The game of making an archaeology game: proposing a design framework for historical game design

Hiriart, JFV

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The Game of Making an Archaeology Game
Proposing a Design Framework for Historical Game Design

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Designing historical game-based learning experiences

Wicked problem
“social problems which are ill-formulated, where the information is confusing, where there are many clients and decision makers with conflicting values, and where the ramifications in the whole system are thoroughly confusing” (Churchman, 1967)
Designing historical game-based learning experiences

Uricchio (2005)

- Event games
  simulation of particular events, attempting to “maximise historical accuracy

- Process oriented games
  Abstract replication of historical processes, allowing players to engage speculatively with the past
Designing historical game-based learning experiences


• Collective memory
  Factual fidelity, coupled with the *action genre*

• Disciplinary history
  Play/think as historians/archaeologists, coupled with *strategy games*

• Postmodern history
  Creative historical engagement, coupled with *sandbox games*
Designing historical game-based learning experiences


- Tourist games
- Puzzle games
- Resource management games
- Historical battle games
- Historical combat games
- Historical shooter games
- Role-playing games
- Control games
- Social-mashup games
- Games that allow classroom role-playing of history through in-game camera capture
What’s wrong with the “genre picking” approach?

• Game genre is a problematic way to categorise games
• Games are “promiscuous”; commonly present a combination of gameplay structures, making difficult to associate them with only one particular genre
• Already-made solutions lead to stereotypical gameplay design
Why building a (gamified) historical game design framework?

• Provides a “conversation starter”; it helps to define a design brief while avoiding stereotypical game forms.

• Acts as a mediator of the conversations between multiple disciplines involved in the design process.

• An environment for the creative engagement through play

• Serves as a medium to develop an analytical model for historical game design
Design framework for historical game design

**Historical focus**

*What is this game about?*

*(Character, Site, Battle, Event…)*

**Historical perspective**

*Who is the player?*

*(Common folk, children, leader, God…)*

“History as a discipline is an activity that involves 1) selecting elements; 2) ordering and drawing connections between those elements; and 3) putting them into perspective through a reconstruction or narration” (Cassone et al., 2015)
CONTEXT AND RELATIONS

1. This game is all about:
   a. Each player picks a concept and assigns the number of the cubes
   b. The connections between the concepts, each one involving each other
   c. The cubes numbered by adding “X” numbers
   d. When the cube is discovered, the answer changes to an “x” marker.

LABOUR

ENVIRONMENT

WAR

PEASANT
MICRO-HISTORY

“the intense historical investigation of a small area” (Saïd, 2003)

Micro-history gives a level of agency and protagonism to characters that are very often dismissed by structuralist historians, for whom people are seen as objects rather than as subjects of history (Brewer, 2010, p. 3).
Design framework for historical game design

**Historical focus**

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**Conflicts**

*Primary conflicts: winning / loosing conditions*
*Secondary conflicts: impact in other reward/punishment systems*

“Conflict is an intrinsic element of every game. Conflict, a game as a contest of powers, is a core component of our very definition of the term game” (Salen & Zimmerman, 2003 p. 250)
CONFLICT CHART

4. Select two conflicting concepts and put them face to face.
5. Define the systems and data that players will use to resolve the conflict.

SYSTEMS
How the conflict is resolved in the game? Add gameplay and narrative systems in this space.

VS

DATA
Which particular sets of data are needed to solve the conflict?

Environment
Peasant

Conflict is an intrinsic element of every game. Conflict, a game as a center of powers, is a core component of our very definition of the term 'game.' - Gelden & Zimmerman, 2003, p. 1526
Design framework for historical game design

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**Game mechanics (agon)**

*Challenges - Actions*

*(Combat, Survival, Exploration…)*

*(video) games really do consist of segmented units that can be replaced independently by other patterns. For example: the player’s energy level really is just a number, and thus any pattern or mechanic that can output a number can be brought to bear on the player’s energy level* (Juul, 2014)
Design framework for historical game design

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*Challenges - Actions*

*(Combat, Survival, Exploration…)*

**Fiction** *(mimicry)*

*Game narratives connected with challenges and actions*

*(Dialogues, Events…)*
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**Fiction (mimicry)**

*Game narratives connected with challenges and actions*
*(Dialogues, Events…)*

**Historical data**

*What data is needed to solve the conflict?*
*(GIS, Factual…)*

"Unlike the data-driven scientific simulation models, which aim to deliver reliable findings, accurate training conditions, and highly elaborate answers to very specific scientific problems, games are centered on the dramatic experience. They do not provide new knowledge through the execution of their code but instead present engaging questions. The necessary dramatization leads to a different kind of product that concentrates not on the data, but on the player." (Nitsche, 2008 p.9)
CONFLICT CHART

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ROLE PLAY  SURVIVAL  CRAFTING

ENVIRONMENT  FACTUAL  ART

PEASANT  ARCHAEOLOGY

“Conflict is an intrinsic element of every game. Conflict, a game as a contest of power, is a core component of our very definition of the term ‘game’” (Guth & Zimmerman, 2003, p. 49)
References


Thanks!

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