

Slovak Game Industry Continues to Grow

Michal Kabát

According to the annual survey by the Slovak Game Developers Association, the game industry in Slovakia was not hit hard by the global pandemic in 2020. Unlike other creative sectors in the country, the gaming business actually experienced a mild growth similar to the pre-Covid-19 era. There are 63 active companies in Slovakia, up from 55 in 2020, employing 870 people (up from 762). Pixel Federation leads the market both in turnover and in number of employees, followed by PowerPlay Studio and SuperScale, all based in the capital city Bratislava. The industry is concentrated in Bratislava (30 companies) and in the surrounding region of West Slovakia (66% of all companies). The second most important centre is Košice with 12 active companies (e.g., InLogic Software, 4th top company in sales, 3rd in number of employees). The East Slovak region is home to 31% of companies overall.

Studios hired 198 new workers, while 116 were sacked. Overall turnover went up from 51 mil. EUR in 2019 to 72.2 mil. in 2020. Additionally the mood remained optimistic. The turnover for 2021 is projected at almost 85 mil. EUR. If there was any slowdown, it was in the number of newly developed full-release in-house games, with 26 in 2020, compared to 50 in 2019. However, cooperations and total active projects both went up.

The workforce in the game industry grew more diverse with 80 (9%) foreign developers (up from 40 and 5% in 2019). 41% companies employ someone from abroad, 6% more than the previous year. These employees most often come from the Czech Republic (24%), Russia and the UK (both 7%). However, the ratio of women working in Slovak game development remained at the same level (16.4% in 2019, 16.2% in 2020). A narrow majority (51%) of game developers do not think that the pandemic affected their business financially, 21% even think that it did so positively, and only 28% felt any negative impact. Even more (61%) say that the pandemic did not affect the costs of their projects. On the other hand, the impact was negative or very negative to 32% of survey participants.

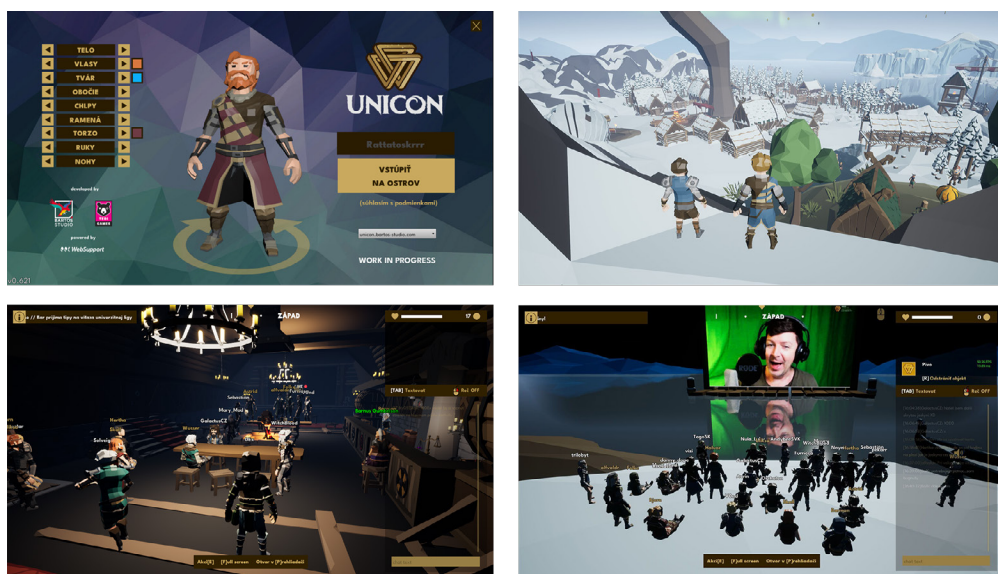
UniCon 2021: The First Game Festival You Can Actually Play

Alexandra Kukumbergová

The pandemic didn't just bring suffering, but also created new opportunities in the marketplace. This was especially true for the gaming industry that bloomed in many ways, except when it came to events such as festivals, cons, gatherings and tournaments. While esports tournaments quickly moved online and tried to win over some of the traditional sports audience, cons and festivals were mostly postponed or moved to streaming, thus losing much of their potential in connecting people and providing a place for shared experiences. There are numerous ways in which games can provide help during a pandemic crisis, and playing them in festive gatherings is one of them. The idea of using a game

interface to substitute a real life event was the theme of *UniCon 2021*, the only game festival happening this year in Trnava.

UniCon is a festival organized by employees and students of the University of Ss. Cyril and Methodius in Trnava and previous UniCons were also hosted there. This year it was managed mostly by a handful of people – huge credit goes to Dalibor Bartoš and his one-man indie studio *Bartoš Studio* (www.bartos-studio.com). The festival took place exclusively online, in the online multiplayer Viking-themed game environment created solely for this purpose. In the context of Eastern Europe, this was rather unique. We witnessed many similar events turning into virtual avatar gatherings, but none as playful as UniCon, since it not only moved the entire programme to online streaming, but it actually provided a lively, interactive and organic playground for its visitors. The festival's virtual island was filled with stories, missions, and responsive students role-playing as quest givers and other characters. While not crowded, UniCon aspired to provide its visitors with lectures as well as playful exploration of the virtual island, its lore and inhabitants, with characters (visitors and hosts) communicating through voice chats (Picture 1).



Picture 1: Screenshots of the game festival UniCon 2021

Source: own processing

Although it seems now that live events are getting the green light worldwide again, there is also an opening for this practice to continue – after all why shouldn't it since there are so many benefits in using online platforms and in using game experience as a tool to reach out, communicate, educate and play around.