

WORKSHOP REPORT



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Project: Games, Heritage, Arts, & Sport:
the economic, social, and cultural value of the European video game ecosystem.

GAMEHEARTS

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The GAMEHEARTS project aims to bolster the European video game industry ecosystems (hereafter, EVGIE) within the larger framework of creative and cultural industries (hereafter, CCI) by promoting economic growth, job creation, and social cohesion through enhanced collaboration between traditional and emerging cultural sectors. This initiative seeks to provide policy recommendations and development roadmaps for the EVGIE, employing a holistic, evidence-based approach to explore how video game technologies can drive innovation within the wider CCI. As part of these efforts, consortium members organised five formative workshops between April and June 2024. These workshops leveraged existing networks and established new connections among the EVGIE, academia, CCI, and local governments, providing a platform for key stakeholders to generate new knowledge and address various challenges facing the EVGIE.

This report reviews and analyses these five workshops, which explored the challenges and benefits within the video game industry. The events addressed issues such as exclusion, financial difficulties in production and distribution, the need for regulatory intervention, and the cultural, artistic, and educational value of video games. By synthesising inputs from different countries, the report highlights both common struggles and unique challenges faced by the video game industry (hereafter, VGI) in each member country. Additionally, it offers significant recommendations based on workshop insights to advance the industry by making it more collaborative and inclusive.

Each workshop, conducted in different countries, brought unique perspectives and tailored discussions, contributing to a comprehensive understanding of the European video game industry. Despite their varied focuses, common recommendations emerged in the synthesis. Key recommendations included enhancing collaboration within the VGI and external partners, targeting funding to support diversity and innovation, and addressing diversity gaps through initiatives and practical measures. Education was also emphasised, with calls for increased media literacy and promoting video game development as a viable career path. Regulation recommendations varied, with some workshops advocating for stricter laws to protect children, while others called for more flexible regulations to encourage innovation. Additionally, the impact of Artificial Intelligence (AI) on the industry was noted, emphasising the need for a balanced approach to its integration.



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I PROJECT SUMMARY

GAMEHEARTS will seek to maximise the value of the EVGIE within a wider social context of the CCI. This will consider the importance of the EVGIE in contributing to economic growth, job creation, physical and mental wellbeing, and social and cultural cohesion, by particularly focusing on how a stronger and closer working relationship between more the traditional and emergent cultural sectors, can work better to create more inclusive and socially responsible cultural experiences. The consortium will offer policy recommendations and roadmaps setting out how the EVGIE can and should develop, and where it could act as a driver for sustained innovation and economic growth. It will utilise an evidence-based approach that focuses not just on video game development, but rather adopts a holistic ecosystem approach, utilising both established and more innovative methodologies, to consider the competitiveness and development of the EVGIE, and how video game know-how and technologies could drive innovation in the wider CCI. In doing so, GAMEHEARTS will develop 'ludic experiences', to explore possibilities of more inclusive, engaging, and empowering cultural experiences. Working across seven work packages the universities of Salford (UK), Tampere (Finland), Vienna (Austria), Breda University of Applied Sciences (Netherlands), and Wroclaw University of Economics and Business (Poland) will work in partnership with Ubisoft (France) and other major video game partners and associations to explore current and future trends in the EVGIE. Beyond this, we will work with certain cultural case studies partners to consider the ways in which video game-related technologies and practices are, and could be used to, increase access to heritage, the arts, and sport.



2 INTRODUCTION

The GAMEHEARTS project seeks to enhance the EVGIE within the broader context of CCI by fostering economic growth, job creation, and social cohesion through stronger collaboration between traditional and emerging cultural sectors. The project aims to provide policy recommendations and development roadmaps for the EVGIE, utilising a holistic, evidence-based approach to explore the potential of video game technologies in driving innovation within the wider CCI. As part of these efforts, the consortium members conducted five formative workshops between April and June 2024. The workshops leveraged existing networks and created new connections within the EVGIE, academia, CCI, and local governments. These events provided a platform for key stakeholders to come together, generate new knowledge, and address the various challenges facing the EVGIE.

The following report reviews and analyses five workshops that explored various challenges and benefits within the video game industry. These events addressed issues such as exclusion, financial difficulties in production and distribution, the need for regulatory intervention, and the cultural, artistic, and educational value of video games. By synthesising the inputs from different countries, the report highlights the common struggles and unique challenges faced by the VGI in each member country. Additionally, it offers significant recommendations based on workshop insights to advance the industry by making it more collaborative and inclusive. Before delving into the workshops, we review relevant literature and previous reports which allow us to provide an overview of the current state of the EVGIE. This will include a reflection on the value of the industry beyond its monetary success and the ways in which we can gain insights on our society and culture by examining the EVGIE. Then, we move on to reviewing each university's workshop, including a detailed depiction of the event, its recommendations and pathways to impact. We conclude the report with a final discussion by raising shared recommendations, which could be espoused by video game industries across Europe.

2.1 EVALUATING THE VIDEO GAME INDUSTRY

When academics, journalists, and industry professionals contemplate the significance of the video game industry, one of the main aspects they often raise is its financial success. Indeed, video games are considered a thriving international industry, which significantly contributes to the economy. The European video game sector, for instance, is valued at over €23 billion annually (ISFE and EGDF, 2022; Neogames Finland, 2024) and in the UK alone, the industry



supports 71,400 jobs and contributes £5.1 billion to the economy (Ukie, 2023). In 2021, Europe was the third-largest video game market globally with revenues 4.3 times higher than that of the music industry and 1.8 times higher than video on demand (Neogames Finland, 2024). The sector also significantly increased over the COVID-19 pandemic, from an estimated 222 million European players between the ages of 6-64 in 2019 to 246 million in 2023 (European Commission, 2023). The profile of those who play is also widening in terms of diversity: 47% of women in Europe were estimated to play video games in 2021, compared to 45% in 2019 (ISFE and EGDF, 2021).

Beyond their financial value, video games have become a hegemonic cultural form with a growing impact in shaping broader culture and helping digitalisation and gamification processes. In general, Brennen and Kreiss defined digitalisation as “the way many domains of social life are restructured around digital communication and media infrastructures” (2016, p. 1). Such phenomenon has permeated our everyday and most mundane activities and reshaped our culture (Ørmen, Helles & Jensen, 2021). In such processes, many aspects of our society can be understood through the prism of video games. As Muriel and Crawford argue, our everyday life has been “colonised by the logic and mechanics of video games [...] fields of economy, work, leisure, education, health and consumption, are permeated by the rationale that governs video games” (2018, pp. 20-21). Indeed, aspects of gamification can be found everywhere: from swipes and the rush of accruing matches on dating apps (Bandinelli, 2022; Garda & Karhulahti, 2021), to playful fitness apps, like *Zombies, Run!*. Such examples are part of what Fuchs et al. explain as a “general process in which games and playful experiences are understood as essential components of society and culture” (2014, p. 7).

As part of digitalisation processes, the VGI has influenced a wide array of sectors, from architecture to healthcare and automobiles. A recent report by Ukie (2023) depicts how this growing spillover has enabled different sectors to boost innovation and total output, improve product designs, enhance safety and training efforts, enrich customer experiences, and preserve culture. For instance, the pharmaceutical industry has adopted video game technology, using video game engines to facilitate drug discovery and development across multiple disease areas. In a different example, real estate developers and architectures are now using video rendering technology from video game engines to create interactive digital designs, aiding in project development and construction.



The spillover of the VGI is also prominent across CCI. For instance, the convergence of video games with film and television has resulted in a rich, interconnected media landscape. These are marked by successful franchises such as *The Super Mario Bros. Movie* (2023), the second-highest-grossing film of the year, and critically acclaimed TV adaptations like *The Last of Us* (2023 - ongoing) and *Fallout* (2024 - ongoing). This cross-media pollination demonstrates the importance of the VGI in expanding the narrative and artistic possibilities available to creators and audiences. It underscores the importance of video games as a cultural touchstone, shaping contemporary storytelling and entertainment (MacDonald, 2023; Martens, 2023). In other examples, video game exhibitions and museums, festivals and tournaments have also proliferated in recent years, showcasing the importance of video games in fostering community engagement and providing new career opportunities (Eklund et al., 2019; Taylor, 2012; Witkowski, 2012).

Having mentioned the influence of the VGI on other sectors and society as a whole, it is important to acknowledge that such impact is not always celebrated. The relationship between traditional CCI and emerging digital industries remains tenuous, often marked by mistrust and misunderstanding. At times, video games are viewed merely as sources of technological innovation or intellectual property to be adapted while new technologies are frequently seen as disruptive to traditional media industries (The Economist, 2023). For instance, in 2016, FA Premier League Executive Chairman Richard Scudamore identified video games and social media as significant threats to maintaining young people's engagement with football (Lawrence & Crawford, 2019). In light of such suspicion, there is still a need to examine and showcase the different contributions the VGI has on society and the ways in which it transforms other sectors and industries.

2.2 VIDEO GAMES AS CULTURE

When studying the value of video games and the video game industry, it is crucial to consider how they create a unique culture while also mirroring the broader culture we inhabit. Muriel and Crawford acknowledge these two facets and define video game culture as “the institutionalisation of video game practices, experiences, and meanings” (2018, p. 5). Muriel and Crawford, however, recognise that culture is not homogenous or monolithic, “video game culture is diverse, complex, and constantly evolving” (2018, p. 2). As we will return to in the discussion portion of this meta report, while GAMEHEARTS examines a European



video game culture, this emerges from an assortment of interdependent entities and a plurality of entangled cultures from a local and national level.

Video game culture co-construct the wider cultural sphere and serves as a lens for analysing broader issues in contemporary society (ibid). For instance, video games have been traditionally considered a gendered hobby, dominated by men. Although data shows an almost even gender split among gamers, women are frequently ignored or belittled by male gamers and the industry alike (Chess, 2017; Cote, 2020). This disparity is evident in the fact that women comprised only 22% of the European VGI in 2020 (European Parliament, 2023). Similarly, studies also indicate the marginalisation of gamers based on ethnicity or sexuality (Gray, 2017; Ruberg, 2019) as the industry continues to be dominated by white employees (e.g., 90% in the UK VGI, as presented by Ukie, 2022). At the same time, there is evidence to suggest that inclusive video game design can help in reducing different types of exclusion, thus leading to higher inclusions of women (Mozelius et al., 2022), low-income or ethnic groups (Dawson, 2014), and people with mental or physical disabilities (Heron, 2012; Malinverni et al., 217).

Video games can also reflect and raise current political and social discussions through their narratives and character representation. For instance, video games like *Papers, Please* and *This War of Mine* address complex social issues such as immigration and war. Through these themes, they invite players to ponder on the struggles and ethical dilemmas faced by individuals in challenging situations (Formosa et al., 2016; Muriel & Crawford, 2018). Moreover, recent pushback against the introduction of ethnically and sexually diverse characters in popular franchises like *The Last of Us Part II* (Byrd, 2020; Tassi, 2020) and *Assassin's Creed* (Kim, 2024; Murray, 2024) reflects a broader social discourse regarding diversity and cultural openness. Such controversies highlight the importance of representation while also showcasing resistance to what some perceive as "woke" culture.

Thus, as Gershenfeld and Anst (2021) suggest, video games can be a bridge to understanding culture. They offer a unique opportunity to create culturally infused worlds that introduce new ideas as well as offer us a better understanding of our own current social climate. They present to us a microcosm of our social fabric, its tensions and strives for equality and inclusion while pushing a variety of sectors forward through digital advancements.

2.3 THIS REPORT



Having reviewed the ways in which video games and the EVGIE as a whole could be evaluated and understood, we move on to review the five workshops that were conducted by the consortium. The report is based on the use of workshops as a research method (Alminde & Warming, 2020; Ørngreen & Levinsen, 2017). Workshops and seminars are often utilised to disseminate results or enhance the reach and impact of findings, serving as both an endpoint and an effective starting point for research by offering a dynamic, interactive approach to gathering data and insights. By bringing together participants from diverse backgrounds and areas of expertise, workshops create a collaborative environment that encourages the free exchange of ideas, facilitating real-time feedback, group discussions, and the generation of creative solutions to complex problems (Ørngreen & Levinsen, 2017).

As highlighted earlier, these workshops covered an array of themes and topics relating to the current state of the VGI, its values, and its challenges. The workshop conducted by Breda University of Applied Sciences, for instance, focused on the financial challenges facing the VGI and the need for a streamlined funding process. The University of Vienna's workshop dealt with issues of regulation and policy measures, whereas Wroclaw University of Economics and Business discussed ways to open up the VGI's ecosystem and promoting respectful collaborations. Tampere University centred on pathways for an inclusive VGI, and, lastly, The University of Salford's workshop reflected on video games' value and contributions to culture. The workshops are presented in the chronological order in which they occurred.

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3 WROCLAW UNIVERSITY OF ECONOMICS AND BUSINESS WORKSHOP

3.1 INTRODUCTION

The first workshop took place at the Wroclaw University of Economics and Business (WUEB). It was planned and implemented as a joint in-depth and confrontational discussion on key issues concerning the effective transfer of value and co-creation of value in the EVGIE and other cultural and creative sectors. Workshop participants focused on identifying the motives for collaboration between the VGI and the CCI. As a result, some preliminary recommendations for industry decision-makers were identified. Additionally, the research team was able to get inspiring insights into the further research conducted within the GAMEHEARTS project.

3.2 METHODOLOGY

This workshop took place on the April 26th, 2024 and aimed to investigate the challenges, and drivers for cooperation and value transfer between VGI and CCI. The main part of the workshop lasted 2 hours (10:00-12:00), which was preceded by the registration that started at 09:30, and followed by a 1-hour networking session integrated with lunch.

Following the assumptions of the Grant Agreement (i.e., T2.1. in particular), this workshop integrated existing and new contacts in the EVGIE and the CCI, as well as national government bodies. Given the above, we have invited a diversified group of Video Game Developers (VGDs), Video Game Ecosystem (VGE), and CCI representatives to provide a comprehensive perspective of various actors. A detailed description of the participants is presented in Table I.

Table I. Workshop/WUEB – Participants’ characteristics

Code	Institution	Type of stakeholder
P1	Fabblar AI	VGD / VR games
P2	Ministry of Culture and National Heritage	Policymaker
P3	The National Forum of Music (NFM)	Music



P4	The Knights of Unity	VGD
P5	Museum of Illusion	Museum
P6	Center for the Development of Creative Industries	Policymaker
P7	Xi4G; BTC Studios	VGD / serious games
P8	Polish Games Observatory	VGE / research & lobbying
P9	Polish Games Observatory	VGE / research & lobbying
P10	AMD	VGE / software & hardware producer

To fully use the potential and valuable insights provided by our participants, we have decided to use the hybrid mode as some of them could not attend the meeting in person. Thus, the workshop was planned in the hybrid room with a fully equipped system adjusted for hybrid meetings – as shown in Figure I. We have also recorded the workshop to collect the transcriptions, which are valuable for further stages of the project.

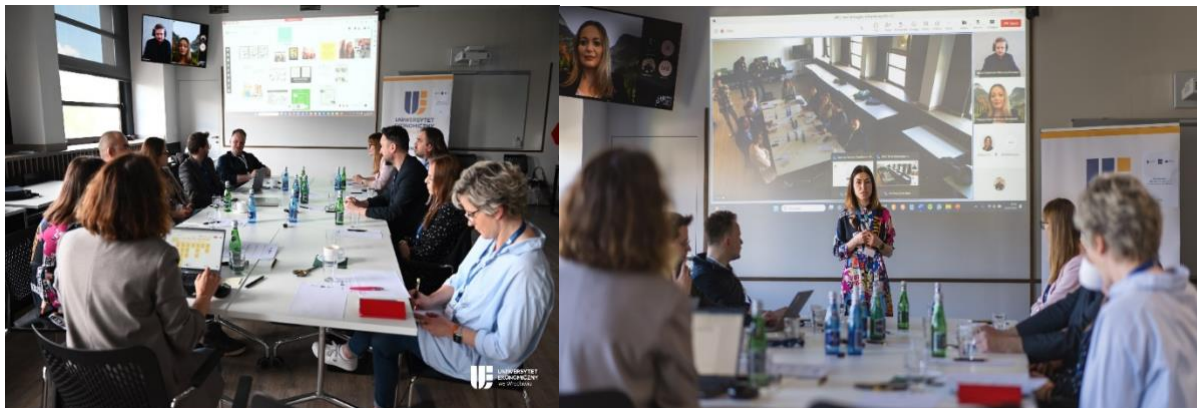


Figure I. A multimedia room used to run the workshop at WUEB

In accordance with ethical principles and GDPR regulations, all participants were asked to familiarise themselves with a detailed description of the study, which was sent via email, and to consent to the following before participating:

- Participation in the discussion panel – consent option via online form: <https://forms.gle/egbUN3vzzQvYL3qQ8>
- Processing of personal data – consent option via online form: <https://forms.gle/sNQKiiZf2gcc5erL6>



Providing consent through these forms was mandatory and a prerequisite for participating in the workshop, which was concluded by all 10 participants before the workshop began.

Our workshop was divided into three stages:

- **Pre-work:** A few days before the workshop, participants received an invitation to the workshop and were asked to look for a quote, metaphor, or personal story that best represents their approach to business collaboration. We shared our ideas for metaphors, while participants were asked to post their associations regarding cooperation and co-creation of value on a virtual Mural board, as shown in Figure 2 and available at <https://app.mural.co/t/monikasworkshop9604/m/monikasworkshop9604/1712930758042/4442d4ef5fad7793159e4b5b0be0a34abeb9b960?sender=4fabad02-eba0-4f7b-ae17-39a8912a2055>.



Figure 2. Ideas for metaphors of cooperation in a business context as the pre-work

- **Workshop:** After welcoming the participants by Ewa Stańczyk-Hugiet (Vice-Rector for Research and Academic Staff) and the presentation of the workshop scenario provided Patrycja Klimas (Project Manager) and a brief introduction provided by each participant, we discussed the pre-work results. Then, we have proceeded with the discussion divided into the following themes and questions:



- **Cooperation - mechanisms, resources, experiences** (*What are your experiences regarding collaborative practices in CCI so far? Are there such experiences at all? Are they good or bad? Any examples? What resources are being engaged? Is this engagement symmetrical? Any examples? What is the operational interaction, and what is the coordination of joint activities and actions? Which areas are involved in the collaboration - e.g., marketing, new product development, and others?*)
 - **Motives and factors of cooperation in CCI** (*What factors, motives, and needs push you to cooperate? What values guide the establishment of such cooperation? Why does it take place? Examples? To what extent do the motives, factors, needs, and values behind establishing cooperation converge for different partners in this cooperation, and to what extent do they diverge?*)
 - **Problems & challenges in cooperation in CCI** (*Anchor metaphor - what hinders networking in CCI?*)
-
- **Feedback & suggestions:** We have prepared a separate document to be delivered after the workshop to gain insights and recommendations that emerged after the meeting, which was answered by four participants. We aimed to investigate the catalogue of “must haves” of good cooperation in CCI. Participants were asked to share their opinions and feedback in the online questionnaire available at <https://forms.gle/6DZw4KZgEkjklmeP6>.



GAMEHEARTS

Panel dyskusyjny **GameHearts** na temat międzysektorowej współpracy podmiotów kreatywnych i kultury, ze szczególnym uwzględnieniem perspektywy twórców gier komputerowych i wideo.

Droga Uczestniczko/Drogi Uczestniku naszego panelu zachęcamy do podzielenia się swoją opinią i uwagami. Twój feedback jest niezwykle cenny dla naszego zespołu badawczego i pomoże nam dalej doskonalić nasze działania, a także doprecyzować ich założenia.

patrycja.jedrysik@gmail.com [Przełącz konto](#)

* Wskazuje wymagane pytanie

Adres e-mail *

Twój adres e-mail

Dalej Strona 1 z 6 [Wyczyść formularz](#)

Figure 3. Post-workshop online questionnaire

The media relation from the workshop is available at <https://uew.pl/warsztaty-GAMEHEARTS-relacja/>. Some photos that were taken during the meeting are also shown below together with the results.

A deep qualitative analysis was performed after collecting the raw data (in the form of transcripts). The iterative data analysis process was used to identify several themes and codes that emerged from the data. Further description of findings was structured around the codes recognized in the data. Thus, the categories described within the results are the outcome of the applied coding procedure. The codes and adopted categories represent the outcomes of intra-team brainstorming sessions.

3.3 RESULTS



GAMEHEARTS (<https://gamehearts.eu/>) has received funding from European Union's Horizon Europe Research and Innovation programme under Grant Agreement No. 101132543.



The outcomes of the stakeholder workshop at WUEB were presented chronologically, considering the data and information obtained before the workshop in Subsection 3.3.1, during its implementation in Subsection 3.3.2, and after its conclusion in Subsection 3.3.3.

3.3.1 PRE-WORKSHOP

To encourage workshop participants to prepare for the discussion, they were not only sent key thematic issues to be discussed but also asked to prepare thoughts, metaphors, and/or anecdotes related to intra- and cross-industry cooperation. Among the notes left by participants on the virtual Mural board, cooperation was portrayed as:

- **a factor for business success:** *"Talent wins games, but teamwork and intelligence win championships. Following M. Jordan";*
- **a phenomenon not necessarily exclusively formalised and bureaucratic:** *"If you can laugh together, you can work together. Following R. Orben";*
- **a tool/mechanism for social education:** *"Education at the level of media, officials, and business, and promoting information based on research (not stereotypes), as well as understanding the broad international context of the gaming industry, is crucial for understanding the financial, cultural, and social value of games, the needs, challenges, and threats for creators/producers and end-users";*
- **a "must be" factor due to the complexity of video games and the requirements of heterogeneous consumers:** *"When creating games, we build adventurous worlds of player activities across many target groups. When creating the right products, this type of activity should be utilised in specific segments of education and business."*

Given the comments made by participants, it can be claimed that cooperation is relevant at the industry, inter-industry, and society levels.

3.3.2 WORKSHOP

According to the planned scenario reported in Section 2, the workshop adopted a process perspective on cross-industry cooperation. Therefore, the attention was focused on key issues identifiable before engaging in cooperation and during its course (motives and challenges).



3.3.2.1. MOTIVES

The substantive part of the workshop began with identifying the motives for cooperation between the gaming industry and developers, representatives of other cultural industries, and political decision-makers.

Each participant indicated the key (in their opinion) sources of cooperation. In the opinion of the first policy representative, establishing cooperation with the gaming industry is an opportunity to simultaneously achieve government policy goals for developing creative sectors while achieving commercial goals.

In turn, the participant representing an institution subordinate to the Minister of Culture emphasised that the main branch of their activity is cooperation in the strict sense. More specifically, the respondent indicated that the purpose of business cooperation is to support and assist in development at the local (national) and international levels. The initiatives undertaken include subsidising production and providing space during fairs and events.

In addition to achieving the previously mentioned goals, the museum's representatives emphasised relationality's importance and offered guests a more comprehensive range of cultural attractions. The participants believe "*the best projects are based on strong relationships combining trust, a common vision, and care for the client (museum guest).*"

Company values, transparency, quality, and stability are the main messages the gaming industry needs to cooperate with developers. Moreover, as the participant emphasised, the organisation in which he works is guided by these assumptions when making all decisions (both short and long-term, strategic, and operational).

In turn, game developers and publishers focus on the attractiveness of the budget. As the participant emphasises, the value and size of the budget allocated for this purpose are essential for joint activities.

An interesting point of view is presented by the founders of the non-profit scientific and research initiative, who are also professionally associated with the VGI. As it turns out, business cooperation aims to build long-term relationships for mutual benefit. In the opinion of the participants, it should be a business model (business scenario) that considers the needs of end users while at the same time being able to monetize these needs (about producers, developers, stakeholders).



The last speaker was a company representative supplying technological components for the VGI. The participant emphasised that the main criterion for business cooperation is building relationships based on trust, understanding, and respect for the partners' needs.

It should be emphasised that, besides the indicated motives for business cooperation, all participants emphasised the material aspect. This means measurable financial benefits for every stakeholder, i.e., producers, video game creators, institutions, and cultural organisations. In this understanding, the effect of cooperation becomes the capital value of the demand of end users (e.g., gamers or museum guests) for the proposed offer or product. To conclude the business motives, it is worth synthesising the previous considerations. For this purpose, Figure 5 broadly presents the key motives for establishing business relations between the VGI and the patronage of culture, art, and political decision-makers. Figure 5 shows that building relationships are the primary motive for starting business cooperation (indicated by 5 participants). Practitioners also highly rated the care for the end user (indicated by 4 participants). Participants also pointed to achieving government policy goals, achieving commercial goals, and support and assistance in development as motives to establish business relations with VGI.

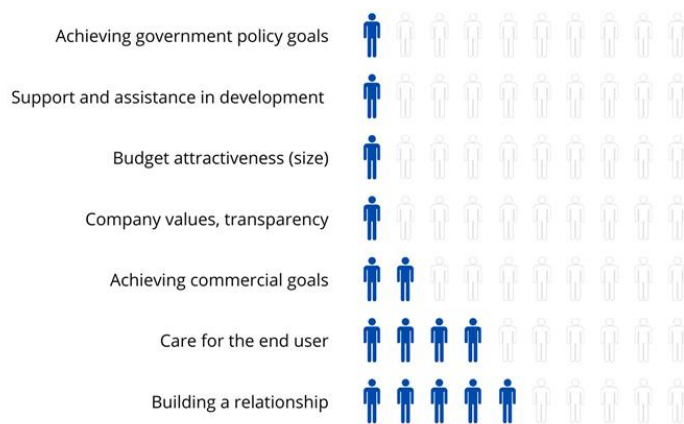


Figure 5. The main motives of cooperation within CCI per participant

However, to implement the assumptions of the analysis of motivators for business cooperation, Figure 6 clusters the stakeholder clusters into groups labelled "culture and art" (including museums, theatres), "policymakers" (including representatives of the ministry), and "gaming" (including producers, game developers, technology solution providers).





Figure 6. Motives for cooperation by the type of EVIGIE actor

As the above analysis shows, financial benefits are essential predictors of cooperation for all clusters studied. Representatives of culture and art pointed to achieving commercial goals, support, and assistance in development, building relationships, and caring for the end user. Producers and creators of video games (gaming) agree that building relationships, caring for the end user, company values, transparency, and attractive budget (size) are the central assumptions of business relationships. In turn, for political decision-makers, achieving government policy goals and commercial goals is essential in establishing business relationships.

It is also worth noting that the common denominator of cooperation between the three stakeholder clusters is material benefits. However, motives such as building relationships and caring for the end user are essential for "gaming" and "culture and art."

3.3.2.2 CHALLENGES

Among the challenges addressed by our participants, we may identify several themes, including financial constraints, dealing with misperceptions, mindset-related challenges, difficulties with predicting the drivers of success (or failure), and market challenges.

First, they argued that **financial constraints** are the most common challenge they must face. This type of challenge relates not only to the initial source of financing the project, but also to the constant search for additional financial streams needed when the product is being developed. Under these limitations, the legal restrictions were also mentioned as factors that impact not only the scope but also the rate of financing.



Another theme mentioned during the discussion was the challenge of **dealing with misperceptions**. This category was diversified, as it covered:

- The need to deal with misperceptions of timing accompanied by too rigid rules that hinder flexibility;
- A lack of coherence in financial perception;
- The necessity to handle the misperceptions of expectations when various actors are involved in the cooperation;
- The limited coherence of common terms of relationships (in some cases, even changed during the cooperation process) followed by cooperation dilemmas (the question of how far the engagement should be considered);
- The need to deal with the distorted perception regarding the value and importance of the VGI. Those distortions are extensive, as they concern the policymakers, various institutions, media, and society (including consumer attitudes), which makes dealing with them even more difficult.

Our participants' next set of challenges could be labelled as **mindset-related**. Within this theme, we uncovered two main streams: silo-mentality and limited perception, which led to the emergence of mental constraints outlined mainly among policymakers. That group of challenges is extremely difficult to address as they are rooted in beliefs and incoherent goals. Both categories are complex and hard to change or even modify.

During our workshop, the challenges mentioned by our participants circulated around difficulties in predicting several, sometimes hard-to-identify, **drivers of success (or failure)**. That is another theme we may distinguish. Those drivers are usually external, as it is hard to predict whether the dominant theme of the video game would fulfil the users' requirements, not only in terms of the general motive itself but also other factors that drive the popularity and may not be so straightforward to be uncovered.

The final category of challenges considered during the discussion was the **market challenges**, as the Polish market is less developed than the other markets, limiting growth possibilities and hindering competitiveness. The cultural issues were also raised as the cultural context created several constraints in product development and business model implementation.

We may divide the identified challenges into two categories – external and internal. Their allocation is presented in Figure 7.



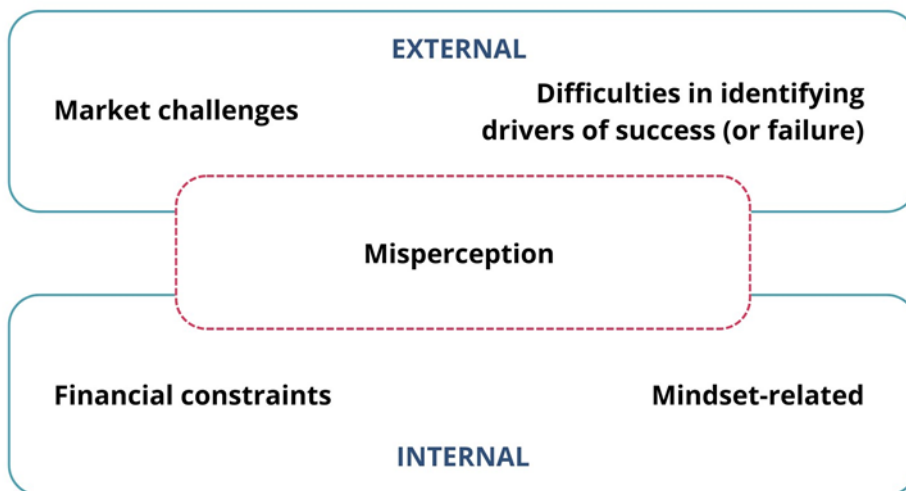


Figure 7. Categories identified within the challenges

3.3.3 POST-WORKSHOP REFLECTIONS

Feedback was collected throughout the month of May 2024. Importantly, four out of the ten workshop participants shared their opinions with us, representing distinct types of organisations operating within the gaming ecosystem. Therefore, it should be stressed that the opinions presented below are given from the perspective of VGI only.

The feedback form primarily focused on evaluating the process and outcomes of the workshop for its participants. Additionally, participants were asked to provide additional information on their opinions on the GAMEHEARTS project and its future research plans¹.

Regarding post-workshop reflections on its assumptions, implementation and scope the attention was focused on three primary areas: the primary associations related to the workshop, the most important outcomes of the workshop for the participants and their organisations, and the main associations related to the GAMEHEARTS project.

As for the key associations related to this workshop, participants highlighted various issues that can be categorised into four thematic areas: organisational aspects of the workshop, the

¹ Those research plans are as follows: Identification and verification of mechanisms of value transfer and value co-creation by EVGIE and CCI in the context of cultural audiences and the increase of (multidimensional) inclusivity; Exploration of impacts of co-creative innovation relationships maintained between EVGIE and CCI on organisational innovativeness of game developers (i.e., on 3 dimensions of innovativeness as identified in the Polish VGE), Development of strategic recommendations for VGDs (e.g. exploitation of co-creative innovation relationships; practices of efficient value transfer & value creation, smooth implementation of co-innovation processes).



course of the workshop, organisational aspects regarding the specificity of the participants relevant for industry recommendations, and industry-specific aspects of the gaming sector that are relevant for industry recommendations.

- **Regarding the workshop's organisation:** well-chosen participants, including diverse perspectives.
- **Regarding the workshop's execution:** interesting discussion), insightful conclusions, good intentions of organisers and participants, the workshop as an opportunity to expand knowledge, establish contacts, and understand new opportunities.
- **Regarding the specifics of the participants:** participants mistakenly adopt a local and personal perspective rather than being aware of the industry and European/global perspective , too excessive focus on financial issues of some workshop participants.
- **Regarding the gaming ecosystem:** lack of communication channels within the gaming industry and the broader gaming ecosystem.

In light of the above, the following conclusions can be drawn: (1) well-designed participant structure, which is crucial for the potential focus group interviews (FGIs) and virtual focus group interviews (vFGI); (2) in practice, significant heterogeneity of perspectives and approaches is important both within VGI and between VGI and CCI, justifying the assumption of the necessity for conducting in-depth interviews with various actors, not only game developers or VGI representatives; (3) although the gaming industry is dynamically developing and is hyper-growing, there is still considerable room for institutional improvement, especially in terms of its connections with other CCI sectors, which seem to be utilised to a very limited extent.

The second issue for which feedback was requested was the most important, and even critical, effects or implications of participating in the workshop for the participants and/or the organisations they represent. Interestingly, workshop participants highlighted not only aspects significant from their individual/organisational point of view but also pointed out implications relevant to the current and future functioning of video game development.

- **Implications relevant to the functioning and future of video game development:** the opportunity to present industry pains (3/4), the ability to draw attention to the understanding of the gaming industry;
- **Implications relevant to the interests of workshop participants:** the opportunity to understand the perspectives of other types of ecosystem actors (2/4), the ability to



present difficulties and challenges related to CCI, as well as "*The free opportunity to present inconvenient facts*" [P8], the possibility to establish contacts.

In general, it can be concluded that (1) the creative industries feel poorly heard at the level of policymakers, but their representatives are willing to share knowledge and ideas, or engage in broader cooperation (e.g., expert work, lobbying); (2) it can be assumed that the workshop achieved its goals related to creating intra- and inter-industry connections (i.e., T2.1.).

Last but not least, when it comes to the substantive and merit aspects, we asked our participants what their three key initial thoughts are when they think about the GAMEHEARTS project. It turned out that their associations concerned the workshop organiser, the specificity of the project, and – which is particularly valuable to us – the opportunities that participation and implementation of the project create for the domestic and European video game development industry:

- **Concerning the organisation conducting the research within GAMEHEARTS:** Wroclaw, WUEB;
- **Concerning the specificity of the project:** scientific and comprehensive research;
- **Concerning the opportunities that GAMEHEARTS creates for video game development:** the possibility of creating and strengthening cooperation, including pan-European cooperation, tightening cooperation within the creative industries, the possibility of building awareness of the gaming industry as an "*influential cultural medium that 'co-educates' the new consumer/cultural recipient*" [P9], education about the gaming industry; the possibility of co-creating grassroots recommendations and pro-development suggestions, including setting directions for legislative changes for the gaming industry in Europe.

In conclusion, it can be assumed that (1) the prepared and presented project description and activities to the workshop participants can be considered understandable, and more importantly, also encouraging for participation in the further research process, (2) it is significant that the participants perceive the GAMEHEARTS project as scientific, and thus a project that will bring credible and reliable results.

3.4 CONCLUSIONS

The workshop was intended to serve three main goals. First, to **bring key stakeholders together to generate new knowledge and ideas**. This goal can be considered achieved, as the execution of the workshop, as well as the information gathered a posteriori, allowed



the identification of key motives, challenges, and postulates and recommendations regarding cooperation and value co-creation at the VGI-CCI interface.

Second, **integration of existing and new contacts in the EVGIE and the CCI, as well as national government bodies**. Proper planning of the organisational and personnel structure of the workshop (as detailed in Subsection 3.2) allowed for the achievement of the second goal as well. It is worth noting that during the workshop, participants exchanged not only contacts but also mutual invitations to cross-industry events, such as *MeetUp65: Sounds Good*, organised on June 27, 2024, by the Centre for the Development of Creative Industries in Warsaw, whose poster is presented in Figure 10.



Figure 10. Invitation to MeetUp65: Sounds Good by Centre for the Development of Creative Industries (Source: [CRPK - MeetUp65: SoundsGood – zapraszamy 27 czerwca do CRPK!](#))

3.4.1. PATHWAYS TO IMPACT

The workshop of experts was an integrative, problem-oriented meeting moderated by a specialised facilitator, which made it distinctive. All participants outlined the workshops' significant practical and educational value. For instance, they were able to gain awareness about different perspectives, share contacts, and invitations to future events targeting CCI. Indeed, our participants highlighted the added value of the workshop, where the various actors could reveal their perspectives and discuss several themes, considering diversified viewpoints. Although there are some events where the discussion is launched, the possibility



of integrating, sometimes opposite, standpoints is exceptional. Moreover, it turned out that stakeholders had the opportunity to highlight both the barriers and the benefits of jointly achieving business goals in a friendly atmosphere. An example would be the support of political decision-makers in developing the gaming industry in the creative sector.

Moreover, decision-makers emphasised the need to continue significantly moderated meetings, which professionally manage threads while allowing deeper exploration and saturation of topics.

During the discussion, topics related to promoting video games and gaming via initiatives related to classical music were widely discussed both by the representative of the related institution, as well as by other participants to share experiences of the past, current, and potential initiatives inspired by the good practice from other countries. Multiple examples were new and even surprising for participants, who articulated their interest in the London Symphony Orchestra participation in the GAMEHEARTS project, looking for inspiration for their own future initiatives.

The usefulness (usability) of the workshop can be summarised in a few key points:

- The opportunity to learn different points of view on cross-sector cooperation, listen to each other and understand alternative perspectives;
- The possibility to present the specific challenges of the creative sector and the video game industry, thereby expanding the research field for subsequent project stages;
- The possibility of considering practitioners' perspectives when designing research tools, verifying whether all relevant topics have been included in the research plan;
- Preparing a framework for more efficient, market-oriented collaboration between VGI and other CCI entities;
- The opportunity to create an initial set of market practitioners' recommendations for entities influencing the direction of legislative changes supporting the video game industry in Europe.

3.4.2 INSIGHTS AND RECOMMENDATIONS FOR GAME DEVELOPERS

Our workshop also allowed us to collect some preliminary insights regarding the recommendations for game developers. First, video game producers and creators dedicate their products to the audience (players) of Generation Z or Alpha (teenagers, children aged 9-15). Meanwhile, addressees representing Generation X and Baby Boomers (people aged



45+, 50+) are increasingly playing a key role. Overall, it was fiercely discussed that **the silver gamers segment** will gain importance in the future, which should be considered by game developers.

Second, the gaming industry is perceived as hermetic and homogeneous. It seems essential to **popularise openness and willingness to cooperate** with other cultural industries and government entities. Pluralism can be achieved by promoting reports, research, and initiatives about co-innovation activities. Furthermore, it seems that VGDs are rarely aware that such cross-industry cooperation may be mutually beneficial.

Third, the European game developers **lack resilience against the increasing dominance of the North American and Asian publishers**. Better cooperation within the industry, with more mutual understanding and less internal competition, could prevent the situation in which most of the significant European studios will be owned by Chinese companies.

3.5.3 INSIGHTS AND RECOMMENDATIONS FOR POLICYMAKERS

- The participants agreed that policymakers need to improve their awareness of the potential and significance of the VGI. The EVGIE has great potential not only for economic profit but also for its important role in educational and cultural policies. Considering the relative insignificance of Europe as a gaming market compared to Asia and North America, there is much to be done not only to improve the role of the EVGIE on the global market, but also to prevent the progressive expansion of Chinese gaming companies and their economic and potential cultural impact on European gamers and, by extension, society. Additionally, there is a noticeable absence of a major or positive presence of the European Union in video games, representing a potential niche to fill.
- It is commonly known that the gaming industry is hyperdynamic and develops extremely fast, but our workshop shows that there is still considerable room for institutional improvement, especially in terms of its connections with other CCI sectors, which are utilised to a very limited extent. Furthermore, organisations feel their voices are not being heard (or perhaps ignored) despite their willingness to engage in joint actions to improve CCI further.
- There is a recognised deficit of research not only on VGI but also more broadly on CCI. Importantly, the discussion highlighted the need for reliable, valid, and credible research.



This suggests the existence of a need for institutionally funded research conducted by specialised scientific and/or research entities.



4 BRED A UNIVERSITY OF APPLIED SCIENCES

WORKSHOP

4.1 INTRODUCTION

As part of the GAMEHEARTS project, a workshop was organised and carried out by Breda University of Applied Sciences researchers. This section presents the insights and recommendations that emerged from the workshop: “The Trends, Policies and Collaboration of Making Video Games.” Since game developers are a primary stakeholder of the project, professionals with seniority in the video game industry were invited to participate in the workshop. The purpose of the workshop is to collect insights related to the key research themes of the project, exploring current trends of the EVGIE, possibilities for future collaboration and innovation, and recommendations to EU and broader European policies.

4.2 METHODOLOGY

The workshop was developed and executed by Mata Haggis-Burridge, Lindsey Bouwels, Silke Hassreiter, and Tuki Clavero of the Academy of AI, Games, and Media at Breda University of Applied Sciences. To maximise the participation of the video game industry professionals, the workshop was run twice via Microsoft Teams. The workshops were conducted on Friday May 17th and Tuesday May 21st, 2024. Both workshops last one hour and were conducted in English. All six participants were male-presenting, using he/him pronouns, and live in Europe. The invitee list was significantly more diverse, but only men responded. All participants are involved with the entertainment video game industry, with five currently working in development and one in video game-related law. Among the participants working as developers, there is representation from a variety of company sizes: one participant is part of an indie studio, one works for a start-up company, one works for a small company and two work for medium-sized companies. Five of the six participants are company co-founders. Prior to the workshops, the participants were given access to a digital whiteboard with the outline of the workshop and questions to be answered. These questions and the answers functioned as the main discussion points during the workshops. Both workshops were automatically transcribed using MS Teams and lightly edited for readability. The transcriptions have been encoded using Atlas.TI 24. Screenshots of the outline, questions, and answers on the digital whiteboard can be found in the appendix.



4.3 RESULTS

The following section describes the themes that emerged during the workshop.

4.3.1 RISK VERSUS REWARD

The main overarching theme emerging from the workshop was 'risk versus reward'. For video game industry professionals, the rewards for obtaining a grant, including accessibility features, and collaboration with other cultural industries need to be higher than the perceived risks. 'Risks' are primarily defined as being workload and its corresponding costs, but entwined with financial ramifications there were also topics of cultural sensitivity, inclusion, and tokenism. Although the benefits of these collaborative practices are recognised, without changes in legislation, the current risks were viewed as often outweighing the rewards. There are many options open for video game developers, so changing practices to include non-developers was seen as adding complexity in a way that other, safer and less-collaborative options did not.

4.3.2 MISMATCH BETWEEN GRANTS AND VIDEO GAME INDUSTRY

The risks vs reward theme was especially prominent in discussions surrounding grants. There is a mismatch between the potential and current state of video game grants. Several participants mentioned feeling that the grants are not aimed towards video game development, but rather other cultural industries such as film.

- *They write their grant applications around what they know, which from my experience at least apparently is film, because the first application we did for [indie video game name] was pretty much a film application that we had to do. (BUAS_P1)*
- *quite often what I see with [regional game developer support organisation] [...] is that often we get a message of the municipalities "oh, game developers can apply for this" and either they aren't kept in mind when issuing the grant or they're like, "well, it's suitable and if you read the text..." [...] so I believe there is a natural communication misfit there. (BUAS_P5)*

The creation of specific video game grants is a relatively new subject. As such, there are not a lot of grants to apply for.

- *There were media grants, which is mostly film and music, but they accepted games for a long time now and this year actually is the first year where they have the new grant that they*



have and it's not all the different grants kind of mixed into one. [...] But that's also kind of the only thing we have game specific here in Austria. (BUAS_P6)

One of the reasons that grants might not fit the video game development industry is the perceived lack of sufficient video game knowledge involved in the administration of grants.

- *I think that the problem is, at least for us, the people that decide those grants and those make those programmes don't know much about the games industry in general. They don't realise that there's an actual market there and that's also why it's always been in the shadows. (BUAS_P6)*

It was also agreed by the participants that often the language used in the grants did not match or align with industry terminology.

- *What I often see is that there are grants [...] then you see that actually it is fit for a developer to apply to a certain grant. But quite often there is a lot of legalese there. There's a lot of grant language and quite often people think: well, sorry, but I just make games. (BUAS_P5)*

One participant mentioned an organisation that provides grants in Belgium that has attuned the grant's language to that of video game developers:

- *The VAF is the Flanders Audiovisual Fund in Belgium. [...] It's for all audiovisual works. So not only games, but they have a specific game fund team. And one thing that's relatively good about that fund is that some people informed involved in short of Advisory Board, are a lot of Dutch and Belgian games industry folks. [...] it's pretty much written in a way that game developers have an aha moment. (BUAS_P6)*

The discussion during the workshop resulted in a clear view that grants are currently not sufficiently aimed at game developers. Increasing the knowledge of organisations or governments that create these grants could establish a more attuned grant system.

4.3.3 BUREAUCRACY OF GRANTS

According to participants, obtaining a grant is a very bureaucratic process, with a considerable number of requirements beforehand, while the funds might not be sufficient to sustain the development of the video game.



- *But then there's also just so much bureaucratic stuff, especially on the European level, and I get that there's some European requirements that that have to be filled in and it's fine. But there's so much stuff. (BUAS_P1)*
- *I mean, the problem is that if you're taking a grant, you're just getting paid for the development, right? This is not sustainable for post game launch. So you're still at the end making a product that you hope will sustain your business for a foreseeable future. (BUAS_P3)*
- *I find it very hard to bridge the first steps. Let's say when you're trying to create something out of scratch, you don't have a track record. You don't even have a solid team at place because you cannot pay a solid team and there you have this kind of chicken egg situation. (BUAS_P4)*

Some industry professionals choose to outsource the grant applications because of the number of requirements and resources needed.

- *I've been looking at getting an external party to do it for me because it's the bureaucracy. I don't care for it too much. (BUAS_P3)*

The sense of grant applications being performative in a manner outside of normal industry boundaries, to an extent that the work becomes burdensome or feels inauthentic, is a theme that returned in other topics. While 'authenticity' is not explicitly discussed in the workshops, there is an underlying sense that some framings of video game development are more aligned with the reality of the working situation, the desires of game developers, and player communities, than other framings that attempt to impose external orders or themes onto the group.

4.3.4 COLLABORATION AND ADDED VALUE

Similar to grant applications, participants are somewhat hesitant about collaboration, because they see collaborating with other cultural organisations/institutions as a risk. Game developers sell products and so need to develop a marketable product. The workshop participants mention the economic aspect is the highest concern: it needs to be economically beneficial for them to collaborate, which currently is not yet fully the case.

- [Interviewer] *So if you wanted to get historians excited to reach out to game studios, what would you? What tips would you recommend?*



- *Bring money. Bring a big ass bag of money. (BUAS_PI)*

All participants agreed with this sentiment. BUAS_PI elaborated:

- *50 grand is not a lot of money in the grand scheme of things. [...] that's just putting that risk on the game developers. I was like, OK, but where's the return? If you're better off gambling it on Steam and, you know, make money there. (BUAS_PI)*

An example of economic value in collaborations brought forward by one of the participants, is the use of licensing IP's in the current market:

- *Games are, of course, a kind of mass global product, right? So there's plenty of movie IPs or movie, all or like licence holders, that want to get their IP into games. (BUAS_P3)*

Participants also mention that the collaboration needs to make sense and feel natural. They emphasise that game developers don't want to go outside of their comfort zone too much.

- *But what I see is that at least parties would like to collaborate, but they don't want to go out of their comfort zone too much to only make that grant work. (BUAS_P5)*
- *In the end it also depends also what the collaboration is. I think if I would make like a football game, I would very much love a football club to be part of it [...] hell yeah, we can use your names or your logos or whatever they can also help both sides. (BUAS_P6)*

One participant shared their experiences on collaborating with other industries:

- *[...] these other industries, they are amazing grant hustlers. So if they have contact with games people, they will automatically try to say, "yo, I hustled this grant. Do you want to be part of this grant I just hustled?" And then you have the cross pollination that way in a sort of, I think, viable organic way. (BUAS_P2)*

Several participants mention that collaboration can feel unnatural or even forced. Collaboration for the sake of implementing culture in video games is deemed as such and the majority of the participants agrees that entertainment video games are already culture.

- *[...] if I look at the perspective from the art form, I don't believe it's that much different because culture like culture, is everything a society brings forward. And games translate that because they have societal teams. We have political teams and also culture is what brings us together and games bring people together. So, in that sense, I really believe it's culture. (BUAS_P5)*
- *But I think even if games are just purely entertainment, I think they still have cultural value, and you can see by the people who made it what influenced them. And even if it's*



entertainment you, you can see the culture behind the people who made the game. I think therefore it is very much already by itself part of culture. (BUAS_P6)

There is a perceived difference between who is involved in the collaboration, as collaboration with other video game companies and between countries feels much more natural than working with a university.

- *[...] I see some co-development between Dutch developers and like Belgian developers where one of the requirements is that a Belgian party is involved for that grant, so then you see like a natural collaboration between parties. That helps. But sometimes, like you said, is there are also collaboration you need in the university. Then you see an entertainment dev and they try to work with the university and the university wants to try to work with the dev, but that doesn't work necessarily. (BUAS_P5)*
- *[...] it's more like, not doing it out of their own interest, but more to kind of fit in those grants. So more forcefully in the end than there is a natural, interest in collaboration there. (BUAS_P6)*

This concept of developer's 'comfort zones' is an important underlying theme in many of the responses, connecting with authenticity, financial and cultural risk-avoidance, and more.

Another effect according to participants, is that forced collaboration could lead to gatekeeping:

- *And you'd also want to prevent that those kinds of collaboration lead to gatekeeping. [...] there are different producers knowing that they're needed. And it also leads to commercial arrangements, which are not that optimal because they're gatekeeping ground. Like, if you want it, you need me. So that also means that I impose these commercial conditions on you in the collab. (BUAS_P6)*

To ensure success for creating a viable product, participants highlighted the need for a respectful collaboration:

- *If they want to make a game where music is very important and they can find an orchestra. But that orchestra should also be open to working with developers and really also embrace it as an art form. Because if they're like "Oh well, there's that stupid little video game." Then they should at least treat each other as equals as equal makers of art. And then I*



believe the most beautiful collaborations can come out of it. But that also requires work from both sides. (BUAS_P5)

- *In what way can you insert games in other fields without also reducing them to something else that they're not. You know, if games is about an experience you're having, which is you, with your friends or you spending time alone with screen and inserting yourself in the story. It's something that you cannot maybe have in a gallery space for did 5 minutes. (BUAS_P4)*

Apart from the monetary reasons for collaboration, it is important that both parties need to be open to the collaboration while respecting each other's expertise and products. Game developers want to be proud and engaged with the video games they are making, and the idea of creating a five-minute gallery experience needs to fulfil their creative goals alongside their financial considerations.

4.3.5 VIDEO GAME INDUSTRY AND INCLUSION

One of the areas that has gathered more focus is the access to video games. Whether that is monetary limitations, stigma, social marginalisation, or technology, developers are overall more mindful whether people can play the video games they release or not, compared to 10 years ago. While all participants agreed this was a positive development, one participant was especially passionate on this topic:

- *[Participant] The new generation Gen Z and what's coming there? I feel like they don't even know what a controller is at all and they're more used to touching things, so it needs to be touch screen. [...] So yeah, I think the new generation might have a barrier there as well. (BUAS_P6)*
- *[Interviewer] Do you do you feel like there's a language of video games that needs to be learnt?*
- *[Participant] Yes, yes, for sure. Especially people that have never played games before and like I just said they don't know which buttons to press and when. [...] I think there is a language there and I think it's important for us as developers that we also think about first time players. (BUAS_P6)*



The concept of video games having their own language of interactions is a powerful consideration when considering accessibility for broader audiences, particularly in venues where non-players may encounter a video game-like experience for the first time.

Several participants vocalised their concerns with a divide in the industry when it comes to inclusion. This again reflects the theme of risk versus reward. They mention it is a challenge to match inclusion and business needs:

- *Inclusion like has the risk of excluding another group. From a business point of view, it is very difficult when you're dealing with a target audience to figure out how far you can go.*
(BUAS_P3)

The divide in the industry can also be seen in the policing of accessibility and inclusion throughout the video game industry. While participants mention this happening in other industries such as film, the policing in the video game industry is perceived as more prominent.

- [Participant] *At the same time I still see the anti-woke police of Sweet Baby Inc. [a company that was targeted due its positivity towards inclusion] and everything. So it is strange to see it like both improving and actually lagging behind. Because if you look at it from that perspective, how developers are harassed by trying to be inclusive. [...] We just came out from the dark ages. We are actually improving and at the same time I'm a bit scared that we are being thrown back by a small group of players with a big mouth.*
(BUAS_P5)
- [Interviewer] *Yeah. Do you see that as being a problem for other parts of the cultural industry, or do you think it's particularly strong within video games?*
- [Participant] *I think it's particularly strong within video games because if you look at it from a player perspective and I also see that when I am busy in E-sports, is that the toxic masculinity in online video game communities might, at least, halt some developments which are needed. The toxic masculinity of people looking at paintings, seems to be less so. So I believe it's really something that's tied to online gamer communities every now and then.* (BUAS_P5)

Another participant mentioned that accessibility can feel like an afterthought for AAA companies:

- *At the same time, especially for triple-A games, it often feels like they slap some accessibility on at the last minute. [...] It's still positive because it shows accessibility is needed. On the*



other hand, it might also not always work or be helpful for the people that actually need it, and in that sense be like also like a bad representation of accessibility. (BUAS_P6)

During the discussion about inclusion and accessibility within the video game industry, it became apparent that there are differences between company size on the topic of implementing inclusion. Some participants that worked at smaller sized or start-up companies, as well as indie developers, explained they can be more experimental with implementing inclusion.

- *If someone's going to hate on it, someone's going like it. For us, that doesn't matter. It is a very different scale, you know, times 6 smaller. I think we do have that option to be more experimental. [...] That was like fuck it, let's do it. We don't care. We'll see how it works out. (BUAS_P1)*
- *I do feel there is room for a bit more risky approaches, perhaps starting with smaller projects. (BUAS_P4)*

One developer working at a medium sized company stated that safer is often better for their company, because experimenting poses risk of alienating part of their target audience:

- *I think it's good if you if you've got a game that really has a strong resonating message, but you do risk like not having a proper business for it. [...] I think if you're expecting that it needs to really sell a lot of money, it's an expensive game to make, then I think it becomes maybe too risky to do. At our scale, it definitely already is a big question mark if we can be as experimental. Sometimes just being safer is just easier. (BUAS_P3)*

These changes in room for experimentation between different tie back to the main risk vs reward argument. If there are recommended changes in legislation or policies, such as awarding of grants related to inclusion, company size could be a factor to be taken into consideration.

4.3.6 SOCIAL ACCESSIBILITY

Social accessibility is another topic that was brought up several times during the workshop. Participants expressed concern about developing video games becoming a less viable career choice due poverty, a lack of a social safety net, or education.

- *[...] if you do want to like get like triple A, don't think you have a choice but going to university. How many big companies hire people that are self-taught nowadays? [...] You*



can get an internship. You got the paper. You got the connection. You get an initiative. That's why you do it. Everything else you can learn online. (BUAS_P1)

- *It's becoming a little bit of a luxurious career in essence, like an economically privileged career to be in essentially. I think, therefore, the amount of voices who have not had true economic anxiety goes down in games as a result. (BUAS_P2)*
- *And I think then developing games also has the additional gate of being a very high requirement industry which you need to know a lot. And technically, the wages of the salaries are also quite low, so you know a lot. You don't get paid very well, you take a lot of risks. It's in many ways an industry of passion. It's not an industry of luxury. (BUAS_P3)*

This growing social inaccessibility of video game development as a career is another factor in the risk versus reward theme. As participant BUAS_P2 points out, if video game development becomes a luxurious career, the number of developers with a less privileged background decrease. This could affect the representation in the video game industry, and therefore, the themes and cultures reflected in video games. The same participant relates this to the application of grants:

- *[...] what I wanted to like to tell legislators about funding is: when you make funding schemes, very ivory tower, you are worsening the amount of how luxurious the career becomes very quickly. Because it only becomes accessible to people with higher education and with the time and money to spend the time on these applications. (BUAS_P2)*

The administrative burden of grant applications risks making them inaccessible for developers without the resources, experiences, skills, or knowledge to navigate bureaucratic processes, which can exclude developers from marginalised groups and less privileged classes. Apart from the accessibility of grants themselves, several attendees pointed out that these grant application criteria surrounding inclusion and diversity also risk becoming performative.

- *There was this a thing in there in the application about diversity, right? And it wasn't about diversity of your game. It was diversity of your team. They made us write down every single person in the team and why they were diverse. And I refuse to do that. [...] this is their private information like why do I have to "expose them" for your application, so you can feel good about it. (BUAS_P1)*

The argument highlights the concerns about social accessibility in the video game industry. Attendees emphasised that economic disadvantage, lack of education, and a lack of a social



safety net is holding back the diversity of the video game industry, and with that, the future of video game development.

4.3.7 ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE

As part of the workshop, attendees were asked about emerging trends within the video game industry. Several attendees mentioned Artificial Intelligence (AI) on the board and in conversation. They see the benefits of using AI and would pursue the use of AI in their work. According to one attendee, AI has the potential to increase the access to video game development:

- *I think it offers a lot of valuable tools for developers, especially also for those whom game development itself is not that accessible. It can make it much more accessible to people, and it gives people that don't have a certain skill set still a way to create something that they want to create without having to find other people to make the whole thing.*
(BUAS_P6)

Here, BUAS_P6 highlights where AI can fill in for a lack of skill or development team. He also expresses concern regarding the use of AI in video game development.

- *I think that's also kind of like the downside of AI where we'll see much more AI made games, probably, flooding the market at some point. [...] it might be harder to even find quality content. In some cases, you don't know how the AI does certain things and if you don't validate the output that it does, it might also lead to problems.* (BUAS_P6)

Another attendee shared similar concerns:

- *And also things being created can be automatic IP infringements because they use a certain tool datasets. The largest risk I see from a creative perspective is that AI can't do everything a regular artist can, but AI is rather cheap [...] I believe a game studio needs to decide for itself: we can do something with AI and then it's pretty standard, but it's super cheap or (inaudible- 42.53) tailor made, but that's rather expensive. Then you need to decide for yourself: am I going to pay that extra for something tailor made? And if that decision is increasingly answered with no, then I believe you have games that really are going to look like each other. And I believe that's the largest risk because then it becomes really bland, like a photocopy.* (BUAS_P5)



The opinions on the use of AI in video game development seemed to be divided, but the overall sentiment was both AI-generated and handcrafted video games can co-exist within the future market.

- *I think there will be a market for AI driven games and there will be still a market for handcrafted games because people will appreciate them, especially if there's more generic stuff out there. People are going to look for personal experiences, people telling their stories.*
(BUAS_P6)

Therefore, similar to grant applications and collaboration with other industries, the use of AI appears to be subjected to the risk versus reward discussion. It is apparent that apart from policy changes, video game companies, as well as the wider cultural sector, needs to be proactive in the decision if and how to implement AI. The use of AI is seen as posing a threat of homogenisation to video game content, lowering cultural value and, eventually, also the financial returns that game developers rely on to create their next game.

4.4 CONCLUSIONS

This workshop highlights the need for policymaking that creates a more supportive framework for video game industry professionals to explore the opportunities that come with grants, inclusion, and cultural collaboration. It is apparent that the current practices and legislation do not match with the state of the video game industry. There are underlying concerns about authenticity from many perspectives, such as resistance to performative inclusion to collaboration for the sake of grants rather than goals matching game developer's creative urges. There is a balance in the developers' goals, between their desire to maintain passion for the video games they make and the complex financial and cultural milieu they operate in. These considerations manifest in many forms of the 'risk versus reward' balance that is fundamental to all themes.

4.4.1 RECOMMENDATIONS FROM INDUSTRY PROFESSIONALS

Based on the outcomes of the workshop, some recommendations for can be made:

- Grants
 - Involve game developers are in the creation of grants
 - Align language with video game industry standards
 - Ensure accessibility of language and processes
 - Optimise and modernise the application processes and technology used



- Be mindful of the costs of video game development compared to grant-preparation costs
- Explore grant variation between countries
- Collaboration
 - Define clear financial arguments for collaboration
 - Ensure video game expertise is equally valued
 - Define clear support structure – European – national – regional – local
 - Evaluate collaboration between universities and video game companies
- Diversity and inclusion
 - Evaluate diversity targets of grants, these were viewed as positive but not always sensitively implemented
 - Consider company size in implementation of accessibility features
 - Consider digital literacy
- Artificial Intelligence
 - AI is a double-edged sword – it offers benefits while presenting new and complex problems which mean participants are very cautious about its use and overall somewhat negative about its likely impact on the financial and cultural importance of video games.

4.4.2 PATHWAYS TO IMPACT

This workshop brought together a variety of video game industry professionals within the same digital space and connected them and the researchers on the various topics that were discussed. Since the discussed topics included recommendations for future video game policies and collaborations, the workshop succeeded in understanding not only the needs and wants of a variety of video game company sizes in the Netherlands, but also the struggle of risk vs reward the video game industry faces and how this weighs in their decision making process.

It should be noted that during four of the six participants expressed immediate interest in joining the Expert Panel, while the other two mentioned possibly being interest in a future oversight board but did not want to decide at that moment.



4.5. APPENDIX

4.5.1 APPENDIX A

The following screenshots show the results of the workshop. The digital whiteboard can be viewed through this [link \(https://miro.com/app/board/uXjVKPDXYgs=?share_link_id=339022212275\)](https://miro.com/app/board/uXjVKPDXYgs=?share_link_id=339022212275) with the password: gamehearts. The answers in the red sticky notes are from the AI generated developer “Lucas”, whose contributions were added to start the conversations on the board. For more information about the prompts used to generate these texts, see Appendix B.

4.5.1.1 TRENDS AND SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY

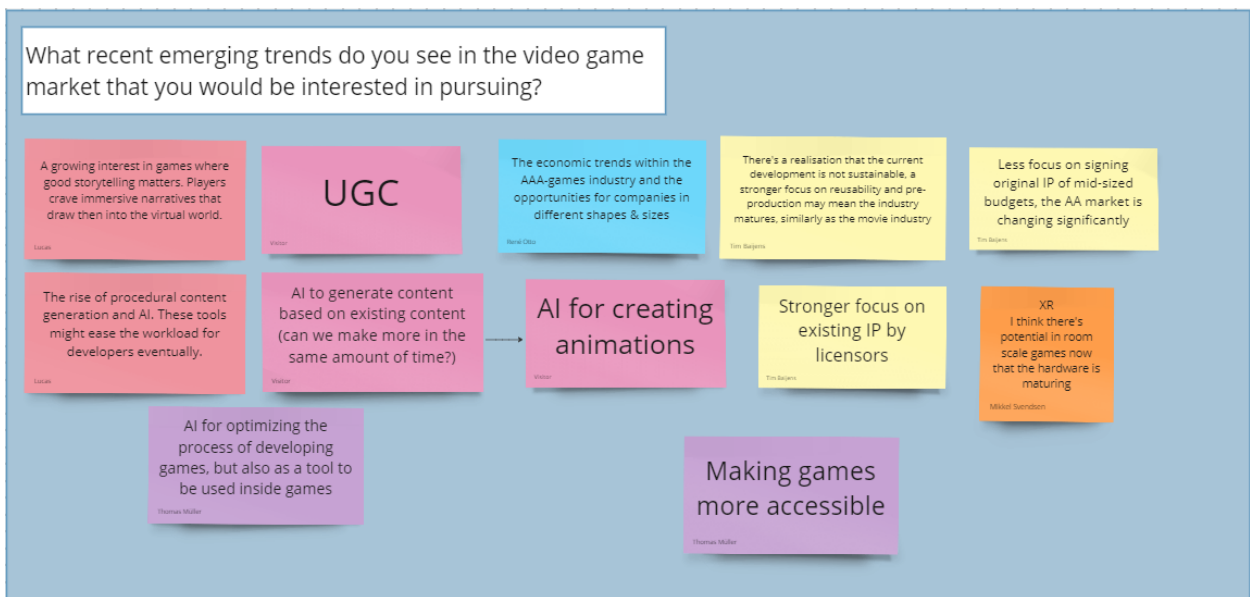


Figure 1. Recent trends participants would be interested in pursuing.



Figure 2. Recent trends participants are concerned about.



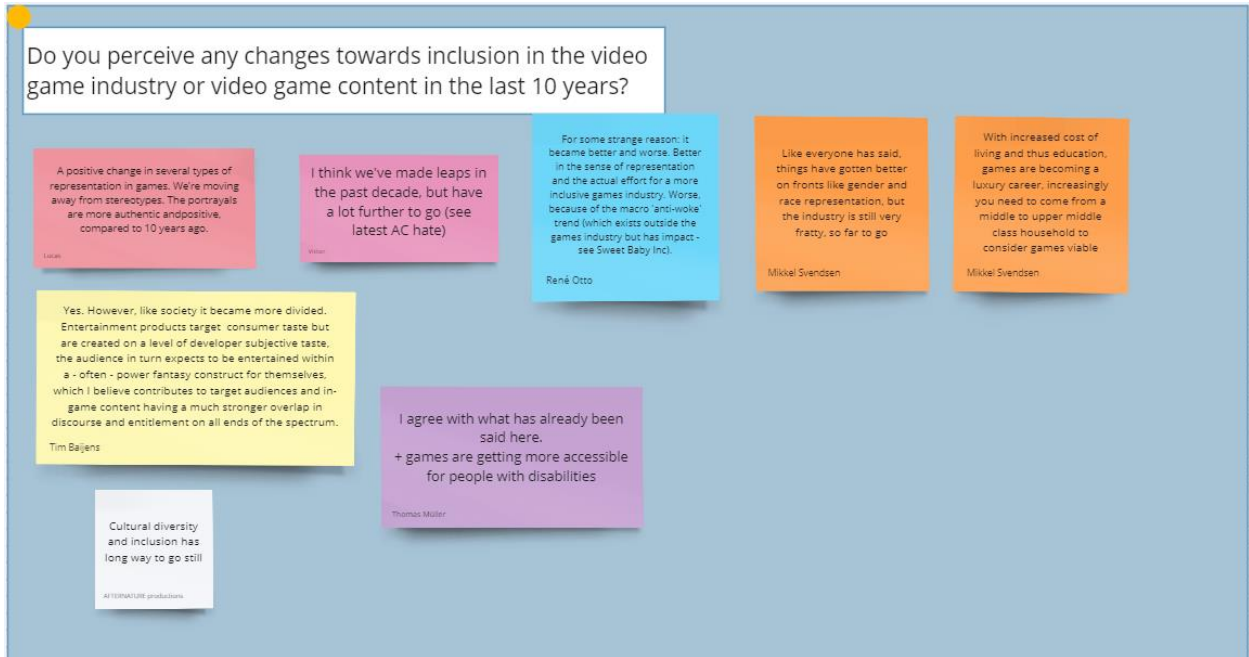


Figure 3. Perceived changes towards inclusion in the last 10 years.



Figure 4. Social responsibility in video game development.



Figure 5. Bonus question: Opportunities of a strong video game industry.



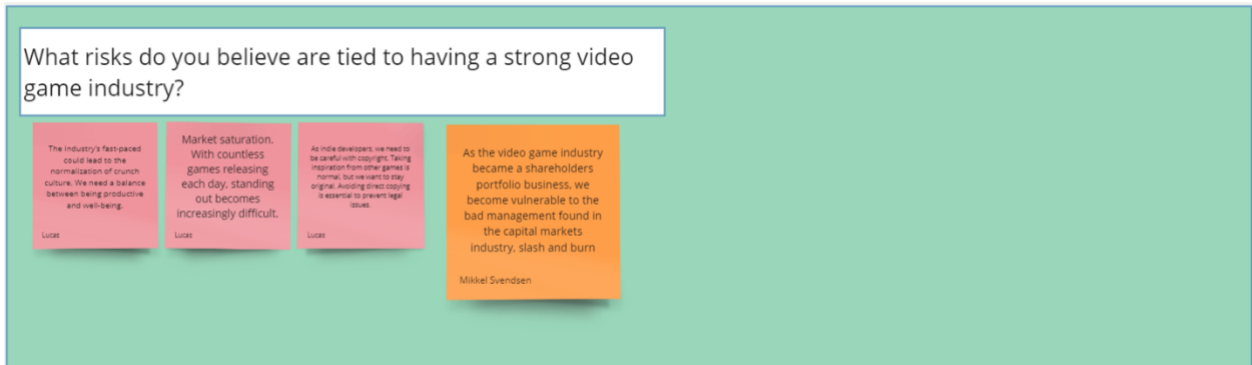


Figure 6. Bonus question: Risks of a strong video game industry.

4.5.1.2 CULTURE AND COLLABORATION



Figure 7. How video games contribute to a wider culture.

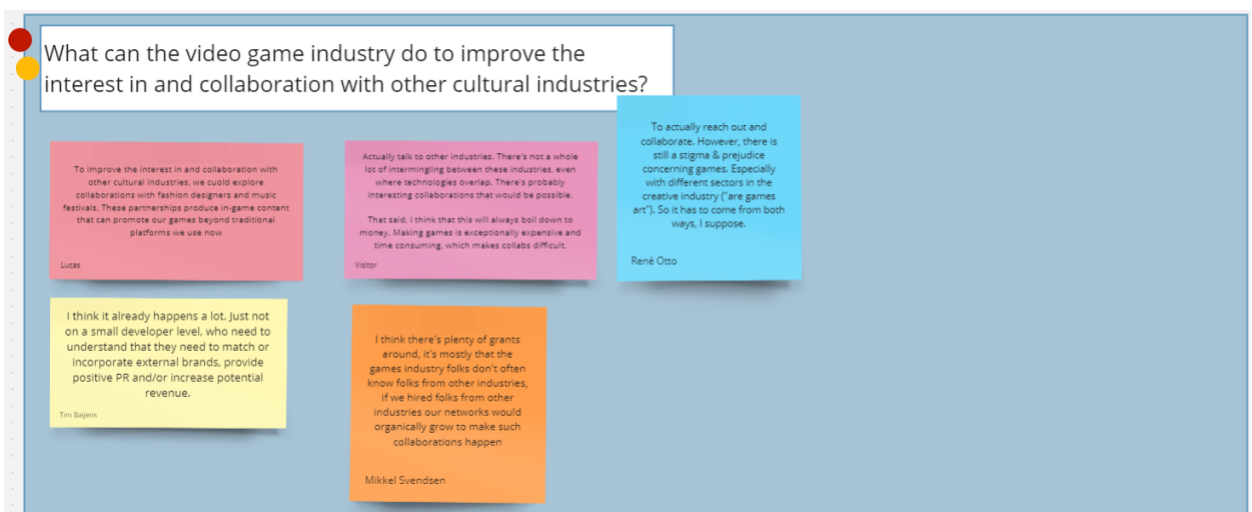


Figure 8. Ways to Improving interest and collaboration with other cultural industries.



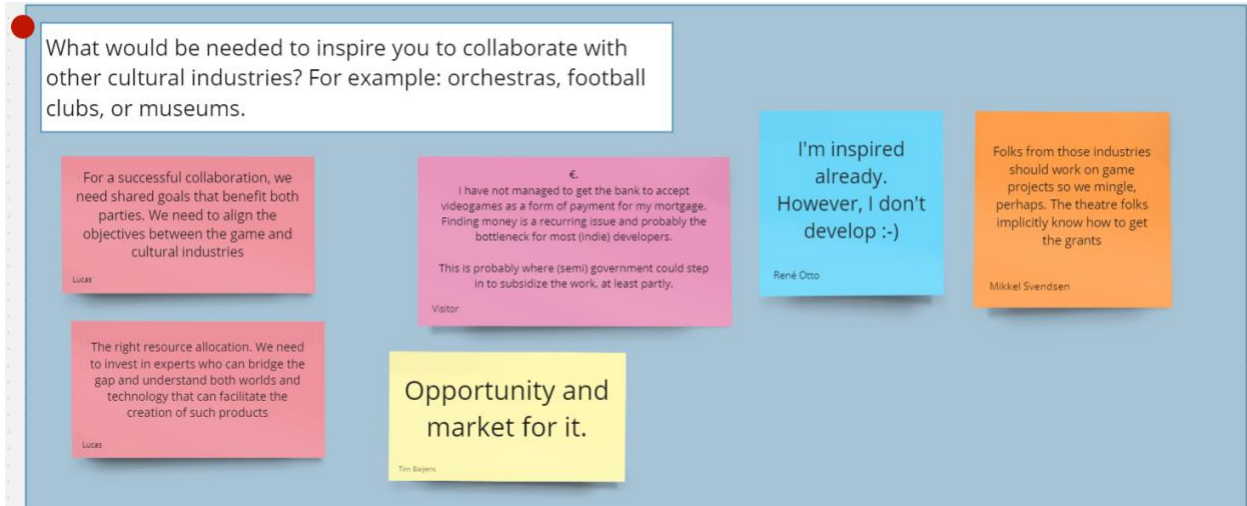


Figure 9. What is needed to inspire collaboration with other cultural industries.



Figure 10. Bonus question: Cultural collaboration experiences.

4.5.1.3 POLICIES

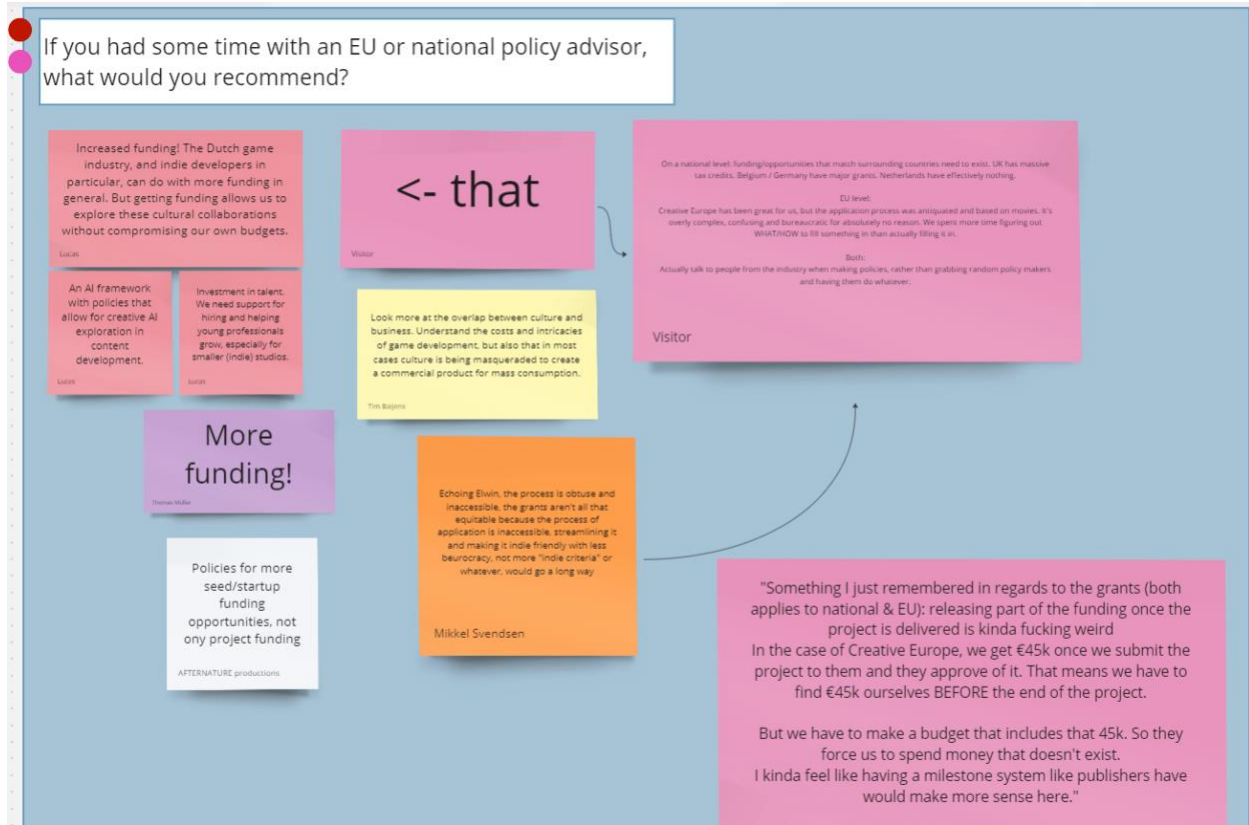


Figure 11. Experiences with policies in video game development.



GAMEHEARTS (<https://gamehearts.eu/>) has received funding from European Union's Horizon Europe Research and Innovation programme under Grant Agreement No. 101132543.





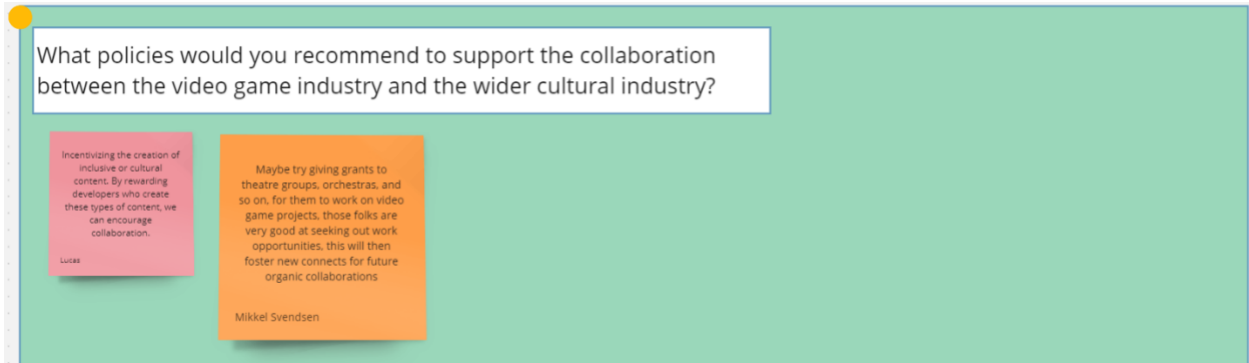


Figure 14. Bonus question: Policy recommendations to support collaboration.

4.5.1.4 KEY TAKEAWAYS

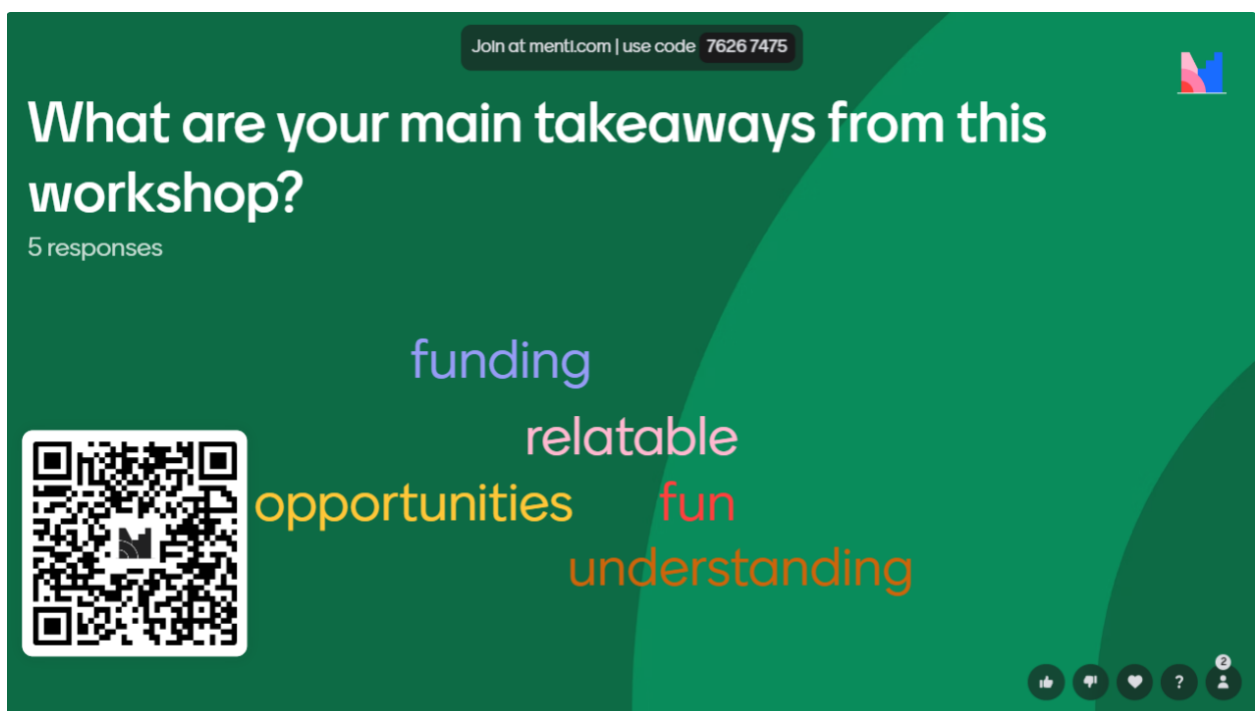


Figure 15. Word cloud of the key takeaways of the workshop.

4.5.2 APPENDIX B

The following section describes the characteristics that were chosen to represent the AI-generated video game developer “Lucas”. These characteristics were used to answer the questions by MS Copilot LLM and for editing purposes afterwards.

Details about Lucas:

- Senior video game developer



GAMEHEARTS (<https://gamehearts.eu/>) has received funding from European Union's Horizon Europe Research and Innovation programme under Grant Agreement No. 101132543.



- From the Netherlands
- Indie company
- Focused on innovation, collaboration and making more money
- Makes casual games
- Lucas' main market is the Netherlands and Europe
- Abundance of technical knowledge
- Somewhat sceptical about the impact of policies
- Somewhat apprehensive to collaborate with cultural industries, but open to collaborate



5 UNIVERSITY OF VIENNA WORKSHOP

5.1 INTRODUCTION

The gaming industry has emerged as a significant cultural and social force, influencing not only entertainment but also educational and social dynamics across the globe. Recognising the multifaceted impact of gaming, this report presents insights from the "Gaming as a Cultural and Social Actor: Vienna Stakeholders' Workshop."

The workshop held by the team of the University of Vienna is a starting point and foundation for the gathering of knowledge from other academics, industry practitioners, policymakers, and diverse stakeholders, in shaping the direction of the research that follows and is one of the series of workshop ran by all partners in the framework of the GAMEHEARTS project.

The primary goal of the workshop was to identify key issues and opportunities within the gaming sector, with a particular focus on policy measures and the role of gaming in supporting societal values, especially for children. Participants were invited to address critical questions such as the one change they would like to see in the European Union gaming industry, the obligations of developers and companies to gaming communities regarding inclusion, addiction, and online transparency, and whether current regulatory frameworks aid or hinder the industry's ability to promote citizen well-being. Additionally, the workshop discussed the persistent gender disparity in the industry, where women, despite making up half of the player base in Europe, are significantly underrepresented in professional and leadership roles. Solutions were explored, alongside strategies for enhancing transparency in video game development to foster greater trust among consumers and stakeholders.

5.2 METHODOLOGY

The workshop brought together a diverse group of stakeholders from various fields, as detailed in the appendix. Sixteen participants included educational scientists specialising in digital media and pedagogy, game developers, CEOs and founders of video game studios, showcasing a deep engagement with both the creative and business sides of the video games industry.

The media sector was represented by podcast hosts dedicated to 'nerd' culture and a prominent video game streamer, highlighting the role of community and media in gaming culture. Additionally, experts in gamification, behavioural design, and AI ethics provided



insights into the broader implications of gaming. Legal perspectives on youth protection in video games were also discussed, alongside contributions from media critics and psychologists focusing on the impact of video games on children and families. This diverse group of participants underscored the multifaceted nature of gaming as both a cultural and social phenomenon.

The workshop was held on May 21, 2024 online to ensure convenience and accessibility for all attendees. It lasted 90 minutes, commenced with a welcoming message and introductions from each participant, fostering a conducive environment for open discourse.

The discussion was formed around three axes: regulation and protection of minors, education for children through gaming, gender and diversity in the gaming industry. Participants were invited to reflect on ethics, diversity, and responsibilities in the gaming industry:

- Do game developers or companies have any obligation to gaming communities with regard to inclusion, addiction, transparency for the on-line experience?
- Do existing frameworks support or hinder gaming industries' potential to cater for citizens' well-being?
- Women make half of the players across Europe, yet they disappear in the professions and in industry leadership. What might be a way out of this asymmetry?
- How can transparency in game development processes be improved to build trust with consumers and other stakeholders?

5.3 RESULTS

Participants raised significant concerns regarding **the regulation and protection of minors** in the realm of esports and gaming. Numerous questions arose, particularly concerning the age demographics of consumers and players. This included inquiries into labour laws and, notably, the safeguarding of minors.

Critiques were voiced regarding Austria's federal system, which has resulted in a patchwork of regulations across its nine states. Participants advocated for a more unified approach to minor protection in esports and gaming, highlighting the need for consistency and coherence in regulations.

There is a perceived inadequacy in the current measures designed to protect minors. They highlighted instances where age verification processes were lacking, such as in the case of opening a Steam account, where users can input any information without undergoing Know



Your Client (KYC) checks. Additionally, concerns were raised about the accessibility of age-inappropriate content on platforms like Twitch, where individuals can freely stream video games like *Counter-Strike* without sufficient age restrictions.

A counter argument presented was the need to focus on responsibility not only on behalf of the state but to the parents, emphasising the crucial role of parents in understanding and managing their children's media consumption. They drew parallels between this responsibility and the task of ensuring children do not watch inappropriate movies or read unsuitable books. Furthermore, they called for enhanced media training and awareness among parents, highlighting the necessity for better education in navigating the complexities of contemporary media environments.

The educational aspect of gaming was discussed through the lens of how video games can be used as tools for learning and engagement of children. Participants stressed the need for balanced approaches that combine regulation with education to help parents and children navigate the complexities of gaming.

Recommendations included developing educational video games that are both engaging and easy to understand, providing media training for parents, and fostering collaboration between the gaming industry, educational institutions, and policymakers.

The role of gaming in inspiring dreams and aspirations among young people was acknowledged, alongside the ethical considerations of video game design. Participants emphasised the need for integrating ethics into the education of video game designers to ensure responsible and sustainable innovation. The workshop also highlighted the importance of addressing psychological impacts, such as the habituation to microtransactions and the potential for gaming addiction, through educational initiatives and thoughtful video game design.

In addition, it was highlighted that there is a longstanding presence and credibility of regulatory bodies, such as USK (since 1994) and PEGI (since 2003). The argument was against the notion that these institutions are new or inadequate in their regulatory functions. The participant elucidated the rigorous processes involved in obtaining age ratings, which include the submission of extensive documentation and representative content for thorough review.

The importance of raising awareness about these issues was also emphasised, particularly regarding the significant financial expenditures that can occur within video games. They



underscored the challenges faced by children and young people who may struggle to keep pace with their peers due to financial constraints or age-inappropriate content.

Overall, consensus was clear when it was stressed that there is an important need for a balanced approach to regulation—one that considers both the industry's financial imperatives and the well-being of young people and families. They emphasised the importance of not overlooking the perspectives of these stakeholders in the pursuit of commercial interests.

Gender and diversity issues were discussed with the focus on underrepresentation of women and marginalised groups in the gaming community and industry. Participants noted the significant challenges women face in entering and succeeding in gaming, including harassment and the dominance of male players in genres such as first-person shooters. From the female streamer's point of view, there is a great pressure, and expectations placed on women, with constant over-scrutiny and judgement toward them while performing on streams. The prevalence of harassment, including sexist comments, threats, and toxic behaviour, is a significant issue that negatively impacts the gaming experience for women. The underrepresentation of women in esports is a significant issue that was raised due to the male-dominated nature of the field, with only approximately 5% of players being female. It was highlighted that female esports players face a challenging environment and harassment which make it extremely difficult for women to enter the esports industry, exacerbating the existing gender disparity.

The importance of early exposure to gaming for girls, inclusive events, and female role models was emphasised as crucial for encouraging diverse participation. The workshop also highlighted the disparity between casual and hardcore gamers, with the latter group often being dismissive of the former. It was pointed out that the video gaming community has a noticeable division between casual and hardcore gamers, with women often associated with casual and single-player video games while men tend to gravitate towards multiplayer and hardcore gaming. There is a perceived hierarchy within the community, with hardcore gamers looking down on casual players. Women, in particular, face challenges when transitioning from casual to more social gaming experiences, such as those found in multiplayer video games. Attention was drawn to the community's reputation for being unwelcoming and harsh, particularly towards women, contributing to the difficulty for women to integrate into the gaming sector as a whole, making it important to foster a more beginner-friendly environment. However, despite these challenges, it was pointed out that there are instances of women



being warmly received by the gaming community, emphasising the need for inclusivity and support for all gamers.

Participants advocated for industry-wide efforts to create a more welcoming environment, support initiatives that promote inclusivity, and address systemic barriers that hinder diversity. There was a call for more video games designed for beginners and older generations, aiming to bridge the gap between different demographic groups and provide positive shared experiences for families. There was a call for more video games designed for beginners and older generations, aiming to bridge the gap between different demographic groups and provide positive shared experiences for families.

The workshop shed light on the **operational aspects of the gaming industry** and the challenges faced by developers, especially indie studios. Securing funding remains a significant hurdle, with a reliance on public funding seen as vital for supporting innovative and niche projects that venture capital might overlook. Participants discussed the economic pressures that lead to the adoption of microtransactions and other monetisation strategies. There was a call for sustainable business models that balance revenue generation with consumer satisfaction, and for fairer representation and inclusivity in leadership roles within the industry. The importance of accurate and consistent rating systems for digital content was also highlighted, along with the need for greater visibility and recognition of the industry's contributions.

5.4 CONCLUSIONS

Based on the outcomes of the workshop, some recommendations from the stakeholders' overview were made in the following Subsections.

5.4.1 REGULATION AND PROTECTION OF MINORS

Stringent age verification processes on gaming platforms are crucial to prevent minors from accessing age-inappropriate content. This includes mandatory Know Your Customer (KYC) checks similar to those used in the financial industry to ensure accurate age verification. Additionally, it is important to regulate advertisements targeting children, particularly those promoting in-game purchases and microtransactions. Monitoring and restricting the marketing of gift cards and in-game currency to minors is also necessary. To address the inconsistency of current regulations, a unified regulatory framework across EU should be developed.



Collaboration among member states is essential to ensure coherent policy implementation that consistently protects minors.

5.4.2 INDUSTRY PRACTICES AND CHANGES

The gaming industry should see an increase in public funding to support diverse and innovative video game projects, particularly those from indie developers. Funding mechanisms that prioritize projects promoting cultural heritage and educational content are vital. Developing sustainable business models that balance revenue generation with consumer well-being is another crucial step. Transparency in microtransactions and fair pricing strategies are essential to prevent exploitative practices. Additionally, improving representation and inclusivity in industry leadership roles can be achieved by creating mentorship programs and support networks for underrepresented groups. Policies promoting diversity in hiring practices and leadership positions within gaming companies should be implemented to foster a more inclusive industry environment.

5.4.3 GENDER AND DIVERSITY

Promoting early exposure to gaming for girls through educational programs and inclusive gaming events is essential. Organising workshops and events specifically aimed at encouraging young girls to explore gaming and video game development can help achieve this goal. Supporting female role models in gaming is also important to inspire and encourage more women to enter the industry. Platforms should be created for women to share their experiences and achievements in gaming. Furthermore, industry-wide initiatives should be implemented to address harassment and create a safer, more welcoming environment for women and marginalized groups. Developing policies and guidelines to combat toxic behaviour and ensure inclusive practices in gaming communities and workplaces is necessary for fostering a more inclusive gaming culture.

5.4.4 EDUCATIONAL INTEGRATION

Developing educational video games that are engaging and easy to use, while integrating educational content with enjoyable gameplay, is vital for leveraging the educational potential of video games. Collaboration with educational institutions to create video games that align with curricular goals and learning outcomes is essential. Additionally, providing media training



and resources for parents can help them manage their children's gaming activities and understand the potential benefits and risks. Workshops and informational materials on setting appropriate boundaries and encouraging healthy gaming habits should be made available. Fostering collaboration between the gaming industry, educational institutions, and policymakers is crucial for enhancing the educational potential of video games. Joint initiatives that leverage gaming technologies for educational purposes and promote digital literacy can significantly contribute to this goal.

These recommendations aim to create a balanced approach to regulation, support innovation in the gaming industry, and promote inclusivity and educational integration. Implementing these recommendations requires coordinated efforts from industry stakeholders, policymakers, and the broader community to ensure the gaming ecosystem contributes positively to society.

5.4.5 PATHWAYS TO IMPACT

The workshop provided critical insights and recommendations that will inform policy measures within the gaming industry, particularly regarding the regulation and protection of minors, ethical considerations, and inclusivity. By bringing together diverse stakeholders, the workshop facilitated discussions on sustainable business models, transparency in microtransactions, and the need for public funding to support innovative and culturally significant projects, particularly from indie developers.

Emphasising the educational potential of video games, the workshop called for collaboration between the gaming industry, educational institutions, and policymakers to develop engaging educational video games and provide media training for parents. This integration aims to enhance digital literacy and promote positive gaming habits among children and families.

This workshop was one of the series of the preliminary workshops hosted by the academic partners of GAMEHEARTS and will be used to help establish further links to industry, academics, and policymakers. The workshops will facilitate the start of a continued conversation that will carry on throughout the project (and beyond), allowing the latest thinking to be fed into the project, and in turn, findings fed back and tested (where appropriate) in an iterative process of continued industry, academic, and policy engagement. These workshops will also be used as a research tool, bringing people and organisations together to not just share, but create new knowledge.



5.5 APPENDIX A

Organisers:

Katharine Sarikakis, Univ-Prof. Dr., head of Media Governance and Industries Research Lab, coordinator of “GAMEHEARTS”.

Oleksandra Gudkova, Dr., senior research assistant.

Lisa Alfonzo, MSc, research assistant.

Lisa Alfonzo is a research assistant at the Department of Communication, working on the GAMEHEARTS project led by Katharine Sarikakis. Driven by a desire to explore communication dynamics, her research sheds light on critical aspects of the digital age. Lisa holds a BA in Communication from George Mason University and a Master’s degree in Communication Science from the UNIVIE. Her research interests encompass children's digital media interaction and online privacy concerns, with a focus on media governance and policy to promote ethical standards in the digital sphere.

Lisa Baumgartner has been a streamer and Twitch Partner since October 2020. Her streaming journey began a few years before that but she started streaming regularly right when the pandemic hit and became a partner after only a few months. She specialises in shooters, with Escape from Tarkov being her main game, but also enjoys playing other popular shooters like Valorant.

Felix Bohatsch is CEO of Broken Rules. Indie at his heart, he co-founded Broken Rules right after finishing his studies at Vienna University of Technology and Hogeschool voor de Kunsten, Utrecht. His area of expertise includes game direction and level design and gameplay programming which he has done on all games of the studio. Additionally, he has been responsible for ensuring project quality and handling all organisational activity of Broken Rules. The last game he co-created was Apple Design Award winner Gibbon: Beyond the Trees, before that he co-directed critically acclaimed Old Man's Journey.

Martin Filipp began his career in the game industry in 2000 at neo Software, which became Rockstar Vienna in 2003. He served in various management roles until the company's closure



in 2006. That same year, he co-founded Games That Matter, introducing an innovative game development model. In 2010, Martin joined lo-Interactive in Denmark, working on HITMAN titles for three years. He then supported the Austrian Xbox team with the Xbox One launch in 2013., Martin joined Mi'pu'mi Games as COO & Managing Director. He is also a founding member and Chair of the Pioneers of Game Development Austria, a non-profit dedicated to advancing the Austrian game industry.

Oleksandra Gudkova is a post-doc Senior Researcher at the Department of Communication, UNIVIE. Her research areas are Media Governance, Gender and Democracy, in particular women's roles in European pro-democracy and gender justice social movements as these are connected to questions of governance of the public sphere. In 2022-2023 she worked at the Jean Monnet Centre of Excellence FREuDe and researched children's roles as future citizens and their informational rights, as well as refugees as a special social group of particular importance for the future of Europe. She is currently working on the GAMEHEARTS project.

Karina Kaiser-Fallent, mother of a 6 year old boy, psychologist, studied psychology at the UNIVIE, working at the Department of Youth in the Federal Chancellery of Austria, Head of „BuPP – Information of Digital Games“ (www.bupp.at): assessing digital games and publishing game recommendations for children since 2005, offering workshops and articles for parents, teachers, students and children concerning media use and potentials of digital games and participating in scientific discourse.

Jasmin Karatas is a leading expert in Gamification, Games, and Business. With over seven years of experience in service design and a background in product design, she founded her own company to advance Gamification and Behavioural Design. Jasmin is passionate about the emotional impact of games and their potential to solve real-world problems. She envisions a future where daily life and global challenges are approached with the engagement and excitement found in gaming.

Markus Meschik runs the NGO Enter, a counselling centre for families and professionals dealing with digital media in Graz. He is a researcher and lecturer at the University of Graz,



the University of Klagenfurt and the University of Applied Sciences Linz with a research focus on problematic gaming behaviour and financing models of digital games, as well as a reviewer and expert for the BuPP of the Federal Chancellery. His book “Game Over ? Digitale Spiele in Familien und der Kinder- und Jugendhilfe” (Digital Games in Families and Child and Youth Welfare) was published by Büchner Verlag as an open access edition in 2022.

Christian Rapani founded his law firm in 2013, focusing on corporate and company law as well as gambling, gaming and betting law. Christian Rapani is the author of numerous publications in these fields. He has extensive experience in advising national and international clients in all areas of business law. One of his main areas of consultancy is gambling and betting law. He assists with licensing procedures and advises clients on national regulatory requirements and developments affecting their business activities.

Arianusch Riesner has a Bachelor's degree in Content Production and Digital Media Management. She has served as a news editor and presenter at a nationwide radio station in Austria including hosting successful podcasts such as "Rolling Madness" and "Nerd Sisters". "Nerd Sisters", a podcast dedicated to nerd culture and aims to empower women within the nerd and gaming community. Hosted by Lea Zauner and Arianusch Riesner, the show passionately discusses movies, TV series, comics, video games, and more, while welcoming prominent female guests from nerd culture.

Katharine Sarikakis is a Professor of Communication Science with a focus on Media Governance, Media Organization, and Media Industries at the Department of Communication, UNIVIE. At the forefront of her field, she leads the Media Governance and Industries Research Lab, a pioneering initiative dedicated to delving into the intricate realms of media and cultural governance. Her research seeks to unravel the complexities surrounding issues, contexts, actors, and impacts within media landscapes, shedding light on the often-overlooked intersections between governance, citizenship, autonomy, and control, and their implications for society at large.

Clemens Scharfen is a programmer in the creative and games industry. After finishing his MSc in Game Engineering in 2014, he specialised in the field of Virtual Reality. Currently he



is working as Senior Programmer at nDreams. As a line manager, he leads, reviews, and supports other senior programmers, ensuring they have the resources they need. Additionally, Clemens served as the interim leader of nDreams' accessibility workgroup and continues to be an active member, driven by his passion for accessibility and usability.

Rainer Sigl, a freelance journalist based in Vienna, has been writing about computer games since 2006 for various media outlets, including REPORT, FM4, Falter, Telepolis, and more. He founded the Games Feuilleton videogametourism.at in January 2012. Since September 2013, he has hosted the monthly radio show "fm4 Extraleben" and the weekly "FM4 Game Podcast," along with contributing to other podcasts like "Early Birds" for Insert Moin.

Matthias Steinböck, a former software engineer turned part-time game developer and designer, bridges the gap between industry and education. With experience in university-level teaching and founding companies in software engineering and industrial AI, he's now a member of the GameLab at the UNIVIE. Passionate about digital education, he leads workshops in computer science, seeking to innovate and collaborate across industry, academia, and education.

Pinelopi Troullinou holds a PhD and is an AI ethicist and Senior Researcher at Trilateral Research. Her research focuses on supporting ethical and socially sustainable technology development. She mediates between stakeholders, translating user needs into ethics-informed requirements. Passionate about children's rights, she advocates for their involvement in technology design while upholding privacy, dignity, and autonomy. Dr. Troullinou holds a PhD in Surveillance Studies from The Open University (UK), with work featured in international conferences and peer-reviewed publications.

Lea Zauner is a dedicated advocate for women in gaming and a licensed Esports referee in Austria. With deep connections in the Esports community, she works at various events and conducts workshops for kids and teenagers, emphasising the educational benefits of gaming. Lea is passionate about bridging the generational gap in perceptions of gaming, highlighting its positive impacts compared to passive activities like watching TV. She aims to increase visibility



and respect for the gaming industry, advocating for its recognition as a valuable and enriching part of society.



6 TAMPERE UNIVERSITY WORKSHOP

6.1 INTRODUCTION

As one of the biggest industries in the world, the gaming industry holds immense potential to influence society towards a more inclusive direction. However, this is not an easy task, and it requires an active collaboration effort from different spheres of society. In this sense, the purpose of the “Impact of video games in shaping more inclusive society” workshop was to maximise the impact and engagement with key stakeholders in the industry, academia, non-governmental organisations (NGOs), civil society organisations (CSOs), and policymaking spheres on the topic of how video games and gamification can shape inclusive societies. A key aim was to co-create meaning and shared understanding around video games and inclusion across these sectors. The workshop was imagined as a networking event, but also as a meeting place for the cross-sectional generation of ideas, knowledge, and insights. Future collaborative possibilities, efforts and partnerships for fostering inclusivity by way of video games and gamification was envisioned as an outcome of the workshop. This report presents the results and gathers insights from this stakeholder workshop conducted by Tampere University.

6.2 METHODOLOGY

Researchers met to prepare for the workshop and deliberated on the theme, relevant stakeholders to be invited, and drafting the privacy notice and consent form on May 23, 2024. After these were agreed upon, invitations have been distributed across different channels until the day of the workshop, which included: e-mails, LinkedIn, relevant Discord servers and researchers’ private networks.

The workshop aimed to include participants beyond the video game industry, such as stakeholders related to academic, non-profit, corporate, and educational contexts, as shown in Table I. The academic sector included scholars, students, and an administrative representative; the non-profit sector was represented by a video games-related association, a peace organisation, and a youth work association; corporate sector was represented by a diversity, equity and inclusion (DEI) consultancy; the non-profit sector was represented by peace organisations and video game industry-related associations. The policymaking sector was represented by a video game industry-related association. This diverse group of participants underscored the multifaceted nature of gaming as both a cultural and social phenomenon. Because of the vastly different backgrounds of the participants regarding the



topics of video games and inclusion respectively, the workshop content was designed in a way that all stakeholders could participate with their respective expertise. For that reason, the discussion topics were held on a rather abstract level and did not go into expert level knowledge in neither direction. As the main aim of the workshop indeed was to ideate around video games and inclusion as way to go forward together, this was a suitable approach.

Table I. List of workshop participants by sector and respective fields.

Sector	Field
Academia	Management
Academia	Sustainable development*
Academia	Sustainable digital life
Academia	Software development
Academia	Administration
Policymaking/Industry	Gaming
NGO/CSO	Peace
NGO/CSO	Peace
NGO/CSO	Peace*
NGO/CSO	Youth
Industry (company)	DEI
Industry (non-profit)	Gaming

* Only participated in part of the workshop

Upon agreeing to participate in the workshop, all participants received a confirmation email that elaborated on the aims of the workshop and provided practical information regarding their participation. The email also included a link to a survey that had been designed to capture the background and perspectives of the stakeholders who agreed to participate. This survey included questions on their expectations for the workshop, their vision of inclusive society, and what video games mean to them. It also asked about their opinions on the key stakeholders who should be involved in connecting video games and inclusion, their awareness



of organisations or institutions related to video games and inclusivity, and if they are already collaborating with them.

Before the workshop took place, all participants were asked to give their consent to the privacy notice as part of the pre-survey. Those who have not filled the pre-survey were given time to do so in the beginning of the workshop and were informed about the privacy notice shown in the appendix, having the opportunity to read about the workshop purpose, procedures and data collection, followed by a space for questions and a request to leave the workshop in case they did not agree with the privacy notice.

The workshop was held on June 6th, 2024, through the Zoom online communications platform and it lasted 120 minutes in total. The workshop was designed for discussion around video games in society in general and, more specifically, around games for change, especially in the context of impacting or fostering inclusion in video games themselves.

After a brief introduction from all fifteen participants, including the four facilitators who are also the main authors of this report, the workshop started with four keynote presentations on the role of video games in tackling inclusivity from different angles: the use of gamification for social sustainability in organisations, the design of video games to reduce bias and discrimination, and the co-creation of gameful conflict mitigation.

These keynote presentations were shortly followed by a group discussion. During this discussion, participants were divided into two breakout rooms, in which they were asked by two facilitators to reflect and exchange their experience and expertise on the topic of impact of video games in shaping more inclusive society. Considering that the participants were representatives of different sectors and with varying levels of experience in notions of video games and gamification, the term “video game” was referred to in a broader sense; being understood as anything that would fall under the umbrella term and phenomenon of “gamefulness” in society.

The first discussion part targeted play in society, the public debate on the expansion of gamefulness throughout society and the concept of playing around serious matters. Participants were asked to reflect on why people play and what function play and video games have in society. This created a bridge over to inclusion as a serious matter in society that needs to be addressed, as the second discussion part consequently targeted the potential of play and video games for this end. Participants were also asked to share from their perspectives and roles how gamefulness can help to reflect on and support inclusion in society.



Making idea generation and connection building the focal point of the workshop allowed for all stakeholders to take an active part, and further paved the way for more action-oriented conversations in the future.

The workshop ended with a brief silent self-reflection in the online collaboration tool Flinga on the impressions from the discussion, in which participants were invited to share their impressions from the group discussion, their understanding on how to work across sectors and borders to continue developing video games and inclusivity, and what they would take with them after the workshop.

6.3 RESULTS

6.3.1 SURVEY

The goal of the survey conducted before the workshop was to understand participants, their prior knowledge and skills regarding the topic, their ideas about the nexus between video games and inclusivity, and to gather any questions or inquiries they might have. The answers for these questions are summarised below.

- **How do you envision inclusive society?**

There were various responses on the meaning of inclusive society. The similarities reveal a common vision of inclusive society, which entails respect for individuality, support for diversity, and assurance of non-discrimination. The differences lie in the specificity of what an inclusive society looks like. Many responses indicate that inclusive society does not discriminate or marginalise any individual based on their appearance, background, identity, circumstances, or any other characteristic. In inclusive society, people are not threatened based on their associations; everyone is allowed to be free and has equal access to opportunities and resources. In such a society, everyone has the freedom of expression without judgment or fear. Diverse values are equally celebrated, mutual understanding of differences is promoted, and the removal of social, economic, and cultural barriers is an ultimate goal. One comment emphasised the need to actively promote equity instead of equality.

- **What do video games mean to you?**



Participants view the scope of video games as versatile, encompassing professional and research aspects, personal impact, immersive experiences, and social and community building. Video games offer entertainment, education, storytelling, and interactive art. They serve as tools for education, social change, and community building, fostering empathy and critical thinking. Participants recognise the usefulness of video games in both formal and non-formal educational sectors for teaching and learning various topics and encouraging active critical thinking. Video games can provide players with relaxation from daily stress and serve as interactive tools that offer immersion into new realities and perspectives. Responses also describe video games as a non-solitary activity that promotes personal growth and self-identification. Their dynamism offers opportunities for collaborative play, connecting with others within communities, and helping to create social bonds.

- **Who would you list as the key stakeholders to involve when connecting games and inclusion? Do you or your organisation/institution already cooperate with some of them?**

Responses acknowledged that both video games and inclusion are society-wide phenomena, and the potential range of stakeholders is vast. They mentioned the involvement of various interest groups in Finland, including those in the industry and educational sectors. Key stakeholders include trade associations, game developer studios and publishers, video game industry service providers (e.g., lawyers focused on corporate governance), formal video game education institutions (e.g., universities), non-formal media education institutions (e.g., video game development youth hubs), video game clusters, video game incubators, libraries, and Finnish non-profit organisations. These groups make significant efforts in this direction by organising conferences, video game jams, meetups, and other events, often for free, and paying special attention to the safety and protection of participants through Codes of Conduct. Additionally, other important stakeholders include telecommunication companies, NGOs, CSOs active in the fields of youth, community building, and peacebuilding, policymakers and advisors, youth (or specific target groups of the game), video game organisations, psychologists, sociologists, social educators (facilitators, trainers, and people who will use the game), and gamers. Also, TAU has many partners supporting multidisciplinary and inclusive approaches to gaming. Lastly, the responses highlight the need for more stakeholders to get involved, as heterogeneity is a means for inclusion.



- **Expectations and enquiries**

Most participants expressed a desire to learn about the GAMEHEARTS project, current research and efforts in inclusive video game design, the intersection of inclusive video game design and profit-making, and how video games and gamification can promote DEI. They also want to understand social inclusion in the context of video games, discover more organisations that prioritise equality and inclusivity, and learn how these values are brought to life. Additionally, participants are interested in learning about people and institutions working on challenges related to designing video games for inclusion, listening to different perspectives, and networking and collaborating with other stakeholders to explore the practical applications of creating more inclusive and impactful video games.

6.3.2 KEYNOTES

As a means to communicate the goals of GAMEHEARTS project, promote potential networking and support diverse stakeholders' understanding on the different gameful approaches that could be used to support more inclusive society, the workshop started with short keynote presentations by each of the four facilitators from TAU. These presentations were related to gameful approaches to DEI education by Ana Klock, gamification for social sustainability in organisations led by Ylva Sundvik, video games to reduce bias and discrimination by Faith Opeyemi Ilesanmi, and gameful conflict mitigation by Nevena Sicevic. Participants demonstrated interest in all these topics, being some more relevant than others depending on their profiles.

6.3.3 GROUP DISCUSSION

To contextualise the topic of the workshop and to contribute to the discussion about the role and function of video games in society, the participants were asked to reflect on **why people play and what function play and video games have in society**. Play was recognised as part of being human; play as means for exploration and learning about the world. However, video games were also brought into connection with creativity and expression in multiple ways: expression of self and own identities, as well as cultural or artistic expressions. Video game making was referred to as an outlet for innovation. Another important point, according to the participants, were the social aspects of video games and play: video games connect people, they enable space for social interaction and can foster team building.



Compared to other social media platforms today, video games tend to be less influenced by algorithms, allowing for more immersion, building deeper friendships and enhancing the feeling of belonging. Applied video games were discussed mostly from the aspect of education and raising awareness on societal topics; for example, in non-formal education sector a gameful approach based in role-play can create a safe space for educating on peace related topics.

The questions on the impact of video games in society showed that video games have both positive and negative effects. For example, understanding of video games as safe spaces and escapism from everyday society raised concern that, if video games and virtual worlds are needed to shelter us from society, what kind of society are we living in. Reflecting on the ubiquitousness of play raised a point about what aspects of life should or should not be gamified and how serious topics should be approached from a sensitised lens. When asked about whether everything in society should be gamified, there was not a clear yes or no consensus, participants rather addressed the problem of how using video games to tackle sensitive topics could potentially bring a feeling of ridicule and moral dilemmas. Moreover, a perspective was shared that, although play saturates also “serious contexts” such as strategic management, some people might be hesitant to admit that they are engaging in playful behaviour in the context of their work. It was noted that, when dealing with serious or sensitive topics, special attention should be given in how to translate the topic properly.

In the second part of the discussion, participants were asked to share from their perspectives and roles how gamefulness can help to reflect on and support inclusion in society. Two sides of this nexus can be identified as emergent from the discussions: **inclusion within video games themselves** and **video games with an inclusive impact**.

The conversations around making video games inclusive highlighted the importance of representation of different people and perspectives, as well as inclusive and non-discriminatory storylines and values in commercial video games. For this end, the importance of creating awareness among developers, co-authoring, including diverse people and perspectives in the design phase as well as equal design participation were greatly emphasised. Thoughts and examples that highlight how inclusion can be embedded in the design process and as a fundamental part of gameplay were shared. For example, offering the player choice in the gameplay was suggested as a way of addressing the use of stereotypes. Another theme around inclusion within video games was accessibility. Accessible video game interfaces and accessible video game wear were mentioned, along with accessibility of video game culture



and video game devices themselves. In this regard, the socio-economic aspect of accessibility to video games was considered crucial, and one that needs further attention and data. Here, the issue becomes one of systemic lack of inclusion as a direct result of differing socio-economic situations in society. Other challenges connected to inclusion in video games were privacy-related, and the balance of managing for example children's right to culture with the protection of their privacy was voiced. The need for a regulatory framework was expressed. Further, finding a balance between freedom of speech and restriction in video game spheres was seen as tricky. Capitalism and market forces were brought up as obstacles for reaching a certain level of inclusion in video games, as the video games with the biggest outreach usually are made by big studios unwilling to take risks. The question then becomes one of influencing and lobbying decision-makers that control the resources and strategic directions.

Video game elements were seen as crucial when talking about video games having or teaching an inclusive message/experience. Competitiveness, progress and scores, badges and leaderboards in particular were seen as somewhat antithetical to what inclusion is about, and it was proposed that social-based elements such as role-taking, on the one hand, or immersive design, on the other, would be a more fruitful direction to develop these kinds of video games. In general, the immersive experience of "meeting otherness" through video games were highlighted as a key strategy for fostering reflection around oneself in relation to others, in turn fostering inclusion. Here, all types of immersive elements like storylines, visuals and audio were brought up as ways to help the player experience other situations, cultural eras, or even states of mind. For example, there are video games that can recreate the state of experiencing visual and auditive hallucinations, with the aim of transmitting the experience of living with schizophrenia. There was further a common agreement that catering to target groups could be somewhat problematic a when it comes to inclusive video games with an educational purpose. How do you make sure the game reaches the right target group and has the desired effect for that group specifically? On the other hand, it was stressed that in the spirit of inclusion, target groups should not be excluding by default and video games should be designed to be played and enjoyed by anyone. Financial factors were again mentioned as a challenge for developing video games for inclusive impact. Creating educational or serious video games requires a niche market/target group, often has an intangible return on investment and requires external financing. This circles back to the challenge of cultivating strategic interest in making video games for inclusion. Generally, participants agreed that for shaping inclusive



societies through video games, more education and collaboration are needed to allow for inclusion of different perspectives.

6.3.4 SELF-REFLECTION AND COLLABORATION

The participant feedback from the workshop was overall positive. Participants expressed interest in the GAMEHEARTS project and in future collaborations and reported feelings of inspiration after attending the workshop. Participants reported that focusing on inclusion already in the design phase through co-design and other coparticipatory strategies is the first step. Moreover, participants suggested that joint projects and an open dialogue around matters of inclusion are also key in bringing about change. More concrete actions like establishing distribution channels for inclusive video games as well as proper validation and certification of video games with inclusive impact were also highlighted.

6.4 CONCLUSIONS

Based on the results, key take aways included an overall increased awareness of the aspect of inclusion in video games and a spark of ideas around the matter. Three main themes emerged as especially important for going forward: co-design in video game development, interdisciplinary collaboration, and inclusivity awareness in industry:

- **TAKEAWAY 1: CO-DESIGN IN VIDEO GAME DEVELOPMENT**

The multifaceted nature of play and games:

- Play and games for self-expression and understanding of social and cultural identities
- Video games are tools for raising awareness about societal topics/issues
- Role-playing in games enables a safe space for educating on peace-related topics

Positive, negative and societal impact of video games:

- Design video games that enable a safe space for everyone
- Carefully select social issues for gamification to prevent moral dilemmas

- **TAKEAWAY 2: INTERDISCIPLINARY COLLABORATION**

Crucial nexus of inclusion, gamification, and society:

- Interdisciplinary collaboration and cultural representation among game designers
- Game developers and other stakeholders need to be sensitised on inclusivity



- Addition of “choice” as an element in game play to avoid stereotyping

- **TAKEAWAY 3: INCLUSIVITY AWARENESS IN INDUSTRY**

Inclusion gaps in the gaming industry:

- Capitalism and market forces are obstacles to inclusion
- There is a need for regulatory framework
- Progress, badges and leaderboard, etc are antithetical to inclusion
- Immersive designs, rich storylines with role-taking are key

6.4.1 PATHWAYS TO IMPACT

This workshop main impact is seen by opening space for relevant stakeholders to share expertise and experiences, as well as co-create knowledge on the topic of video games and inclusion, inspiring them to act as multipliers in their own environments. It is a starting point of discussion and ideation around games for change, enabling cross-sectoral collaboration on matters of inclusion, equity, and diversity in and through video games. One of the strategies to promote continuous exchange, ideation, and action on these topics was the creation of a Discord server called “Change as Game”, a meeting point of these stakeholders interested in and working on these topics, to discuss, collaborate, and co-design novel and impactful gameful solutions of the future.

6.5 APPENDIX A

WORKSHOP DESCRIPTION AND PRIVACY NOTICE

WORKSHOP “THE IMPACT OF VIDEO GAMES IN SHAPING MORE INCLUSIVE SOCIETY”

We are cordially inviting you to participate in this workshop on the topic of impact of video games on shaping more inclusive society. After you have read this notice, you will be given an opportunity to ask questions about the workshop. After that, you will be asked to give your consent to participate by filling out the workshop pre-survey. Please note that to participate in the workshop, you must give your acceptance to the privacy notice.

Please bear in mind that this workshop is a research-based event, and that collected data might be presented in an academic publication. In this document, you will find more



information about the event and how the information you provide will be collected and processed.

Purpose of the workshop

The purpose of this workshop is to maximise impact and engagement with key stakeholders in the industry, academia, and/or policymaking spheres on the topic of how games and gamification can shape inclusive societies.

For this purpose, a workshop lasting up to two hours is conducted in which the participants share their opinions and experience on the topic in a guided discussion by Tampere University's researchers. The workshop is envisioned as more than just a networking event; it is an interactive forum for the collective generation of new knowledge and insights, which will lay the foundations for the partnerships across sectors and collaborative efforts on shaping inclusive societies through games and gamification. The workshop is part of the project GAMEHEARTS (Games, Heritage, Arts, & Sport): The Economic, Social, and Cultural Value of the European Videogame Ecosystem (HORIZON-CL2-2023-HERITAGE-01-06, grant agreement 101132543).

Course of the workshop

The workshop will take place on June 6, 2024, 14:00-16:00 EEST / 13:00-15:00 CEST. The workshop opens with a 20-minute keynote speech by Tampere University's researchers working on the GAMEHEARTS project. Then, group discussions will follow, in which the participants will be asked to share their opinions and experiences on the topics such as the role of play and games in society and use of games for raising awareness about inclusion and ideate together what kind of partnerships and collaborations are needed to shape inclusive societies of the future. This part will last approximately 60 minutes, followed by a Q&A and feedback session. A short break between larger sessions will also be included in the workshop.

How is the workshop data collected?

The workshop will take place remotely via Zoom platform. The workshop discussions will be recorded and the written materials captured, with the purpose of being submitted as a report to GAMEHEARTS's consortium members and published in an academic paper. Collected data



will be transcribed and pseudonymised in both the report and the academic paper, so they will not be identifiable to individual participants nor their respective organisations.

Benefits and risks related to the workshop

Participants will not receive any monetary nor other compensations for their participation. Participants and the organisations they represent will benefit in new knowledge and insights, engagement, networks, and possible new partnerships with other stakeholders.

There is no health, social, economic, or personal data processing risks associated with the methodology used in this workshop. Low risk exists when it comes to the possibility of external persons identifying participants. Measures to prevent this from happening include storing and handling personal data in accordance with the Tampere University recommendations and regulations.

Confidentiality, data processing and storage

The research data collected about you will be handled confidentially in accordance with the EU's General Data Protection Regulation and the Finnish Data Protection Act. Collected contact email information will be securely stored and used solely for the purpose of facilitating the workshop.

Privacy protection of individuals assured in scientific publications

The research files and the data collected for the workshop will be pseudonymised and preserved at Tampere University for maximum of one year, after which they will be destroyed.

Funders

European Commission, project "GAMEHEARTS" (HORIZON-CL2-2023-HERITAGE-01-06, grant agreement 101132543).

Voluntariness

Participation in the workshop is completely voluntary and you can withdraw your participation at any time. You can also suspend your participation for a period of your choosing. Refusing



or suspending participation will not affect any treatment you may need later. If the participant decides to withdraw, all data that was previously collected would be destroyed.

Privacy in research publications and communications about the research

In scientific and other publications, any and all data collected from the participants will be presented in an aggregated form. Research results will be available in scientific publications.

Using the data for other than research and further study

All data collected from the participants will only be used by projects' researchers for research purposes and publication of scientific findings.

Further information

For more information about the workshop, you may contact Nevena Sicevic.

Researcher's contact details

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7 UNIVERSITY OF SALFORD WORKSHOP

7.1 INTRODUCTION

As the video game industry continues to expand throughout Europe, reflecting on its cultural significance becomes increasingly vital. Both academia and industry professionals have considered the ways in which video games mirror and shape culture and explored the cultural value of gaming and its broader impact on society. To delve deeper into these questions, we convened a collaborative workshop, GAMEHEARTS X BAFTA, which was held on Monday, 10th of June at MediaCityUK, Salford. Hence, this was the final workshop.

The primary goal of the workshop was to discuss the different ways in which we can evaluate gaming and the video game industry, and to reflect on the value gaming adds to our culture. Moreover, we aimed to examine how video games and the video game industry operates in culture and society, and the ways in which it reflects and impacts them. The workshop was planned in collaboration with BAFTA Games, a video game focused division of The British Academy of Film and Television Arts. BAFTA is a world-renowned independent arts charity dedicated to championing talent and recognising exceptional storytelling within the screen industries.

7.2 METHDOLOGY

The GAMEHEARTS x BAFTA event at MediaCityUK brought together a variety of experts from academia and industry as panellists, including CEOs of gaming studios, journalists, museums curators and game developers (see full list of speakers in the appendix). The event was public, free, and drew 82 attendees from a variety of sectors, comprising of media broadcasters, game developers, academics, CCI professionals, policymakers and interested members of the public.

The workshop was opened by welcome talks, by Garry Crawford (University of Salford) and Luke Hebblethwaite (Head of BAFTA Games). It was followed by a keynote speaker, television and radio presenter, Elle Osili Wood, and two panels: *Games as Culture*, and *Games in Culture*. The keynote lasted for 30 minutes while the panels were 45 minutes each. To allow for networking opportunities, the workshop was an in-person event only, where attendees and panellists could interact with each other over refreshments at the end of the event.



After the workshop, attendees were invited to fill in our post-event survey where they were asked to share their own reflections on the topics that had been discussed and to provide feedback on the event. While this report is composed of the keynote and the two panels, we do make reference to this survey in the pathways to impact section.

The following report provides a comprehensive overview of the event². It details the keynote and panels, while exploring themes such as the cultural value of video games, the industry's desire for recognition within the cultural sector, and the intersection of gaming with other industries (See full list of participants in the appendix). It concludes with recommendations to foster inclusivity, education, and a more positive discourse around video games, and highlights the event's impact on attendees and its broader significance for the video game industry.

7.3 RESULTS

7.3.1 KEYNOTE

The keynote was delivered by Elle Osili-Wood, a TV and radio presenter and a key public advocate for video games who has worked for ITV, Netflix, BBC, and has twice presented the BAFTA Game Awards. Her talk introduced multiple salient themes which have been summarised below, these ideas were also present throughout the following panels through the questions developed for the event, the discussions had, as well as later during networking conversations.



Figure 1. Elle Osili-Wood's keynote

7.3.1.1 The collective nature of video game development

² Due to the public nature of the event and its well-known speakers, the following report will detail the workshop without anonymising its participants.



Osili-Wood's talk began with the German word *Gesamtkunstwerk*, which refers to a work of art which synthesises many forms of art in its own creation. Used by Richard Wagner in his 1849 essays to describe the opera, Elle argued for the term's contemporary equivalent being video games. The crafts required to produce a game include computer science, music, animation, narrative, and beyond. Video games are an amalgamation of art forms from across culture.

There is, however, the possibility of solo-development. Unlike film and television which requires large teams of people working simultaneously for a piece of media to be created; video games can be made by a singular person. The industry's ability to support large teams and single developers demonstrates the flexibility of the medium as well as the multiple pathways in which video game development can be approached.

7.3.1.2 The unique offering of video games

Video games have unique aspects not found in other mediums. In particular, the ability to immerse players into a world is a vital reason, Elle argued, that external industries and sectors are experimenting with implementing interactive and immersive elements that originate from video games into their products. As gamification techniques keep audiences engaged in an app, or a webpage, or a media project for longer, which has meant that external industries are applying techniques developed in the video game industry. As the following panel discussion then showed, this idea is also reflected in the discussion had by professionals from the wider cultural sector.

7.3.1.3 The “playwall”

To describe the barriers to play, Elle suggested the term *playwall*. These barriers, she argued, can be made up of language, media literacy, and stereotyped expectations. For example, the language used to describe video game genres, terms like Rogue-like and Metroidvania, require previous knowledge of video games to understand them. Due to this use of specialist language video games have often been a closed ecosystem. In addition, the moral panic which surrounds video games – specifically that they are a non-productive way of spending time – also potentially creates a barrier socially. Related to this, Osili-Wood discussed the perceived value of playing video games being lower than going to the cinema or reading a book. Furthermore, Osili-Wood argued that the stereotype of video games as a childish pursuit is reinforced



through the industry's reliance on bright colours and pixels for its aesthetics. Video games have a wider visual style beyond pixels, and it was suggested that the industry should utilise their artists to express this range. Hence here, Osili-Wood advocated the need to reduce or remove these barriers, whether that is in the language that is used, the way we describe the aesthetic experience of playing video games, and/or the culture we build up around the industry. By doing this, the industry can then reach new audiences who may have been put off from playing video games in the past.

7.3.1.4 Integration of video games beyond the console/PC experience

This keynote also addressed how video games are becoming more integrated into other cultural experiences and events. For example, the Tribeca and Venice film festivals now accept video games as entries, there are VR experiences of Shakespeare plays and opera performances, and high fashion brands have been featured in video games. It is these efforts, which Elle argued, are exposing video games to new audiences beyond their traditional placement on a dedicated gaming platform.

7.3.1.5 Reaching new audiences

Elle's keynote closed with a conversation of how we as advocates can work together to increase the possible audience that video games reach. Primarily this involved strengthening bonds between sectors as well as altering language and ways of speaking about video games. This included avoiding statements such as "this isn't *Call of Duty*" and "gaming isn't only for the boys" which threaten to sustain stereotypes rather than dissolve them. In addition, instead of being defensive of video games we should be enthusiastic about them as that puts us in a better position for arguing about the worth and value of video games. As well as speaking enthusiastically about video games, the way we contextualise play and the way we play video games as part of our everyday lives should be used to sell the media form. One way of achieving this, Osili-Wood discussed, was finding our own way of romanticising spending time with a video game, which will subsequently interest more people in the experience. For example, finding the industry's equivalent to spending a rainy weekend curled up reading a book, which is widely considered a worthwhile, cosy, and valuable way of spending leisure time. In addition, introducing key figureheads who can represent the video game industry was argued as a way of deanonymising the industry and increasing its relatability. Finally, Osili-



Wood called for increased collaboration across sectors, beginning with those in attendance in the event, as a way of integrating video games into other cultural and creative industries.

7.3.2 PANEL I: GAMES AS CULTURE

The first panel of the day was made up of four participants from areas of video game development, journalism, and curation invited by BAFTA Games to speak on the topic of video games as culture and was chaired by panel member Simon Smith. The panel were:

- Simon Smith: Video game executive producer, chair of Gameopolis, the Greater Manchester video game network and CEO at thumbfood;
- Cat Powell: Director of Visitor Experience and co-CEO, National Videogame Museum;
- Michael French: Head of Games, Games London;
- Simon Parkin: Award winning writer and journalist.

The panel responded to set questions which also built on the topics introduced by the keynote and were then developed through the panellists' expert knowledge of their sectors as well as their perspective on video games as they pertain to culture. Below are four key aspects which arose from the discussion had by the panel.



Figure 2. Panel I: Games as Culture

7.3.2.1 Games for everyone

The panel was invited to pick upon a key issue raised by the keynote through questions which focused on how to widen the audience for video games. Cat Powell, who is the director of visitor experience at the National Videogame Museum reported that she is keen in her role



to expand the demographics who choose to visit the museum. While video games' being association with children was suggested to be not necessarily a bad thing, as children have the largest amount of free time; though it was noted that they are not able to attend museums alone and so consideration is made as to how to involve non-gamer family members.

A similar viewpoint was shared by Michael French concerning the audiences he sees attending the London Games Festival; usually a family with at least one dedicated gamer. The challenge is therefore creating an experience that gamers and non-gamers in attendance will enjoy and find meaningful.

As the panel progressed Simon Parkin also argued that the issue of older generations being considered not 'gamers' will naturally change with time as current gamers age, but do not age out of video games. However, currently those who visit museums or video game festivals are younger and the industry does struggle to appeal to retired communities.

7.3.2.2 Does the video game industry want games to be part of culture?

The wording of the panel, Video Games as Culture, was interrogated to try and understand where video games currently exist, or would like to exist, within an understanding of culture. Video games' position as culture was not questioned; however, there was discussion on whether the video game industry wishes to be seen as part of culture. There was no true consensus on this point. Simon Smith, a video game designer, talked of his own personal experience making video games and while he creates video games for people to enjoy, he does not necessarily consider them "art". While Michael French suggested that the video game industry is contributing to culture whether or not they are explicitly trying to. He stated that everything we do contributes to culture, regardless of the intent of game developers, video games will move people and make connections. It was also suggested that a lot depends on the particular game developer or publisher. Annapurna, for example, has crafted its brand specifically to appeal to a certain notion of culture while Supercell cultivate a very different idea of how they interact with their audience and the idea of culture.

7.3.2.3 Video Game Value

Throughout the panel discussed the perceived value of video games and the different types of value they represented or produced for different sectors



- **Financial value:** Although the financial value of video games was considered to be noticeably important, there was a view that there is more value to video games beyond the monetary, which are expressed in the following values. In addition, pursuing the financial possibility of video games has led, it was argued, to an industry that generally is averse to risk. Simon Parkin argued that the video game industry is incentivised to develop video games which are immersive, perpetual experiences such as Roblox and other “games-as-live-service” titles where players spend larger amounts of time. While there is financial value in video games, the challenge is in incentivising different modes of game and gameplay.
- **Nostalgia value:** Certain video games can bring with them a nostalgia that can be used to market adaptations of specific game experiences to new mediums. For example, the recent successful *Fallout* series on Amazon Prime demonstrates both television studios’ and audience’s appetite for stories set in established video game worlds. The value of nostalgia is closely linked to financial value, through this marketing.
- **Enjoyment value:** The notion that video games are “for children” or “childlike” does not have to be understood negatively. Indeed, children have more leisure time and can therefore allocate more of their time to playful experiences, such as gaming. Many of the panellists spoke of their deep enjoyment of video games and found personal value in playing games.
- **Educational value:** The educational value of video games was discussed in two ways. First, video games can serve as an educational platform, making learning new skills into a fun and accessible experience for children and adults alike. Second, the craft and the making of video games/gaming can be educational in itself — as will be elaborated next.

7.3.2.4 Translating play into a career

While the panel discussed expanding the audience for video games and the success of the industry in adapting their video game worlds to other mediums, the difficulty for young people to access the industry as a career was also deliberated. Two issues were raised within the time limit of the panel which related to this point:

- Young people not considering it a career: Cat Powell identified a general trend of children who visit the museum and who are gamers but have never considered the video game



industry as a viable career possibility. Part of their responsibility as a museum, she argued, is therefore to present video games as a possible future career.

- Difficulty in securing industry speakers: Michael French and Simon Parkin mentioned the difficulty of talking to industry professionals. This included booking interviews with leads of studios, inviting speakers to festivals, and securing the rights to show video games in public spaces. It was argued that the industry, beyond a handful of male auteurs, does not put forward figureheads for video games and makes efforts to keep creative teams from speaking to the public. Whether this was due to attempts to control their workers, to protect them from 'toxic' fan communities, or an effort to maintain secrecy in an industry of exclusives and world premieres was debated. Without reliable industry involvement in journalism, festivals, and museums, it was argued, the passing on of passion, knowledge exchange, and highlighting video games as a site of culture is threatened.

7.3.4 PANEL 2: GAMES IN CULTURE

The second and final panel of the day involved panellists from sectors who influence and are influenced by video games. This panel was assembled by GAMEHEARTS and was chaired by Maria Stukoff who asked questions pertaining to the positioning and role of video games within wider creative and cultural industries. The panellists here were:

- Eloise Singer, Creative Director & CEO, Singer Studios;
- Ben Gallop, Head of Commissioning and Digital, BBC Sport;
- Ian Kikuchi, Senior Curator (Historian), Imperial War Museums;
- Colm Seeley, Insight and Innovation Manager, Ukie.

The following four aspects formed the core of the conversation which arose from the questions asked about the ways in which video games and other industries and sectors merge and complement each other.





Figure 2: Panel 2: Games in Culture

7.3.4.1 What can other sectors learn from video games?

One of the sectors that was discussed by the panellists was sport and the way it is broadcasted, such as on the BBC, and the similarities there are to here to gaming. According to Ben Gallop, sport and gaming have prominent crossovers as they are both usually unscripted, real-time, competitive experiences. Moreover, the way people consume sport nowadays draws from gaming: as it is frequently smartphone-based engagement which includes polls and quizzes alongside the airing of matches and competitions, “likes” and “dislikes”, and similar. Although the BBC is a traditional and ‘old’ media broadcast network, it already draws from the video game industry to learn how to engage with younger audiences. In a different example, the overspill of video games to cinema was also discussed. The impact of video gaming on cinema goes beyond the adaptation of video game IP to films and television shows, but also involves the insertion of other video game elements into cinematic narratives. Examples given by the panellists were movies such as *Source Code* and *The Edge of Tomorrow* that include cycles of success and failure and striving for a high score despite finishing the mission.

7.3.4.2 What can the video game industry learn from other sectors?

Coming from the film industry, Eloise Singer held a press junket for the video game she developed, *The Pirate Queen*. In gaming, press junkets, or engagement with the media as a whole, is rare (as was also discussed by our keynote speaker). According to Eloise press junkets are a helpful tool to talk about the importance of video games and spread the word about them. Eloise continued that more engagement with the media would result in an increase in open dialogue with those outside of the video game industry. Fans, she stated, are



interested in behind the scenes and listening to the reasons on why developers are making the media they are making.

Ben Gallop stated that the video game industry has already learnt from the world of sport which can be traced through the history of E-sports and their competitors, casters (commentary), as well as venues and marketing. However, Ben did also discuss how the BBC's remit "to serve everyone" and universal access could be incorporated into the video game industry in terms of presenting video games in a way which opens participation.

7.3.4.3 The cultural and social impact of video games

In answer to a question on the cultural and social impact of video games, the panellists decided to present a game that they each felt had either had an impact on themselves personally or on society.

Colm Seeley presented *Sekiro: Shadows Die Twice* and the profound message he took away from the final boss level; a romanticised manifestation of the good old days that needs to be defeated to embrace a new world order. Gaming, from Colm's perspective can have a profound message, be artistic, and be very entertaining all at the same time. Its distinctiveness is in, how it does not need to choose to be either profound or entertaining, video games can be multifaceted, which lends to their ability to impart deep messages to a wide audience.

Ben Gallop spoke to fantasy football as a crossover of gaming and sport that has impacted the culture around experiencing a yearly league. In addition, he also mentioned *Wordle* as extremely impactful for both The New York Times as well as the general public.

Ian discussed *Bury Me, My Love* a video game about Syrian refugee's journey that was featured in their War Games exhibition at the Imperial War Museum. The video game had a profound impact on Ian Kikuchi both during the time he played and afterwards; making him think about the experience of Syrian refugees in a deeper way than he had previously.

Finally, Eloise Singer focused on the educational power of video games through *Age of Empires*, which she remembered playing with her siblings. While it was very educational, she recognised that there were no female leaders in *Age of Empires*. This became a direct inspiration for the production of *The Pirate Queen*. Singer Studios has donated copies of *The Pirate Queen* to schools as a pedagogical tool to educate students in a similar way to her family's experience with *Age of Empires*.



In addition to mentioning a specific title, during the panel Colm Seeley brought to the surface the unique types of video game which can be created through public funding. He mentioned the UK games fund, as well as the Arts Council and UKIE as possible sources of money. An example he posed was the Ferguslie Thread Works project which reconstructed a demolished spinning mill in a game engine. Video games, Colm argued, can be a method of preservation. While that may not be a financially lucrative project for commercial game developers, the existence of public funding allows for important uses of video game technology in the areas of preservation and cultural engagement.

7.3.4.4 Importance of inclusivity and diversity

The topic of inclusivity was discussed by the panel, in relation to gaming's similarities to other sectors. Ben Gallop spoke to the BBC having a remit to serve everyone, and how BBC Sport has had to work actively to change perceptions of sport as a masculine only field. In the same way that the BBC has put money and time into promoting women's sport, the video game industry needs to do the same to address points where there is a lack of diversity and inclusivity.

The necessity of the video game industry to take active steps to address inclusivity and diversity was echoed by Eloise Singer who talked about her experience making *The Pirate Queen* in VR. Previously the only modelled hands for the player's avatar were male, with there being some resistance to the creation of female hands for *The Pirate Queen* due to concerns that it would put off a subset of gamers. It is through making video games from different perspectives, Eloise argued, that these inclusivity limits can be discovered and overcome. *The Pirate Queen* was partially funded by Creative England through its prototype funding, its existence allowed Eloise and Singer Studios to develop a video game which could make steps towards an inclusive industry by adding feminine hands to VR.

Related to topics of inclusivity, Ian Kikuchi spoke to the difficulty of bringing video games to public spaces such as museums. The interactive design has to be highly accessible to accommodate for the museum's visitors who have physical and mental needs that are required to be met so they can equally engage. Museums, he added, should be for everyone, asking visitors to interact with a video game controller, in order to access an exhibit, risks implementing too many barriers for entry.



7.4 CONCLUSIONS

Given the insightful discussions that took part in the workshop, we suggest the following recommendation that could push the video industry further and turn it into a more accessible and open cultural sector:

- **More figureheads in the video game industry:** as discussed by the keynote and other speakers, the video game industry needs to be helmed by public individuals who will not only ‘sell’ the industry better to the general public, but will also make the industry more tangible, available, and accessible to the public, the media, and academia.
- **The promotion of Gesamtkunstwerk:** the collaboration between the different industries has proven to be successful and fruitful for all sides. Therefore, such ties should be strengthened and promoted in creative industries as a whole. Developing such important ties demonstrate the importance of accessible figureheads in the video game industry (see above).
- **Opening the gaming ecosystem:** following the previous recommendations and discussions, it is clear that the video game industry is often considered a closed, gated industry that must become more open for other industries as well as the general public. To do so, gatekeeping must be reduced by using less jargon and exclusionary discourse, gaming should be included more in public spaces, and more diverse publics should be encouraged to engage with video games.
- **Gaming education:** firstly, general media literacy should be promoted, where individuals will learn to not be daunted by consoles and controllers. Secondly, it should be more well-known that gaming careers exist through relevant education. These careers should be achievable by all demographics.
- **More direct funding:** governmental funding should be offered more directly to gaming, rather than creative industries as a whole, and should be used to fund projects interested in increasing diversity and inclusivity.
- **More positivity in gaming discourse:** Video games should not be discussed in terms of what they are not (“this isn’t *Call of Duty*”), but what they are and can be. Video games should and could be ‘romanticised’, much like other forms of cultural engagement. We should talk about playing video games in the same way as leisure reading or going to the cinema to see a new release. This kind of ‘positive talk’ will help with destigmatising video games and will help with encouraging more people to openly engage with video games.



7.5.1 PATHWAYS TO IMPACT

The workshop not only led to insightful discussions, networking opportunities and useful recommendations, but has also made impact in the following ways:

- **Attendance:** the workshop was an open, in-person event, and was well-attended, drawing 82 people in total. The panellists and audiences alike consisted of diverse individuals in terms of gender, ethnicity, and occupational field. The workshop's attendance success could be demonstrated by the esteemed list of panellists and guests from prestigious cultural organisations such as the BBC or City Football Group. The workshop, held in Northwest England, outside of London, attracted a strong turnout, showcasing its appeal to both industry professionals and the general public. This highlights the region, especially Greater Manchester, as a national hub for the video game industry.
- **Positive feedback:** After the conference, through the survey, several attendees expressed their excitement about the project and their enjoyment from the workshop. For instance, one attendee shared, that it was 'really excellent to hear about the different dimensions of the project', while another wrote 'great starting point for honest, fearless questioning of games and culture'. The attendees particularly praised the keynote, saying that it was 'the most interesting I've ever seen on the topic of the video game industry, so insightful! It contained valuable info on how we're perceived and what we need to do better'. Attendees also expressed their interest in following the project as it progresses and asked to join its mailing list in order to stay updated.
- **Social media attention:** By using the hashtag GAMERHEARTSXBAFTA, attendees were able to spread the word about the project and the workshop on platforms such as X (formerly known as Twitter) and LinkedIn. Posts about the event were shared by speakers and audiences alike who used the platforms to commend the project and express interest to follow its findings in the future. There were 6 uses of the hashtag on LinkedIn, the majority receiving between 10-30 likes and 3-5 reposts. On twitter we received a similar number of tweets with between 5-15 likes on average. We anticipate that the slightly higher engagement on LinkedIn can be attributed to the larger number of industry professionals in attendance who primarily engage with this social media for work events. These modest numbers are indicative of the start of a project. The posts, reposts, likes,



and positive comments demonstrate that GAMEHEARTS is of interest to those in the game industry and the wider CCI.

7.6 APPENDIX

Elle Osili-Wood is an award-winning television presenter and broadcaster. She is widely recognised for her work in film, which includes being an entertainment presenter for ITV, fronting the BFI Future Film Awards, and hosting red carpets for Netflix and BAFTA. Her extensive career in video games, presenting for brands like PlayStation and Xbox, as well as twice hosting the BAFTA Games Awards, has seen her described as “one of the most influential women in games” by Google.

Ben Gallop is a distinguished figure in sports journalism and broadcasting, currently serving as the Head of Commissioning and Digital at BBC Sport. Gallop has been instrumental in transforming the network's digital sports coverage, making it a leading source of sports news and live event broadcasting globally.

Ian Kikuchi is Senior Curator at the Imperial War Museums (IWM). In 2022 Ian launched the exhibition *War Games: Real Conflicts | Virtual Worlds | Extreme Entertainment*, with support from the studio Rebellion. The exhibition explored the relationship between video games and conflict through a series of titles which, over the last forty years, have reflected events from the First World War to the present.

Elosie Singer is the CEO and founder of Singer Studios, a UK based production company and creative studio which produces narratives within film and games. Their work has been shown widely at festivals such as Tribeca, Venice, London, SXSW, Raindance, and Sundance: London. In March 2024 Eloise published *The Pirate Queen*, a multi-award winning VR narrative adventure game starring Lucy Liu.

Colm Seeley is the Insight and Innovation Manager at Ukie, the trade body for the UK's games and interactive entertainment industry. They oversee Ukie's research projects including, census and annual valuations and represent Ukie members and the industry on



data-related boards. Previously at the British Film Institute he worked as a video games analyst, administering the cultural test to video games intending to apply for tax relief.

Simon Smith is a game designer with over twenty-four years of industry experience working for companies such as Team 17, Sony, and Studio Liddel. He is chair of Gameopolis, the network to promote and link the Greater Manchester video games industry. In addition, he is CEO of Thumbfood an independent game production company which provide creative mentorship, initial funding, and offer business development to talented indie developers.

Cat Powell is Director of Visitor Experience and co-CEO at the National Videogame Museum (NVM). challenging preconceptions of settings and advocating for a user-centred approach to design and engagement. In a previous role she managed Artfelt, an award winning arts programme at Sheffield Children's Hospital where she commissioned games such as *Artic Escape*, in order to transform the hospital environment in order to help children's recovery.

Michael French is Head of Games at Games London. In his role as Head of Games Michael works as the London Games Festival Director. The 2024 programme included, *Ensemble*, an exhibition that celebrates Black, Asian, and underrepresented ethnicity games talent from across the UK, as well as *Screen Play*, a new conference which examined renewed links between games and other screen sectors.

Simon Parkin is an award-winning author and journalist who writes on games. Parkin's work has been featured in *The New Yorker*, *The Guardian*, and *The New York Times*. His 2015 non-fiction book *Death by Video Game: Tales of Obsession from the Virtual Frontline*, uncovers stories of developers and players whose dedication to games and play become obsessive.



8 DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

In this section, we synthesise the findings and draw recommendations from each report into five key categories: collaboration, funding, diversity initiatives and promotion, education, and regulation.

Although this discussion section has been structured in order to extract the key recommendations shared by each workshop's own reporting, these recommendations should be considered entangled with one another. These points diffract off each other, affecting how they are positioned on a local, national, and global level. Diffraction being the process of 'marking differences from within and as part of an entangled state' (Barad, 2007, p. 89). While we have taken efforts to disentangle in order to increase readability, a reader of this report should take away the complexity inherent in the recommendations as a set. They are not meant to be taken as individual points of action. Any decision to increase collaboration is enfolded with the discussions which surround funding, education, diversity and inclusion, as well as regulation.

The diffractive nature of the recommendations also motions towards a secondary key finding of this meta report. There is no singular homogenous European video game culture being drawn on in these workshops, but they emerge with commonalities. Each country designed a different style of workshop and in addition generated different types of discussion and recommendations from their sessions. However, much like the recommendations, the experiences and expertise of the workshop attendees are entangled, containing rich overlap with which we can find common threads.

Part of GAMEHEARTS' project is to adopt a holistic approach to the examination of the EVGIE. This requires viewing each aspect of the industry as interdependent, able to affect the whole but reliant on each other in order to maintain the balance required. As such, this report concludes by stressing the importance of collaboration, not only as a recommendation united within the individual reports between the game industry and CCIs, but also within the project of GAMEHEARTS going forward. The workshops highlighted our diffractive nature as institutions, being interdependent parts of an entangled state.

8.1 WORKSHOP SIMILARITIES AND DIFFERENCES

Due to the different engagement with GAMEHEARTS and their division within the partner universities, each workshop focused on different areas of the video game industry. While



there were intersecting issues discussed, each workshop had a particular focus that they drew on when producing questions for their participants to answer. The University of Vienna focused on diversity and safeguarding. Breda University of Applied Science examined the experiences of game developers and workshopped ways to increase collaboration and diversity in those areas. The University of Salford discussed video games as and in culture. Wroclaw University of Economics and Business looked to collaboration and value transfer. The University of Tampere sought to answer questions of diversity and inclusion in the industry. While this meant that the questions being asked in each session were often different from each other, they still each built on an overarching conversation about the EVGIE. Each workshop brought on a group of experts which comprised of members from the video game industry, government, NGOs, CCIs, and journalists. Their acceptance to be part of a GAMEHEARTS workshop demonstrates the projects potential for impact, attendees were interested in the project, what it will uncover, and the opportunities that events such as these workshops can build for the collaboration and cooperation recommended in the reports. Every workshop was appreciated by its attendees and was well received. We anticipate that the networks established in these workshops will become vital throughout the life of GAMEHEARTS and will be influential in the continued outputs and impacts of the project.

8.2 RECOMMENDATIONS

Below, we group together the recommendations of each partner's workshop report and present five key themes, which permeated collaboration, funding, diversity incentives and promotion, education, and regulations. In addition, we also discuss a recommendation raised by a singular partner, BUAS, which we anticipate having implications for the project.

8.2.1 COLLABORATION

A vital strand which permeated each workshop report was the idea of collaboration, each workshop called for there to be increased cooperation either within the video game industry or between it and external partners. Some sites of potential collaboration suggested included: educational institutions and policymakers (University of Vienna), universities (Breda University of Applied Science), government entities (Wroclaw University of Economics and Business), between game designers in different disciplines (The University of Tampere), and the wider creative industries (University of Salford, The University of Tampere).



Collaboration was considered a defining part of the VGI in the University of Salford workshop, where the term *Gesamtkunstwerk* was used in order to establish video games as an amalgamation of different art forms and expertise. That video games are bringing together different skills was also discussed by the University of Tampere, who also looked at collaboration as the defining feature of the way video games are developed and something which the industry should expand on by enfolded in more diversity of developers into the process of producing a video game.

Increasing the incentive to collaborate was key for both Breda University of Applied Science and Wroclaw University of Economics and Business. The report from Wroclaw University of Economics and Business specifically argued for popularising ‘openness and willingness to cooperate with other cultural industries and government entities’ through the use of initiatives co-innovative activities and research in those areas. Meanwhile Breda University of Applied Science’s report discussed evaluating collaboration in order to assure game developers of their worth financially as well as creatively. They argued that in order for collaboration to be successful the expertise of game developers needs to be respected and equally valued in comparison to experts from other sectors.

This meta report finds that collaboration stretches much further than any one report established. The people and industries that video games can collaborate with is extensive. The potential to connect both internally and externally with other industries is an exciting possibility which has already had success as shown through examples brought up in some of the reports. What video games can offer to other CCI’s, and in turn what other sectors can offer the video game industry will provide new ways of presenting information, experiences, and narratives which have wide ranging applications. As a result, we argue that collaboration should be a central tenet in future policies and initiatives within the EVGIE.

8.2.2 FUNDING

Often connected to the theme of collaboration in each workshop, funding was a second key aspect in each partner’s reporting. Smart targeted funding was identified as a way of being able to draw more sectors to work together and produce video games outside of a traditional commercial market.



Targeting the video game industry specifically was identified in the University of Salford report which called for more direct funding of the sector, rather than a more general funding of the creative industries. As well as targeting the video game industry specifically, Breda University of Applied Science recommended that game developers should be consulted in the creation of these grants and funding pots to ensure that they are fit for purpose. The video game industry should be more directly involved in initiatives which may fund the sector.

The majority of partners focused on targeting funding being used as an incentive to increase diversity. University of Vienna and University of Salford both recommended using external funding in order to incentivise diversity both in terms of the representation in the inter-story worlds of video games as well as in development teams. In addition to looking forward to future funding, Breda University of Applied Science also made mention of the diversity targets which already exist for grants, they suggest that while they are important, they need to be more sensitively enfolded into the funding itself.

While not directly discussed by University of Tampere, they included a takeaway in the report that 'capitalism and market forces are obstacles to inclusion'. In the current commercial market, they argue, large video game development companies with big budgets (known in the industry as Triple-A) that produce video games that often have a larger impact on the industry are less willing to take risks in order to conserve profits. The current economic state of the industry has a direct effect on the types of video games produced and by who.

It should be noted that funding was at times spoken as connected to regulation. Specifically, Breda University of Applied Science's report mentions the cost of producing grant applications and the repercussions on video game development. They also commented on the differences between funding initiatives and their implementation, reminding readers that the EVGIE is made up of an amalgamation of local and national funding bodies, which have different requirements.

Finally, funding was also not limited to the creation of video games. Wroclaw University of Economics and Business examined the need for more funding for research and called for 'institutionally funded research conducted by specialised scientific and/or research entities'. If the industry is to be further examined and understood, concerted funded efforts to study the sector with projects such as GAMEHEARTS, are key to expanding knowledge which can feed back into the sector.



Considering the contribution of each partner, this meta report puts forth a recommendation for more targeted funding, which incorporates game developers in the process of its design. Video games are expensive to make, although as highlighted in the introduction to this meta report and the majority of the partner's reports, video games have impressive financial value. The cost of producing a video game disincentivises innovation and risk taking, as such public funding can help alleviate this pressure while increasing the diversity of the industry.

8.2.3 DIVERSITY AND INCLUSION

Each workshop was keen to discuss issues of diversity in the video game industry and ways in which steps could be taken to address the diversity and inclusion gap. As such, all included some mention of diversity in their recommendations.

University of Vienna looked at developing incentives to increase female involvement in the video game industry either as players or developers. They suggested initiative which introduce girls to gaming at a younger age. They also spoke to a need for more support in the industry for female role models, whether that is in the industry as developers, streamers, or other celebrity personalities.

Wroclaw University of Economics and Business and University of Salford both mentioned an emerging silver gamer demographic made up of older players. The conversations surrounded their inevitable increase due to younger gamers aging, and their changing needs which need to be anticipated by the video game industry.

In addition to talking about increasing diversity and inclusion, University of Tampere included in their workshop discussions about the reduction of bias and discrimination in the design of video games. It is not enough to simply add diversity into video games, but there is a requirement to also take active steps to remove stereotyping, conscious and unconscious bias, and to remove possible discrimination for both intra-story video game worlds and in the development of video games.

Breda University of Applied Science incorporated practical thinking surrounding how diversity metrics and initiatives are blended into funding bids and video game budgets. The smaller a game studio, the less money they have to implement accessibility aids. Being aware of the financial incentives inherent in video game design and creating funding which target these areas can help bridge gaps between what differently sized game studios can achieve.



University of Salford spoke also to the need to alter the language used to describe video games in order to open dialogue with people who may be enticed to play video games but are put off by the current closed ecosystem of gaming. While specific terminology must be used by any highly technological medium, video games often employed closed, complicated jargon which require knowledge of the history of video games in order to describe mechanics, styles of video game, and ways of playing. This results in a standoffish and often impenetrable industry which discourages a casual engagement by non-gamers; instead, we should take steps to explain complicated terms in order to reduce these barriers to entry.

This meta report recommends that diversity should be considered a key aspect of any implementation of other recommendations put forward in this report. Collaboration, funding, education, and regulations should all be discussed with diverse stakeholders in mind. It should be noted that none of the workshop's reporting directly discussed diversity in the form of ethnicity, LGBTQIA+, or disability beyond those encountered by aging. In the majority of cases the workshop discussions and recommendations were led by participants with questions set by the GAMEHEART partners, as this project evolves the meta report recommends that these issues are enfolded more into our conversations. Issues of ethnicity, sexuality, and disability, intersect with issues of gender and age which were discussed at length. In order for the project to represent the European video game player base and game developers we need to take active steps to diversify and include these voices in our research.

8.2.4 EDUCATION

Another uniting recommendation with various interpretations was education, with each workshop report recommending that education needs increasing in an assortment of different areas. Whether that be in the realms of education video games targeting multiple subjects (University of Vienna), media/digital literacy for all (Breda University of Applied Science, University of Salford), educating game developers of best practice for inclusion (University of Tampere), teaching the broad applications of video games beyond entertainment (Breda University of Applied Science), raising awareness of parents surrounding children's gaming habits and how to manage them (University of Vienna).

In addition, there was also a strand of discussions surrounding education which looked to the development of new industry professionals. University of Salford examined the continued lack of diversity in the video game industry, arguing that the idea of a career in video games is not



considered a potential or even possible pathway to many children. This was echoed by Breda University of Applied Science, who commented on the high education requirement in order to get employment in the industry as reducing accessibility to those from less privileged backgrounds. While Wroclaw University of Economics and Business challenged the structuring of secondary and university education as not providing the skills needed by the industry to potential game developers.

This meta report strongly calls for these increases in the varied application of education as a recommendation included in each partner's report. Access to education, as well as targeted types of education to both children and adults, are required in order to expand the demographics who feel comfortable engaging with video games, to widen who is involved in video game development, and to safeguard children in the digital landscape.

8.2.5 REGULATION

While the above recommendations were shared between each of the countries' workshops, regulation was a common thread of only two: University of Vienna and University of Tampere. Whilst Wroclaw University of Economics and Business did not include regulation as a recommendation, the theme did emerge in their report. This connection between the three countries' reports is interesting as they reveal differing perspectives on the idea of regulation. University of Vienna's recommendations focused on safeguarding. In particular, advocating for stricter laws surrounding children's access to video games through online platform age verification as well as regulating video game advertisements shown to young people and children's access to gift cards. They identified a need for a balanced approach to regulation 'one that considers both the industry's financial imperatives and the well-being of young people and families'. With the latter stakeholder not being overlooked due to the commercial drive of the industry. Specific to Austria, regulation in these areas is fragmented across its nine states, the workshop called for a national unification of directives on children's safeguarding in the video game industry.

For University of Tampere, their recommendations for regulation also focused on the safeguarding of children, highlighting the need to balance 'children's right to culture with the protection of their privacy'. This recommendation was placed under the heading 'Inclusion gaps in the industry', considering issues that young people face in the industry not only an



issue of safeguarding but also the potential to be an issue of inclusion. As such sensitive understanding of the complexities of video games, their benefits for children as well as their potential, current harms, and how to mitigate these issues, are required in order for regulation to be appropriate.

Whilst University of Tampere and University of Vienna are both arguing for increased regulation in the areas of safeguarding, Wroclaw University of Economics and Business' workshop discussed a need for less rigid regulation surrounding emerging trends and new technologies. Legal barriers were cited by a small percentage of participants as a challenge to collaborating to produce video games as well as to work with CCIs.

This meta report recommends a balanced approach to regulation which puts young people and their families' needs to be both safeguarded and included in culture as priority. In addition, regulation as it pertains to the industry collaboration and use of technology should be examined to ensure that they are not producing unnecessary barriers which disincentivise initiatives to collaborate as established in the previous section.

8.2.6 AI

While this meta report looks to bring to the surface the commonalities between recommendations, we wanted to allow room for a recommendation which did not cross over but we think/argue has implications for the project and the general state of the European VGI. Breda University of Applied Science was the only workshop which directly discussed AI in its recommendations. They describe it as a 'double-edged sword - it offers benefits while presenting new and complex problems'. A cautious approach to AI is proposed: its problems should not be ignored but its benefits should be listened to. Although not discussed in every report AI is a prescient issue which is currently affecting the video game industry and will continue to do so. AI is also something which the European Union is in the process of engaging with as new legislation has been released this year which looks to:

improve the functioning of the internal market and promote the uptake of human-centric and trustworthy artificial intelligence (AI), while ensuring a high level of protection of health, safety, fundamental rights enshrined in the Charter, including democracy, the rule of law and environmental protection, against the harmful effects of AI systems in the Union and supporting innovation (EU, 2024).



While the EU AI act makes no specific mention of video games and AI's application in the sector, there are many points which cross over into the video game industry, including the use of generative AI systems such as CHATGPT. This meta report argues that AI is an ongoing aspect of contemporary society which has implications for the video game industry and other CCIs, while its blind incorporation into video games should be avoided, conversation about its benefits balanced with honest conversations about its harms to the environment, the ethical implications for data, as well as the biases which can appear in its data sets, should be enfolded into the project where applicable, appropriate, and possible.

8.3 CONTECTUALISING THE REPORT WITHIN A EUROPEAN VIDEO GAME CULTURE/S

In the beginning of this discussion section, we examined the entangled nature of the recommendations suggested by each partner workshop report. Rather than these being individual recommendations that can be implemented separately, they consider each other in their emergence. In addition to its entanglement of recommendations, the meta report states that there is no direct united European video game culture to be observed; instead, European video game culture is made up of interdependent diffractive entities which co-create each other. Each workshop took place in the countries where the partner universities are located, Austria, Finland, Netherlands, Poland, United Kingdom, which each have their own unique video game culture. While there are key common threads, which we have indicated, the structuring of the workshops and their different interests and combinations of experts demonstrate that a one-size-fits-all solution cannot be used as a blanket way of approaching EVGIE. As such, communication and collaboration between each of the research institutes in GAMEHEARTS, as well as between the video game industry and wider CCIs, is vital for understanding how the EVGIE is produced, through both academic and non-academic sectors.

8.4 IMPLICATIONS FOR THE PROJECT MOVING FORWARD

As a result of the workshops, each partner university has a rich group of experts within the VGI and wider CCI networks who are both aware of the GAMEHEARTS project and have expressed interest in being involved in the project in the future. This is beneficial to both each university as an individual institution, but also to the project as a whole, as volunteers from



the expert attendees, made up of game designers, government officials, curators, journalists, media producers, will form part of our expert panel. This group will be invited to comment and engage with ongoing research. Subsequently, GAMEHEARTS is on track to achieve its goal of being a research project which is not simply about the VGI, but produced with the support of members of the European VGI. We anticipate the benefits from this workshop radiating outwards, encompassing both the full length of the GAMEHEARTS project and, in addition, future projects undertaken by each of the partner universities.

8.5 REFERENCES

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