

2nd INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE OF VIDEO GAME STUDIES

■ VIDEO GAMES AS A CHALLENGE TO ACADEMIA ■ 50 YEARS OF THE GAMING INDUSTRY ■

SESSION REPORTS

December 2022

Uses for Video Games – Virtual Realities, Education, Therapy, Gamification

Jasmina Arsenijević

On December the 9th, in the first session (13.00 – 14.00) called Uses for Video Games – Virtual Realities, Education, Therapy, Gamification participated about 20 people. Two papers were presented. The first paper was presented by Maja Bosanac, from the Faculty of Philosophy, University of Novi Sad (Serbia), with the title “Erasing the boundaries between different sectors: An application of digital games in education”, after which followed a discussion about the feasibility of the wider introduction of digital games in education and its pedagogical implications. In the second presentation, Balca Arda, an author from Kadir Has University, Istanbul (Turkey), discussed the user experience of aesthetic knowledge production in citizen science gamification. The topic of the discussion moved to the field of citizen science and the role of video games and gamification in the motivation of citizens in their participation in citizen science projects. Parallels were drawn with a plenary lecture called *Gamers for Science: How to Change the World in Small Steps*.

Two papers were presented in the second session (Uses for Video Games – Virtual Realities, Education, Therapy, Gamification, 15.00 – 16.30). Lindsey Maxwell, a professor from the Department of History at Florida International University (USA), presented the paper called *Revisiting the Frontier: Teaching the American West with Red Dead Redemption II*. The author presented her experience in her usage of the video game *Red Dead Redemption II* in teaching history and advocated for integrating game studies into History courses. Many questions were raised and discussion followed. Finally, Mladen Popović, author from the Faculty of Philosophy, University of Niš (Serbia), presented research results in the paper called *In the eye of the beholder: An eye-tracking examination of the visual-procedural linkage*. Afterwards, participants discussed other possibilities and disciplines for implementing the results.

Culture and Criticism: Towards Interpreting Video Games

Biljana Mitrović and Stefan Alidini

The first part of the session included papers that approached the video game studies in different ways: in terms of attention to the recent production of books in the video game studies; the application of anthropological methods of the

game analysis using the example of the specific game and its reception; and the use of methods from different fields in order to describe one case study and the critical potential of the game from a multiperspective. The presentations showed different possibilities of approaching the conference topic – academic discourse and methodology of video game studies. It was also significant that the audience at the session was diverse in terms of academic level, universities and the countries they came from, so the discussion was rich and varied. Students of all levels of academic study, researchers, lecturers and retired professors of various affiliations participated in the discussion (University of Novi Sad, University of Belgrade, University of Arts in Belgrade, University of Zadar – Croatia and researchers from UK).

This gave a special diversity in perspectives and experiences, and made it possible to connect researchers and the institutions from which they originate.

The second part of the session included inspiring presentations and discussions of entropy, cultural heritage and questions of representation, as well as how the system of game critique was established in the UK. The discussion veered from topics such as the depictions of cultural heritage across game genres, to lively discussions of literary and film works describing entropy, to the intricacies of producing video game screenshots in the early video game printed publications. A great number of students attended the second part of the session, with many questions raised. Ultimately, the session demonstrated the diversity of approaches to video games, and the diversity of voices and questions they inspire, as well as the necessity for additional channels which might serve as vehicles for broader discussion.

Video Games from the Inside Out: Industry Perspectives

Mladen Čudanov

During the session *Video Games from the Inside Out: Industry Perspectives*, five out of six papers were presented. Those were:

Video games and adaptation: An introduction

Various aspects of video games adaptations were discussed. Independent researcher Darjan Kubik presented the results, analyzing the problem both synchronically and diachronically. Framework related to the participatory with showing and telling was used to explain issues in cross-media adaptation. The discussion was aimed towards the case studies of various adaptations. Successful adaptations and flops were described and reasons for both the success and failure were suggested.

The position of a producer in the video game industry—between hard and soft skills

Dušica Dragin presented the need within the industry for the producer. Performing job specifications, she proposed the set of soft and hard skills necessary for the role, as well as their balance. Analysing the educational background, gaps were identified that need to be filled by adequate formal and informal programs. The discussion was aimed at comparison of producer role in similar industries – movies, and music, as well as the personal impact that the producer creates on the output.

Understanding individuals' in-game purchase motivation: First steps of initial analysis for in-game purchase scale

Mustafa Can Gursesli Presented quantitative research on in-game purchase and its factors. The main identified factors were: Utility, Enjoyment, Reputation, and Investment. Full empirical research was performed on 573 participants, with statistical analysis. Discussion of the presented results was mostly aimed at statistically significant relationships with the in-game purchase, as well as the application of these findings in the industry.

Work hard, play hard—The concept of playbour in Animal Crossing: New Horizons

Gemma Fantacci presented the massive online game Animal Crossing: New Horizons and its “pink glasses” review on the paradigms of the contemporary capitalist system. Playbour, as well as manual repetitive tasks, and its role in the game mechanics, were explained and criticized. The discussion was mostly aimed at similar games as well as the neglected strength of video games as the propaganda medium and its impact on the gamers population.

Development of a gaming business model through multi-industry ecosystems: Links with sport, fashion and other industries

Through a literature review and multiple case analyses, this paper presented relations between the gaming industry and the food and beverage, fashion, IT, beauty and cosmetics, healthcare and pharmaceutical industries. Examples of corporate networks, ecosystems and alliances were given to illustrate the maturity of the industry and its deep connections with the rest of the economy. The discussion was mostly aimed at the future development of the gaming industry, as well as the roles of various stakeholders in that development.

All in all, discussions were open, and friendly and had a large part of the session value, in time as well as in contribution. All participants showed a high level of academic cooperation and open-mindedly reviewed a wide array of presented topics. Feedback was appreciated and different opinions were respected. As a section moderator, I am grateful to all the organisers for a chance to meet and network with researchers from different countries, as well as to learn a lot about the future of the gaming industry.

Understanding Games through Structuring Diverse Approaches

Stefan Alidini

The online Zoom session titled Understanding Games through Structuring Diverse Approaches was concerned mainly with responses to questions such as: how to interpret games, how to understand their individual components (the audio, visual, architectural, literary, philosophical aspect of video games) as well as how video games relate to other concepts such as history. On top of this, game preservation and recreation through emulation, ethnographic approaches, etc were also among the themes featured in this session.

The discussion was fruitful and engaging, and centred mostly around three key issues — architecture in games, the use of history in games, and video games and interpreting them using techniques coming from the study of literature. Among the questions raised at the outset was how the architecture of games impacts their performance as games, how architectural spaces can function as built environments and impact game-play and the perception of games, how the aesthetic impulse can define what a game is, given its prominence in the medium, and more.

The other main nexus of discussion revolved around how history is perceived in video games, how historical representation can better reflect actual historical events, and inspire the transmission of historical knowledge. The question of education was particularly apt in this context, and several participants were interested in how video games might be used in education, as tools for learning historical knowledge, or how games might re-model and re-invent game-play so that historical veracity can come to the fore.

Academic Pursuits: Interplays between Games and Research

Dunja Dušanić

The last virtual session of the conference, *Academic Pursuits: Interplays between Games and Research*, brought together scholars from all over the world: Austria, China, Italy, Serbia, Thailand, Malaysia, and the USA. It was divided into two thematic sections. The first dealt with the complex, dynamic, and sometimes quite tense relationships between academia, governmental structures, and the video game industry. Olga Kolokytha, from the University of Vienna, gave an overview of the video game sector in Austria based on the results of the Cicerone research project, while Alessandra Micalizzi and Marija Lelićanin of the SAE Institute (Milan and Belgrade) presented the results of a hackathon (*Playseriously*) funded by the CEI and designed to develop a video game for five- to seven-year-old children with the goal of screening predictors of dyslexia. Lifeng Huang, from the City University of Hong Kong, gave a fascinating talk about the obstacles faced by the gaming community in today's China.

The focus on education persisted in the second half of the session, where Lauren Rebecca Clark from the Chiang Mai University in Thailand and Gurkan Maruf Mihci from Indiana University shared their experience, as educators, of the importance of video games for the development of the students' cognitive and creative abilities. The session also included readings of individual games and analyses of concrete issues faced by game developers. Siti Noraisyah Abd. Rahman of the National Academy of Arts in Kuala Lumpur gave an in-depth reading of the representation of sexual, racial, class, and other forms of diversity in *Identity V*, an asymmetrical multiplayer survival-horror adventure developed by NetEase, while Upulanka Premasiri from the Chiang Mai University, Thailand, talked about the challenges of interactive in-game advertising in open-world games.

The papers presented during this session were diverse – both geographically and thematically. Spanning several continents and encompassing equally distant concerns and approaches, they confirmed once again that the connections between academia and the videogame industry – domains which are more of than not considered separate, if not openly hostile to one another – are much closer than it is usually assumed. By bringing together gamers and designers, psychologists and social scientists, developers and critics, the session proved to be an excellent example of the dialogue that the entire conference sought to stimulate and promote.