

The professional identity of gameworkers revisited. A qualitative inquiry on the case study of German professionals

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“Paid work significantly shapes the lives of most people in late modern societies. Indeed, who and what we consider ourselves and others to be as persons is frequently articulated in relationship to ‘work’.” (Du Gay, 1997: 288)

ABSTRACT

The phenomena of computer games and the plethora of game cultures have already been drawing attention of researchers for many years, whereas the people behind computer games – the gameworkers – undeservingly remained in the shadows until quite recently. The lack of information about this workforce and its professional identity makes this research object especially interesting. The analysis relies on a pilot study about the issue of the professional identity of gameworkers, which aimed to dig deeper with the means of qualitative research. During that project nine German gameworkers were interviewed and an attempt to give an in-depth description of their professional identity was made. The study shows that the respondents have a very strong coherence with their profession and perceive themselves as a part of their profession and the team/studio they work with/at. The most salient reason for this is the deep interest the respondents have in computer games (for both making and playing games).

Keywords

Culture of production, game development, game industry, identity, profession

INTRODUCTION

Computer games as a key medium of our society are a common topic of public discourse, although the discussion is mainly narrowed down on the aspects of the protection of minors, the addictiveness and the level of violence. Thus, the phenomena of computer games and the different game cultures have already been drawing attention of researchers

Proceedings of DiGRA 2011 Conference: Think Design Play.

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for many years, whereas the people behind computer games – the gameworkers – undeservingly remained in the shadows until quite recently: “While much is known about video game consumers and the products themselves, little is known about the actual makeup of the games’ creators” (IGDA, 2005: 4). Similarly Deuze et al. (2007: 335) point out: “Unlike the detailed credit roll in movies or editorial bylines in journalism, gameworkers (much like their creative colleagues in advertising) generally remain unknown to their audiences.”

The lack of information about this workforce and its professional identity makes this research object especially interesting: What kinds of people are gameworkers? What is personally important to them as professionals? What directs them during a production process? What demands do they meet? etc. The provided analysis relies on a pilot study about the issue of the professional identity of gameworkers, which aimed to dig deeper with the means of qualitative research. During that project nine German gameworkers were interviewed and an attempt to give an in-depth description of their professional identity was made.

1. THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

1.1 Game business and gameworkers

First of all, what do we know about the profession of the gameworkers? Only a few studies investigated gameworkers as a professional group. A survey by the International Game Developers Association (IGDA) (2005) threw light on the work demographics in the game industry. According to it, 88,5 % of the respondents identified themselves as males and only 11,5 % as females (cf. IGDA 2005: 12). Besides this men also strongly dominate the work positions in the core game development jobs: design, programming, visual arts (cf. Deuze et al., 2007; Consalvo, 2008). Based on its survey’s results, the IGDA (2005: 10) provides a somewhat ironic portrait of a typical gameworker, which is “non-disabled, 31 years old, working in the industry just over 5 years, university/college educated.”

Deuze et al. (2007) conducted a multi-methodological study where they intended to “to describe the issues and challenges facing gameworkers in their everyday lives in terms of how they construct and give meaning to their professional identity in the global computer and videogame industry.” This study can serve as a starting point for understanding the nature of gamework. Deuze et al. (2007) grasp the professional identity of gameworkers in its context of the game industry from the viewpoint of five domains following the culture of production framework of Peterson and Arnand (2004):

1. For Deuze et al. (2007: 338, see also Dovey & Kennedy, 2006) *technology* serves as the driving force in the industry: “As the global hardware manufacturing industry continually renews and replaces its technologies, the creative work of game developers (including, but not limited to, the technicians) must be understood as taking place in a context of permanent change, looking for and exploring new capabilities, discoveries and experiments.”
2. *Law and regulation* in the game industry mainly concern two aspects: the first one is the publishers’ control over the co-creative process (where modders are involved) with its ‘informal’ labour contracts (Kücklich, 2005; Nieborg & van der Graaf, 2008); the second aspect deals with the formal contracts which are used by professionals inside the industry (Deuze et al., 2007: 340). The game development process is very complex and includes many steps, the amount of which can vary

- depending on the type of a game, platform, target audience, budgeting and some other factors (cf. Bartle, 2006; Kerr, 2006a). Taking into consideration the complexity of game development makes clear why it implies teamwork as well: “Game development can be seen as a specific form of software development where certain product and/or service is designed and developed. The outcome of the development, i.e., digital game, comprises of assets – audio-visual material and software, which generally exist only in electronic format. Due to the heterogeneous nature of game assets, the development requires multi-talented teams consisting of skilled individuals working in seamless collaboration.” (Manninen et al., 2006: 5)
3. Concerning the *industrial and organizational structure* of the industry, the following peculiarities are to be highlighted (cf. Consalvo, 2006; Kerr, 2006a; Deuze et al., 2007: 341ff.): Games are often produced in temporary projects and in collaboration with other people than just gameworkers – software developers, modders etc. – which could be described best as a highly participatory business structure. The industry relies heavily on transnational game development studios and publisher, which brings people of different nationalities and countries of residence to work together on projects (Consalvo, 2006; Potanin, 2010). Normally games are created in teams of professionals where every member has its own role and tasks. In doing so there is often a strong system of seniority and subordination within teams.
 4. The *occupational careers* in the game industry are determined by the specifics of these business *structures*, which has the following results (cf. De Peuter & Dyer-Witthford, 2005; Deuze et al., 2007: 345ff.; Consalvo, 2008; Potanin, 2010): The overwhelming majority of gameworkers are males, which provokes a male-slanted orientation of marketing and design. The labor market is highly competitive, and the amount of people willing to enter the business keeps growing. The specifics of game production make the work environment stressful, or to put it bluntly: “While it may be fun to play games, it is often far from fun to make them.” (Potanin 2010: 135) Gameworkers constantly face crunch times (often unpaid) and work in a necessity to constantly meet deadlines. Passion could be estimated as the essential compound in gamework. Researchers often underline the stressful character of gamework and the high workload as well as the official professional representation: “The workplace is a stressful one everywhere, more so in the game industry than in most others” (IGDA 2004: 5). According to IGDA (2004: 30), three out of five gameworkers usually exceed 46 hours of work per week, and during crunch time “35.2% of the respondents work 65 to 80 hours a week and 13% work over 80 hours a week.” Moreover, more than half of the respondents reported to the IGDA that their management treats crunch as a normal way of doing work (IGDA 2004: 30ff.).
 5. The *markets* of the game industry possess several peculiarities: First of all, computer games are ubiquitous; Second, the game market is stereotypically predefined and leads the whole game industry which is oriented by the demands of the audience and thus the actuality of certain game types (Deuze et al., 2007: 348); Third, this market considers gamers and co-creators of games, not just simple audiences (e.g. modding communities). Livermore (2009: 1) specifies the connection between the game business and conditions of the gameworkers’ labour: “Digital games have historically been rife with crisis, defining the games industry and its practices to a significant degree.” The fact that it is originally harder to gain profits in this business than in other media (such as movie production) and the immaterial nature of gamework explain the work strain that gameworkers have to cope with.

To sum up, Dyer-Witthford and de Peuter (2006: 601) characterize a game workplace as a “site of conflict, rather than of acquiescence” and describe (2006: 601ff.) work in the

game industry rather dramatically with four catchwords: First people entering the industry are happy about the creative freedom they have, which features little bureaucracy, a lot of teamwork etc. (= “enjoyment”). They also get the sense of being in a “total ‘old boys’ club” as game development is a kind of “masculine dungeon” (= “exclusion”). The work is permanently followed by stress, long working hours and crunch time (= “exploitation”) which results in a high rate of turnover in the industry and a lot of gameworkers who plan to leave the business in the future (50% want to leave the industry within ten years, 35% within five years according to IGDA 2004) (= “exodus”).

1.2 Gameworkers and professional identity

Although Deuze et al. (2007) put a heavy emphasis on the term *professional identity*, they surprisingly do not provide a definition of it at all and constrain their analysis on the domains of so called gamework (see chapter 1). From a sociological perspective, identities are constructed as Castells (1997: 7) points out: “The construction of identities uses building materials from history, from geography, from biology, from productive and reproductive institutions, from collective memory and from personal fantasies, from power apparatuses and religious revelations.” Scott et al. (1998) provide an integrative framework based on the structuration theory by Anthony Giddens for understanding the process of identification at the workplace, and also how a personal identity is constructed, what influences its development, and how an identity itself has an influence on actions of individuals and groups in a work environment. Attachment to a profession is shaped both by individuals and by social contexts the individuals are part of and refers to “the linkage between an individual and some target or social resource based on perceived social memberships and the manifest behaviours that produce and are produced through those perceived memberships.” (Patchen, 1970, cited in Scott et al., 1998: 299)

The social identity (Tajfel, 1978; Tajfel and Turner, 1979) of a person refers to “a social category (e.g. nationality, political affiliation, organization, work group) within which one falls, and to which one feels one belongs, and provides a definition of who one is in terms of the defining characteristics of the category – a self-definition that is a part of the self-concept” (Hogg and Terry, 2001: 3). Individuals can possess several memberships, which vary in importance in the self-concept. Each categorical membership is represented in the individual’s mind as a social identity that both describes and prescribes an individual’s attributes as a member of a certain group (for example, how one should behave and think or feel). So, when a certain social identity becomes a basis for self-regulation in a certain context (e.g. work team), “self perception and conduct become in-group stereotypical, and intergroup behaviour acquires, to varying degrees depending on the nature of relations between the groups, competitive and discriminatory properties” (Hogg and Terry, 2001: 3).

The articulation of identity nowadays occurs increasingly by the means of *mediated resources*, e.g. self-identification by means of mediated symbols and appropriation of media content, collective self-assurance through mass media and media generated publics (Morley & Robins, 1995; Winter et al., 2003). So today, media and identity can be hardly separated from each other. That’s why today’s identities can be called “*mediated identities*”. In our case we suppose gamework is tightly connected with playing computer games and with popular media culture in general (Charrieras and Roy-Valex, 2008), so one can say that the identity of a gameworker is strongly contextualized by media culture. Before making a professional choice, a person spends free time playing games and when a person is already employed as a gameworker, she/he keeps playing computer games because she/he likes this amusement and because playing games is necessary in order to

keep up with what is going on in the game industry. Krotz (2003) considers media as the resources for identity. First of all, he states that media communication can change the structure and the consistency of the self-roles. Because the self-roles excavate examples of behaviour and roles with regard to which people have experiences, it can occur that some *independent role-based experiences* are made by means of media. For example, it is possible that the self-roles can be influenced through computer-mediated talk or identity plays. Second, media can influence the structure of relationships of *reasoning and behaviour in certain situations*. Insofar specific peculiarities of these relationships in relation to various forms of mediated communication are worked out (for example, when a person is a “couch potato”, Krotz 2003: 40). Third, media can offer and hold ready content as attributes for the constitution of an identity. This concerns *lifestyle and group-bound accessories* (for example, evaluation of hair styles and clothes). Finally, media can provide connections to media characters and orientations at *behavioural procedures* that can influence the constitution of the identity. It concerns specific mediated characters, which can serve as role models and behavioural examples (cf. Krotz, 2003: 40 ff.) These aspects can be projected on the gameworkers and their relationships with games as a medium – it influences their role-based experiences, directs behaviour and forms of lifestyles and group-bound accessories.

Derived from these shortly drafted perspectives, the following definition served as a basis for constructing the guideline for the interviews and also was used during the analysis: *Professional identity is a mostly mediated self-concept of an individual as a member of a certain professional group, followed by a strong sense of coherence with professional life and understanding of and behaving in accordance with professional standards, values and roles.*

2. METHODOLOGY

When analysing phenomena that have not been in the focus of research, an explorative design is necessary (see Lindlof, 1995). The specifics of the study imply a qualitative research design. Several in-depth interviews were conducted with the intention of gaining expanded information about specifics of this profession from the first hand. The study was conducted in Germany with participation of German gameworkers. Because it was decided to investigate first in one country as an explorative case study, Germany was considered as a good place for such kind of research because it is currently the second largest game market in Europe and it still qualifies as a booming market (e.g. Newzoo, 2010). Moreover, the profession of a gameworker is relatively new in this country and professionalization is probably not that professionalized and therefore standardized as, for example, in the USA or Japan (Consalvo, 2006a; Kerr, 2006a).

A theoretical sampling method was chosen because it allows gathering data, which promises greatest insights in the subject of the research (cf. Flick, 2009: 117). Following the aim of the research it was decided to interview respondents in different positions in the game industry, employed in game development studios of different sizes. Also, it was aimed at involve the basic specialists who make up the core of game development teams: designers, artists, programmers and producers (cf. Deuze, 2007; Kerr, 2006b). It was also decided to interview independent gameworkers (freelancers) as well. Interviewing respondents of various job titles and employed in the studios of various sizes was to help to get a deeper understanding of the professional identity of gameworkers and to elicit the factors which influence its formation and also the factors which cause heterogeneity.

In a period of about two months nine interviews were conducted (seven via phone and two interviews via e-mail). Table 1 gives an overview of the interviewed persons and their gaming profiles (all names have been changed to guarantee anonymity).

| Name | Age | Gender | Level of education | Time in the industry, years | Current position | Size of the studio |
|---------|-----|--------|--------------------|-----------------------------|------------------------------------|--------------------|
| Peter | 32 | M | Ph.D. | 13 | Executive director | ~25 |
| Manuel | 39 | M | High school | 20 | Artist, Graphic designer, Director | ~6 |
| Philipp | 36 | M | University | 14 | Freelance script writer | n/a |
| Dennis | 37 | M | High school | 13 | Freelance programmer | n/a |
| Anja | 34 | F | University | 5 | 3D- and Level designer | ~25 |
| Tommy | 34 | M | University | 9 | CEO | 7 |
| Felix | 36 | M | University | 10 | Programmer, producer | ~25 |
| Andreas | 32 | M | High school | 10 | Creative director | ~12 |
| Alex | 34 | M | University | 10 | Creative Director, producer | ~15 |

Table 1: Gameworkers' profile.

A semi-structured interview method was used for data collection. In accordance with this method, the interviewer was not required to strictly stick to the sequence of the questions, and mostly open questions are involved (cf. Flick, 2009: 156ff.). As components of the professional identity of gameworkers there can be referred such dimensions as *work biography, media experiences and preferences, work life, professional orientations* and *self-concept*. These five dimensions of professional identity were operationalized and used for building up the interview guideline. The category work biography served as the starting point of the interview. It also was necessary to get acquainted with the

respondents' background have, so the following aspects were considered: work background, lifestyle/spare time. Besides this, information about age, education and marital status was collected (in most cases via e-mail in order to avoid possible embarrassment). The second category media experiences/preferences was included with regard to the notion of media identity. Nowadays media cause undeniable influence on the formation of human identities. Thus, it was considered to be useful to gain information about what media the respondents were/have been into, so that the connection between media and the professional identity of the gameworkers could be analysed. The interviewees were asked about their media likes and pop-cultural background. Professional identity is also inseparably connected with the various aspects of work life. This category included questions about the peculiarities of work life of gameworkers, including information about why this profession was chosen (motives/influences on the career choice subcategory), gameworkers' view of the work process, tasks and workload (workload/production process subcategory), how relationships with their colleagues are assessed (personality-group relations) and what a person likes/dislikes in his or her work (work like/dislikes subcategory). The category professional orientations included questions with the intent to receive first hand information about of the professional identity on aspects such as professional standards, values, and ethics. According to the definition of the professional identity, it is a self-concept of a person as a member of a professional group. Getting an idea to which extent the gameworkers associate themselves with the profession was fundamental to help build the full picture of the professional identity of gameworkers. Corresponding to these five categories, a questionnaire consisting of 25 questions was created. All the recorded interviews were transcribed and analysed with the means of the qualitative content analysis according to Mayring (2000), which helps condense the material and conceptualize a set of categories (Flick, 2009: 326) that can characterize our research object.

3. FINDINGS

In the following sections, we will present the main findings of this analysis according to the different dimensions of professional identity. Examples and individual statements will be added to give some in-depth impression of the everyday experience that lies behind the more general and abstract trends described below.

3.1 Work biography

Concerning the time span during which the respondents were involved in the game industry professionally, the shortest time is five years, the average time is ten years and the longest time is 20 years. But the majority of the respondents were already interested in this business in childhood and teen ages, so in some cases the border between the amateur and professional gamework was *blurred*. For example, Manuel, who has 20 years of professional experience, started drawing when he was a little kid and then, at the age of eleven, drew on his first computer using the Paint program. Gradually it became his profession, but in between, at the age of 17, he already created his first game together with his friends (the game was never released though). A year later he was employed as an assistant art director in a game development studio. A similar situation was with Dennis, 13 years of professional experience, who began programming long before he started working for money, so when he was hired as an intern in a studio, he was already a quite experienced programmer. Before Peter and his roommate founded their own company, he was extremely interested in the game development business and was curious about how things work out there, what is possible in terms of game play, programming etc., so this amateur devotion followed by amateur and freelance projects lead to the

formation of his own business. If to have a look at which jobs the respondents had before they started doing what they do now, the following commonality is revealed: the overwhelming majority of them had been, in one way or another, previously engaged in the game development business.

The interviews showed that with growing professional experience and time spent in the industry it is common for people to start executing other tasks in addition to those, which they had been responsible for before. For example, two of the respondents who are now CEOs started their careers as programmers. With time, they became familiar with all the aspects of game development and this made it possible for them to switch to producing. It is quite typical that specialists holding such superior positions such as producer, creative director, CEO etc. have originally set foot in the industry with something else and then grown professionally and sometimes turned to the business side of the production process. It can also be concluded that it is typical for gameworkers to move around the industry and change occupations as their experience grows.

Computer games (both playing and making) were naturally mentioned among hobbies. Although some of respondents don't play that much anymore because of lack of time, games still take an important place in the spare time. Moreover, same as movies, it is a source of inspiration for work. Felix statement is representative: "The more you play, the more ideas you get for the projects so it's good if you have hobbies that are placed in this environment." For some of the respondents there is an equal mark between work and hobby. Thus, a digital artist mentioned graphic design as one of his hobbies (interview Peter), a programmer mentioned artificial intelligence as his hobby (interview Dennis). Family takes one of the leading places. Most of the respondents are married and some have children and thus mention spending time together with families as one of the free time activities. Anja says that her child is her biggest hobby now, she even works part time because of him. For Dennis and Felix, their families also take one of the first positions after work.

A vibrant social life was also mentioned. For example, in many studios it is traditional that the colleagues engage in social activities together after work (like parties, watching football, drinking beer etc.). Anja says it is typical for the industry that gameworkers do something together and the atmosphere in a studio is good and positive. Alex says: "And we do spend some time with each other after work. Like drinks sometimes. It's very comfortable work. I think it's the reason why people can actually deal with the business, because it sometimes can be really demanding in terms of working hours. We wouldn't be able to keep up the high quality work; we couldn't work like this. People would like run away including myself."

Also, besides spending time with colleagues, going out with friends, going to parties, watching movies, playing guitar etc. were mentioned. Thus communication with other people and social life are quite important for the gameworkers. This sort of denies the stereotype that the gameworkers deal with games all the time. Upon talking to the gameworkers, it became clear that university degrees are not always a must-have in disciplines connected with game development. From their perspective, one can still become a professional through curiosity, self-development and practical skills. On the other hand, today's situation has been dramatically changing because of growing competition.

3.2 Media experiences and preferences

In terms of media preferences, it was interesting to trace connections between respondents' media use and their profession. As it was already mentioned, media are listed among the hobbies and interests of the gameworkers. Watching movies, reading newspapers, magazines and books etc. – this is what the respondents like to do. It could be assumed that gameworkers in general are quite open to the world around. Their interests are not only about playing games and making games – they like to do a lot of other things not connected with their work. And, of course, reading books, watching movies, football etc. can serve as a source of inspiration. There is no regularity, which game genres gameworkers prefer. Even though the respondents play games with different levels of involvement, it is to be pointed out that playing games is one of the current demands of the profession. The gameworkers must be aware of what is going on in the game industry, so they keep eye on the market demands, released novelties, new technologies etc. (e.g. O'Donnell 2009). So, all in all, playing computer games is an important aspect of professional lives of gameworkers, as well as media/pop-culture likes. This is how a producer comments on this: “You know, for this special position in development it's of course highly important that you play every game that comes around. It is important to play as much as you can. (...) It's important that you look on the market: what is in, what is out, what do the people like, what don't they like.” (Interview Felix)

3.3 Work life

According to our interviewees, it is quite usual for the industry that one gameworker performs more than one role. It is quite typical when a person acts as a cross-functional worker doing both creative and business tasks together. For example, when starting as a digital artist, a person becomes involved in the business aspect of the game production with the growth of experience (interacting with publishers, for example).

The work in game development studios is performed in accordance with the hierarchy in the studio and the level of autonomy, which is defined by the studio direction and/or the publishers. The fact that our sample consisted of members from small and medium studios probably explains why the interviewees all stated that they have a relatively high or high level of autonomy and creative freedom. Also, the interviewees indicated that they do not feel the hierarchies on the social level. It was claimed by some that everybody in their studios has his say and the atmosphere of the decision-making is quite democratic (both owners of studios and gameworkers in management or regular positions pointed this out).

This perceived freedom of creativity and autonomy probably varies from project to project and from a studio to studio. Also, it depends on the stage of the project – thus, members of a studio have more possibilities to express their ideas at the stage of planning when initial brainstorming takes place must comply more tightly when design documents are ready and the project starts. The gameworkers get along with this tension with what they call “feeling of the game”-skill, what will be explained in more detail in the next chapter. On the one hand gameworkers are encouraged to go a bit further, and on the other hand the work they perform should fit to the story and the project and meet demands of the superiors. The perception of work roles and positions in particular and in the studio in general in relation to the studio size shows great promise for further research. Because of the case study character of our analysis, no interviewees from large studios were invited who could provide their view of the level of creative autonomy and hierarchies at their work place.

3.4. Professional orientations

Regarding the professional standards the gameworkers must meet; most of the interviewees refer to a specific professional knowledge that is a prerequisite for a certain work specialization. For example, a 3D designer should be excellent in 3D interface and also be a good drawer, and artists must have a good knowledge of anatomy and colours etc. Nowadays the educational background of the gameworkers mostly supports these qualification demands. The necessity of a special education can be explained by the fact that the contemporary game industry is technology-driven and highly competitive, which furthers its professionalization. At the same time, being good in one particular specialization is not enough. It can be drawn as a conclusion from the interviews that it is also necessary to be familiar with all aspects of game production, which is predetermined by the team format of work and the collaborative practice regarding creative work (see e.g. Bilton, 2007: 45ff.).

A consolidated view on the interviews indicates that it is crucial that gameworkers have a good understanding of the current developments concerning the game market – which games have been published recently, which games received awards etc. Not only because all the interviewed gameworkers have the demand to deliver up-to-date quality games which would be accepted by the market. Besides this, the interviewees concretize certain personal skills, *which* gameworkers must possess. These qualities, such as talent and creativity, are perceived as highly important because gamework is rated foremost as a creative work. Thus, there is a clearly observable connection between creativity of gameworkers and their consumption of media (other than computer games) – media products broaden the minds of gameworkers and give them new ideas.

Social skills are also mentioned as a “must-have” of the profession. This relates to the necessity of a person to be well integrated into the team, feeling like being a part of it, and also with the necessity of building connections with other parties, such as partners and publishers, for example (this concerns primarily gameworkers who deals with business tasks). One of the respondents speaks of the importance to work well in a team: “You know, it’s a hard work. You need to have real ability and the endurance to stay in the project and not give up. That is really important. Most of the people, who really fail the game industry, they cannot work in a team.” (Interview Dennis)

As the game industry and the technologies are constantly developing, lifelong learning and therefore the motivation to increase the individual professional competencies can also be referred to the professional orientations. For example, one of the respondents said: “I want to try some new stuff for a very long time – get to know different software, get the knowledge about animation, how is it.” (Interview Anja) In addition, as game development implies time-consuming production processes often accompanied by stress, it is very important for gameworkers to have endurance and patience to cope with stress and long hours at work. Without having a pleasant atmosphere in the studio it would be hard to bear such workloads. Also, high commitment to work and enthusiasm (induced by a passion for games) makes gameworkers turn the blind eye to such difficulties.

Finally, making quality games can be stated as the perceived standards of the profession, although some of the respondents mentioned that there are still a lot of games with extremely low quality in the market, so the issue of quality of games is important only to self-respecting studios that consider reputation an important factor. The same could be said about the ethics of game development – there is still no generally accepted ethical code of conduct of gameworkers, so normally they have their own idea of ethics, which is

formed by personal attitudes and/or by the attitude of the studio they work at. However, taking into consideration that the respondents mentioned that the issues of games quality and games ethics are important to them, it can be supposed that these issues are not ignored by the majority of gameworkers and the number of studios that make low-quality games and ignore ethical matters will decline with further expansion and professionalization of the game industry.

Values of the profession partially overlap with the standards of the profession. Answering the question, how an ideal gameworker should be, passion for games was stated first, followed by high dedication and motivation to work: “First of all you have to be passionate about games.” (Interview Peter) In the analysis, the conclusion was drawn that it is a great plus for a gameworker if she/he has “a feeling of a game” – sort of an intuitional understanding of what would fit the game better, what the audience would positively take in at the market. Feeling of a game depends on a gameworker’s understanding of the situation on the game development market, its trends, standards, needs etc. Also, understanding of every aspect of game production is necessary. “Feeling of a game” corresponds to the social skills, once again, but in a very particular context – with gameworkers being good everyday psychologists who understanding what common people who play games want. Feeling of a game can sometimes be a complicated issue because it implies that a gameworker goes a bit further in his work, applies his creative forces. But the game industry is at the interface of commerce and creativity, so a gameworker has to look for a certain balance (cf. Deuze, 2008: 6).

Among other values, high motivation to entertain game players is often mentioned. This motivation derives from passion for playing games, passion for making games and dedication to work. Making good acknowledged games is not only about financial gains (although, making good profits is one of the aims) because it is important for gameworkers that their studio is a well-recognized brand that proved its worth as a developer of the best games (see also next chapter). The people of this profession like to see results of their work, how their games are estimated, what feedback they get from the audience. It is so because gameworkers feel a strong coherence with the games they make because making games it not just a work, it is a hobby and an expansion of their creativity. Ambitions for self-development, and learning new things that are expressed in a willingness to make more complicated games can be also referred to the values of the profession.

3.5 Self-concept

The interviewees were asked whether they consider themselves as typical representatives of their profession. The answers showed that the majority of respondents associate themselves with the industry to a large extent. The following serves as examples for factors that can be detached among the indicators: a high-established interest in everything that is about computer games (both playing and making); a strong connection with media products – cinema, books (fantasy, fiction etc.); quite often – previous experience in making games long before entering the industry as a professional; a lot of other interests, other than just playing and making games (e.g. family, sports, social life, traveling etc.). What is still not typical for a gameworker – being female: “A typical person in the industry is male. (...) I am not male (laugh).” (Interview Anja)

The reason for this is that all gameworkers, to various extents, have always been interested in computer games. First they became acquainted with games as a hobby and with time, it became the profession they now feel a part of. Quite interestingly, the

interviews showed that the sense of belonging not only to the game industry, but to the individual game studio as well, is quite high. For example, when reasoning about the goals and plans for future, many of the respondents spoke of the prosperity of their studio in one way or another. Among the examples was becoming one of the leading German developers (Interview Peter) or: “Our goals is to strengthen the infrastructure of our company and for this, we’re looking into options for online distribution on our own.” (Interview Alex)

It does not only refer to the owners of the studios who, of course, aspires financial prosperity and an increase of the size of his business. The employees in our sample also demonstrated the expectation that their studios will develop more complicated games with larger sized teams involved (expansion of the studio) and entering new market segments (not only the German ones). Also, there were explicit expectations that the studio should archive the status of a strong recognizable brand making “cool” high quality games.

CONCLUSION

So, what is the professional identity of the gameworkers like? Upon investigating this issue it became clear that it is not easy to describe what constitutes the professional identity of the gameworkers because it refers to several dimensions. Therefore it was attempted to answer this question with a qualitative analysis based on five categories (work biography, media preferences, work life, professional orientations, and self concept) that were developed in accordance with the dimensions of the professional identity of gameworkers. The study shows that the respondents have a very strong coherence with their profession and perceive themselves as a part of their profession and the team/studio they work with/at. The most salient reason for this is the deep interest the respondents have in computer games (for both making and playing games). It is quite traditional for the game industry that people start with playing computer games, then they get interested in some aspects of making games (be it programming, graphics, business or whatever else) and begin the career path of a gameworker. In the context of the notion of media as the resources of influence on identity, digital games can be determined as the main medium, which further the formation of the identity of a gameworker.

Besides this it has to be mentioned that the interviewees typically relate their work to their hobbies, so they do not perceive work as work because it is a vocation, or they are so strongly interested in making games that this process is enjoyable despite all the difficulties. For many gameworkers, there is therefore a slight division between work and hobby. As gamework intersects with their hobby, gameworkers manage to cope with the difficulties, which follow the work process. If gameworkers are on the same wavelength with the game industry and work in accordance with the standards and values of the profession, they somehow survive the tough conditions.

So, in accordance with which standards and values must a gameworker behave? Which demands must be met? Certainly, a gameworker should have a genuine interest in computer games, both making and playing. This is the pillar of this profession. Besides this, it is useful for a gameworker to have a wide area of thought, which implies deriving inspiration from other things besides computer games. Also, it becomes obvious that the role of special education is growing, which is connected to the increasing competitiveness on the labour market and also to the increasing complexity of the technologies and products of the game industry. Social skills also have a very important position in this profession. This derives foremost from the characteristics of gamework because

gameworkers mostly work in teams. Teamwork is also the reason why a gameworker must be familiar with every side of the game production process as it implies a lot of collaboration between various members of the team (programmers, designers, artists, testers etc.). They also must have a clear understanding of their roles and tasks in the team, as well as of the roles and tasks of their colleagues.

In times of a very large market and high levels of competitiveness between game makers, it is crucial to be aware of what is currently of central significance on the market, what the target audience wants, what the competitors have released etc. This demands concern by gameworkers of all the various specializations, not only by those who are responsible for the main idea of a game. Possessing specific personal qualities is also a trait of a contemporary gameworker. Creativity, social skills (as mentioned above), high ability to handle stress, enthusiasm about work and willingness to learn new things are a must. Besides this, possessing a “feeling of the game” – an intuitive understanding of what would fit a game the best – can be referred to as one of the most vital qualities of a gameworker.

A tentative approach was taken to present the results of the study which aim was to answer the question “What professional identity do gameworkers have?” Despite some limitations of the study (for example, the absence of respondents from large game development studios due to pragmatic reasons), it is clear that it opens a number of interesting prospective paths for further research. In addition to a representative survey, it could be investigated how the professional identities of gameworkers working in large, medium or small studios differ. Another interesting prospective for possible further research is an international comparative study. Especially interesting seems a more profound look on female gameworkers. Even though the number of women employed in the game industry has grown recently, they are still a minority. The work conditions of female gameworkers differ from their male colleagues (Consalvo, 2008). But do their professional attitudes also differ on a representative level?

And, finally, one of the next steps of research could be to develop a model of influence on the professional identity to which factors show the most salient influence on the formation of the professional identity. Would it be the game market, passion for games, the audience or maybe something else?

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