

Editorial Board

Editor-in-Chief

Zdenko Mago

Deputy Editor-in-Chief

Zuzana Kvetanová

Publishing Consultant

Martin Solík

Indexing Process & Technical Editing

Zuzana Kvetanová
Veronika Šašalová
Mária Dolniaková

English Editor

Michael Valek

Advisory Board

Peter A. Bruck
Slavomír Gálik
Koichi Hosoi
Zora Hudíková
Michał Kłosiński
Małgorzata Łuszczak
Juraj Malíček
Hana Pravdová
Jaroslav Světlík

Editorial Team

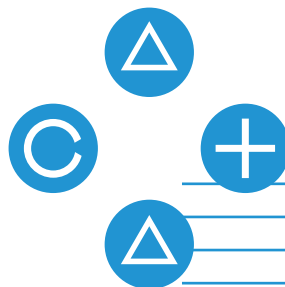
Anna Hurajová
Michal Kabát
Miroslav Macák
Veronika Šašalová
Magdaléna Švecová

Illustrations

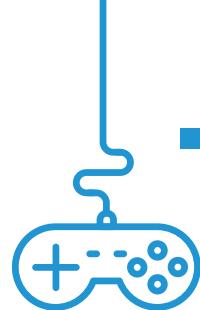
Andrea Kianičková

Graphic Production Coordinators & Cover

Martin Graca
Martin Klementis



Journal Orientation



Acta Ludologica is a scientific journal in the field of games and digital games. The journal contains professional scientific reflections on digital games; it also offers academic discourses on games, especially media and digital competencies, creation, design, marketing, research, development, psychology, sociology, history and the future of digital games and game studies.

Acta Ludologica is a double-blind peer reviewed journal published twice a year. It focuses on theoretical studies, theoretical and empirical studies, research results and their implementation into practice, as well as professional publication and scientific reviews of digital games.

Acta Ludologica

Vol. 7, No. 2, December 2024

Publisher

Faculty of Mass Media Communication
University of Ss. Cyril and Methodius in Trnava
Námestie Jozefa Herdu 2
917 01 Trnava
SLOVAK REPUBLIC

IČO: 360 789 13

Price: 4,99 €

Published twice a year.

ISSN 2585-8599
e-ISSN 2585-9218
EV 5620/18
EV 29/22/EPP

Games Industry Today: Flops, Layoffs, and the Fear of AI

The digital games industry is currently experiencing a turbulent period, characterised by massive layoffs, unexpected failures of high-profile projects and significant challenges associated with the adoption of generative artificial intelligence (AI). These issues reveal a more fundamental structural fragility, demonstrating the vulnerability of a sector that has long been regarded as a symbol of innovation, growth and modern entertainment.

In 2023, over 10,000 workers were laid off, a number that has already been surpassed by mid-2024. It has a considerable impact on roles across the fields of programming, design, and quality assurance. Industry executives attribute this situation to economic pressures, including market corrections and rising costs, despite the annual game market's multibillion-dollar revenues. Overhiring during production, followed by mass layoffs after game launch, has resulted in a situation where skilled professionals struggle in a saturated job market, amplifying instability.

Furthermore, layoffs have been accompanied by an increasing number of commercial failures among high-profile AAA titles. Games developed with considerable budgets, anticipated to exert a dominant influence on the market and generate high profits, are beset with technical deficiencies, delays, or unconvincing content. The popularity of service-driven game platforms that facilitate user-generated content has resulted in a shift in player behaviour. It has led to a reduction in opportunities for newer or riskier projects, additionally, it creates pressure on game studios to adopt live-service models. Consequently, even long-developed, highly-anticipated projects fail to gain traction due to the volatile nature of game production, delays and insufficient marketing, and ultimately turn into commercial flops within days. This is happening regardless of established brands or game franchises.

AI complicates this game industry's landscape even further. While the potential of AI tools for streamlining production and enhancing gameplay is significant, concerns have been raised about the impact on copyrights, market saturation and the displacement of creative roles, which could result in further job losses. The use of AI in monetisation strategies, such as behaviour-targeted offers, could also lead to a backlash from players who are already wary of exploitative practices. It is therefore becoming increasingly urgent to strike a balance between innovation, the importance of human capital and permanent job security.

In summary, the attempt to meet the expectations and demands of the contemporary gaming market while generating profit has resulted in dissatisfaction among employees, consumers, and gaming companies themselves. Moreover, the potential of generative AI tools to facilitate these processes has made it possible for anyone to become a game developer, which could lead to an oversaturation of the market with lower-quality game titles, consequently reducing consumer trust, and leading to a decline in both purchases and revenues. Once again, history provides a valuable lesson in this regard, and it would be wise to consider its insights before the situation reaches a critical point. One can only hope that the events of the early 1980s will not be repeated.

A certain advantage of the current situation in the gaming market is that new topics and questions arise that need to be researched, as this issue of *Acta Ludologica* discusses. Georgios Liapis and Ioannis Vlahavas explore the use of machine learning in the context of serious games and smart NPCs with personality. Michaela Fikejzová and Martin Charvát investigate the game *Bloodborne* in terms of the medicalisation and dissemination of cosmic horror. Amin Heidari examines the various strategies for incorporating emojis into digital game design. A pilot study by Átila Gonçalves Barcelos da Silva Duval and Domingos Savio Coelho focuses on the development of young people's socio-emotional repertoires through TTRPGs. Marshall Needleman Armintor explores looter shooter games from the perspective of capitalist surrealism. Anshika Garg, Jyoti Prakash Pujari and Aditi Namboothiri examine digital narratives of oppression related to the White Terror in Taiwan through the games *Detention* and *Devotion*. Aaron Oldenburg explores walking simulators and self-playing games in the context of death meditation. The latest game study by Hana Pravdová and Monika Cihlářová deals with the innovation of game mechanics across the *Sid Meier's Civilization* series.

The following sections include an interview with Marek Rosa about AI, games and the future of mankind, by Michal Kabát, and reviews of the Slovak game *Vivat Slovakia* by Mária Dolniaková and the books *Eureka! Pocket guide to creativity* by Martin Engler and the *Routledge handbook of eSports* by Mária Koscelníková. The issue closes, as always, with Add-ons, a reflection by Kevin Rebecchi on the topic from *homo spiendens to homo ludens*.

I wish the readers of this issue of *Acta Ludologica* a playful but also scientifically enriching experience.

assoc. prof. Mgr. Zdenko Mago, PhD.

Acta Ludologica Editor-in-Chief

Contents



GAME STUDIES

Smart NPCs with Personality in a Serious Game Using Machine Learning
Georgios Liapis, Ioannis Vlahavas.....
4

The Medicalisation and Dissemination of Cosmic Horror in *Bloodborne*
Michaela Fikejzová, Martin Charvát.....
26

Gaming with Emojis: A Look at Different Strategies of Emoji Inclusion in the Design of Digital Games
Amin Heidari.....
38

Developing Socioemotional Repertoire in Youth through TTRPGs: A Pilot Study
Átila Gonçalves Barcelos da Silva Duval, Domingos Savio Coelho.....
52

Digital Narratives of Oppression: Surveillance and Control in *Detention* and *Devotion* Depicting Taiwan During the White Terror
Anshika Garg, Jyoti Prakash Pujari, Aditi Namboothiri.....
64

Capitalist Surrealism: Grind, Loot Boxes, and the Work of the Looter Shooter
Marshall Needleman Armintor.....
80

Observing the World without You: Automatic Walking and Death Meditation
Aaron Oldenburg.....
94

Sid Meier's Civilization Franchise: Sustaining Innovation in a Shifting Gaming Landscape
Hana Pravdová, Monika Cihlářová.....
110

INTERVIEW

Games Might Filter Out the Need to Try Everything in Real Life, Offering a Space to Learn and Grow without Real-World Consequences
Interview with Marek ROSA
Michal Kabát.....
130

REVIEWS

Vivat Slovakia
Mária Dolniaková.....
136

Eureka! Pocket Guide to Creativity
Martin Engler.....
139

Routledge Handbook of Esports
Mária Koscelníková.....
142

ADD-ONS

From "Homo Spieldens" by Fröbel to "Homo Ludens" by Huizinga: The Foundations of Human Development and Culture through Play
Kevin Rebecchi.....
144

