GAMIFICATION LAB

Press Play for Research

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From 2012 to 2015 the Gamification research lab and experimental studio operating in the north German city of Lüneburg gained high significance in Germany, Europe and worldwide. Originally the Gamification Lab was established as part of the European Union project Lüneburg Innovation Incubator. This brochure provides an overview of the activities, research and the broad network in which the Gamification Lab is found.

Gamification is concerned with game elements that crop up where we least expect them – at work, in health care, at school and in training programs. Many authors have criticized gamification as marketing hype and have questioned whether game elements in “non-game applications” (Deterding et al. 2011) can still be understood as “play” in the sense of the word Huizinga attributed to it (Huizinga 1938). The more pressing issue, however, appears to be the examination of gamification as a form of play in which we “half believe” (Pfaller 2000) or accept as “half real” (Juul 2005). This is because our social reality is shaped by this type of quasi-playfulness and our ludic experiences today have inscribed themselves on the apparatus. Play is no longer a pure concept or a trivial activity, but has become a “hardware” component in our social reality.

During the “Rethinking Gamification” conference, the Gamification Lab team developed a repertoire of critical approaches which led to the publication of “Rethinking Gamification” (Fuchs, Fizek, Ruffino & Schrape, 2014).

Beyond these and a few other critical assessments, there has been no analysis of the connection between playful practices and technical settings. The main objective of our research is to bridge this gap. The Gamification Lab will pursue the methodical approach of linking theoretical considerations with a critical look at everyday technologies and their habitual use. That is why we develop games and apps, game mechanics and gamified environments. We do not limit ourselves to reading, writing or discussing these issues.

You can read about our work in the articles on audio games, Lüneburg 3D, serious games and the new board game developments at the Gamification Lab. The object of our examination is the link between the playful with device surfaces and underlying social structures.

Only an analysis that takes up device-specific and ludologic aspects, as we intend to do, can escape the confines of a purely techno-or culture-deterministic or philosophical perspective and thereby yield a critical assessment and impact analysis for gamification. Exactly at the moment when the dynamics of technological innovation collide with the conditions of a cultural context, gamification manifests itself in a way that is more than just a marketing trend, a fad or a technical extravaganza. Gamification is – so it seems – developing into the leitmotif of our society.

Prof. Dr. Mathias Fuchs
Head of the Gamification Lab
When gamification became a trendy topic around 2010, it was said to be a potentially revolutionary method for creating social awareness, solving health problems and achieving new forms of user and consumer engagement. In 2011, however, critics pronounced gamification ‘bullshit’ (as game scholar Ian Bogost put it), a buzzword used to sell design, business and marketing consultancies while exploiting the popularity of digital games among broad and varied audiences.

In 2013 we established the Gamification Lab, whose mission was to ‘investigate the aesthetic, ethical and political implications of gamification and work on innovative formats of gamified apps’. In other words, we have been concerned from the outset with a thorough examination of gamification as a technique to save the world or as a scam.

The dual nature of gamification may very well be the target of such harsh opposition. On the one hand, gamification consists of a precise set of techniques and solutions adopted mostly within the design context. Publications such as ‘Gamification by Design’ (Zichermann and Cunningham, 2011) and the many online courses and tutorials on how to implement gamification offer a fairly straightforward understanding of the phenomenon. In this context gamification is seen as a general approach to creating playful environments in order to attract and retain users. This use of gamification has been attacked from many sides, mostly because it is said to claim more than it actually delivers. Critics are skeptical of the boast that this type of gamification offers unlimited forms of engagement—in civil and social sectors too—and that its scope extends beyond profit-making businesses to include social applications.
Fortunately, there is another way of looking at gamification. It can be described as a metaphor for the social and cultural change in which games and playfulness are becoming more and more pervasive. This other kind of gamification looks at the pervasiveness of the playful in our contemporary Western culture as prompted by a complex series of historical events with implications beyond the business sector. This other gamification is the name given to a more complex combination of events, discourses and performances that have transformed games into a form of knowledge.

Seen from the latter perspective, gamification is neither bullshit nor a problem-solving technique. It is instead a discursive formation entangled with many different ways of living in our contemporary world. This is the kind of gamification we have tried to re-evaluate in our research in past years and which we believe should be given much more consideration in the study of our culture.
In 2013 when the Gamification Lab opened its doors, we were confronted with the challenge of understanding exactly what gamification is. Given the large number of definitions that were debated in marketing and design contexts, we decided that we had to redefine gamification while introducing more complex and interesting notions than those previously proposed. We had to think not only about how gamification was used as a term and concept at that time and what its implications were, but also how it could be imagined differently and ‘rethought’. In May 2013 we organized the first Rethinking Gamification workshop, which drew about 15 international scholars to Lüneburg. In three days we initiated a dialogue that later developed into a book project. The book “Rethinking Gamification”, which was published by meson Press in 2014, is available both in printed format and as a downloadable PDF file that guarantees free and open access to its contents. Edited by Gamification Lab members Mathias Fuchs, Sonia Fizek, Paolo Ruffino and Niklas Schrape, the book is a collection of essays from a variety of perspectives. Gamification is seen here as a tool for reinforcing behavior, as an historical construct, through its social and technological contexts, as a form of control to be overturned and contested and, finally, as a design technique. The publication offers a theoretical perspective on the gamification phenomenon without delegitimizing the potential of this cultural trend or diminishing the hype surrounding it. The book instead examines the often-overlooked aspects of gamification, its potential for the design of meaningful experiences and its implications for the cultural and technical study of video games. In conclusion, the research carried out in the workshop and the publication has contributed to revamping the debate on the meanings of gamification and to exploring the relation between games and our everyday lives.

The collective volume “Rethinking Gamification” was published by meson press in 2014.

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“Rethinking Gamification” was sold as a print version at the time of the book launch and has been made available online as a downloadable PDF.
SERIOUS GAMING
by Enrique Perez

Have you recently played a video game and realized it made you think about climate change and its consequences? Have you found games in newspapers or political blogs that attempt to take a stand on a specific political incident? In the not too distant past, have you seen a mini game on the web about a very sensitive or unusual topic? Video games not only deal with fictional worlds, fantastic characters and hypothetical situations, but also describe our reality and even address important social topics.

Games can entertain, but also have the potential to inspire, persuade, criticize and sensitize us to issues requiring our attention. Meaningful messages and stories can be presented to us through simulations with the aim of increasing our awareness or leading us to a moment of reflection.

These games have been coined “serious games” because their goal is not simply amusement. It is not that they do not intend to entertain but they have another main objective. Based on the primary aim, they are sub-classified as persuasive games, advergames, political games, games for health, games for learning, games for activism, games for subversion and news games, just to name a few.

September 12th: A Toy World (2003) by Newsgaming and Gonzalo Frasca is a game that got a lot of popularity because it makes reference to the very sensitive subject of 9/11. It presents a Middle East-looking village that the player bombards in the quest to annihilate terrorists. After the bombings the survivors mourn their dead fellows, rebuild their village and become terrorists. It is a powerful simulation that makes the player question whether the military actions undertaken against terrorism were perpetuated against innocent people who in turn defended themselves from their attackers.

Darfur is Dying (2006) is an award-winning game by Take Action Games that attempts to portray the challenges faced by the millions of refugees trying to survive in the humanitarian crisis caused by war in Darfur. First, the player has to control a character who is trying to make her way to a well and back with water while dodging patrols of the militia. If successful, the player has to manage resources to grow crops and build huts. Besides depicting a delicate situation, the game tries to go further by encouraging the players to invite other friends to play the game, sign petitions and send letters to local representatives in the government.

A handful of different examples of serious games also can be found at MolleIndustria, an online project that showcases quick-to-play games dealing with topics like the labor market, queer theory, religious intolerance, alienation and satires of the political and social systems in which we are immersed. This is a platform commonly referred to by many serious games connoisseurs for its innovative approach to tackling controversial themes and situations.

Another game that has recently drawn a lot of attention is the multi-awarded “Papers Please” (2013) by Lars Pope. It deals with the issue of migration, putting the player in the shoes of a customs officer who has to check the documents of people and keep undesired individuals such as terrorists and criminals out of the country.

The game “Tampon Run” (2014) generated a lot of buzz on social media in recent months because it showed that video games are becoming accessible tools for communication for people regardless of their ages. It presents a character running through a level collecting tampons and...
throwing them to enemies. It was made by a couple of high school students at the Girls Who Code camp who wanted to talk about the stigma surrounding menstruation.

The importance of serious games is such that many academic institutions have also integrated them into their activities. Several universities offering game studies have serious games in their research focus or at least one academic who works in this field of research. Some prominent institutions have dedicated programs and initiatives such as MIT Game Lab’s “Purposeful Games for Social Change”, an online platform that encompasses several of these games and provides useful information about their content, authors, supporters and websites.

Many other initiatives have also been created around this kind of game. For instance, the research centers specializing in the design of games for social impact Values at Play and Tiltfactor, both led by Dr. Mary Flanagan, who is one of the most prominent academics within the study of serious games and the organization Games for Change, which organizes festivals in the USA and in Europe and runs an online platform to showcase and award the best works within serious games.

Moreover, prestigious organizations around the world are participating in the development of this kind of game. It is common to see that a game labeled as “serious” or “with a purpose”, has been commissioned by United Nations or produced with the support of Microsoft or Ericsson, or another major sponsor.

At the Gamification Lab we share the interest in this type of game, as seen in many of our activities. We led discussions and ran a serious board game session at the “Playing for Change” conferences organized by the Games and Social Change Network; attended the Serious Games summer school 2014 in Finland; presented a board game about corruption at PlayPublik 2014 in Krakow; managed a project that focused on the prototyping of an art game on sex slavery and a game on bullying; and commissioned the development of “Civilization VI”, a game about subversion and hacking in the world of corporations.
Bully me, Bully you is a strategy game that works with self-esteem levels and the way they fluctuate as the result of bullying incidents. You can flow between being labelled “cool” or “a loser” and get to see the power of your actions and their consequences when you injure your opponents. You can always ask for help as you try to temporarily neutralize bullies, but assistance is not assured. In order to win, you must lower someone else’s esteem level to the minimum. That condition, of course, endangers the survival of all players. The digital version for this game is called “Bullying Cells”.

Corruption (Denounce!) is a game characterized by simplicity that portrays the negative consequences of corruption in society. You have to choose between being corrupt or honest and have to collaborate with other players in denouncing players for corrupt acts in order to make progress cooperatively. This is a simple game with the peculiarity of allowing you to follow or break the rules about the direction of your moves.

Love is rarely a bed of roses. It oftentimes throws us into stormy weather only to reward us with the most stunning rainbow afterwards. Fortunately, a successful relationship is not a pure game of chance. In the “Boat 4 Two” you will try to maintain a happy relationship, going through its beauties and hardships. The game is an artistic cooperative puzzle platform for two players, in which your goal is to push the floating boat up the river by casting stones into the water. But beware: big waves may carry the boat against the shore or sink it. So, manoeuvre the boat wisely, overcome the obstacles and see how strong your bond is. You may even be rewarded with a surprising line of poetry.

Games can be more than fun! They allow players not only to passively read about serious subjects but to actively experience them. We are developing several serious games as board games and as digital versions in order to explore the potential of this exciting medium. The games’ topics range from sex slavery, bullying and corruption to the complex dynamics of love relationships. They offer players what other games don’t—interesting choices, challenges, competition, strategy and the opportunity to reflect upon important social issues. These projects breach the limits of games and expand the medium’s potential for expression.

“Kept in the chest” is a series of interactions in the form of an art installation that leads the player through the routine of a sex slave. In this game you have freedom concerning just one thing, your thoughts, and depending on them you will have more or less desire to escape from your captivity. The more attempts to escape the better, because the physical representation of your body disintegrates with every incident you undergo. Choose the mindset with which you will do your work and encounter your captor, either positively, like thinking of the persons you love or your dreams, or negatively, being indifferent or depressed. Unfortunately, the likelihood of breaking free is very low and based entirely on your luck and your motivation, which wanes as you run out of positive thoughts over time.

In a reversal of what is commonly thought about games and their ability to entertain, this one intends to provide a thoroughly unpleasant experience by referring abstractly but never grotesquely to a very sensitive issue.

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CIVILIZATION VI: AGE OF WARCRAFT

Can game design serve as a method to analyze the pressing issues of our time? Can a topic like digital cyber warfare be explored and understood in play? The game “Civilization VI: Age of Warcraft”, developed by the Serbian artist collective Eastwood and commissioned by the Gamification Lab, puts the player in the role of a secret service agency that strives for global dominion. To attain that goal and to beat the adversary agencies, the player needs to build up a worldwide digital spy network and develop more and more surveillance technologies. The game is built on the technical basis of the successful Civilization series by Firaxis, but twists and turns its mechanics to explore its own topic. As researchers we wanted to look over the artists’ shoulders and investigate how they translated the results of their own studies into playful structures by using game design as an analytical method. “Civilization VI: Age of Warcraft” was presented at transmediale 2015 in Berlin to great critical acclaim.

AUDIO GAME HUB: LISTEN CAREFULLY!

Have you ever played Tetris with your eyes closed? Now you can. We have transferred multiple casual games into the audio sphere. Play with no visuals and let yourself be guided by sound only. Draw your audio bow in Archery, test your memory in Animal Farm, check your reflexes in the multiplayer Samurai or find the way out of the fearsome audio Labyrinth. Discover our audio game collection consisting of several arcades and platforms. Each of our games requires a different type of interaction pattern and audio gameplay mechanics. That’s why they are so much fun. The application was developed for mobile platforms (iOS, Android, Windows Phone) and for the desktop (Windows, OSX).

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As a child were you amused by playing “blind man’s bluff”? Maybe you always wondered why the fables read aloud by your parents were far more magical than the same stories on the TV screen. Sound has limitless potential to create beautifully immersive scenery without the help of a single paintbrush or animated pixel. For centuries human beings have willingly lost themselves in the imaginary worlds of sound, from oral stories told by the fire and musical entertainment to more recent inventions such as radio drama and audio books. With the introduction of computers and the ever-growing popularity of electronic entertainment, it was only a matter of time before “blind man’s bluff” would be adapted to the digital medium.

So what happens when sound meets interactivity and the lights go off? Meet the audio game. Unlike popular video games, it does not rely on visual elements, but is operated by sound. The game world is created in the player’s imagination by the omnipresent soundscape.

The first attempts to build electronic audio games were made in the late 1970s when Atari designed Touch Me, a rhythm game on a handheld device, which became an inspiration for the popular Simon (1978). Although sounds played a crucial role, it was not possible to play the game and operate the device without visuals. The player had to memorize and reproduce the sequence of four buttons that lit up with particular sounds attached to them. In 1996, Bop It, another sound-based handheld playful device appeared on the market. This time the interaction pattern was designed solely with audio in mind. The device featured a button, a lever and a handle. The player’s task was to listen to the commands (bop it, twist it, or pull it) and interact with the corresponding parts of the electronic console.

One of the first commercial story-driven audio games was Real Sound – Kaze No Regret (1999), an audio adventure created for Sega Dreamcast and Sega Saturn consoles. Unlike several previous electronic and video games, the mechanics of Real Sound depended entirely on sound. The year 2001 started with Shades of Doom, the first Windows-based adventure title fully accessible to the visually impaired. Inspired by the graphical game Doom (1993), it adapted the First Person Shooter (FPS) genre to the world of sounds. The players oriented themselves in the soundscape by the echo of footsteps, the wind howling through the passages and the sounds of nearby equipment. The titles designed by the GMA Games in the past decade are exclusively tailored to the visually impaired community and known only in relatively small circles.

In recent years, the status of audio games has been gradually changing as sound artists, game developers, and researchers became more interested. Several games based on moving through space have been created, predominantly for tablets and smartphones, including Papa Sangre (2010), Sound Swallower (2011), Audio Defence: Zombie Arena (2014) and Blindside (2012) for the PC. An interesting experiment developed by a Copenhagen Game Collective, uses existing commercial game controllers. In “Dark Room Sex Game” (2008) two players bring their invisible avatars to orgasm by shaking the Wii motion controls. One of the most recent interactive audio projects has been developed by the Gamification Lab’s team, who adapted popular casual games such as Tetris to the realm of sounds. The collection of games in the Audio Game Hub (2015) may be played on smartphones, tablets and PCs.
Much more complex projects go in the direction of audio adventures. The so-called “interactive audio books” are still a nuisance, but their enormous potential has yet to be discovered. The core experience of an interactive book includes impersonating a character, choosing alternative story paths and literally exploring the virtual story world. The player traverses selected locations in the game, indicated by the narrator’s descriptions and background landscape sounds. For instance, once the player reaches a fireplace, he hears the sounds of the fire burning, and the buzz of voices of other non-player characters with whom he may engage in dialogues or battles. One of the first interactive audio books is “1812: The Heart of Winter” (2011). Available in three language versions (Polish, English and French), it can be played on smartphones and computers.

With the popularity of mobile devices, the ubiquity of mobile game platforms (e.g., App Store, Google Play, Windows Store) and the proliferation of the independent scene (“indie” games), audio games are poised for a bright future on the edge of still-unexplored territory.

Even the film industry is toying with turning screens off. In January 2015 in the UK an experimental 1962 horror film Carnival of Souls was adapted to a 3D audio-only experience relayed across wireless headsets (Cornerhouse.org). Blind and partially sighted audience members served in the project’s advisory group.

In the coming years audio games may migrate from smart phones and tablets to smart watches, wearable technology, smart clothing or even to such novelties as fiber implants. For the time being, however, such predictions seem to belong to the science fiction realm of the H+: The Digital Series (2012).
Playing and learning have lots in common. Baby animals at play practice behavior they will need in later life, from the hunt to symbolic submission in struggles for pack dominance. Human children also learn to make sense of their world through play. So it is no surprise that educators have always hoped to be able to use play in their work. If play makes learning fun, why then can’t we wrap educational content into a game? It’s an old idea that dates back to the time of Plato. Today, it is known as “game-based learning”. With the help of computer games, learning should happen on its own. But it is not that simple.

Learning at play is really quite practical; it is comprehending, grasping how to use or manage something. Many toddlers, for example, exhibit a great fascination with doors and enjoy opening and closing them again and again. Such playing around is apparently without purpose. Satisfaction comes from the simple experience of the back and forth motion and from the realization that the movement is caused by oneself. But such playing around is not meaningless, for doors are an important part of our culture and it would be disastrous if we could not practice how to use them. By playing with the door, the child develops a feeling for cause-and-effect and learns to recognize danger – for instance, that it hurts when your finger gets caught in the door. In this way the child learns what she can do with a door, but she would not know how a hinge works. That is typical for learning while playing.

At play we do not generally learn what the educators wish. We don’t learn dates, facts and formulas but rather how to do something within the realm of possibility. The possible could encompass...
the door’s range of motion or the number of constellations for pieces on a chessboard. Through its elements a game opens up a limited space of possibilities within which the player can act. When we play we learn what to do to succeed within the possible or we learn to expand it by creative means, as when we cheat. Everyone has been through the same thing: We want to test out a new board game with friends, but we know that it does little good to brood for hours over complicated rules. You just have to play the game and learn which possibilities and consequences the rules hold. That’s how you develop a feeling for the game and the space of possibilities — you simply get it. So physicists are not per se better billiards players, because knowledge of the angle of incidence and the angle of reflection is less important than the intuitive grasp of the game.

Playing motivates us to learn, but to learn only that which you need to be able to play. In explicit educational games playful structures are often grafted onto the subject matter, as when correct answers to a vocabulary quiz are rewarded with a brief game of skill. In the best case the game would motivate one to learn vocabulary, but the learning does not take place within the game itself, but next to it. You could just as well give the child a chocolate bar after every test.

Successful “game-based learning” is an art. It consists of integrating the subject matter into the game so that the player has to learn it in order to play the game. For example, I have to understand certain production processes and economic cycles in order to complete a business simulation game successfully. Integration of this sort, however, has to look unforced. If the educational intention pushes into the foreground, the game loses its most important characteristic — the freedom from purpose. According to all findings, that’s what players say is a real buzzkiller. However, if the integration of the subject matter is done very subtly, there is a danger that the player will not become aware of it. The player learns, but she does not know what she learns there. The subject

matter is hidden in the game and has to be lifted back into the conscious mind. One way to do that is to follow up the game experience with a discussion. This sort of didactical framing ensures the transfer of the educational content from the world of the game to the real world. The experience with the business simulation, for example, could be compared to current economic news. To ensure that such a contextual framing actually takes place, an educational institution often has to be involved and integrate the subject matter in classroom lessons, for example. But that in turn threatens to rob the game of its purposelessness.

The connection between playing and learning proves to be as fundamental as it is precarious. “Game-based learning” is not a cure-all. You cannot simply turn a math book into a game. The design of educational games is realized in the unresolved tension between the purposelessness of play and the purposeful orientation of education. It is a game with contradictions — an art.
ONLINE COURSE: “EXPLORING 200 YEARS OF THE STÄDEL COLLECTION”

Visual culture is rapidly gaining meaning as all areas of life are digitalized. Basic knowledge of visual elements is an essential component for carefully considered action in the globalized media society. Despite existing demand, the market in German-speaking countries lacks relevant offers of ‘visual literacy’ courses based on suitable cultural studies methodology and art history perspectives. In response to this deficit, the Städel Museum in Frankfurt and the Centre for Digital Cultures (CDC) at Leuphana University of Lüneburg are jointly developing a transdisciplinary online format for self-directed, ad hoc learning. In this project the work of the Gamification Labs entails advising the institutions on how to integrate playful motivation mechanisms in the courses. In the course now in development, introductory art history content will be didactically prepared for target groups with no previous knowledge. The free course offers interest-driven skills acquisition as a sort of basic digital liberal arts education.

Playful feedback mechanisms and interfaces are meant to assure high accessibility and to motivate long term – without compromising the seriousness of the online course. The challenge is to integrate game elements in such a way that they do not seem contrived, but can meld with the subject matter to form a holistic, motivational and in-depth learning experience. The online course, which has no admission requirements, will be made available around the world for use on tablets.

GAME SEMINARS – LEARN TO PLAY

To convey knowledge with games is an artform, but so it is to teach about games themselves. How can we theorise about games? What constitutes a good game design? And how are they being produced? Besides our research at the Gamification Lab, and in our spare time, we explored these and many more questions together with students in various courses at BA and MA level. What all our offerings had in common was that we merged theoretical readings and academic discussion with very practical tasks. The reason is simple: games are actions – in order to understand them, one has to play and even make them.

The course “Game Development” by Enrique Perez provided an overview of the process of game creation and the way it is undertaken in the industry. The participants learned about iterative game design and had hands-on experiences; they developed a simple digital game with a web engine and crafted and playtested their own board games.

Sonia Fizek’s course “Game Theory and Analysis” familiarised students with selected aspects of games and play, and the young field of Game Studies. The students acquainted themselves with classical game definitions, categories, and literature as well as with the most recent phenomena, such as: ludification, ludic turn, and games for science. The seminar, besides academic discussions, included short gameplay sessions and design workshops.

In “Computer Games and Computer Simulation” Niklas Schrape paired the reading of key text of the Game Studies with epistemological texts about scientific computer simulations and mathematical game theory, highlighting the interrelations between them. As part of the requirements the students took part in a “game jam”, where they developed design concepts and prototypes.
Edkimo, a start-up project affiliated to the Gamification Lab, presented its Feedback-App at CeBIT 2015.

EDKIMO – FEEDBACK FOR LEARNING

Did your teacher ask for your opinion at school? How would you have responded as a pupil? Edkimo, a start-up project affiliated to our lab, has developed an app that enables pupils to provide feedback on their classes. The app simplifies the process of self-evaluation which is mandatory in German schools and takes the pupils as experts for their own learning process seriously. The app, which is already in use at selected schools in Lower Saxony, Hesse and Berlin, focuses on a playful approach on feedback processes. It should be fun to use for pupils and teachers and ought to encourage continuous communication in the classroom. But the technology is not an end in itself, it is tied to the needs of daily school practices. In this short interview, the founders Sebastian Waack and Kai-Roman Ditsche-Klein talk about how playful motivation can serve as an impetus at work and whether their app can work for businesses, too.

How did you come up with the idea for this app?

Sebastian Waack: Research on teaching has shown that schools that have built a sustained feedback culture have higher teaching standards and that students are more successful learners. When working as a teacher myself, I experienced that the most valuable feedback often came from my students.

Kai-Roman Ditsche-Klein: Today, almost every student has a smartphone. However, those are often banned from classrooms since there aren’t many sensible possible applications. In my opinion, the digital revolution requires us to approach new technologies in a positive-critical manner. Schools can provide valuable input in this context. And we want our feedback app to be a part of that.

Can playful motivation also serve as an impetus at work?

Ditsche-Klein: We are convinced it can. The challenge for both businesses and schools is to find a solution that is easy yet not simple. Playful does not mean childish or silly. And gamification is far more than awarding medals and star stickers.

Could the app also be used by businesses?

Waack: We see great potential for our app in vocational training. We are not aiming to compete with well-established management feedback techniques, but are focusing our further development on what is at the core of the project, that is, providing feedback on the process of teaching and learning. We believe this can be transferred to a variety of situations, for example trainees and apprentices giving feedback on their professional training.

Are there any plans to further develop the app for businesses?

Waack: At this point, we are working to optimize the app for schools. However, we have already connected with several companies, the Chamber of Industry and Commerce and the federal association of institutions for adult education in order to include potential for further development in professional training right from the start.
Between autumn 2013 and summer 2015 the Gamification Lab conducted several workshops aimed at networking experts from the regional and national economy with national and international artists and researchers. A special highlight was the first international event that featured a critical look at the phenomenon of gamification. The “Rethinking Gamification” Workshop (15-17 May 2013) brought together researchers from around the world and kicked off the book project of the same name.

German-language computer games research was the focus of the workshop “Cutting Edges and Dead Ends” (11-12 April 2014), which we organized in cooperation with the Games work group of the German society for media studies (GfM). German researchers discussed current trends, developments and burning research questions with Espen Aarseth, an international expert in this field of research.
“Playing for Change” (12–13 June 2014) was all about activism and politics and how games can be used to motivate players to critical reflection of social issues. “Audio Games and Interactivity” (13 November 2014) brought together international designers, media artists and young entrepreneurs from the region to work out the potential of experimental interfaces. At “Board Game Workshop” (5 March 2015) the issue was technically simpler but conceptually more complex as international board game designers debated the surprising potential of their medium.

The workshops inspired us and gave us the chance to subject our own theoretical and applied research to criticism from experts. Most of all we hope that the workshops helped to put Lüneburg on the map of computer game research.
As a sub-project of the Innovation Incubator research project “Art and Civic Media”, the Gamification Lab put emphasis on the dialog with regional companies.

IN DIALOG WITH THE REGION

The Gamification Lab, a sub-project of the Innovation Incubator research project “Art and Civic Media”, engages companies from Lüneburg and northern Lower Saxony in dialog while encouraging the lively exchange of ideas and providing opportunities for rewarding collaboration on the development of new business models. We have hosted many events at which we presented our applied and theoretical research work to regional companies. In cooperation with the Chambers of Industry and Commerce for Stade, Lüneburg, Hamburg, Lübeck, Kiel and Flensburg, we invited representatives of the regional economy to such an event in November 2014. Under the title “Gamification – Work as Game?”, we provided insight into our research topics, showed the potential of gamification in user-oriented projects, and discussed related issues with the businesspeople. In process optimization, employee motivation and customer retention, gamification elements have long been present in our working lives. Their potential for business is enormous. Getting to a higher level and collecting extra points motivates people and encourages certain behavior. In computer games players often complete demanding and repetitive tasks. You could call it “work”, but the players do it all voluntarily. Difficulties normally avoided at work become welcome challenges in a game. As a follow-up to the event, representatives from regional businesses discussed the subject of “Audio Gaming” with researchers and experts as part of the Incubator ANALOG series in May 2015. Not just established businesses can benefit from networking and knowledge transfer. In mini workshops we met entrepreneurs who presented their ideas and concepts for business, which ranged from online courses with game elements and gamified cultural marketing to economy simulation games. The start-up community from the EU convergence region never fails to impress us with its vitality and creativity.

CONTACT

Prof. Dr. Mathias Fuchs
mathias.fuchs@inkubator.leuphana.de

LÜNEBURG 3D: VIRTUAL CITY TOUR

Lüneburg is admired by visitors and known for its medieval architecture featuring North German brick Gothic style and artistically adorned gables on historic patrician houses. In the Gamification Lab we are working with an accurate replica of the historical city center as we develop a virtual city tour with Lüneburg 3D. Thanks to our game, a computer user in Peking, Moscow or Rio de Janeiro can walk through the streets of Lüneburg and learn about the city’s historic buildings and places. Our primary concern is the transfer of knowledge. Users can examine the smallest details on buildings steeped in history and listen to information about their historic background.

Experience Lüneburg digitally

Painstaking research was the first order of business in the development of our city tour. In close cooperation with Lüneburg Marketing GmbH, we incorporated historic materials such as old photographs and handed-down stories in our game design to guarantee results suitable to both the city and tourism. Through the integration of mini-games we tested the extent to which game elements could be inserted in touristic city marketing to win over new groups of visitors. The goal was to give young people around the world the chance to acquaint themselves with the North German Hanseatic city on the computer and to let them stroll through the streets as “non-traveling tourists” before deciding to make a real-life trip to Lüneburg. Lüneburg 3D will be available in a Web and tablet version.

CONTACT

Prof. Dr. Mathias Fuchs
mathias.fuchs@inkubator.leuphana.de
Your keynote at the conference will focus on “The Gamification of the Gothic”. Horror games, like movies, are quite a popular genre of games. How could you explain the pleasure of being interactively involved in horror scenarios?

Over 20% of games fall into Horror categories – a pretty good showing! As is the case in cinema, horror has a very well understood market, hence its success as genre. Asking what types of pleasures games that employ different aspects of Gothic seek to create for players is the beating heart of my paper. Seeking to theorize desire and pleasure in relation to Gothic and horror fiction has always acted as strong driver for my academic work. In this paper I evaluate critically the types of pleasures that different forms of Gothic in games aim to invoke.

Astrid Ensslin, Professor of Digital Culture and Communication at Bangor University (GB)

As a researcher, what types of games could be distinguished and how does the term ‘game’ differ from the notion of ‘play’?

‘Game’ and ‘play’ aren’t radically discrete notions when it comes to digital games. A game is made often with the player in mind, an implied player, to use Iser’s terminology. Granted, that doesn’t mean players aren’t capable of deviations to intention or of escaping developers’ assumptions. But because many games are composed of multiple and deterministic arrays of feedback mechanisms, they hold this implied player and the scope of affordances for them to play at the heart of their virtuouan design. This also means that players are often more heavily interpellated into a game, often leaving less room for ‘play’ in the utopian ‘free’ sense, particularly in games that follow cinematic strategies for creating suspense.

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Astrid Ensslin, Professor of Digital Culture and Communication at Bangor University (GB)

Part of your research revolves around “digital fiction”, which is a form of fiction that requires the digital medium to unfold all of its structural or aesthetic meaning. Can you describe some transitional effects between reading digital literature and playing games?

In my work I assume that there is a cognitive-interactive difference between reading and gaming, although it’s not an absolute difference but rather a continuum between hyper vs. deep attention. Gaming lies more on the hyperattentive side, whilst reading tends to be deep-attentive. Some writers integrate playful, game-like elements such as narrative 3D worlds...
Markus Rautzenberg, Philosopher and Media Theorist at Freie Universität Berlin (GER)

Your research is often concerned with the theory and the aesthetics of disturbances. What is the role of disturbances in our use of media?

Disturbances reveal what is usually kept hidden: the material nature of media. Part of the logic of media in use is the transparency regarding their “contents”. I cannot read a word by staring at individual letters. Rather, I “look through” them, leaving them behind on the way to making sense of the whole. In disturbances, media become intrusive, pushing themselves into the picture (that’s what makes them unpleasant), thus becoming observable in their autonomy.

Many game developers make creative use of this kind of fault. What potential do “intended” disruptions hold in computer games?

The potential of these intended faults was increasingly recognized in the 1990s. On occasion the faults were implemented as part of the game design or the aesthetics. These “disturbances” always also refer to the game’s artificiality as a cultural artefact, bringing a moment of self-refer-ence into the game experience. This avant-garde element opposes the design ideal of “total immersion” and opens new creative opportunities that are increasingly taken advantage of.

Astrid Ensslin, professor of Digital Culture and Communication at Bangor University.

and aleatoric techniques so they play with the reader by experimenting with the technological affordances of the software they use. On the other hand, there are actual mini-games embedded in the narrative and you have to “win” the games in order to move on with or complete the narrative.

Today, the popularity of games is growing and at the same time we observe how other media, such as books and even newspapers and their digital counterparts, are getting kind of “gami-fied” by more and more interactive elements. Are games the new literature?

Not sure whether you can say that (print!) literature was ever as popular and all-pervasive as games are nowadays. Of course there’s still the digital divide, but even before radio, television and film came to be mass media, literature never had the kind of “mass effect” and the kind of creative, user-driven popular culture that games have. Perhaps you could say that games (and particularly mobile games) are the new television. Another thing we should remember is that literature is no longer confined to print. Instead, writers are exploring — often in teams with other creative practitioners such as film makers, game designers and visual/sound artists — new avenues of literary art and expression. So you could say that some games experiment with and therefore can be seen as new forms of literature.

GAMIFICATION LAB // NEW NETWORKS

Astrid Ensslin, professor of Digital Culture and Communication at Bangor University.

Philosopher and media theorist Dr. Markus Rautzenberg, Freie Universität Berlin.
Karen Palmer, Digital Artist and Film Maker

How would you describe the (aesthetic) potential of combining film and games?

The aesthetic potential of combining film and gaming is an exciting opportunity to create a fully immersive cinematic experience. Transforming film from a purely linear journey of which the director is the sole author into a journey with multiple potential story structures of which the audience is the controller of the experience. This approach creates a bespoke personalised and highly satisfying journey for the viewer/player. Unlike animation, film is a more visual reality-based gaming experience so the type of immersion into this world has a different set of dynamics and therefore has the potential to be a more powerful journey.

From your point of view, what are the risks and opportunities of the more and more blurred distinctions between games and non-games?

I am not aware of any potential risks, but I see a lot of potential opportunities, including new forms of learning and self-development through an engaging format. The experience enables the user to develop the self and to gain practical cognitive skills such as focus, enabling the user to become more productive. Acquiring real world skills through this unique form of “entertainment meets gaming” will enable users to understand their strengths and weakness more.
Mathias Fuchs is an artist, musician and media critic working at Leuphana University of Lüneburg. He has pioneered in the field of artistic use of games and is a leading theoretician on Game Art and Game Studies. He is Professor at the Centre for Digital Cultures and directs the Incubator project Art and Civic Media with a research focus on Ludic Interfaces and on Gamification.

Sonia Fizek is a postdoctoral researcher at the Gamification Lab in the Centre for Digital Cultures and an affiliate at Digital Cultures Research Lab at Leuphana University of Lüneburg. She completed her MA in Electronic Literature at the Institute of English Studies at Lodz University (Poland) and her PhD at the School of Creative Studies & Media at Bangor University (UK). Her doctoral research focused on the establishment of a framework for player character research in offline role-playing games. Building upon her doctoral work, she is still preoccupied with formalism and structural methods in game studies. Her most current academic interests focus on gamification, collaborative citizen science, playful interfaces, and audio gaming. She is leading seminars in game theory and analysis at Leuphana and Hamburg Media School. In January 2015 she joined the Journal of Gaming and Virtual Worlds as the third Associate Editor.

Niklas Schrape is a PostDoc at the Centre for Digital Cultures in Leuphana University of Lüneburg. He holds a double position at the Gamification Lab and at the Institute for Advanced Study in Media Cultures of Computer Simulation (MECS). From 2001-2002, he studied Communications, Psychology and Sociology at FU Berlin, and from 2002-2007 Social and Economic Communications at the University of the Arts Berlin (UdK). He spent a semester abroad at the International Film School of Wales in Newport, UK. Between 2007 and 2011, Niklas finished his PhD thesis in Media Studies at Film and Television University Potsdam-Babelsberg (HFF) as a scholarship holder of the Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung. In 2012, he published his thesis at Campus Verlag under the title “Die Rhetorik von Computergespielen. Wie politische Spiele überzeugen” (The Rhetoric of Computer Games. How Political Games Persuade). His current research interest lies in the consequences of gamification on our understanding of social reality and the relationship between simulation and gamification.

Enrique Perez is an artist and interaction designer from Mexico. He has worked doing gameplay design in the casual gaming industry and has lectured on games at undergraduate and graduate levels. He completed his master’s degrees in Games and New Media and is currently working on his PhD about the design of Persuasive Games using Sacred Geometry. As Research Fellow at the Gamification Lab, he consults on gamification for different projects, leads the development of a 3D simulation of Lüneburg and designs casual serious games about critical social issues.
Paolo Ruffino – Artist and Researcher
Paolo is completing a Ph.D. at Goldsmiths, University of London. Besides his research in the Gamification Lab he works as Lecturer at the Game Cultures programme at London South Bank University. His Ph.D. research involves a study of the concepts of consumer and producer in video games, the history of the medium of the video game and phenomena such as ‘modding’, independent gaming, open games and game art. He has been analysing discourses surrounding the ‘Playstation hacking’ case, the Independent Games Festival and independent gaming, gamification and game development kits. He is also a founding member of the art collective IOCOSE, which has exhibited at the Venice Biennale and Tate Modern. Paolo lives and works in London, UK.

Dr. Fabrizio Poltronieri – Researcher, artist and software developer
Fabrizio Poltronieri, a researcher, artist and software developer from São Paulo, Brazil, holds a PhD in Semiotics from the Pontifical Catholic University of São Paulo – PUC/SP with a thesis on the role of chance in computer art. His main interests are new media, computational aesthetics and video games. Currently, his research efforts reflect upon how the notion of gamification affects language production mediated by apparatuses, in consonance with Vilém Flusser’s thoughts. In 2008 Fabrizio published a chapter on the relations between art and digital games in the seminal Brazilian book about video games “Mapa do Jogo – A diversidade cultural dos games”. He co-edited the volume “The Permanence of the Transient: Precariousness in Art”.

Nina Cerezo – Project Manager
Nina is a researcher and administrative manager responsible for the Gamification Lab and the organization of the international conference DiGRA2015. She has a master’s degree in culture and media management and has worked for institutions such as Hamburgische Kulturstiftung or Zeit Verlag, where event management, public relations and fundraising were her main working fields. She also co-founded the social association “weitblick Hamburg”, which supports educational projects all over the world.

Laleh Torabi – Graphic artist and designer
Laleh Torabi is a graphic artist and designer. After studying Visual Communication at the Fachhochschule für Gestaltung Würzburg (Diplom), she worked for different cultural institutions, festivals, exhibitions and art projects, national and international publishers and magazines. She is passionate about books, posters and typography and enjoys developing identities, visual systems and platforms. Her design and art work has been regularly published, awarded and exhibited. In the field of education she leads art projects at schools with children from different backgrounds. At the Gamification Lab she is designing and illustrating publications and visualising game interfaces and environments. Laleh is also constantly working on self initiated projects with a core interest in drawing, shadow theater and story telling.
Marvin Töllner — Programmer
Marvin Töllner studied computer science with a focus on robotics and automation at the University of Lübeck. He participated in the SAUC-E competition 2012 and his team won the innovation award for constructing and developing the AUV SMART-E. His main interests are software development and innovative technologies.

Jaroslaw Beksa — Researcher, designer and sound engineer
R&D project manager and designer specializing in mobile applications, multimodal user interfaces, user experience, videogames and sound engineering.

We would like to say a big thank you to the former Gamification Lab associates Sophie Jent (Programming Audio Game), Fabian Lehmann (Research Associate) and David Scheeie (Programming and Additional Design Audio Game)!

SELECTED PUBLICATIONS
Since 2012 members of the Gamification Lab in the Lüneburg Innovation Incubator have authored or contributed to the following publications.

Previously published

Expected Publications

The Lüneburg Innovation Incubator is funded by:

www.leuphana.de/inkubator

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