Knowledge
Transfer
Network

Creative Industries

THE CREATIVE INDUSTRIES KTN
EUROPEAN GAMES WORKSHOP REPORT

20 March 2013

INTRODUCTION

THE GLOBAL GAMING INDUSTRY IS PREDICTED TO GROW FROM $67BN IN 2012 TO $82BN IN 2017, DRIVEN IN PARTICULAR BY ONLINE DISTRIBUTION AND AN EXPANDING MOBILE MARKETPLACE.

ONE OF THE RECOMMENDATIONS FROM THE NESTA NEXT GEN. REVIEW, WHICH WAS WELCOMED BY THE UK GOVERNMENT, WAS TO   SUPPORT BETTER RESEARCH-ORIENTED UNIVERSITY/INDUSTRY COLLABORATIONS   WITH A VIEW TO ACCELERATING INNOVATION AND MAINTAINING COMPETITIVE ADVANTAGE IN THE VIDEO GAMES INDUSTRY.

THE EUROPEAN GAMES WORKSHOP SOUGHT TO DIRECTLY ADDRESS THAT RECOMMENDATION BY BRINGING TOGETHER ARTS AND HUMANITIES RESEARCHERS AND VIDEO GAMES DEVELOPERS TO EXPLORE CURRENT RESEARCH CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES FOR THE INDUSTRY, PROMOTE INTERDISCIPLINARY APPROACHES AND COMBINE ACADEMIC EXPLORATION WITH COMMERCIAL INDUSTRY EXPERTISE.

THE WORKSHOP WAS A COLLABORATION BETWEEN THE CREATIVE INDUSTRIES KNOWLEDGE TRANSFER NETWORK, SCIENCE AND INNOVATION NETWORK, ARTS AND HUMANITIES RESEARCH COUNCIL, TIGA AND ICT KNOWLEDGE TRANSFER NETWORK, WITH THE SUPPORT OF NESTA.

CONTEXT SETTING

THE MORNING PRESENTATIONS SET THE CONTEXT FOR THE EVENT AND HIGHLIGHT CASE STUDIES AND MODELS FOR PURPOSEFUL INDUSTRY / ACADEMIC COLLABORATION.

Ian Livingstone CBE

In reflecting on the development of the UK games industry and the background to the Next Gen. report, Ian highlighted some key future challenges:

• Changing the public perception of games to one of a positive experience of problem solving

• Innovation in User Interface and User Experience as a mechanism to continue to draw in a new and diverse gaming audience

• Continuing rapid growth simultaneously with the fundamental transition of games from a product to a service

• Replacement of the term "ICT in education" with "computing" – an active verb – with the mix of art and science as key to success

His solution for UK Development was Invest 5P:

Perception – highlight the creative / technology mix and articulate the value of gaming to the UK economy

Pipes – improve the UK broadband infrastructure

Property – effectively develop and protect IP

Pounds – develop finance mechanisms, both public & private (c.f. Games Tax Relief)

People – grow an appropriately skilled workforce for the games industry

CONTEXT SETTING

Gregor White
University of Abertay, Dundee

Gregor highlighted work undertaken by Abertay on the perception of University / Industry collaboration. Research results on "productive areas of activity" highlighted that the majority response was of a connection around graduate recruitment, but a 0% response for solving design problems, R&D strategy or fundamental research.

Barriers to collaboration were identified as planning and egotiation, bureaucracy and the differing expectations on speed of response.

The result of these issues is that funded research where it exists has a tendency to focus on adjacent areas of technology or platforms rather than core creative or design disciplines.

For Gregor a contributing factor to the fragmented academic / industry relationship was the lack of a coherent mechanism for knowledge transfer and exchange.

Gregor noted the emergence of small independent studios working with new partners in new ways (partners included the Victoria & Albert Museum, National Theatre of Scotland, and Channel 4). He suggested that that the opportunity for collaborative and experimental arts and humanities research might be more fruitful in these new contexts.

A CONTRIBUTING FACTOR TO THE FRAGMENTED ACADEMIC / INDUSTRY RELATIONSHIP WAS THE LACK OF A COHERENT MECHANISM FOR KNOWLEDGE TRANSFER AND EXCHANGE

Joe Cavalla
University of Portsmouth

Joe Cavalla focuses on "research with impact" in his role brokering technology transfer projects between University and business.

He presented Dear Esther, a successful example of collaboration between arts and humanities researchers and business.

The starting point for Dear Esther was to explore a new narrative experience in the format of a first person shooter game - not normally a narrative led genre. The desire was to seek to build in ambiguity, abstraction, randomisation and space for player interpretation.

An AHRC grant of £55k enabled the team to set up the initial experiment, driving a significant interest within the game "mod-ing" community

and attracting key talent to continue to develop the game.

Phase 2 involved the establishment of a stand-alone business, 'The Chinese Room', 'and also fore-grounded cultural and bureaucratic challenges in university to industry collaborations, for example around the structuring of IP ownership.

Dear Esther has now sold 400,000 copies. During the game the player travels around an island triggering randomised storylines – to allow multiple "paths" through the game – which are deliberately ambiguous enough to allow players to overlay their own interpretation.

For Cavalla the key learning points were:

- Quality engenders trust – the user experience has to be good enough to be immersive
- Intrigue enables narrative – allowing players to intelligently interpret narrative
- Provide space - allow the players to generate their own emotional responses
- Quality storytelling and narrative – fundamental to narrative-driven game experiences; no substitute for creative talent and quality in this respect.
- Learning from failure - academics need space to fail as long as they learn something from it

CONTEXT SETTING

**Sebastian Long
Player Research**

Player Research provides playtesting and user research services to the video games industry. By evaluating the player experience iteratively and impartially throughout game development, Player Research contributes evidence and understanding to support design decisions.

"Every game design starts as a hypothesis – playtesting is the experiment designed to explore it" – for Long, game designers can only be certain if their intended design is being experienced as intended through user testing.

Player Research employs a series of research methods, including:

- **Biometric response** – monitoring chages in the players' physiology
- **Eye-tracking** – real-time visualisation of the players' focal point
- **Engagement research** – gathering quantitative and qualitative data on players' long-term engagement

Using rigorous research methodologies, and novel data visualisations, Player Research provides developers with reliable and understandable data to inform changes to UI and game design, ensuring a more enjoyable, accessible and critically successful title.

ONLY THROUGH PLAYTESTING CAN THE SUCCESS OF THE GAME DESIGN BE PROVEN

**KooPee Hiltunen
Neogames**

Neogames is a not-for-profit industry association which exists for the promotion and development of its membership and the Finnish games industry. Finland is seeing something of a games start-up boom of 150+ studios, 40% of which are less than two years old. The industry has approximately 1,800 employees and a total value of approximately €350M.

Between 2008-10 Neogames led research (funded by Tekes) into what it described as 'games as services' – a term embodying the move to digital distribution and resulting changing business models. The research focused on a series of topics: the rise of a service paradigm; rethinking play and players (platforms, experience etc); transformations in business and design.

The Games As Services report identified the following learning points:

1. Researchers must be close to industry
2. Research initiatives must originate and be driven by industry
3. Milestones must be built in to reassure commercial partners of progress
4. Public funding allows smaller companies to be involved, funding solely by major businesses narrows research areas
5. Multidisciplinary teams are most effective
6. Be pragmatic – make the future
7. Even the best theories must be tested in practice

AFTERNOON WORKSHOP

THE AFTERNOON WORKSHOP, LED BY DEE HENNESSEY (LANCASTER UNIVERSITY), SOUGHT TO STIMULATE CONNECTIONS BETWEEN PARTICIPANTS AND GENERATE IDEAS AND INSIGHTS – FINDING AREAS OF SHARED INTEREST AND EXPLORATION AND CAPTURING THE COMMUNAL OPINION ON PRIORITIES, BARRIERS AND OPPORTUNITIES.

HIGHLY COLLABORATIVE, THIS SESSION BROKERED PURPOSEFUL DISCUSSION AND NETWORKING IN ORDER TO FACILITATE ONE OF THE WORKSHOP'S DESIRED OUTCOMES – THAT PARTICIPANTS DEVELOPED NEW CONTACTS AND RESEARCH IDEAS OF MUTUAL INTEREST.

AFTERNOON WORKSHOP

1 The first 'icebreaking' session embodied this process of combining tech / creative / academic / commercial as the small group discussions ranged between simple descriptions of mutual interest to more active attempts to synthesise into new project ideas.

2 Ahead of the workshop, participants had been asked to provide statements on key questions for exploration. Firstly in groups, and then under an individual voting method, participants were asked to prioritise these. Some were discarded during this process but the most important areas of interest were:

PRIORITY

- **SOCIAL CHANGE AND THE ROLE OF GAMES**
- **EXPLORATION OF LOCATION AND SPACE**
- **EXPLORATION OF COMMUNITY AND PLAYER EXPERIENCE AND RELATIONSHIPS**
- **EXPERIMENTATION IN PLATFORMS**
- **EVOLVE GAMES EDUCATION IN PARTNERSHIP WITH INDUSTRY TO TRAIN THE NEXT WAVE OF DEVELOPERS**

SECONDARY

- **EXPERIMENTATION WITH CREATIVE PRACTICE – E.G. MUSIC, GAME AS ART**
- **EXPERIMENTATION WITH CO-CREATION AND PLAYER COLLABORATION / EXPRESSION**
- **EXPERIMENTATION WITH INTERFACE**

There was also a strong consensus about the need for some kind of forum or interactive resource for the promotion of innovation, disruption and collaboration to both generate a research based on the needs of the sector and improve the availability of multidisciplinary training for the next generation of graduates.

AFTERNOON WORKSHOP

3 Barriers to achieving an increase in academic / commercial research were identified as:

- **TIME (MONEY TO BUY STAFF TIME)**
- **LANGUAGE (KNOWLEDGE TRANSFER OR EXCHANGE / JARGON)**
- **FINANCIAL IMPERATIVE AND RETURN ON INVESTMENT**
- **LACK OF NETWORKS TO ENABLE CONNECTIONS AND UNDERSTANDING**
- **IDENTIFYING AND ACCESSING POTENTIAL COLLABORATORS**
- **FLEXIBILITY OF APPROACH AND FINANCIAL SUPPORT**

4 The final session gathered ideas submitted by individual participants (rather than through the collaborative format of the rest of the afternoon) and then categorised them:

Things people can make happen themselves
Understanding of language – an ability to translate between the different, and sometimes exclusive, language used by both academics and businesses.

Collaborative ways forward
Subsidised software licenses to allow businesses to cost effectively experiment – this would need to be seen as "'R&D investment' by the corporate entities and would therefore be better led by a national body as honest broker.

Researcher led
Academic in residence opportunities.

Games developer led
Sabbatical opportunities from industry to research.

Identification and accessibility of collaborators and research excellence - where to find research / researchers?

Prototyping tools and assets?

Event to enable networking – informal format.

Potential support models
Small scale, fail-fast funding - e.g. £5k / 1 month turnaround (a related comment was that the trend to larger research funding excludes smaller companies due to the significant requirement to resource). Multiple variations of this idea were submitted.

Ambassadors / agents / honest brokers – duplicate requests for a similar mechanism, e.g. a resourced individual or body which is able to animate this collaboration opportunity in order to make productive connections.

Series of discussions – support for an ongoing set of conversations to continue to explore opportunity and find connections.

Discover by doing, not talking – a "hack" version of what we are trying to achieve.

CONCLUSIONS

INFRASTRUCTURE INITIATIVES

Honest Broker / Agent – A consistent theme of the day was the requirement for a broker between academia and industry, providing a framework for engagement, highlighting opportunities for collaborations and improving the identification of centres of knowledge and research. This should be a proactive, well-networked, resourced service to promote benefit and connect potential.

People exchange – A model allowing staffing 'transfers' both ways between academia and industry, improving understanding and value add / return on investment on collaboration. It may be that existing initiatives such as KTPs could provide a vehicle for part of this aim but are currently either invisible to industry or too complex in their definition.

Clear desire for small / fast turnaround support – A strong theme of the final workshop session was the need to develop a new model of funding support which allowed small scale investment in ideas to be delivered over a quick turnaround timeframe, e.g. £5k / 1 month projects. The contention was that this allowed focus, whereas larger research grants tended to exclude smaller SMEs due to lack of resources.

Ongoing conversation – Linked to the first point, the requirement to have an ongoing reference point for the conversation, whether formal or informal, and ideally driven by specific interest or content areas rather than a more broad 'intention to collaborate' discussion.

HYGIENE FACTORS

Bureaucracy – This is a common problem associated with collaborations between industry and academia. Culture change in universities would be needed to mitigate this problem.

Complementarity with existing initatives – Future support initiatives in this space should complement rather than duplicate any ongoing activities.

CONTENT FOCUS

Guidance on content – The workshop brought together a representative group of games developers and arts and humanities researchers. The workshop produced helpful and constructive outcomes to inform future initiatives e.g. funding calls, hack style events, brokerage platform.

TRACK AGAINST OUTCOMES

SIN, AHRC, CIKTN, TIGA and ICT KTN defined a series of desired outcomes for the workshop, including:

- **IDENTIFY SPECIFIC AREAS FOR COLLABORATION TO SUPPORT THE FUTURE DEVELOPMENT OF THE VIDEO GAMES INDUSTRY**

- **DEVELOP INTERNATIONAL PARTNERSHIPS BETWEEN ARTS AND HUMANITIES RESEARCH AND THE VIDEO GAMES SECTOR**

- **IDENTIFY SUITABLE SUPPORT MODELS TO ENABLE MEANINGFUL KNOWLEDGE TRANSFER/ EXCHANGE IN THIS SPACE**

- **IDENTIFY KEY THEMATIC AREAS OF CREATIVE CHALLENGE FOR COLLABORATIVE RESEARCH AND DEVELOPMENT IN THE VIDEOGAMES SECTOR**

Whilst the development of international partnerships and knowledge transfer/ exchange opportunities will require longer-term effort, progress was achieved against these aims In a number of ways, resulting in an action plan for follow-up by sponsors.

Of 29 evaluation forms returned, 28 stated 'Yes' to the question "Have you made any beneficial connections or contacts at this event?" with the secondary question regarding future follow up also answered positively in the majority of cases. We look forward to tracking the development of these relationships over the coming months.

OF 29 EVALUATION FORMS RETURNED, 28 STATED 'YES' TO THE QUESTION "HAVE YOU MADE ANY BENEFICIAL CONNECTIONS OR CONTACTS AT THIS EVENT?"

ACTIONS

The findings of the workshop have directly contributed to the scoping of a new AHRC Videogames Research Networking funding call.

Up to 5 awards of up to £30k will be made to encourage the formation of a new national (and hopefully internationally linked) framework to explore ideas and maximise opportunities for bringing new insights, creativity and knowledge to the video games industry to deliver mutual benefits.

The call opened for applications on 5 June 2013 and closes on 1 August.

http://www.ahrc.ac.uk/Funding-Opportunities/Pages/AHRC-Videogames-Research-Networking-Funding-Call.aspx

In response to the challenge of identifying academic research and centres of excellence in this space, the Creative Industries KTN and the Engineering and Physical Sciences Research Council are scoping a pilot project to generate a tool to capture and present information online. This will include the arts and humanities research community.

As highlighted on the day, the Budget Announcement 2013 contained additional financial support for the creative industries via the Technology Strategy Board (£15m) and Skillset (£10m). The relevant partner organisations are defining this funding profile and will feed the results of the event into the consultations on investment profile.

The document detailing enquiry and findings from the event will be circulated widely among organisations and agencies related both directly to the games sector and also tangentially via issues raised, for example relating to finance and skills development.

THE FINDINGS OF THE WORKSHOP HAVE DIRECTLY CONTRIBUTED TO THE SCOPING OF A NEW AHRC VIDEOGAMES RESEARCH NETWORKING CALL.

UP TO FIVE AWARDS OF UP TO £30K WILL BE MADE TO ENCOURAGE THE FORMATION OF A NEW NATIONAL (AND HOPEFULLY INTERNATIONALLY LINKED) FRAMEWORK.

WHAT ELEMENTS OF THIS EVENT DO YOU FEEL HAVE BEEN OF USE TO YOU?

"GOOD WORKSHOP STRUCTURE, IT KEPT MIXING PEOPLE UP AND FACILITATED NETWORKING. GREAT FOR A FOREIGNER"

BJORN BERG MARKLUND, UNIVERSITY OF SKOVDE, SWEDEN

"TALKING TO DIFFERENT INDUSTRIES"

DAVID ARNOLD, WATERFRONT

"NETWORKING, LEARNING ABOUT THE CONTEXT OF GAME CREATION AND THE MONEY AVAILABLE TO SUPPORT IT"

CHRISTIE CARSON, ROYAL HOLLOWAY, UNIVERSITY OF LONDON

"MULTIDISCIPLINARY NETWORKING AND CONVERSATION"

VICOR GAZIS, UNIVERSITY OF EXETER

"SEEING LOTS OF DIFFERENT PERSPECTIVES. LOTS AND LOTS OF VERY INTERESTING CONVERSATIONS"

PAUL ANDREW MCGEE, SECRET LUNCH

"PARTICIPATING IN THE POLICY DISCUSSION"

SATU JOKINEN, DATAPHYSICS LTD

TWITTER FEED

#EUROGAMESWORKSHOP GREAT EVENT TODAY LOTS OF NETWORKING AND COFFEE WHICH IS ALWAYS NICE, LOOK FWD TO CATCHING UP WITH NEW CONTACTS!

THREE REALLY INTERESTING PRESENTATIONS TO KICK OFF THE EUROPEAN GAMES WORKSHOP TODAY.

GREAT POINT ABOUT THE DIVERGING TIMESCALES OF INDUSTRY AND ACADEMIA. #MOVEFASTER #GOSLOWER #EUROGAMESWORKSHOP

LOT OF TALK ABOUT SKILLS BUT GOT TO SHIFT TO RESEARCH IF WANT TO ENGAGE RESEARCH INTENSIVE UNIVERSITIES #EUROGAMESWORKSHOP

IT'S OKAY TO HAVE ENJOYED / BEEN ENTHUSED BY A NETWORKING EVENT, RIGHT? #EUROGAME

#EUROGAMESWORKSHOP IT S GETTING REALLY LOUD IN THE ROOM, THAT CAN ONLY BE A GOOD THING!

AT #EUROGAMESWORKSHOP! ROOM VERY FULL.

EVENT CONTENT

Photos

Flickr - **http://www.flickr.com/photos/citinphoto/sets/72157633229227096/**

Dropbox - **https://www.dropbox.com/sh/pf43bnxl2qgh0nk/Dzg94kACf9**