparation and reflection.

Methodologically, the paper first employs an analytical, reconstructive approach. Core concepts used across different disciplines are reconstructed within their original theoretical contexts and then brought into relation with one another. Particular attention is given to concepts such as restorative justice, gamification, perspective, taking, responsibility, harm, reparation, and reflection. This approach is necessary because identical terms often carry different meanings across disciplines. For example, the concept of “guilt” differs in criminal law, existential philosophy, and restorative practice; similarly, “gamification” cannot be mechanically transferred from digital design literature into legal or therapeutic contexts without prior conceptual clarification. Establishing terminological and theoretical precision is therefore a primary task of the paper.

Subsequently, an interpretative and comparative method is applied. In this phase, key elements of the restorative process are compared with mechanics characteristic of gamified systems. This comparison is not intended to equate the two domains, but to identify points of potential intersection. The goal is not to claim that restorative justice is a form of game or that gamification can replace judicial or

dialogical processes, but to examine whether certain gamification mechanics, such as role, playing, interactive narratives, decision simulations, branching scenarios, and reflective feedback, can function as auxiliary methodological tools in specific phases of restorative justice. In this sense, the comparative approach serves as a tool for conceptual mapping rather than proof of equivalence.

An important component of the methodology is the heuristic approach. Since no fully developed and standardized model of gamified restorative justice currently exists, it was necessary to employ theoretical imagination grounded in disciplined analogy. Experiences from serious games, interactive simulations, moral narratives, and educational digital tools are used as heuristic resources for considering potential applications in the restorative context. This approach requires caution: analogy is not evidence, and examples from education, psychological training, or social simulation cannot be uncritically transferred into judicial processes. Nevertheless, in the study of emerging and underdeveloped topics, heuristic methods represent a legitimate means of opening conceptual inquiry and identifying future research directions.

The paper also adopts a normative, critical approach. It does not limit itself to the question of whether gamification is technically feasible, but also considers whether it is ethically, legally, and socially justified. Particular attention is given to risks such as the trivialization of conflict, secondary victimization, digital inequality, manipulative design, and the reduction of serious restorative processes to simplified interaction models. This normative dimension is essential to avoid technological reductionism and to demonstrate that any potential gamification of restorative justice must be considered within clearly defined ethical boundaries. In other words, the methodology is not neutral toward its subject; it is consciously critical, asking not only what can be done, but also what should be done and under what conditions.

A further significant methodological element is the interdisciplinary synthesis of theory. The topic of gamifying restorative justice cannot be adequately addressed from the perspective of a single discipline, as it simultaneously involves questions of legal responsibility, social responses to harm, the psychology of victims and offenders, and the nature of interactive media. Accordingly, interdisciplinarity is not treated as a mere aggregation of references, but as an effort to construct a coherent conceptual framework from multiple theoretical sources. Within this framework, law provides criteria of responsibility and institutional legitimacy, sociology illuminates the function of punishment and social trust, psychology explains processes of empathy, trauma, and reflection, while game studies and gamification offer models of interactive structure and experiential learning.

Finally, it is important to emphasize the limitations of this study. As a theoretical, conceptual inquiry, its conclusions cannot be interpreted as empirically verified models of applying gamification in restorative justice. The paper does not present experimental results, interviews, focus groups, or quantitative measurements, but rather proposes a conceptual map of potential intersections between the two domains. Its primary contribution lies not in demonstrating that gamified restorative justice is already an established practice, but in showing that such a possibility has sufficient theoretical, psychological, and methodological grounding to warrant further research.

For this reason, the paper has a primarily exploratory, problem, oriented, and heuristic character. It represents an attempt to open a new field of inquiry based on existing knowledge from multiple disciplines and to propose a conceptual framework for its future theoretical and empirical development. In this sense, the methodology is not one of verifying a finished model, but of conceptually shaping a research problem.

Its value lies in enabling the question of gamifying restorative justice to be posed seriously, rigorously, and interdisciplinarily, as a legitimate topic of contemporary legal, social, and philosophical reflection.

Restorative Justice: Concept and Phases of the Process

The idea that social institutions can limit or transform the consequences of human evil has a long philosophical tradition (see: Plato, 2025; Aristotle, 1988; Augustine, 1988; Hegel, 1991; Durkheim, 1984; Arendt, 2000; Jaspers, 2000). In Christian thought, particularly in the work of Saint Augustine, evil is interpreted as a privation of the good (*privatio boni*), that is, as a disturbance of relationships that can be redirected toward a moral order. In modern philosophy, Immanuel Kant speaks of "radical evil" in human nature, while simultaneously emphasizing the importance of moral and legal institutions that enable the disciplining and limitation of such tendencies within social life. In contemporary political theory, Hannah Arendt warns of the phenomenon of the "banality of evil," pointing out that serious moral transgressions often emerge within everyday social practices and bureaucratic structures. Viewed within this broader context, restorative justice, as well as attempts at its methodological innovation through gamification, can be understood as a contemporary institutional response to the enduring question of how societies can limit the consequences of human evil and create space for responsibility and behavioral change.

Restorative justice represents an approach to conflict resolution based on the premise that crime is not merely a violation of a legal norm, but before anything else a disruption of relationships between individuals and the community. Unlike traditional punitive models that focus on establishing guilt and imposing sanctions, restorative justice seeks to involve all relevant actors in the process of understanding the harm caused and identifying ways to repair disrupted relationships. In this sense, the central aims of restorative justice are the assumption of responsibility, the articulation of the victim's experience, dialogue among participants, and, where possible, the restoration of trust within the community.

The theoretical framework of restorative justice has been developed through the work of numerous authors (Durkheim, 1984; Garland, 2001)[2] who pointed to the need to shift the focus of justice systems from punishment to the repair of harm. In this context, particular emphasis is placed on the idea that justice should not be understood exclusively as an institutional process managed by the state, but rather as a social process involving those directly affected by the conflict. For this reason, restorative practices often include various forms of victim–offender mediation, restorative conferences, or dialogue circles in which members of the community also participate. Although restorative programs vary depending on institutional and cultural contexts, most models can be described through several core phases that structure the restorative process.

The first phase concerns understanding the harm caused by the offense. At this stage, the victim is given the opportunity to express their experience and explain how the event has affected their life. At the same time, the offender is confronted with the consequences of their actions and is given the

[2] The development of restorative justice can also be viewed within the broader framework of sociological theories of punishment that emphasize the social function of judicial institutions. Émile Durkheim already argued that punishment in modern societies plays a symbolic role in reaffirming collective moral norms and social solidarity. Contemporary sociological analyses, such as the work of David Garland, show that in late modernity a plurality of approaches to crime has emerged, in which, alongside retributive models, restorative practices increasingly appear, oriented toward repairing harm and social reintegration of offenders. In this context, restorative justice can be understood as part of a broader transformation of contemporary systems of crime control, in which, alongside sanctioning, alternative models of social response to conflict are also being developed.

opportunity to consider the broader social and emotional implications of what they have done. This process of understanding constitutes the foundation for the development of empathy and responsibility.

The second phase of the restorative process involves perspective-taking. For the offender, this means attempting to understand the victim's experience, while for the victim it may involve considering the circumstances that led to the offense. This phase does not imply a relativization of responsibility, but rather the creation of space for a more complex understanding of the conflict. In practice, however, this stage often proves challenging, as participants frequently struggle to move beyond their own perspective and to grasp the experience of the other party.

The third phase relates to dialogue between participants. Restorative dialogue typically takes place with the assistance of a facilitator and represents a space in which participants exchange experiences, ask questions, and attempt to define a mutually acceptable resolution. The aim of this dialogue is not merely the exchange of information, but the creation of conditions for transforming relationships between participants.

The final phase of the restorative process concerns reparation and reflection. Reparation may take various forms, ranging from symbolic apology and agreements on compensation to joint activities that contribute to rebuilding trust. Reflection, on the other hand, involves critically examining the process itself and considering the possibilities for long, term changes in behavior and relationships. Psychological research (see: Herman, 1992; Batson, 2011; Staub, 2006) indicates that restorative approaches can have a significant impact on victims' experiences and on offenders' processes of assuming responsibility. For many victims of crime, the opportunity to directly articulate their experience and to hear acknowledgment of responsibility from the offender represents an important step in recovery from trauma. At the same time, confronting offenders with the concrete consequences of their actions can foster the development of empathy and reflection on their own behavior. These dimensions of restorative justice have been extensively analyzed in psychological studies dealing with trauma, empathy, and processes of reconciliation in social conflicts.

It is precisely this structure of the restorative process, understanding harm, perspective-taking, dialogue, and reparation, that indicates potential points at which different methodological tools could be introduced to support participants. Contemporary research increasingly focuses on methods that encourage experiential learning and reflection through the simulation of social situations. In this context, the concept of gamification opens the possibility of structuring certain elements of restorative justice through interactive scenarios that allow participants to explore different perspectives and the consequences of their decisions within a safe environment. Such an approach would not replace restorative dialogue, but could serve as an additional tool to help participants better prepare for the process itself.

Gamification: Theoretical Framework

In contemporary research on digital media (see more: Bjelajac & Bajac, 2022; Bjelajac & Filipović, 2020; Bjelajac et al., 2022), gamification is defined as the application of elements characteristic of games in contexts that are not games in themselves. In the broadest sense, gamification involves the use of structures such as role-playing, narrative scenarios, decision-making simulations, and feedback systems in order to foster engagement, motivation, and reflection among participants within a given process. Although this concept was initially developed in the fields of education, marketing, and digital platforms,

in recent years there has been increasing interest in its application within social and institutional practices that require active participation and experiential learning. The particular relevance of gamification in this context stems from the fact that games, unlike traditional forms of communication, enable participants to explore different situations through simulation and decision-making. Rather than addressing moral or social dilemmas solely at a theoretical level, gamification allows them to be "experienced" through interactive scenarios. Such experiential learning can have a significant impact on the development of empathy, the understanding of consequences, and the ability to adopt the perspectives of others.

In this sense, gamification can be understood as a potential methodological framework that supports certain phases of the restorative process. Although different authors employ varying terminologies, the literature on restorative justice broadly agrees that these processes consist of several sequential stages that enable the understanding of harm, the assumption of responsibility, and the attempt to restore disrupted relationships (see: Zehr, 2002; Umbreit et al., 2006; Johnstone, 2011; Marshall, 1999). For the purposes of this paper, restorative justice is understood as unfolding through four interconnected phases: understanding the harm, adopting the perspective of the other, engaging in dialogue, and, finally, reparation and reflection. Each of these phases entails specific forms of cognitive and emotional engagement that are not always successfully achieved in practice.

In the phase of understanding harm, one of the key challenges lies in the offender's ability to grasp the consequences of their actions beyond their own perspective. Gamified approaches may, in this context, employ narrative scenarios and simulations of events in order to enable participants to explore different dimensions of the conflict and its consequences. Interactive narratives allow participants to examine, through structured situations, how particular decisions affect other actors involved in the process.

The second phase, which involves perspective-taking, is particularly suitable for the application of role-playing mechanics. Role-play scenarios allow participants to temporarily assume the position of another actor in the conflict and, through simulation, to understand their motivations, emotions, and constraints. Such an approach can help overcome rigid interpretations of conflict and open space for a more complex understanding of the relationship between victim and offender.

In the phase of dialogue, gamification may function as a preparatory and facilitative tool. Simulations of restorative conversations or structured decision-making scenarios can help participants explore different modes of communication and potential outcomes in a safe environment. In this way, the emotional pressure that often accompanies direct encounters between conflicting parties may be reduced.

Finally, in the phase of reparation and reflection, gamified systems may incorporate various forms of feedback that allow participants to reflect on the consequences of their decisions and consider alternative outcomes. These reflective mechanisms do not function as systems of reward or punishment, but rather as tools for analyzing the process and understanding its implications.

In this sense, gamification does not appear as a substitute for restorative processes, but as a potential instrument that may support certain phases of those processes. Its primary value lies in its capacity to foster experiential learning and reflection through simulation and interactivity, thereby opening space for new methodological approaches in the development of restorative practices.

Gamification of Elements of Restorative Justice

If restorative justice is understood not merely as a normative model or institutional technique, but as a carefully structured social process in which the conditions are created for understanding harm, assuming responsibility, and restoring disrupted relationships, then the question of its possible gamification ceases to appear eccentric or technologically fashionable. It becomes a theoretically legitimate inquiry into whether certain components of a complex communicative and affective process can be methodologically strengthened through mechanics that have already demonstrated their capacity to foster engagement, imagination, perspective, taking, and reflection. In other words, the essential question is not whether restorative justice should "become a game", which it clearly must not, but whether certain elements of the restorative process can be structured through interactive and simulation, based patterns characteristic of games and gamified systems, without compromising the seriousness of the process itself.

This distinction is crucial. Restorative justice is grounded in real human harm, real damage, often profound emotional consequences, and social relationships that are neither abstract nor temporary. For this reason, any attempt at gamification must begin from a clear methodological and ethical premise: it must not gamify pain, trauma, or the criminal act itself. Rather, it may involve the gamification of specific procedural elements that can help participants better understand the situation, prepare for dialogue, consider multiple perspectives, and reflect on the consequences of their decisions. Only under such conditions can gamification be understood as a complementary tool within restorative justice, rather than as its trivialization.

The first point at which such reflection becomes possible is the phase of understanding harm. In restorative justice theory, it is often assumed that one of the fundamental preconditions for any further progress is that the offender at least partially understands the harm they have caused, while the victim is given the opportunity to articulate not only the factual but also the emotional and social dimensions of the injury. In practice, however, this is often where the process encounters obstacles. The offender may formally acknowledge the act without truly understanding its impact on another person's life. They may recognize what they have done, yet fail to imagine how that act alters the other person's sense of security, trust, social standing, or personal dignity. At the same time, the victim may feel that neither institutional language nor standard forms of communication adequately convey the full weight of their experience. It is precisely here that gamified models can play an important role, not by replacing the victim's testimony, but by enabling structured scenarios in which the consequences of a given action become visible, differentiated, and experientially accessible.

Interactive scenarios, narrative simulations, and decision-making systems can help translate what is often left at the level of verbal assertion into a more visible structure of consequences. When participants not only hear but also "trace" how a particular action generates chains of psychological, familial, social, and institutional reactions, they enter a different mode of understanding. This understanding may not be emotionally complete, nor does it automatically lead to remorse, but it alters the cognitive framework in which one's own actions are no longer perceived as isolated events, but as causes of complex relational disruption. In this sense, the gamification of the first phase would not involve awarding points for "correct understanding," but rather designing a process of experiential confrontation with consequences.

The second phase, perspective-taking, is even more conducive to gamification. In classical restorative practices, participants are expected to attempt to understand how the same event appears from different perspectives, that of the victim, the offender, the family, and the broader community. This capacity to shift from one's own perspective to that of another represents one of the most cognitively and emotionally complex dimensions of human sociality (see: Byom, 2013; Healey & Grossman, 2018; Samuel et al., 2022). It does not arise spontaneously, nor can it be simply prescribed. In situations of conflict, individuals are often most strongly attached to their own version of events, as it provides them with emotional and identity stability. For this reason, more than an appeal to empathy is required; what is needed is a method that allows participants to temporarily enter the logic of another position. Here, role-playing mechanics and perspective-shifting simulations demonstrate particular value. Role-play, in this context, is not performance for entertainment, but a controlled assumption of another position aimed at understanding motivations, constraints, fears, and consequences. When carefully designed, such procedures do not relativize responsibility or impose artificial reconciliation, but instead create conditions under which deeper understanding becomes possible.

The third phase, dialogue, represents the very core of restorative justice and is therefore both the most important and the most sensitive. It is here that not only two versions of events meet, but also two emotional economies, pain and defense, guilt and fear, the desire for recognition and the need for self-preservation. While in theory the process appears clear, in practice it is often burdened by tensions that limit its depth and spontaneity. Some participants struggle to speak, others to listen, some engage only formally, while others withdraw when emotional intensity becomes overwhelming. For this reason, preparation for dialogue is often more important than the dialogue itself.

Gamification in this phase would not replace the encounter, but rather model it in advance. Simulations of restorative conversations, branching communication scenarios, anticipation of the consequences of particular statements, and structured modules for practicing active listening can function as preparatory tools. They allow participants to explore different communicative strategies in a controlled environment, reducing uncertainty and emotional pressure before the actual encounter.

The fourth phase, reparation and reflection, also offers space for carefully considered gamification. Reparation is often understood as the act through which the offender demonstrates the assumption of responsibility, through apology, compensation, concrete actions, or symbolic gestures aimed at restoring trust. However, reparation is not merely an act, but a learning process. It requires participants to understand why certain gestures are meaningful, to whom they are addressed, and what their limitations are. Gamification can contribute through reflective feedback systems that do not evaluate moral worth, but instead demonstrate how different forms of reparation produce different social and emotional effects.

Reflection is perhaps the most underestimated element of the entire restorative process. Without reflection, reparation remains an external gesture; dialogue becomes a temporary event without lasting effect; and neither victim nor offender gains the opportunity to transform the experience into a basis for future behavior. Gamified approaches can offer tools for post-process analysis, such as decision mapping, reconstruction of key moments in the conflict, comparison of alternative outcomes, and reflection on how different choices might have led to different results. Such analysis is not merely a technical supplement; it is the point at which restorative justice connects with learning, and learning with behavioral transformation.

This opens a broader theoretical question. Restorative justice, the psychology of moral development, and the sociology of conflict share a common assumption: that human behavior is not a fixed entity, but a process shaped by experience, interaction, and interpretation. Gamification is particularly relevant because it allows this processual nature to be modeled. It introduces sequences, decisions, consequences, feedback loops, and alternative trajectories, elements that are especially important in contexts where participants tend to perceive their position as the only possible one. Through gamification, participants become aware that social situations are structured, that choices have consequences, and that alternative paths are not merely abstract possibilities, but conceivable and analyzable options.

At the same time, clear limits must be established. Gamification of restorative justice must not lead to trivialization, aestheticization of conflict, or technological determinism. Not every process is suitable for gamification, nor is every participant prepared for such an approach. It is particularly important to avoid any model that would transform the suffering of victims into a narrative resource for engagement. Equally unacceptable would be reducing complex moral and legal relationships to simplified systems of tasks and rewards. For this reason, it is essential to distinguish between superficial gamification and serious, methodologically grounded applications of interactive structures aimed at preparation, perspective-taking, communication training, and reflection.

Ultimately, the central issue is not technology, but the architecture of the process. The question is not whether digital tools are modern or attractive, but whether structured forms of interaction can strengthen those aspects of restorative justice that are most fragile in practice: understanding harm, developing empathy, enabling dialogue, and sustaining reflection. It is precisely here that the interests of multiple disciplines converge. Legal scholars see the potential for improved procedural design; psychologists recognize tools for perspective, taking, emotional regulation, and reflection; sociologists identify ways of modeling conflict as a relational and socially conditioned process. For this reason, the gamification of restorative justice is not a marginal topic, but one that opens space for new methodological imagination within an already established, yet still insufficiently explored field.

Accordingly, the central task of future research is not to determine in advance whether gamification “works” or “does not work,” but to specify which elements of the restorative process, in which types of cases, under which ethical and institutional conditions, and for which participant profiles, can be meaningfully supported by gamified instruments. Only then will it be possible to distinguish substantive conceptual contribution from superficial technological enthusiasm, and it is precisely this distinction that will determine whether gamification remains a suggestive metaphor or becomes a genuine contribution to the theory and practice of restorative justice. (Table 1)

Based on the preceding analysis, it is possible to identify several points within the restorative process at which gamification approaches could have a methodological function. The preceding analytical matrix illustrates the relationship between key elements of restorative justice, typical problems in their practical implementation, and possible gamification mechanics that could contribute to improving the process.

Limitations and Ethical Dilemmas of Gamifying Restorative Justice

Although the idea of gamifying certain elements of restorative justice opens up interesting methodological possibilities, any serious consideration of this topic must begin with an acknowledgment

Table 1. Analytical Matrix of Possible Gamification Points in a Restorative Process

Element of the restorative process	Typical problems in practice	Possible gamification mechanisms	Expected effects
Understanding harm	Offenders often minimize the consequences of their actions or view them exclusively from their own perspective; victims struggle to communicate the complexity of their experience	Interactive narratives, event simulations, branching decision scenarios showing social and emotional consequences of the conflict	Increased cognitive understanding of consequences of the act; clearer insight into chains of consequences in the lives of the victim and the community
Taking the perspective of the other side	Participants remain confined within their own interpretations of events; empathy is difficult to develop through classical dialogue	Role, play scenarios, perspective switching, simulation of situations from the viewpoint of the other party	Development of perspective-taking; reduction of rigid interpretations of conflict; increased empathic insight
Preparation for dialogue	Fear, mistrust, and emotional tension hinder open communication during the restorative encounter	Simulations of restorative conversations, interactive communication scenarios, branching dialogues with different outcomes	Greater readiness for dialogue; reduced participant anxiety; better communicative preparation
Dialogue between participants	Participants often struggle to articulate experiences or to listen to the other side without defensive reactions	Facilitated dialogue structures, simulations of active listening, modules for practicing communication strategies	Development of communication skills; greater stability of restorative dialogue
Repair (reparation of harm)	Repair is sometimes reduced to a formal gesture without deeper understanding of its meaning	Simulation of different forms of reparation; scenarios showing consequences of different reparative decisions	Better understanding of the symbolic and social meaning of reparation; greater authenticity of reparative actions
Post, process reflection	Participants often lack a structured way to reflect on what they learned during the restorative encounter	Reflective feedback systems, reconstruction of decisions and alternative outcomes, visualization of the conflict process	Deeper reflection on the process; potential for long-term learning and behavioral change

(Authors' research, 2026)

of its limitations and potential ethical challenges. Restorative justice deals with real conflicts, real harm, and often profound emotional trauma. For this reason, any methodological innovation that introduces elements characteristic of games must be carefully designed and critically examined. Otherwise, there is a risk that the seriousness of the conflict may be inadvertently relativized, or that a process intended to

foster understanding and reparation may be transformed into a technical or experimental procedure whose consequences are insufficiently considered, and, importantly, not fully transparent and accepted by all participants from the outset.

One of the most frequently emphasized dilemmas concerns the risk of trivializing conflict. In contemporary culture, games are often associated with entertainment, competition, and reward systems, which can create the impression that gamification necessarily involves elements that are inappropriate for serious social processes. In the context of restorative justice, such a perception can be particularly problematic, as any simplification or aestheticization of conflict may be experienced as a form of disrespect toward the victim's experience. It is therefore essential to clearly distinguish between superficial gamification, based on points, rewards, and competitive structures, and a methodologically grounded application of interactive scenarios that serve exclusively reflective and educational purposes. In other words, if gamification is to be used in a restorative context, it must not be oriented toward entertainment, but toward understanding and perspective-taking.

A second important limitation relates to the psychological dimension of conflict. Restorative processes often involve participants in emotionally sensitive situations, particularly in cases of violence, family conflict, or long-standing interpersonal disputes. In such contexts, any simulation of conflict must be carefully designed to avoid secondary traumatization. If, for example, scenarios that simulate a particular event are perceived as overly realistic or intrusive, they may produce effects contrary to those intended, provoking additional stress or withdrawal from the process rather than reflection and understanding. For this reason, it is essential that gamified tools, if used in restorative practices, be developed in collaboration with experts in psychology and psychotherapy.

A third limitation concerns the institutional context in which restorative justice is implemented. Restorative programs often operate within judicial systems or local communities that vary significantly in their institutional capacities. The introduction of gamified methods requires certain resources, technical infrastructure, and trained facilitators who understand both restorative processes and the logic of interactive tools. Otherwise, there is a risk that gamification will remain a purely theoretical idea without practical applicability. This problem is particularly pronounced in societies where restorative justice has not yet been fully institutionalized.

Additionally, we should consider the question of digital inequality[3]. Gamification in many cases relies on digital platforms and interactive technologies, which can create additional barriers for participants who lack experience with such tools or do not have equal access to them. In restorative processes, where the equal participation of all actors is of crucial importance, such asymmetries may generate new forms of inequality. For this reason, any application of gamified methods must take into account the social and technological context of the participants.

Another important issue concerns the boundaries between simulation and reality. Interactive scenarios can help participants explore different perspectives within a conflict, but they can never fully

[3] The concept of digital inequality refers to differences among social groups in access to digital technologies, digital skills, and the ability to use technology to achieve social and economic benefits. Contemporary research indicates that digital inequality does not only involve disparities in access to the internet or devices, but also differences in users' capacity to effectively use digital systems. These differences can have a significant impact on the implementation of digital or gamified models in various social institutions, including judicial processes. (See: van Dijk, 2020; Hargittai, 2002)

reproduce the complexity of real social relationships. There is a risk that simplified models of conflict may create an illusion of understanding, while simultaneously neglecting broader structural factors that have contributed to a given event. Sociological analyses of conflict often emphasize that individual actions cannot be fully separated from the social conditions in which they arise. For this reason, gamification must remain aware of its own limitations as a model, one that can illuminate certain aspects of conflict, but cannot exhaust its full complexity.

Finally, particular attention must also be given to the question of ethical responsibility in the design of gamified systems[4]. If interactive tools are to be developed for the purposes of restorative processes, they must be grounded in clear ethical principles that protect the dignity of participants and prevent any form of manipulation of their experiences. In this sense, the design of such systems cannot be left solely to technological experts or game designers, but must involve legal scholars, psychologists, sociologists, and practitioners of restorative justice.

These dilemmas do not imply that gamification has no place in the development of restorative methods. On the contrary, their careful consideration enables this idea to evolve in a responsible and methodologically grounded manner. Gamification can offer new tools for perspective, taking and understanding conflict, but only on the condition that it remains clearly subordinate to the core principles of restorative justice – particularly respect for participants' dignity, the authenticity of dialogue, and the pursuit of genuine reparation of social relationships. In this sense, the gamification of restorative justice should not be understood as a technological solution that automatically improves existing practices, but rather as a field of inquiry that requires careful theoretical and empirical examination. Only through such an approach will it be possible to determine under which conditions, and in what ways, interactive models can genuinely contribute to processes of understanding, dialogue, and reconciliation.

Gamification of Restorative Justice between Moral Anthropology and Social Reality

If evil, as previously noted, represents a persistent possibility of human behavior[5], a major anthropological and sociological dilemma arises: can the gamification of restorative justice realistically contribute to its reduction, or is this merely an optimistic assumption lacking deeper reach and substantive grounding? Any discussion of restorative justice, and especially of the possibilities of its methodological innovation through gamification, inevitably confronts an old and persistent question that transcends legal institutions and technological tools, the question of the relationship between good and evil in human relations. Criminal acts, violence, or any form of serious conflict are always part of a much broader anthropological narrative concerning the human capacity to inflict harm upon others, but also the capacity to recognize that harm, to understand it, and to attempt to repair it. In this sense, every theory of justice,

[4] Contemporary debates on the ethics of digital technologies emphasize that the design of interactive systems is not a neutral process, and that rules, choice architectures, and ways of presenting information can significantly influence users' behavior and experiences. For this reason, the literature increasingly highlights the need for ethically responsible design of digital systems, which must take into account user dignity, procedural transparency, and protection against manipulative mechanisms. These issues are particularly important in contexts involving sensitive social processes such as education, therapy, or restorative justice. (See: Floridi, 2013; Sicart, 2009; Salen & Zimmerman, 2004).

[5] According to Saint Augustine, "a world in which evil exists is better than a world in which moral evil would be impossible. A perfect world requires the existence of free beings, and some of those free beings choose evil through their free will. Yet a world with free beings and evil is still better than a world without freedom and without evil."

whether retributive or restorative, implicitly contains a certain conception of human nature and of the limits of moral transformation.

Skeptics of restorative justice often begin precisely from this point. Their argument is relatively simple: the evil that people inflict upon one another cannot be overcome through dialogue, and even less through methodological experiments involving simulations or interactive scenarios. From this standpoint, the only realistic response to serious social harm is a clear and decisive sanction that reaffirms the normative order of the community. From such a perspective, any proposal for additional methods of understanding conflict, including gamification, may be perceived as naïve or as an attempt to dilute the moral seriousness of wrongdoing through procedural innovation.

However, restorative justice has never rested on the assumption that dialogue alone can eliminate evil from human relations. Its foundational premise is much more modest, yet sociologically more realistic: conflict is an inevitable part of social life, but the ways in which societies respond to it may lead to different consequences. Retributive models of justice focus on sanction and the reaffirmation of norms, whereas restorative approaches seek to develop processes, alongside or instead of sanction, in which participants in a conflict can understand harm, assume responsibility, and attempt to restore disrupted relationships. In this context, the question of gamification in restorative justice should not be understood as an attempt to solve the moral problem of evil through technological means. Gamification is neither a moral doctrine nor a promise of social harmony. Its potential value lies in a much narrower but nevertheless significant domain: the creation of interactive frameworks that can help individuals better understand the consequences of their actions and the perspectives of other actors in conflict. In other words, gamification does not aim to transform human nature, but it may contribute to changing the ways in which people interpret and reflect upon their own actions.

In this sense, gamification of restorative justice can be understood as part of a broader tradition of social institutions that seek to shape moral behavior through experience rather than through norms alone. From educational systems to legal procedures, societies continuously develop different mechanisms to familiarize individuals with social rules and the consequences of their violation. Interactive models, including conflict simulations and perspective, taking role, play, can be seen as a contemporary continuation of this tradition. At the same time, a degree of realism must be maintained. It is unlikely that gamification alone will reduce crime or transform deeply entrenched patterns of violence. The social causes of conflict, such as economic inequality, cultural tensions, and institutional weaknesses, cannot be resolved through methodological innovation. However, within concrete restorative processes in which individuals confront the consequences of their actions, tools that foster perspective, taking and reflection may have tangible significance. For this reason, the question of gamification in restorative justice should not be framed in terms of utopia or skeptical rejection. It is more productive to view gamification as an experimental method that may contribute to the development of new forms of restorative pedagogy. If interactive scenarios can indeed help participants in conflict better understand the complexity of the situations in which they are involved, they may become one of the tools that support processes of responsibility, dialogue, and reconciliation.

Finally, it is important to emphasize that restorative justice, with or without gamification, does not seek to eliminate conflict from society. Conflict is a permanent fact of social life. What can change, however, is the way in which societies learn to deal with such conflicts. If gamification can contribute to enabling

individuals to more clearly perceive the consequences of their actions and the reality of others' experiences, then it does not resolve the problem of evil in human relations, but it may help us confront it in a more reflective and responsible manner.

Critical objections to the gamification of restorative justice

Every discussion of the possibilities of gamifying restorative justice must inevitably take into account the strong objections that can be raised against such an approach. A skeptical legal theorist or criminologist might, for instance, present several serious arguments against the idea of supplementing processes that deal with real human suffering with mechanisms characteristic of games.

The first objection may concern the risk of trivializing conflict. A critic might argue that any application of gamification in the context of restorative justice necessarily carries the risk of diminishing the seriousness of the offense or aestheticizing it through interactive scenarios. If games in contemporary culture are primarily associated with entertainment and competition, then how can a method that uses game elements be appropriate for a process dealing with real violence, trauma, and social injustice?

The second objection could be of a sociological nature. From this standpoint, the problem of crime cannot be understood exclusively at the level of individual decisions and interpersonal conflicts. Criminal acts are often linked to broader social factors such as economic inequality, marginalization, or institutional weaknesses. In such a context, a critic might argue that gamification risks reducing complex social causes of conflict to individual moral dilemmas resolved through the simulation of choices.

The third objection could be normative in nature. According to this argument, the fundamental function of the legal system is the reaffirmation of social norms through sanction and the public acknowledgment of responsibility. If too much attention is given to psychological understanding of offenders or to experimental methods such as gamification, there is a risk of weakening the clear message about the unacceptability of certain behaviors. In other words, restorative processes, especially when supplemented with innovative methods, could be interpreted as a form of unjustified leniency toward those who have violated social norms.

These objections deserve serious consideration and cannot simply be dismissed. However, they often rest on the assumption that gamification seeks to replace existing institutions of justice or to relativize the seriousness of conflict. Such an assumption does not correspond to the actual scope of this concept. As shown in the previous analysis, gamification of restorative justice is not an attempt to "turn a criminal act into a game," nor to absolve offenders of responsibility through interactive experiments. On the contrary, its potential lies in a much more modest but methodologically significant domain. Gamification can serve as a tool for participant preparation, for the development of perspective-taking, and for reflection on the consequences of conflict. It does not replace sanction or dialogue between participants but may help make these processes more understandable and reflective. Understood in this way, gamification does not diminish the seriousness of restorative justice, but may contribute to its greater effectiveness. In this sense, skeptical objections should not be seen as a reason to reject the idea of gamification, but as an incentive for its careful, critical development within clearly defined ethical and institutional boundaries. Such an approach allows gamification to be viewed not as a substitute for existing models of justice, but as one of the possible instruments that can contribute to their further development.

The Paradox of Restorative Justice

One of the most interesting sociological problems of restorative justice can be described as a kind of paradox of contemporary societies. This "paradox of restorative justice" links the sociology of punishment, the psychology of victims, and the political legitimacy of justice, and is based on the assumption that societies often trust punishment more than reconciliation, even when empirical evidence shows that restorative approaches can have better long, term effects. Empirical research in different legal systems has shown that restorative programs often lead to greater victim satisfaction, a stronger sense of offender responsibility, and in some cases a reduction in recidivism. Despite this, restorative approaches frequently encounter skepticism from the public and political actors, who often perceive them as too lenient or insufficiently decisive toward offenders. This tension points to a deeper sociological fact: punishment in modern societies has not only a legal but also a symbolic function. It represents a public act of reaffirming social norms and confirming that certain behavior is unacceptable. When the state punishes an offender, it responds not only to a specific criminal act but simultaneously sends a message to the entire community about the boundaries of permissible behavior. Precisely because of this symbolic dimension, societies often perceive restorative models as potentially weakening the moral clarity of the legal system.

The paradox of restorative justice therefore arises from a conflict between two legitimate needs. On the one hand, there is the societal need to clearly condemn wrongdoing and reaffirm normative order. On the other hand, there is the need to resolve conflicts in a way that genuinely contributes to understanding harm, responsibility, and the restoration of relationships between people. While retributive models of justice strongly satisfy the first need, restorative approaches often provide better tools for achieving the second. It is precisely within this tension that the potential of gamification of restorative processes can be considered. If social skepticism toward restorative justice partly stems from a lack of understanding of its aims and functioning, then interactive models that allow citizens to explore different perspectives through simulated conflict may have an important educational function. In this sense, gamification would not serve only participants in restorative processes but could also contribute to a broader societal understanding of restorative justice logic. In other words, gamification may help bridge the gap between two intuitive conceptions of justice that often coexist in public discourse: justice as punishment and justice as restoration of relationships. Through simulation of conflict and its consequences, interactive models can show that these two dimensions are not necessarily opposed. Sanction may reaffirm norms, while understanding harm and dialogue may contribute to their long, term social effectiveness.

The paradox of restorative justice should therefore not be understood as evidence of its weakness, but as an indicator of the complexity of social expectations attached to justice. Contemporary societies simultaneously expect moral condemnation of wrongdoing and the possibility of social reintegration of offenders. For this reason, restorative justice, especially when supplemented by new methodological approaches such as gamification, can be understood as an attempt to reconcile these two demands within a broader concept of social responsibility.

Restorative Justice and the Question of Evil After Punishment

The subject of justice, and in principle also of restorative justice, is always a human being who has committed a *magnum crimen*, thereby inflicting severe and conscious harm and suffering upon a

victim. Society, by applying justice, has already punished this individual, and he or she is serving that punishment. In this sense, retributive justice has completed its task. The question then arises: what does restorative justice do, given that it must not interfere with the justice already enacted by society? What is, in this case, the subject or object of its action, the already punished person, or the evil within the person that, independently of legal sanction, may remain intact, sometimes until the end of life? This is why the present inquiry must consider the relationship, not toward the punished individual, but toward the evil within the already punished individual, as addressed by restorative justice and, in particular, by the gamification of restorative justice. These are ontological, and even metaphysical questions, yet one may attempt to describe this dimension of the present epoch in a Heideggerian sense.

At the moment when a court issues a verdict and the sentence begins to be served, retributive justice has, in a formal sense, completed its work: society has reaffirmed the norm, marked the act as unacceptable, and imposed a sanction. In this sense, justice has "spoken." However, punishment does not resolve a deeper question: what happens to the evil that the offender has introduced into the world of human relations? This question opens the space for restorative justice. It does not negate punishment, nor does it challenge the authority of the legal order. Its focus lies elsewhere, on the relationship between offender, victim, and the disrupted world of relations created by the offense. In this sense, restorative justice operates not primarily at the level of sanction, but at the level of understanding and responsibility. It seeks to render visible what legal procedure often cannot fully capture: the concrete experience of harm, broken relationships, and the moral disruption produced by an act of violence.

If viewed within a Heideggerian horizon, one might say that the evil committed by the offender appears as a disturbance in the way a human being exists among others. A human being is a being that is always already existing in a world with others (*Mitsein*)[6]. When a person commits evil, they do not merely violate a norm but disrupt their very mode of being, with, others. Punishment responds to the violation of normativity, yet it does not necessarily restore this disrupted relation of being, with, others. In this sense, restorative justice can be understood as an attempt to open a space in which the offender may confront the real consequences of their act and of the evil they have committed. Not in order for punishment to be annulled, but so that the committed evil may become intelligible as part of a concrete human situation. This confrontation does not erase evil, but it may change how the offender understands their own actions and their impact on others. Within this context arises the question of the gamification of restorative processes. At first glance, it may appear paradoxical to connect serious moral conflicts with interactive models characteristic of games. However, if gamification is understood not as the transformation of conflict into a game, but as a method of simulating perspectives and the consequences of action, it may open an additional space for reflection. Interactive scenarios enable participants to perceive different positions within a conflict and, through the experience of decisions and their consequences, to understand the complexity of the relations that have been disrupted.

Viewed within the broader horizon of the contemporary epoch, this indicates an interesting shift in the ways societies attempt to confront evil. Traditional institutions of justice focus on norm and sanction, while contemporary approaches increasingly seek to incorporate dimensions of understanding and

[6] The concept of *Mitsein* is developed by Heidegger in *Sein und Zeit*, particularly in §26 ("Das Mitdasein der Anderen und das alltägliche Mitsein"), where he argues that the being-in-the-world of human existence is, in its essence, always already a being-with-others: "Das In-der-Welt-sein des Daseins ist wesenhaft Mitsein." (see: Heidegger, 1977)

reflection. In this process, digital and interactive media become new instruments through which society attempts to make the moral consequences of human action visible. Of course, neither restorative justice nor its possible gamification can eliminate the possibility of evil in the human world. What they can do is open a space in which evil is no longer only an object of punishment, but also an object of understanding and responsibility. It is precisely in this space between sanction and understanding that the possibility emerges for the offender to rediscover a way of being-with-others in a world they have disrupted through their actions.

Guilt as Legal Status and Existential Situation

In classical legal order, guilt has a relatively clear meaning: it represents a legal status established in judicial proceedings. When a court determines that a person has committed a criminal act and imposes a sentence, guilt acquires its formal shape and is integrated into the normative order of society. In this sense, guilt is a legally defined fact that entails certain consequences, primarily punishment and other forms of legal responsibility. Once the judgment is delivered and the sentence imposed, the legal system considers the question of guilt resolved.

However, from a philosophical perspective, guilt is not exhausted by its legal meaning. In his analysis of human existence, Heidegger speaks of guilt as an existential structure of human being. According to this view, human beings are entities that constantly make decisions and thereby assume responsibility for the way they exist in a shared world with others. In this sense, guilt does not merely indicate a violation of law, but a condition in which a person confronts the consequences of their actions and the relations they have shaped or disrupted through them.

This distinction becomes especially visible after sentencing. Legal guilt then reaches its institutional closure: society has identified the offense, imposed a sanction, and thereby reaffirmed the norm. However, the existential dimension of guilt does not necessarily disappear with the judgment. The person who has committed a crime continues to exist in a world in which their actions have left traces in relations with others. In this sense, the question of guilt moves from the domain of legal procedure into the domain of moral and existential confrontation with the consequences of action. It is precisely in this space between the legal and existential dimensions of guilt that the role of restorative justice can be understood. While the legal system responds to norm violation, restorative processes attempt to address the damaged relations that remain after sentencing. Restorative justice therefore does not annul legal guilt nor question punishment, but opens the possibility of understanding its existential dimension through dialogue between offender, victim, and community. Within this context, gamification of restorative processes may acquire a specific meaning. If interactive models are used to simulate perspectives and consequences of action, they may help the offender perceive what legal proceedings often cannot fully capture: the concrete way in which their actions have altered the world of others. Such experiential reflection does not change the legal status of guilt, but it may deepen understanding of its existential meaning. In this way, the distinction between legal and existential guilt reveals a broader sense of restorative justice. It does not aim to replace punishment or relativize the legal order. Its function is different: it opens a space in which a person may confront the evil they have committed not only as a legal offense, but as an action that has transformed their relationship to others in a shared world.

What Happens to Evil During and After Punishment

When a court imposes a sentence and its execution begins, the legal system considers the question of guilt resolved at the normative level. Punishment serves to reaffirm social norms and signal that certain behavior is unacceptable. However, punishment cannot automatically eliminate the evil that the offender has introduced into relations between people. Punishment affects the offender's legal status, but the committed evil remains part of their biography, their relation to others, and to themselves. In this sense, evil does not disappear with sentencing. It is transformed into a form of moral and existential residue carried by the offender during punishment and after its completion. During incarceration, it may operate in different ways. For some, punishment leads to reflection and confrontation with the consequences of their actions. For others, it produces the opposite effect: resentment, self, defense, or moral disengagement from the act. Therefore, punishment alone does not guarantee a change in how the offender understands their actions.

After the sentence is served, the committed evil continues to exist in a social and moral sense. It remains present in the memory of the victim, in collective remembrance, and in the identity of the offender. A person who has committed a serious offense cannot simply "turn back time," and the act becomes part of their life narrative. Future decisions of such a person often depend on how they interpret their past, whether as something they understand and take responsibility for, or as an injustice inflicted upon them by society. This is where the significance of restorative justice emerges. Its function is not to erase evil or annul punishment, but to open a space in which the offender may understand the consequences of their actions in concrete human terms. Such confrontation may change how they carry their past. The evil committed does not disappear, but it may become an object of understanding and responsibility rather than denial or repression. Within this context, gamification of restorative processes may also play a role. If interactive scenarios allow offenders to perceive the perspective of victims and the broader consequences of their actions, they may contribute to a reflective process that punishment alone often does not initiate. Such tools do not remove evil, but they may influence how responsibility is understood and how future decisions are made. Ultimately, the question of what happens to evil after punishment has no simple answer. It does not disappear from the world, but it may change its meaning in the life of the offender. In the best case, restorative processes may help transform committed evil into a source of moral insight and responsibility, rather than a persistent source of denial or repetition of violence.

Evil as Event and Evil as Identity

One of the most difficult questions after punishment concerns how society and the offender themselves understand the relationship between the committed evil and the identity of the person who committed it. In legal terms, judgment formally separates these two levels: the court determines guilt for a specific act and imposes a sentence for that act. However, in social perception and in the offender's own experience, this boundary often becomes blurred. The committed crime easily becomes a permanent identity marker, so that the person is no longer merely someone who committed evil, but becomes and remains a "criminal."

Philosophically, this identification between person and act has serious consequences. If committed evil is equated with identity, the possibility of moral transformation becomes almost inconceivable. The

person remains permanently bound to their most serious act, and society views them through that event regardless of later changes in their life.

Restorative justice seeks to establish a different perspective. It does not deny the committed evil nor diminish responsibility, but attempts to separate the person from the act. Evil is understood as an event with real and often severe consequences, but not necessarily as a defining feature of the offender's identity. This distinction allows processes of confrontation with evil to focus on responsibility and understanding rather than permanent stigmatization. In this sense, restorative justice does not attempt to erase the past, but to change the way it is integrated into the offender's biography and collective memory. The crime remains an irreducible fact, but how it is understood by the offender and responded to by society can open space for change. Within this framework, gamification of restorative processes may also play a role. Interactive scenarios and simulations of perspective can help participants perceive the difference between act and person. When offenders see the consequences of their actions on others through such models, evil appears as a concrete act with consequences, rather than an unchangeable identity marker. This opens space for reflection on responsibility and the possibility of different future choices. Ultimately, the distinction between evil as event and evil as identity points to the broader aim of restorative justice. It does not seek to erase the past or relativize the seriousness of the offense, but to ensure that committed evil does not become a permanent ontological definition of the person. In the space between acknowledgment of harm and the possibility of change lies the possibility that justice becomes not only an act of punishment, but also a process of restoring relations between people.

Final Reflection: Evil, Responsibility, and the Possibility of Change

The discussion on restorative justice and its possible methodological innovations, including gamification, ultimately cannot be fully separated from the long, standing philosophical question concerning the nature of evil in human relations. From ancient and Christian philosophy to contemporary social theories, thinkers have sought to understand why human beings inflict harm upon one another and whether it is possible to establish social institutions capable of limiting or transforming such harm. Across these traditions, we find different answers, ranging from the idea that evil stems from human weakness or ignorance to the view that it may be produced by social structures or by the banality of everyday action. Within this broader framework, restorative justice can be understood as one of the modern attempts to address the problem of evil not exclusively through punishment, but through processes in which individuals are enabled to understand the consequences of their actions and assume responsibility for them. Such an approach does not rest on the assumption that societies will ever fully eliminate violence or injustice. It is grounded in a more modest, yet perhaps more realistic idea: that societies can develop institutions which foster understanding, dialogue, and the possibility of behavioral change.

In this sense, the gamification of restorative processes may be understood as a contemporary attempt to support the traditional aims of justice, understanding harm, assuming responsibility, and enabling social reintegration through new methodological instruments that encourage experiential learning and perspectival understanding. It does not offer a final solution to the problem of evil in human relations, nor can it replace the moral and legal foundations of the social order. However, if interactive models can help individuals more clearly grasp the consequences of their actions and the reality of others' experiences, they may become a modest yet meaningful step in the long societal effort to ensure that conflict is not

addressed solely through punishment, but also through understanding and responsibility. In this sense, the question of gamifying restorative justice does not lead toward technological optimism, but rather toward an older and deeper idea that accompanies the history of political and legal thought: that societies, despite the persistent presence of conflict, can develop institutions that help individuals learn from experiences of harm in order to better limit it in the future.

Contemporary theories of restorative justice proceed from the assumption that a criminal act is not only a violation of legal norms, but also a disruption of interpersonal relations, trust, and social balance. For this reason, restorative approaches seek to include all actors affected by the conflict: the offender, the victim, and the wider community. However, the practical implementation of restorative justice shows that these goals are not easily achieved. Empathy, understanding of consequences, and willingness to engage in dialogue cannot simply be assumed or institutionally produced. They depend on complex psychological and social processes that shape how individuals and communities interpret experiences of harm.

From a psychological perspective, the position of the individual victim in restorative processes is particularly sensitive. For many victims of criminal acts, the very acknowledgment and understanding of harm by the offender can have a strong therapeutic effect, as it allows their experience to be socially recognized and validated. At the same time, however, there is a real risk that restorative processes may be experienced as additional pressure on victims to forgive or relativize their suffering. For this reason, any methodological innovation in this field, including potential gamification, must first and foremost protect the psychological integrity of victims and ensure that their voice remains a central element of the process.

Beyond the individual dimension of the victim, restorative justice also has a broader sociological dimension. A criminal act rarely affects only an individual; it also disrupts trust within the community in which it occurs. In this sense, society itself can often be seen as a secondary or collective victim of conflict. For this reason, public acceptance of restorative justice frequently depends on whether it is perceived as a fair process that contributes to the restoration of social order, or as an unjust reduction of offender accountability. If restorative models are interpreted in public discourse as forgiveness without responsibility, they may provoke strong resistance and undermine trust in the justice system.

Within this context, the potential of gamification in restorative processes should not be understood as a technological solution, but as a methodological instrument that may contribute to a better understanding of conflict and its consequences. Interactive scenarios, perspectival simulations, and reflective decision, making models can help participants grasp the complexity of the relationships between offender, victim, and community. Such tools may be particularly useful in preparatory stages of restorative processes, as they allow participants to explore different perspectives of the conflict in a safe environment and to better understand the consequences of their actions.

However, it is important to emphasize that gamification cannot replace authentic restorative dialogue. Its value lies in its capacity to support processes of perspectival understanding, reflection, and preparation for encounters in which real conflict is addressed. When applied in a responsible and methodologically grounded manner, gamification may contribute to the development of new approaches that integrate legal, psychological, and sociological insights into a coherent framework of restorative practice.

The theoretical contribution of this work lies precisely in identifying points of intersection between restorative justice and gamification models, as well as in proposing a conceptual framework that allows

these two domains to be understood as complementary rather than opposed. Future research should continue in this direction through interdisciplinary projects that empirically examine how interactive models may contribute to conflict understanding, the development of empathy, and the restoration of social trust. Only through such research will it become possible to determine under which conditions and in what contexts gamification can become a useful tool in the development of contemporary restorative practices.

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Gejmifikacija procesa restorativne pravde: konceptualni okvir i mogućnosti primene

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Sažetak

Rad razmatra mogućnosti i ograničenja primene gejmifikacije u okviru procesa restorativne pravde, polazeći od pretpostavke da savremeni interaktivni modeli mogu doprineti unapređenju razumevanja konflikta, razvoja empatije i refleksije učesnika. Restorativna pravda se zasniva na dijalogu između prestupnika, žrtve i zajednice, sa ciljem preuzimanja odgovornosti, razumevanja štete i obnove narušenih odnosa. Međutim, njena praktična primena često je otežana nedovoljnom spremnošću učesnika za perspektivno razumevanje, emocionalnim barijerama i nedostatkom adekvatnih metodoloških alata za pripremu i omogućavanje procesa. U tom kontekstu, rad ispituje potencijal gejmifikacije kao pristupa koji koristi mehanike igara, poput igranja uloga, interaktivnih narativa i simulacije odluka, kako bi podstakao iskustveno učenje i angažman. Kroz teorijsku analizu, identifikuju se ključne faze restorativnog procesa, razumevanje štete, preuzimanje perspektive druge strane, dijalog, reparacija i refleksija, i razmatraju načini na koje bi gejmifikacioni modeli mogli podržati svaku od njih. Posebna pažnja posvećena je ulozi simulacija u razvoju empatije i pripremi za restorativni susret, kao i potencijalu refleksivnih mehanizama za dublje razumevanje posledica konflikta. Istovremeno, rad ukazuje na značajna etička i metodološka ograničenja, uključujući rizik trivijalizacije konflikta, psihološke osetljivosti učesnika i institucionalne prepreke primeni ovakvih pristupa. Zaključno, gejmifikacija se ne može posmatrati kao zamena za restorativni dijalog, već kao dopunski alat koji može unaprediti pojedine faze procesa. Njena vrednost leži u proširenju prostora za refleksiju, perspektivno razumevanje i pripremu učesnika, čime doprinosi razvoju savremenih metodoloških pristupa u restorativnoj pravdi.

Ključne reči: restorativna pravda, gejmifikacija, perspektivno razumevanje, empatija, interaktivne simulacije, dijalog, refleksija