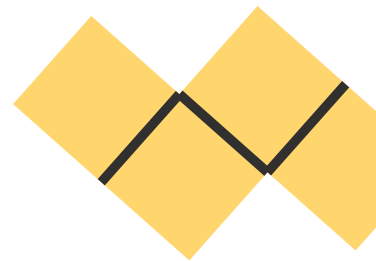
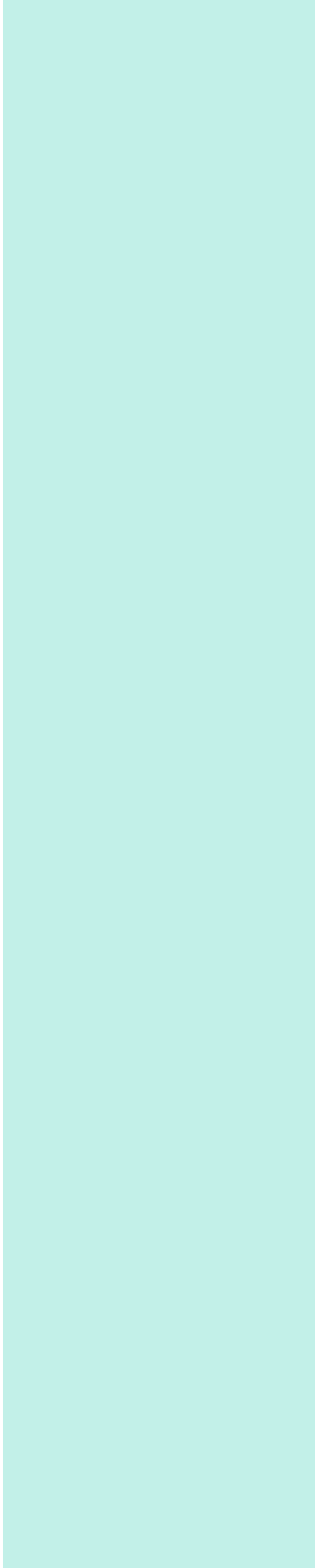
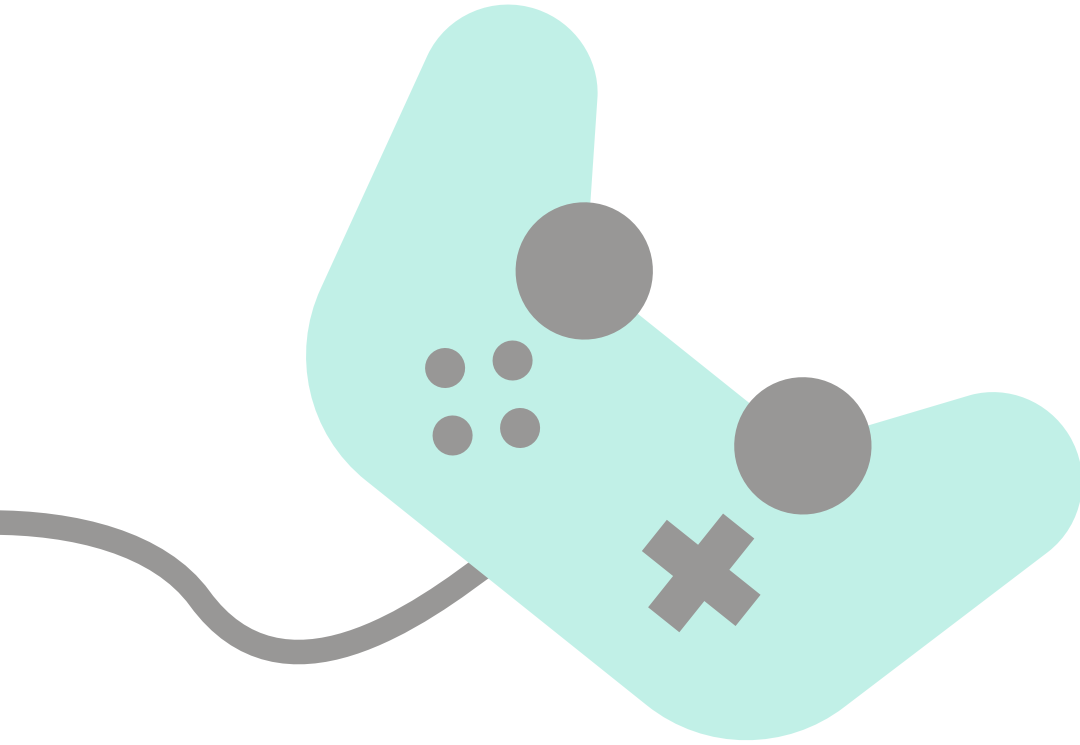




Handbook **Auswärtsspiel**

**Understanding and
Experiencing Foreign
Policy with Games!**





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Welcoming address



Dear readers,

what does the Federal Foreign Office have to do with gaming? As the Federal Foreign Office, we deal with events around the world on a daily basis. But these events are no longer limited to the analogue space of conference rooms and government buildings. Gaming has by now probably become the world's largest space for communication and exchange of our time. Primarily conceived as an entertainment world in its own right, a wide variety of debates takes place in this gaming sphere, from game nights to in-game chats.

However, games also produce political content through their design alone. Digital games in particular create virtually stunning worlds which offer most diverse experiences that shape our world views through their

immersive power and thus – often unconsciously – also convey political stereotypes and narratives. Because in the virtual worlds of digital games, we see more than just pixel graphics and entertaining missions. We experience complex social structures, form relationships with people around the globe and face challenges that often have astonishing parallels to reality. Diplomatic negotiations, alliances, trade relations – all of this takes place not only in government buildings, but also in the universes of *World of Warcraft*, *EVE Online* and many other games. Many games, for example, take place in a setting of colonial power logics, occasionally with “barbarians” who are not granted their own culture, let alone a role as an equal subject with their own means of action. States and political organisation are increasingly

using digital games as a tool of soft power to spread their messages and views. This also entails risks for our democratic and free coexistence, such as the spread of authoritarian narratives, propaganda, or disinformation. It is important to raise awareness of these risks without spoiling the fun of gaming.

The project “Auswärtsspiel“ aims to contribute in creating this awareness from a foreign policy perspective. The core result of “Auswärtsspiel” forms the interdisciplinary catalogue of guiding questions presented in this handbook. It allows all interested parties – whether from the gaming community, game designers and publishers, parents and teachers or professionals in media and culture – to conduct an analytical debate about games in a structured manner. The catalogue of guiding questions is intended to serve as an impulse for self-determined feuilleton debates in gaming, reveal deeper content in gaming experiences and offer inspiration for new gaming ideas.

The world of gaming offers us the opportunity to overcome cultural boundaries and learn from each other – after all, gaming is the oldest cultural technique of learning. In games, we immerse ourselves in different worlds and perspectives, which can lead to a better understanding and deeper appreciation of the diversity of our global community. Wouldn't it be exciting if you could slip into the role of a high-ranking Chinese civil servant in Beijing or a Russian oligarch in the Kremlin in a game?

As the Federal Foreign Office, it is our responsibility to actively go where the discourses take place that affect our foreign policy work. Our daily communication and interactions are increasingly influenced by new technological developments and possibilities. This makes the development of new, innovative formats and channels of communication essential. The “Auswärtsspiel” project meets precisely this requirement and manages to turn digital games into a space for mediating between gaming fun and foreign policy. This makes foreign policy more tangible – through their simulation potential and across many borders, games help us to build a discursive bridge to foreign policy practice.

“Auswärtsspiel“ offers the opportunity to enrich the entertainment space of gaming with a little infotainment. And we also discover new ideas in this discourse.

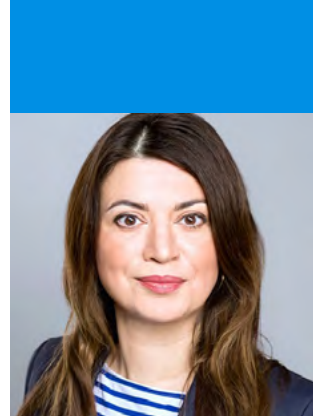
We would like to thank the Foundation for Digital Games Culture as the project executing organization and are delighted that the “Auswärtsspiel”-catalogue of guiding questions has been created and introduced into the gaming world. Supported by the commitment of many experts from various specialist areas and gaming activists that accompanied the project, “Auswärtsspiel” has already initiated new concepts, ideas, collaborations, and perspectives.

We wish you a lot of fun, inspiring impulses, and exciting insights as you continue to use the “Auswärtsspiel”-catalogue of guiding questions and read the handbook!

Mirko Kruppa

Head of Division for Domestic Communication and Citizens' Dialogues Federal Foreign Office

Foreword



Dear readers,

foreign policy and digital games: Why are we bringing these topics together, or why are they already intertwined? The answer becomes clear when we approach the question from the perspective of both fields.

The foreign policy situation in Europe and on a global level is becoming more and more complex. The climate crisis and wars as well as flight and migration are just some of the issues that are increasingly influencing the way we all live together. These developments have an *impact* on the domestic policies of countries and ultimately also on international alliances. Consequently, to prepare and present the multi-layered and complex interrelationships of these topics in a comprehensible manner, has become an urgent task – especially for people who have little to no contact with these topics in their everyday lives. Processes of digitalization and globalization are enhancing the complexity of these connections further – the sheer volume of available information, media channels and digital platforms alone ensures this. The increasingly close-knit global network creates spaces for more dialog and exchange, but it can also lead to disorientation and overburdening. In order to create orientation, we must therefore strive to understand exactly which digital tools can provide added value for education and opinion-forming and how their use can and should be designed.

This is where games and the Foundation for Digital Games Culture come into play. Digital games connect people, create spaces for exchange and encounters and are at the heart of a vibrant pop culture. In short: games are changing the world. The Foundation for Digital Games Culture invites actors from politics, academia and civil society to help shape this change. We are convinced that games can be used to set free positive impulses in our society. And others share this view. In many places, initiatives and networks have now been founded to address the question of how digital games can educate people about complex issues and strengthen their skills. Using keywords such as “serious gaming” or “games for *impact*”, academics and developers are exploring the question of how the stories, characters and game mechanics can promote empathy and understanding for certain topics. On the one hand, because games have a very wide reach as a pop-cultural phenomenon - across all social milieus. On the other hand, because games have many unique qualities, such as interactivity, multimediality and the experience of self-efficacy.

For this reason, we have asked ourselves whether the rule-systematic worlds and interactive scenarios of digital games can contribute to a better understanding of foreign policy actions and issues. To find answers, we launched the pilot project “Auswärtsspiel”, funded by the Federal Foreign Office of the Federal Republic of Germany. The project has set itself the task to investigate the mediating role games can hold for German foreign policy.

Our project has developed from an idea to a concrete endeavour in a period in which geopolitical and societal certainties have been and are being put to the test as rarely before. In this sense, “Auswärtsspiel” is also a project at a turning point in time, which has made the mediation of foreign policy issues and political education even more relevant. I am therefore all the more pleased to present to you the results of “Auswärtsspiel” on the following pages, which will give you a comprehensive overview of the fundamental theories as well as practical examples.

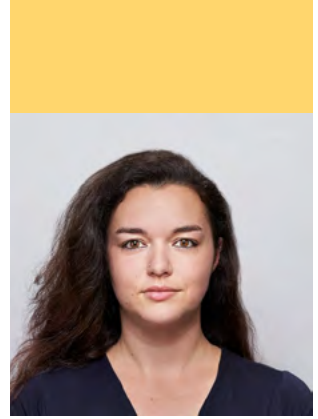
My sincere thanks go to the Federal Foreign Office for funding “Auswärtsspiel” and to our project lead Dr. Tabea Wid-

mann for managing the project regarding its content as well as its organization. I would also like to thank the members of our expert panel and the many people from the gaming industry, academia as well as the foreign policy experts who have contributed their ideas and voices to our formats and events.

I wish you an engaging and insightful read!

Çiğdem Uzunoğlu

Managing Director Foundation for Digital Games Culture



A contribution by Dr. Tabea Widmann

Foreign policy games and playful foreign policy?

Games and politics have always been linked in our cultural ideas and practices. Academia has long recognized this interrelation: Game theories, for example, form part of political studies and are used to describe moments of political decision-making in a comprehensible way or to predict the results of negotiations. Political simulations and simulation games function in a similar way: The medium “game” always functions as a space for trying things out. Within them, the players can pursue questions about how the clash of two or more parties with different interests or values might proceed and how they interact with each other. Thusly, these game spaces can be understood as test spaces of foreign political experiences.

Our language also clearly reflects a connection of (foreign) policy and games: For example, when we ask ourselves whether a top politician is “playing a false game”? Or whether someone on the world political stage has reached a “check mate”? Such analogies surrounding games and playing pervade our talk about foreign political events.

At the same time, such reflections encourage us to reflect on processes on the global foreign political stage through the medium “game”: Is it not the case that global political processes also follow “rules of the game” that are set by international legislation, international law, constitutions, etc.? Such a reflection legitimizes the question that moderator Daniel Budiman put to the public diplomacy-expert, Dr. Hendrik Ohnesorge, at the conference “Gaming und Außenpolitik” (gaming and foreign policy): Are the different national foreign policies engaged in a global party of chess? Or maybe the Chinese game Go? Or is it nowadays necessary to develop a new game-metaphor to do justice to the complex, globally interconnected relations?¹

Following the concept of the cultural researcher Johan Huizinga,² we humans as “homo ludens” (playing women and men) are shaped by play and games in our social behaviour and constant negotiations about living together as collectives even more deeply. Playing is part of our nature. We are playful beings for whom it is necessary to enter the protective sphere of games regularly. It is here

where we can test us – as well as our interrelations –, construct and deconstruct our ideal modes of living, negotiate patterns of behaviour and ultimately, reflect upon our realities and relationships with each other.

In short: Even though the terms “game” and “foreign policy” may appear very distant from each other at a first glance, their contact sphere is both, rich in tradition as well as multidimensional. As the project title ‘Auswärtsspiel’ (away game) suggests, nowadays, this interconnection of games and foreign policy is mostly visible within sports: Especially during events such as the Olympic Games or the football World Cup, discussions about relations between the participating countries also become relevant. Unfortunately, this results mostly in reevoking stereotypical images. Yet, who would not risk these if a global football tournament – a “Global Cup” so to speak – guaranteed peaceful relations around the world? Isn’t it about time to use games more consciously as spaces of compensation in light of the ever more complex global networks and therefore infinite potential points of friction? Or – again switching

¹ Conference „Gaming und Außenpolitik“ on June 13th 2023. Zugriff via <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XEG7ZgheckY>., 00:33:00 [14.11.2023]

² See Huizinga, Johan: Homo Ludens. Vom Ursprung der Kultur im Spiel. Nachdruck. Reinbek bei Hamburg, 1956.

the perspectives – isn't it about time to reflect games as powerful spaces where we can learn about foreign political practices and themes and especially values?

It is exactly questions like these that lie at the core of “Auswärtsspiel”, the interdisciplinary pilot project that was conducted by the Foundation for Digital Games Culture from September 2022 until December 2023, funded by the Federal Foreign Office. Different from the project title's implication, this project focused the dominant narrative medium of the 21st century, namely the digital game.

Games, foreign policy, and the project “Auswärtsspiel”

According to the current report by the game – Verband, 6 out of 10 persons between the ages 6 and 69 play video games.³ So, through its masses of consumers alone, this medium has a broad social reach and therefore, impact. Everyday people move in digital game worlds, facing the adventures and challenges that ask to be conquered. The attraction in this? To experience ownership, the responsibility deriving from the very own decisions and actions, yet also freedom and spaces beyond conventionalities, the ability to cross borders – while enjoying grandiose atmospheres and intense exchange and contact.

These game worlds and diverse narrative game settings overcome a simply analogic connection of games and foreign policy. Instead, they now offer the chance to replay historical battles, to conduct diplomatic negotiations of a culture in a fantasy world or to forge alliances with other players through the game chat – even if these alliances remain purely short-termed and limited

to a specific purpose. Game scenarios can teach their players to act responsibly for their co-players or characters in an involving, even emotionally touching, manner. You need to look no further than the deep connection between Link and Zelda in *The Legends of Zelda* (Nintendo, 1986–2023). Other games confront their players even with moral dilemmas, as *BioShock* (2K Games, 2007) illustrates impressively with the possible interactions with the Little Sister-characters: Will I steal these defenceless creatures' energy to increase my advantage and thusly, better my chances for victory? It seems that gamers are challenged in the fantastic game worlds to move with care – not only regarding their controllers.

And furthermore: The more data volume a game system can process, the more complex their worlds can become. This means that not only the aesthetic design, yet also the rule systems and game mechanics get closer to represent the networks and nuances of real world foreign political processes. Can we then use the involving mechanisms of digital games to reach a deeper understanding of foreign political topics and practices? And how

³ Vgl. Annual report of the German Games Industry 2022, Online-version, access via <https://www.game.de/guides/jahresreport-der-deutschen-games-branche-2022/01-spielerinnen-und-spieler-in-deutschland/> [14.11.2023].

can we motivate a (critical) reflection of foreign political figures, images and stories at the same time?

These questions form the core questions of the interdisciplinary pilot project ‘Auswärtsspiel’ (away game). Throughout its course, the project approached them multi-perspectively and with different foci as well as diverse target audiences. ‘Auswärtsspiel’ aimed to explore digital games to convey foreign political topics and questions as well as to initiate a discourse at the interface of the German games industry and foreign policy institutions.

The project’s three central milestones consisted of a catalogue with key questions, a conference as well as a Game & Mod Jam.

The expert panel and the guiding questions

“Auswärtsspiel”’s first milestone consisted of developing a catalogue of guiding questions that approaches the potential of digital games for foreign political themes and narratives. This was achieved by an interdisciplinary panel of experts: from the fields of foreign policy, academia – political studies as well as game studies – as well as the German gaming industry and societal institutions, various actors came together in a one-day workshop. Collaboratively, they developed a catalogue of 10 guiding questions. These aim to serve as a fruitful impulse for reflexion and exchange. Respectively oriented to a specific game and illustrated by exemplary questions for discussion, the guiding questions open the possibility to analyse different game elements such as images and characters, yet also rules and spaces of dialogue from a foreign political perspective. Furthermore, they aim to explore the potential use of games for foreign policy education more concretely. Thus, the catalogue can be used in all disciplines that were involved in its creation.

The conference “Gaming und Außen- politik” (gaming and foreign policy)

The conference “Gaming und Außenpolitik” took place on June 13th 2023, and served on the one hand as a space to open the initiated dialogue about games and foreign policy with an interested expert audience. On the other hand, it also offered formats of gaming experience where the catalogue of guiding questions was applied to a specific game, respectively accompanied by a live streamed walkthrough as well as an expert discussion. Focused on selected foreign political topics, such as processes of diplomatic negotiations or feminist foreign policy, the speakers traced specific points of contact of these topics with games. Furthermore, they developed perspectives on how these digital games could be used more consciously as means of education in the respective context. The conference took place in collaboration with the local public-law channel ALEX Offener Kanal Berlin. All interested can watch its recording as a YouTube-video with German and English subtitles.⁴

Game & Mod Jam “Auswärtig gespielt” (gamed abroad)

As part of “Auswärtig gespielt - ein Game & Mod Jam zu Außenpolitik”, 50 participants took on the task of developing a digital or analogue prototype on one of four predefined foreign policy topics within two days. The event took place from 9th to 11th November 2023 in cooperation with the Berlin University of Applied Sciences within the DE:HIVE Institute of the HTW. For “Auswärtsspiel”, the main aim was to set the developed catalogue of guiding questions to an initial practical test. Accordingly, part of the task for the participating teams was to integrate the guiding questions into their development process and to document their use. Among other things, the Jam-challenge resulted in projects that deal with foreign climate policy and coming to terms with colonialist pasts. An interdisciplinary jury, which was also made up of the panel’s experts, honoured three projects with 5,000 euros each: Mother Earth – a board game that confronts players with action dilemmas between climate protection and economic interests, Bee Cooperative – a board game in which

different factions of a swarm of bees have to decide on a common direction of flight while avoiding man-made destruction of the environment as far as possible, and Divide & Rule – a digital strategy game that deals with European colonial policies by using arbitrary border demarcations and the fuelling of conflicts of interest to suppress the opposition of local populations and thereby secure the player’s influence.

⁴ Conference “Gaming und Außenpolitik” from 13th of June 2023, accessible via <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XEG7ZgheckY> [14.11.2023]

Handbook Auswärtsspiel – Understanding and Experiencing Foreign Policy with Games!

With this handbook, you now hold the results of the project “Auswärtsspiel” in your hands. It offers contextualisations of the ten guiding questions from the perspective of academia and practice and also contains brief presentations of the prototypes created in the Game & Mod Jam “Auswärtig gespielt”. It also contains other materials to deepen the discourse at the interface of games and foreign policy.

In this handbook, ten experts from the panel each took on “godparenthood” for one of the guiding questions: against the background of their individual expertise, they contextualise the guiding questions that they have helped to develop, anchor them in existing discourses and illustrate their perspective using selected games. The sixth part of *Sid Meier’s Civilization* series (Firaxis Games et al., 1991–2016) in particular is repeatedly used in this first application and discussion of the guiding questions. It thus forms a first convincing example in which different

facets of the interface of foreign policy and games can be understood in a fruitful and multi-perspective way.

Additionally, you can find the results of our Game & Mod Jam “Auswärtig gespielt” in the handbook. Presented with a descriptive text and a visual impression each, you may find out all about the ideas and prototypes developed during the Jam and possibly be inspired by these best-practice examples yourself. Finally, a series of “games profiles” are listed at the end of the handbook. These provide an overview of selected games with their respective links to foreign policy topics or practices and assign three guiding questions from the catalogue to each of them, which may be particularly relevant to the respective title.

Whether developers, game studies researchers or politically interested gamers – the handbook “Auswärtsspiel” is intended as an impulse and a tool for orientation for everyone interested to take a closer look at the interface of games and foreign policy.

**The panel of
experts of
“Auswärtsspiel”**

Michaela Bartelt

Electronic Arts

Prof. Thomas Bremer

Hochschule für Technik und Wirtschaft
Berlin

Daniel Budiman

RocketBeans TV

Riad Djemili

Maschinen Mensch

Lena Falkenhagen

Freischaffende Autorin

Prof. Clemens Hochreiter

Hochschule Fresenius

Stefanie Kastner

Goethe-Institut

Karsten Lehmann

Ubisoft Blue Byte

Hendrik Lesser

Remote Control Productions

Nora Müller

Körper Stiftung

Ata Sergey Nowak

Torpor Games

Prof. Mareike Ottrand

Hochschule für Angewandte
Wissenschaft Hamburg

Dr. Eugen Pfister

Hochschule der Künste Bern

Mick Prinz

Amadeu Antonio Stiftung

Marcus Richter

Freischaffender Journalist & Moderato

Prof. Dr. Thomas Risse

Otto-Suhr-Institut,
Freie Universität Berlin

**Zoran Roso & Maximilian
Bock**

Level Infinite & Tencent

Dr. Joachim Rother

Bertelsmann Stiftung

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Jan Wagner

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Gabriele Woidelko

Körper Stiftung


Franziska Zeiner

Fein Games

Dr. Felix Zimmermann

Bundeszentrale für politische Bildung

**Ten guiding
questions on
the potential of
games at the
interface with
foreign policy**



The following guiding questions focus on the interface of digital games and foreign policy. They are aimed at all interested parties from development, education and research as well as the gaming cultures and practices. The questions invite to use them as an impulse for reflection and exchange about digital games and foreign policy. The guiding questions serve as an orientation to examine games more closely in their potential to mediate topics of foreign policy. At the same time, they seek to sensitize for foreign policy narratives and themes in digital games.

The guiding questions were developed by an interdisciplinary panel of experts as part of the pilot project “Auswärtsspiel”. The following contributions, written by ten members of this panel, approach the guiding questions from the respective expertise of the author. Focusing on one question each, the contributions outline possible areas of application and open up further spaces of reflection at the interface of games and foreign policy.*

* You may find the analogue and digital games that are mentioned in the contributions listed in alphabetical order and supplemented with studios, publishers and year of release on page 61.

01 What potential links does a game offer to foreign policy content and structures?

- Are there (fictional) states, non-state actors, kingdoms, or different social groups in the game, and how is their respective exchange shaped?
- Do various actors exist who differ regarding their cultures and values, (historical) self-identity, state affiliation as well as their respective interests?
- Does a game represent intergovernmental institutions such as the UN, EU or the African Union up to a “Fantasy Assembly of Nations”?

A contribution by Prof. Dr. Thomas Risse

Or: What is foreign policy, anyway?



Anyone who wants to develop games on foreign policy content and structures must answer at least two questions in advance: 1. Who “makes” foreign policy in the game? 2. How is foreign policy made, and what basic assumptions about actors’ interests and motives come into play? Here follow some more thoughts on this matter!

Who makes foreign policy?

Anyone who (occasionally) watches or reads the news might get the impression that the answer is quite simple: Foreign policy is what our foreign minister does, i.e. she travels to foreign countries, meets other foreign ministers, appears at international conferences, flies to the world’s trouble spots – from Ukraine to Israel – and makes very serious statements there, etc. This assessment is certainly correct, because a large part of foreign policy is indeed made by states – and our Foreign Minister represents the Federal Republic of Germany. It is supported by more than 12,000 employees at the Federal Foreign Office and Germany’s more than 220 missions abroad, as well as by numerous other federal and state ministries. This is the world of states.

In addition, there are several thousand international (intergovernmental) organisations. Some are global in scope, such as the United Nations (UN) and its sub-organisations like the World Health Organization (WHO). Some international organisations have thousands of employees, such as the World Bank or the International Monetary Fund (IMF). Others are teeny-tiny, like the Bonn-based “Bat Secretariat” to monitor the Agreement on Bat Conservation at the UN Environment Programme UN-EP. In addition, there are international organisations with regional reach, such as the European Union (EU), the Transatlantic Defense Alliance (NATO), the African Union (AU), and the Organization of American States (OAS).

It becomes even more confusing when we look at what might be called the “social world” of international politics: Several tens of thousands of so-called International Non-Governmental Organisations (INGO) are counted, which do not work for profit but for the common good (at least in their self-description). Amnesty International is one of them, Greenpeace or Doctors without Borders. Well over 50,000 multinational companies with more than half a million subsidiaries in total are added to the list, operating for profit.

If you imagine the world of states and the world of societies with their thousands and thousands of interrelationships, you get a huge global network of actors who all somehow “make” foreign policy. Not all of them are as important or relevant as the German foreign minister, but the power of corporations, as well as INGOs, should not be underestimated. If, for example, the Apple Group were a state and one compared its market value with the gross domestic product of a state, then Apple would have to become a member of the G7 club of the richest industrial nations. This is, of course, a crude comparison, but it shows that one has to take into account the power

of the social world vis-à-vis the world of states as actors in foreign policy.

How is foreign policy made, and what basic assumptions about actors’ interests and motives come into play?

Very often, foreign policy is portrayed as a kind of gigantic competition between powerful states, with nothing at stake but winning or losing. This is also called a zero-sum game: The gain of one is the loss of the other. Foreign policy is then a matter of war or peace, of gaining or losing power.

Above I have already tried to show that this description is already wrong on the level of the actors. Certainly, the issue of war and peace is central to foreign policy. But why do we get upset about the Russian aggression against Ukraine or the Hamas massacre in Israel, when wars between or within states are “normal”? This is not only a matter of moral indignation, but also of the fact that central norms and rules of coexistence between peoples

have been violated, namely the prohibition of a war of aggression as well as fundamental human rights. These rules are laid down, among others, in the Charter of the United Nations as well as in countless international agreements. Diplomacy and foreign policy – whether in the world of states or the world of society – can only function if these rules, which are enshrined in international law, are also observed, at least by the majority of the actors.

A world of zero-sum games, in which the law of the strongest constantly breaks the strength of the law, is also incapable of even addressing, let alone solving, the global problems of humanity. Take the 2015 Paris Climate Agreement, in which 197 countries (plus the EU) pledged to limit global warming to well below two degrees Celsius compared to pre-industrial times: Without cooperation and compromise, this global agreement would never have been reached. Of course, states and other international actors try to achieve their own goals and interests in negotiations. But foreign policy only succeeds when there is also a willingness to solve common problems through cooperation. In other words, in many situations of action in international politics, it makes no sense

to portray the actors as zero-sum players, but as players with both common and conflicting interests. The art of diplomacy or foreign policy then consists in conducting negotiations in such a way that the self-interests of the “other players” are safeguarded and at the same time the common goals can be achieved.

Finally, I would like to point out another issue that needs to be considered in game-based modelling of foreign policy behaviour: In real life, foreign policy almost always involves conflicting goals. For example, the supreme goals of German foreign policy – the triad of peace, freedom and prosperity – can almost never be achieved simultaneously and without compromise. Let’s take the example of Germany’s relationship with the People’s Republic of China: On the one hand, German foreign policy is obliged to uphold human rights and must therefore not remain neutral in the face of the Chinese government’s serious human rights violations (e.g. against the Uyghur minority). On the other hand, numerous German companies are active in China or export there; a complete abandonment of the Chinese market would cost thousands of jobs in Germany as well and thus cause last-

ing damage to our welfare interests. Finally, Chinese military aggression in the South China Sea or toward Taiwan would damage both our security and our welfare interests. So how should Germany behave toward the increasingly authoritarian Chinese leadership without permanently damaging our values and interests in terms of peace, freedom and prosperity? Thus, smart foreign policy consists of repeatedly balancing conflicting values and interests. This, too, must be taken into account when developing games that aim to represent foreign policy action situations in a realistic way.



02 What are the interrelations between foreign policy references, formats, and actors in a game?

- Is the reference to foreign policy made in a game with an educative intention (as a “serious game”) or as part of the narrated game world, designed for entertainment (as a “flow game”)?
- Are possible contradictions between the game system and foreign policy events revealed, moderated, or ignored?
- Does a game make the complexity of foreign policy visible, and does it sensitise the players to possible populist or propagandistic narratives in the process?

A contribution by Mirko Kruppa

Diplomatic mission at the CIV summit



As soon as differently designed game characters exist in games, references to foreign policy realities are already easy to establish. Through rule systems with their game mechanics for the player-interactions, different interests or goals of the game characters or even just through a game setting, influenced by the chosen graphic design: foreign policy power mech-

anisms or historically rooted foreign policy topics can be easily derived with little specialised knowledge and a little imagination. Nevertheless, it seems counterintuitive to actually make active use of this proximity of games to foreign policy perspectives in everyday gaming. Entertainment remains at the foreground.

As a civil servant at the German Foreign Office, to suddenly co-hosting a gaming event for the first time with real-world foreign policy perspectives was thus not an obvious choice. But at the invitation of Rocket Beans TV in Hamburg, I was to do just that as a “real diplomat” and co-host the live broadcast “G8-CIV Summit” in November 2021: An online event based on

Sid Meier's Civilization VI (Civ6). Now, with the Russian aggression against Ukraine, the G8 has not existed since 2014 (today's G7). But it should continue to be primarily about entertainment, not fact-checks. Foreign policy references were to be included only where they had added audience value in the sense of entertainment.

We wanted to design a new format of discreet infotainment in gaming. Building on the experience of this event, *Civ6* appears to be a suitable example to deal specifically with the question of foreign policy reference points, formats and actors.

Is the reference to foreign policy made in a game with an educative intention or as part of the narrated game world, designed for entertainment?

Civilization VI simulates the development of (historical) “nations” from the Stone Age over countless game turns into the Atomic Age and primarily serves as entertainment. (Stereotypical) characteristics are attributed to the “nations”. And they are led by historical figures, so that, for example, Egypt’s Cleopatra interacts with Germany’s Ludwig II or the Aztec leader Montezuma. The *Civ6* developers did a lot of historical research to program these characters and their “nations”. Historically, however, the very concept of “nation” is a projection of our present onto the past. For the term “nation” originates from 19th century Europe, when class orders, caste systems, and feudal structures increasingly disintegrated in the course of growing political equality and European society began to define itself primarily in terms of common language and culture. However, these “nations”

also make the game very interesting for the examination of foreign policy functions and basic mechanisms of power logic. There are also options like “religion victory” or “diplomacy victory”, as well as features like trade or friendship treaties, which give a lot of room for discussions about real foreign policy. Thus, the claim of the game developers to a certain realism is quite desirable and certainly an important reason why *Civ6* is one of the most successful games worldwide with several million downloads and at times up to 160,000 live gamers at peak times. And for the critical eye, there are also enough points of departure for debates on colonialism, for example, with a view to the design of the “barbarians” in the game.

Are contradictions between the game system and foreign policy events revealed, moderated, or ignored?

Civilization VI takes up foreign policy or historical contexts but does not discuss them. It is a so-called 4X strat-

egy game (explore, expand, exploit, exterminate) and thus follows a colonial-expansive and imperialistic policy with power logics of a (Europe-centred) 19th and early 20th century. For example, domestic political constraints are only marginally reflected, so that the real political rule of thumb “foreign policy is always a function of domestic policy” is not revealed by the game mechanics. The complexity and interdependence that characterise today’s foreign policy as it is lived in multilateral structures of the EU or African Union, the United Nations, NATO, the World Trade Organization in Geneva, or via regional free trade zones does not exist in *Civ6*. At the same time, however, in times of Ukraine war and great power logics following current debates about a “new multipolar world order”, one can argue that these ways of thinking remain current and relevant despite all foreign policy structures. The game opens the space to discuss this.

Does the game make the complexity of foreign policy visible and does it sensitise for possible populist and propagandistic narratives?

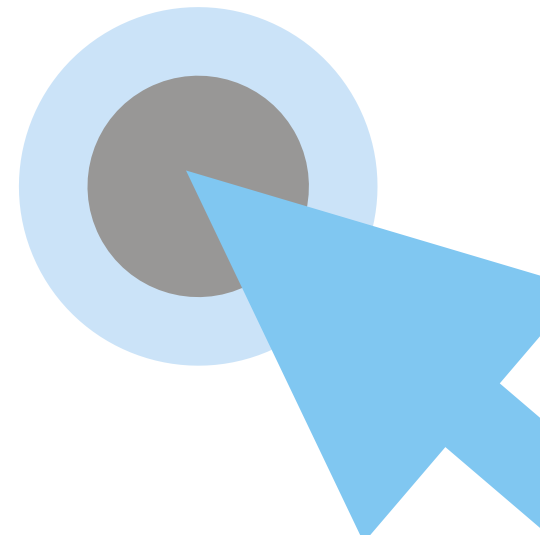
Civilization VI itself does not cover this debate work, nor does it offer much in the way of features for moderating such foreign policy mechanisms of action. However, it offers a wealth of points of departure for reflecting on real foreign policy contexts from the game situation with a historical or day-to-day political perspective. At the latest, the possibility to achieve a victory with a “nuclear strike” in *Civ6* offers enough reason for further, not only foreign policy debates.

During the two “CIV Summits”, Rocket Beans TV took advantage of the lack of multilateral structures in *Civ6* and introduced a “Diplomacy Table”: Thus – in the style of the United Nations in New York – conflicts between gamers known in the gaming community were negotiated transparently for the

audience. As a diplomat, I had the task of preventing wars and promoting compromises – not necessarily the kind of thing that makes an entertainment format more dramatic. So the “populist” call for “action” was countered by “diplomatic conflict mediation”, which is only possible thanks to *Civ6*’s game mechanics. Thus, at the second “CIV Summit of 15 October 2022”, a situation arose in which the entire game could have escalated into a war of all against all. *Civ6* thus offered the opportunity to indirectly address the Russian war of aggression against Ukraine and thus foreign policy rule systems.* At the first CIV Summit in 2021, gaming reflected the mechanisms and incentive patterns that drove Europe’s empires into the catastrophe of WW1.

The Rocket Beans TV format “CIV Summit” thus exemplifies options for implementing the “Auswärtsspiel”-catalogue of guiding questions. It succeeded in making foreign policy references surprisingly apparent in the course of the gaming action, and in engaging the audience. Similar approaches are conceivable for other games, modding competitions or

game jams. *The Witcher*-series, for example, with its heterogeneous game characters as well as the deliberate creation of game situations with only poor options for action, contains many starting points for foreign policy considerations. This core product of the Polish gaming industry also reveals the central historical experience of Poland and its long history of suffering caused by great powers.



* To see on <https://youtu.be/xBBn-kNO0eE?si=wqoGo6MbQLwkGWc8> from 04:48:00 to 05:08:00.

03 What foreign policy themes and narratives are represented in a game?

- Which historical and/or current, economic and/or social conditions motivate the game characters (player-controlled and system-controlled) in their actions?
- What underlying conflict, e.g. expansion vs. preservation, prosperity vs. exploitation, is being played out?

A contribution by **Stefanie Kastner**

Games as a bridge between the Global North and South



Digital games have unique strengths that set them apart from other media: Games are interactive, they allow identification and making one's own decisions, they promote engagement, have an emotional impact, can contribute to one's own empowerment. They help us learn, promote social interaction and inclusion, and can teach cultural diversity. Digital games give us the

opportunity to slip into the skin of another person and to have experiences in this role that are normally outside our horizon of experience. They are therefore particularly suitable for taking up foreign policy motifs and narratives and making them tangible. Games help us to empathise with historical or social settings, to try out different roles, and to see how different behaviours and choices feel.

When communicating foreign policy values through games, it is important to check if there is a sufficient amount of different cultural roles available and to see how these roles are designed in the game. What historical or current, economic or social conditions motivate

the characters' actions? What basic conflict is being played out? Is the game about expansion or preservation, about prosperity or exploitation? What methods are used to play out these basic conflicts: is there the possibility to act, to negotiate, to go to war, to make peace, to vote democratically, to vote out governments...? To what extent are characters from the so-called Global South and its political systems and structures represented in the game? How are these characters portrayed? From my perspective, the latter questions in particular are highly relevant in the context of possible foreign policy motifs and narratives in digital games.

This is because games are often conceived by game studios and developers from the so-called Global North and developed in less diverse teams. Game studios from the African continent, for example, are significantly underrepresented on the European and world markets. This fact raises two problems:

1. Realities of the Global South are only little perceived and understood in the Global North and cannot be “played” and emotionally grasped and
2. people from the Global South feel that their realities are not represented in games.

In this context, the catalogue with its guiding questions can help to identify games that have as diverse characters and game scenarios as possible.


Games are a powerful medium for cultural expression and understanding. By including characters from the Global South, game developers can promote diversity and inclusion, fostering a sense of representation and belonging for players from countries in the Southern Hemisphere. This can help break down stereotypes and promote intercultural understanding.

The inclusion of political and historical scenarios outside the “Western world” also lends authenticity and realism to the game worlds. It is important to represent different settings, cultures, and historical or contemporary contexts, and to depict the diversity of our world.

The gaming industry has a global reach and gamers from all over the world engage with games. Including characters and stories from the Global South can engage a more diverse audience and increase the range of experiences that can be had in the game.

Seeing characters from the Global South portrayed as heroines, leaders, kings, and protagonists can be incredibly empowering and inspiring for players of colour. This sends a positive message that anyone and everyone





can be an important part of a game storyline.

Games can also be pedagogical instruments that familiarise players with different perspectives that differ from their own horizons of experience. Games help educate players about the diversity of the world and encourage them to learn more about other countries, their political systems, and their history.

In the media in general and in games in particular, there is a tendency to rely on stereotypes when portraying characters from the Global South. By

including diverse and differentiated People of Colour characters in games, these stereotypes can be challenged, diversified, and subverted, leading to better and more understandable representations.

The inclusion of characters from the Global South can encourage collaboration with developers, artists, and writers from these regions. This exchange of ideas and experiences can lead to more detailed and authentic game narratives and settings.

Game developers have the opportunity to promote social awareness and positive change through their games. Accurate representation of PoC characters from the Global South is consistent with this responsibility and contributes to a more equitable representation of the world's population. In summary, the representation of

people from the Global South as PoC characters in games is a step toward creating a more inclusive, diverse, and culturally rich gaming landscape. This benefits players, the industry and society as a whole by promoting understanding, empowerment and positive social impact.

04 Does a game offer collaborative, confrontative, and/or multi-perspective elements in its rule-based representation?

- Does a game allow for changing perspectives and positions of (inter-) action?
- Does a game address e.g., trade, war, diplomatic conflict resolution, and/or balancing such different motives?

A contribution by Prof. Clemens Hoch

Multiperspectivity and co-op modes for (foreign policy) narrative game design



The guiding question of collaborative, confrontational and/or multi-perspective game elements concerns, on the one hand, the rules of the game and, on the other hand, the perspective that the players adopt. It is therefore particularly relevant for narrative designers, game designers, and authors. Since the answer to the question has very profound effects on the develop-

ment of the game, it should always be asked at the beginning of a game production. But why is this question of such particular relevance in the context of foreign policy issues that it appears here in the list of guiding questions?

Here's a thought experiment: A developer wants to make a strategy game about a real conflict. In this game genre, it is absolutely common to present conflicts from multiple perspectives. For example, in *StarCraft* we experience a war from the point of view of different "races". Here, at the latest, we can sit up and take notice for the first time. In *StarCraft*, people talk about "races" in a pain-free manner; in

the context of foreign policy, the term alone would be difficult.

But back to the game mechanics: We can experience *StarCraft* as a "single player" game in the form of a campaign; in this case it is also multi-perspective. The player experiences the conflict depicted one after the other from the perspective of the different "races". *StarCraft* always encourages its players to consider different perspectives and evaluate their own actions accordingly – a concern of foreign policy to a large extent.

However, the game can also be played in "multiplayer" mode. In this form, the *StarCraft* series has become an important part of e-sports and is used

for international e-sports tournaments. In multiplayer mode, different game modes are offered. In our context, it is particularly relevant that the game can be played both against each other and cooperatively (hence: co-op mode), opening up completely different spaces of experience in contact with the other players.

So the game offers numerous ways to experience it. This is very interesting both in terms of game mechanics and narration. But can we do the same when depicting a real conflict?

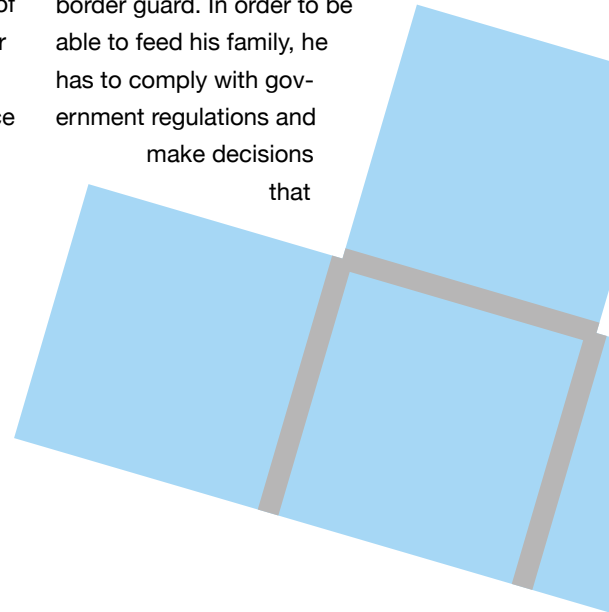
The short answer is: Yes, of course we can, but we will then have to deal with ethical issues.

The narrative perspective in the game is largely based on the conventions we have learned in other media. The hero's journey, which is common in film, sends a protagonist into a foreign world, which he/she leaves again at the end of the film, enriched by new knowledge and new experiences. He/She takes these experiences back to the "old world" and develops further as a result.

Let's take as an example the feature film "The Empire of the Sun" (1987) by Steven Spielberg, which deals with the role of Japan in World War II. One of the strengths of this film is certainly the chosen narrative perspective. So we experience the war situation from the point of view of a British boy growing up in Shanghai. A child who has very limited insight into the conflicts and is correspondingly naive. The viewer has a considerable knowledge advantage over the protagonist due to his prior knowledge. Thus, the child watches the planes with fascination, while the spectator sees the danger of the air raids. Repeatedly, it puts itself in danger. The difference in knowledge between the recipient and the protagonist creates an enormous tension, which is called suspense. At the end of the film, the child has lived through far more than the average recipient. Now it is the child who has more experience than they do, although the audience will always carry the film experience itself with them as part of their own lives.

With games, we have the opportunity to take this principle to the extreme. It is the players themselves who go through these experiences. In the simplest case, we as developers

can provide them with experiences from a foreign world that they can integrate into their lives. Narrative design is about cleverly merging game mechanics and narrative. This offers us further possibilities than we know from linear media. In the learning game, there is often an attempt to map the learning content as a game mechanic. The player "does" what he/she is supposed to learn. In the context of foreign policy, it seems particularly interesting to me to go one step further here. Thus, an interesting conflict arises when the mechanics of the game go against the ethical beliefs of the players or those of the narrative. A principle that has reached high fame with the game *Papers, Please*. The players take on the role of a border guard. In order to be able to feed his family, he has to comply with government regulations and make decisions that



go against our moral beliefs. In general, it can be stated that although the judgment of whether a game action is appropriate or not is determined by the rules of the game, the player will always make a comparison with his or her own moral compass. When in doubt, every action in the game has a consequence. Possibly a clear genre definition of the “documentary game” with established conventions, as already exists in film studies, would help even more concretely how such reflection processes can be applied in game development.

It is obvious that there are enormous possibilities to make a conflict playable in multiple perspectives. The change of perspective is an integral part of negotiation management for a reason. As a game developer, you should ask yourself the question: Do I really want to show only one side, and why? For example, do I choose the viewpoint of the resistance fighter because it's supposedly easier to tell, or because it's more playfully interesting?

In the context of foreign policy, the “Multiplayer Co-op” game mode seems particularly interesting to me. Our world is full

of conflicts that can only be resolved if we work together. A game about the climate crisis just cries out for a cooperative approach. In the game *Utopolis*, produced by my company, the players are threatened by an environmental catastrophe. They can win by cooperating, communicating and setting smart rules together. This is done by proposing and voting for laws. Recently I had the opportunity to play a prototype that does everything differently on the same theme. Here you have to confrontatively assert your interests as a fracking tycoon against the “annoying environmentalists”. This game mode also works well because there is again an alignment with the players' own value system.

In summary, games offer us numerous other modes besides the intuitively correct game mode and perspective. Therefore, it is worth asking whether, in the end, another mode of communicating a (foreign policy) topic is not more interesting, even if it is more difficult for us as developers and exposes us to the risk of being vulnerable.

05 What are the origins of the aesthetic elements of a game world and what emotional worlds do they transport?

- From which historical and cultural contexts do visual elements, sound and music originate?
- What emotional perspective of experience is created for the players (adventure, learning experience, power experience, etc.)?
- Are the acting figures complex characters whose motives are comprehensible and who can be met with empathy and respect?

A contribution by Lena Falkenhagen

Contexts and associations in digital game worlds



Many game worlds and game narratives leave a deep, often emotional impression on the players in front of the monitor. Especially in the case of so-called “serious games”, i.e. games that aim to provide support in the health/sports sector, in the learning sector or address serious topics such as territorial conflicts, mental illnesses (depression or similar), the chosen topic of the game plays a major role. The theme, the first level that the audience “reads” as they wonder what the game is

about, is at the heart of the 5th guiding question and forms the subject of this paper.

The narrative of a game is created by the sum of the actions performed in the game (the gameplay) and quests, the graphic level and the sound level. When well-coordinated, they collectively form the interwoven tapestry of the players’ perception of the game.

From which historical and cultural contexts do visual elements, sound and music originate?

Aesthetics – be narrative, graphic or musical – always contribute to placing the players in a historical or cultural

context. They suggest certain themes; iconic images can be understood like tourist attractions in a city. Who doesn’t think of Berlin when they think of the Brandenburg Gate, or Paris when they think of L’Arc de Triomphe? In computer games, they are often called “landmarks” and are used for orientation in the game. At the same time, however, landmarks can suggest, for example, a historical era (especially in the area of clothing, hairstyles), or evoke certain historical events (such as certain buildings or gestures, for example, a specific bow).

Many specific “assets”, elements of a computer game, bring into a game via what is called “environmental storytelling” (the telling of context via audiovisual elements). Harpsichord music and a lavishly decorated fountain probably evoke associations with the 18th century for many. However, this form of storytelling also implies that each person brings his or her own culturally shaped horizon of experience, his or her own world of experience to the interpretation of such aesthetic elements.

The more specific the element, the more similar the associations of the players. Swastikas as extreme examples (now also accepted in artistic computer games according to the social adequacy clause) are a graphic element that is extraordinarily preloaded worldwide and is usually interpreted in the same way, namely as marking a place or the proximity of a person to the German Nazi era and NSDAP, or alternatively to the new extreme right.

Whether gamers interpret representations and symbols positively or negatively certainly depends on their own political attitudes as well as on the “framing”, i.e., the specific representation of the situation. A characterisation

of symbolisms with somberly staged music portrays them menacingly. The tone of the narrative, that is, the narrative, also plays a role. A more apologetic narrative level will certainly generate less empathy in the players and will instead take political positions than a differentiated plot.

Iconic musical components of computer games also provide such narrative location. If you play the game *Fall 89*. On the streets of Leipzig of the studio Playing History and hears the chants from the Monday demonstrations, chanting “We are the people!”, then this triggers in people who have experienced the fall of the Wall or associate with it much, emotional reactions that link to powerful feelings. For players who did not experience this time, the game can then serve as a medium for cultural remembrance.

What emotional experience perspective is created for the game players (adventure, learning experience, power experience, etc.)?

Computer games are often said to offer the player positive experiences through an escapist exaggeration of oneself. Certainly there are such games, as a counter-example, *This War of Mine*: here, you play normal people; civilians who, themselves relatively helpless, suffer from a war that they are not fighting themselves. The actions they have to perform in order to survive in this extreme situation, however, do not exaggerate the characters (and the players), but show the suffering and desperation of the people in a multi-perspective view.

Are the acting figures complex characters whose motives are comprehensible and who can be met with empathy and respect?

When considering computer games, as with other media, the narrative perspective with which one lives through the action applies. Do you live through the game's action as a specific character, or does it (also like *Fall 89*) offer a multi-perspective approach? Are the characters complex characters whose motives are understandable? A key aspect here is conveying the motivation and depth of the characters, giving insight into the historical era or a particular situation. It is often true that games that offer perpetrator figures as vehicles for identification tend to simplify. If the characterisation of characters strikes in a more apologetic direction of atrocities, one might even suspect a political message.

One example from Germany is the game *Through the Darkest of Times* by Berlin-based studio Paintbucket Games. In it, you play the members of a resistance cell against the strengthening NSDAP. The characters (there are several of them) organise actions, collect materials and funds, and try to recruit supporters for the resistance against the growing threat of the SA and SS. The game intertwines a visual narrative – that is, a narrative game that clearly depicts the political stages of the NSDAP's strengthening in two-dimensional graphics – and a strategy game (the organisation of the resistance). A combat-oriented shooter on the same historical foil or a skill-oriented Indiana Jones adventure often offer gamers a less differentiated experience perspective.

Through the Darkest of Times can also serve as a good and reflective model for the aesthetic realm: The game's art director, Sebastian Schulze, took it upon himself to design the game in a look that would have been considered "degenerate" during the Nazi era. In this way, the play avoids repeating the exalting and glorifying aesthetics of the Nazi era in the style of Leni Riefenstahl and others, in which the German man is understood as an icon of mascu-

linity, the woman as an exaggerated mother figure. *Through the Darkest of Times*, on the other hand, emphasises the individuality of people on the one hand and the importance of group cooperation on the other. Each of these people is clearly not the German ideal. The focus is on the group, not the individual.

Of course, games can also be valuable and serve as a calling card for a state's foreign policy if they are simply fun, or less narrative. In narrative games, however, it is worth taking a second and third look at the representation of aesthetic elements and their framing.

06 Can the players shape the story, game world and game mechanics in a self-effective way?

- To what extent can the players act as subject or object of a story?
- What actions and options for foreign policy decision-making does a game offer its players?

A contribution by Prof. Thomas Bremer

Foreign policy options for action and decision in games – interplay between rules and narration



Foreign policy is the strategic design and implementation of a state's actions and interactions on the international stage to promote and protect its national interests. It is a fundamental component of a country's overall political leadership and

influences its relations with other states as well as its positioning on the world stage. Foreign policy pursues various goals, including security and defence, promoting economic interests, diplomatic relations, promoting human rights and values, increasing influence and prestige, conflict resolution and peacekeeping, and addressing global challenges such as environmental protection and health pandemics.

Mathematical game theory is a mathematical theory for modelling decision-making situations in which multiple participants interact. It captures rational decision-making behaviour in social conflict situations and is applied in various domains. In its sense, foreign policy could also be seen as a collection of games involving the interplay of interests, values, diplomacy, and power relations among different players. The exact goals and priorities may vary from “player to player”, depending on changing global circumstances and national priorities.

The following article therefore focuses on the playful power of action between rules and narration in particular reference to game theory.

One of the oldest games still played today is chess. Chess, for all its abstraction, is a war game in which two players duel to checkmate the king, the ruler. Although the gameplay is complex, it is predictable because all the information is out in the open. The pieces are signs that refer to war, but ultimately the game of chess has nothing to do with the real war. The “as if” is an aspect of all games, not just human ones. Animal children also do mock-fights without causing harm to themselves.

In the rules game, we learn effective strategies and techniques to address conflicts constructively, find solutions, and strengthen our interpersonal relationships. We also improve our communication skills to avoid misunderstandings and communicate effectively. By learning these important skills, we develop a better understanding of different perspectives and learn to be respectful and tolerant.

Players are able to accept the set of rules separately from the symbol level.

I can play chess with soldier pieces or with abstract shapes. The rulebook remains the same and at its core it changes little in player life. Conversely, this also means that we don’t have much to look forward to if we enrich the symbolic and narrative level of the game without changing the rulebook. There are a number of games with foreign policy narratives such as *Civilization VI: Diplomacy, Espionage and Cultural Diplomacy*, *Crusader Kings III: Dynastic Alliances and Political Intrigue*, *Stellaris: Interstellar Diplomacy and Federations*, *Victoria II: Colonial politics and economic diplomacy* and many others of this kind. In the narrative and symbolic representation of the conflicts between states, the term diplomacy in these games has little meaning, but perhaps only has the function of postponing options for action. In the end, what always counts in these games is the gain of space and resources – in other words, the imperialist gesture that is almost literally placed in the hands of the players.

At this point, it becomes clear that what is close to the challenges of foreign policy can only be incompletely represented and experienced in a single-player game. Conflicts are implemented algorithmically in these

games, leaving the players with only the courses of action intended by the game-makers. In the real world of foreign policy, however, we are dealing with “game players” who represent their own interests and are additionally not provided with a level playing field.

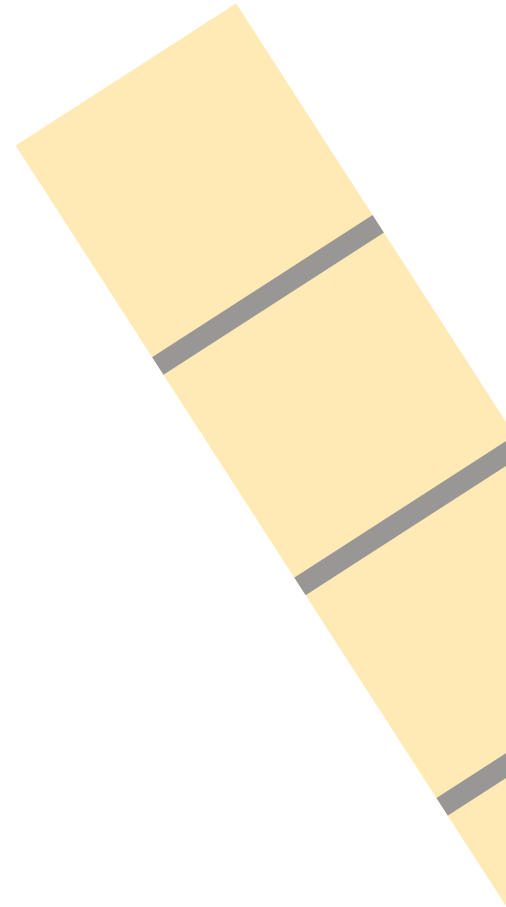
In mathematical game theory, there are various models to describe, or model, aspects of foreign policy. The Prisoner’s Dilemma, for example, is a classic example of such a game, in which states must decide whether to cooperate or betray each other. Nash equilibrium theory describes situations in which neither side has an incentive to deviate from its strategy alone if the strategies of the other players remain unchanged. The security dilemma is a concept in game theory that highlights how actions taken by one state to secure its own interests can be perceived as a threat by other states. All of these different models can help convey how states can signal their intentions while ensuring that those intentions are properly interpreted by other states. Concept of “credibility” is of particular importance here. In international politics, relationships are often characterised by repeated interactions. Game-theoretic models of

repeat games can be used to analyse how a state's actions and decisions affect its reputation and interactions with other states over time. Game theory can be used to analyse the formation and maintenance of strategic alliances and coalitions. States must weigh when it is in their interest to ally with other states and what concessions they should make to maintain those alliances.

All of these aspects are and can ultimately be part of many multi-player games especially Massively Multi-player Online Role-Playing Games (MMORPG). However, even these games are primarily dominance and imperial in their mechanisms. At the same time, it doesn't mean that their real-world playmates share those views.

Many games deal with warfare, human rights, and resource exploitation. The moral consequences of player decisions and the portrayal of conflict and diplomatic relations in games often remain superficial. Game makers could consider the moral consequences of player decisions and create game mechanisms that allow player ends to opt out. The depiction of resource exploitation in games is also ethical-

ly problematic. Game makers could implement alternative models of resource management that promote sustainability and social responsibility. The portrayal of conflict and diplomatic relations in games should also be viewed critically. Game makers should strive to more credibly represent the complexities of diplomatic negotiations and the potential consequences of different diplomatic approaches, and to allow players more options for action and more individualised strategies.



07 According to which ethical principles does a game function?

- Are player actions ethically classified by mechanical or narrative evaluations of a game?
- Does a game set a binding framework, or does it allow moments of rupture for playful experimentation?
- Does a game provide moderating or sanctioning structures that correspond to real-world foreign policy institutions (e.g., the UN Charter and international law) when rules are violated?

A contribution by Dr. Felix Zimmermann

Foreign political (un)ethical action in Civilization 6?



An ethical discussion of digital games is complex and can deal with different aspects of the game, the gameplay, the players and their social embedding.⁵ This short article therefore aims to offer a concrete examination of one sub-area of this complex: the ethical implications of

virtual gaming. In accordance with the objective of the Away Game project, the focus here is on game actions that are modelled on real-world foreign policy options, with the sixth part of the *Civilization*-series serving as an example (including the expansions).

The historical game studies in particular have already produced numerous studies on the *Civilization*-series, which generally attest to a Eurocentric view of history that elevates expansion, competition, and growth to the natural state of human coexistence between clearly delimited nation-states.⁶ The

game's goal and staging are clear in this respect: We take on the role of an immortal leader of a nation and live through thousands of years of human history, finally achieving victory as the only nation, whether through science, culture, religion, diplomacy or domination. As a representative of the so-called 4X genre, which stands for "eXplore", "eXpand", "eXploit", and "eXterminate", the *Civilization* series is a prime example of judging the meaningfulness of digital games not only by their surface (the narrative, the setting, etc.), but also by their underlying game mechanics.⁷ To this end, the concept of "procedural rhetoric", popularised

⁵ See a.o. Ostritsch, S. (2018), Ethik. In: Philosophie des Computerspiels. Theorie – Praxis – Ästhetik (herausgegeben von Daniel Martin Feige, Sebastian Ostritsch und Markus Rautzenberg), S. 77-96.

⁶ See a.o. Bassermann, M. (2021), Gameplay loops and other politics: Musings on *Civilization*, ideology and game development. In: Historical Games Network, <https://www.historicalgames.net/gameplay-loops-and-other-politics-musings-on-civilization-ideology-and-game-development/>

⁷ See Huberts, C. (2022), Spiele mit Ideologie. In: Dossier Digitale Spiele, <https://www.bpb.de/themen/kultur/digitale-spiele/504992/spiele-mit-ideologie/>

by Ian Bogost,⁸ is usually used to formulate the following core argument: With the help of the program code and the game rules that make up the game mechanics, game developers make more or less subtle and more or less conscious statements about the world and – this is already expressed in the rhetoric – work to persuade people to make these statements.

However, the discussion about the meaningfulness of game mechanics is complicated when it is supplemented by an ethical question: Does a game like *Civilization 6*, with its options for expansionist-warlike action, suggest to players that war is a morally good course of action?

The six possible victory variants offered by *Civilization 6* seem to argue against a bias towards warfare, since a science victory, culture victory, or diplomacy victory could theoretically also be achieved in the course of a pacifist gameplay. Practically, however, warlike action is the most reliable path to victory. An example: A science victory is achieved by researching the necessary technologies to launch a space expedition to a planet outside our solar system. Players need many

and large cities to build libraries and universities in order to collect research points. So expansion is necessary and when all land is settled, there is only one way to expand further: declare war on other nations. In addition, players who engage in intensive research efforts inevitably unlock increasingly powerful war technologies, which provide a significant advantage in competition with other nations and accordingly entice their use in a war. There is no completely pacifist research in *Civilization 6* in this sense. Especially on higher difficulty levels, which give computer-controlled opponents far-reaching advantages (e.g. an increased share of resource generation), players* are forced to eliminate other nations early and mercilessly through war – unless they accept almost inevitable defeat.

Taking the procedural rhetoric argument seriously, this game-mechanical necessity to wage war in *Civilization 6* means that it functions as one, if not the morally valid option to achieve one's goals in the contest of nations.

But it's not quite that simple, both in terms of *Civilization 6* and other games that are based on foreign policy. There

are two counter-arguments to be made: Firstly, it is common practice and to a certain extent also core to the medium of digital games that the player's actions are classified and in part also commented on by game narration or mechanics. Through this, the morality of the players' actions can also be put up for debate. In *Civilization 6*, for example, players earn resentment from other nations when they wage "surprise wars". Belligerent behaviour can thus even lead to a special session of the so-called World Congress, which then imposes sanctions. The second, even more far-reaching counter-argument refers to the players and their possibility and responsibility to develop an attitude towards a given game. In fact, players are much more than mere executors of the instructions of a program code.

The difference here is between instrumental and creative play. Certainly, players can play a game like *Civilization 6* instrumentally, recognising that waging war is the most reliable path to victory. But even this does not mean that they embrace the normative message conveyed through the mechanics of the game. Even if they play instrumentally, players can still

⁸ Bogost, I. (2007), *Persuasive Games. The Expressive Power of Videogames*.

consider war immoral – in comparison with their real-world values. And more: They can also reflect their real-world values in their gameplay by creatively exploring the limits and possibilities of the program code and game mechanics (for example, by exploiting glitches and bugs). Thus, in *Civilization 6* – as in many other games – some players attempt a “Pacifist Run”, i.e. a successful game without warfare, which represents a special challenge and can be interpreted as a playful negotiation of ethical principles.

For some players, that’s not enough: For example, there is a modification for *Civilization 6* called “Forever Peace”, which makes any warlike action impossible and thus represents a break with the rules of the game and the intended game mechanics. Even more than creative playing, one could speak of transgressive playing⁹ i.e. a resistance against the constraints of the program code – and thus possibly also against the normative statements embedded in it. One game developer even went so far as to create a parody of the *Civilization*-series entitled *Syphillisation*, which challenges the basic principles of the

series but also of other 4X games such as expansion, competition, and growth.¹⁰

The complexity of the question “According to which ethical principles does the game function?” then lies precisely in the fact that intended or unintended normative statements by the developers can not only occur and be reflected upon in a variety of ways in game-immanent terms, but that players can also behave in just as many different ways in relation to these statements, and that it is precisely the creative, experimental, and in part also transgressive moment of the playful that comes into its own.

⁹ Aarseth, E. (2007), I Fought the Law: Transgressive Play and the Implied Player, <http://www.digra.org/wp-content/uploads/digital-library/07313.03489.pdf>

¹⁰ See Evans-Thirlwell, E. (2023), Can you make an anti-imperial empire game? In: Eurogamer, <https://www.eurogamer.net/can-you-make-an-anti-imperial-empire-game>

08 Which foreign policy scenarios does a game setting convey?

- How are foreign policy scenarios expressed in a depicted game world (game design, aesthetics, and narration)?
- According to which rules do player actions in a game function and how are their consequences communicated to the players?

A contribution by Nora Müller

Foreign policy with and in digital games



Video games are political, or at least have a political subtext, even if they come across as purely commercial products of a rapidly growing gaming industry. What Joshua Foust notes with regard to the U.S. market is likely to apply increasingly to Europe as well: Video games are increasingly becoming a contested politicised space¹¹ in which state,

as well as private sector and civil society actors, place competing narratives that influence users' worldviews. Unlike traditional forms of entertainment, the degree of interaction and identification with the protagonists of the video game is significantly higher.

This is especially true for so-called first-person shooters (FPS). "Video games force players to become participants in simulated events"¹², is how Marcus Schulzke explains it. In this respect, the foreign policy scenarios on which a video game is based have a formative influence on the players. Depending on the respective narrative situation, digital games can thus

convey very different impressions of "foreign policy" to their players.

It is clear that game series such as *Call of Duty* or *Battlefield* place a one-sided focus on the military dimension of foreign policy action, even presenting military force as an almost inevitable means of settling international conflicts. Washington appears only as a military power, never as a diplomatic actor. Moreover, they present a Manichean view of the world in which the U.S. is engaged in an epic struggle against enemies bent on its destruction, such as Islamist terrorists. Beyond stereotypical images of the enemy, there is little room for a differentiated examination of complex

¹¹ Foust, J. (25. März 2021), Video games are the new contested space for public policy. <https://www.brookings.edu/articles/video-games-are-the-new-contested-space-for-public-policy/>.

¹² Schulzke, M. (1 August 2014), Video Games and the Simulation of International Conflict. <https://www.e-ir.info/2014/08/01/video-games-and-the-simulation-of-international-conflict/>.

conflict scenarios. The perspective of the “other” does not matter. In *Call of Duty*, according to Daniel Golebiewski, the U.S. continues to be ascribed the role of “world policeman” and hegemon, willing and able to intervene around the world when America’s values and interests are in danger.¹³ It is therefore not surprising that the discussion about the extent to which such games are (also) an instrument of strategic communication for the goals and interests of U.S. foreign policy has been going on for a long time.

The non-commercial video game *Convene the Council* from the genre of “serious games”¹⁴ is an alternative to *Call of Duty*. *Convene the Council*, developed by the U.S. think tank Council on Foreign Relations and iCivics, an innovative platform for political education, is designed to give young players in particular a better understanding of key issues in U.S. foreign and security policy. Users take on the role of the U.S. president and must make foreign

policy decisions from the White House “Situation Room” together with the National Security Council – whether in the event of a disease outbreak with pandemic potential overseas or an attack against a U.S. ally. Although both game settings – *Call of Duty* as well as *Convene the Council* – address U.S. foreign policy, they generate completely different scenarios and perceptions of it.

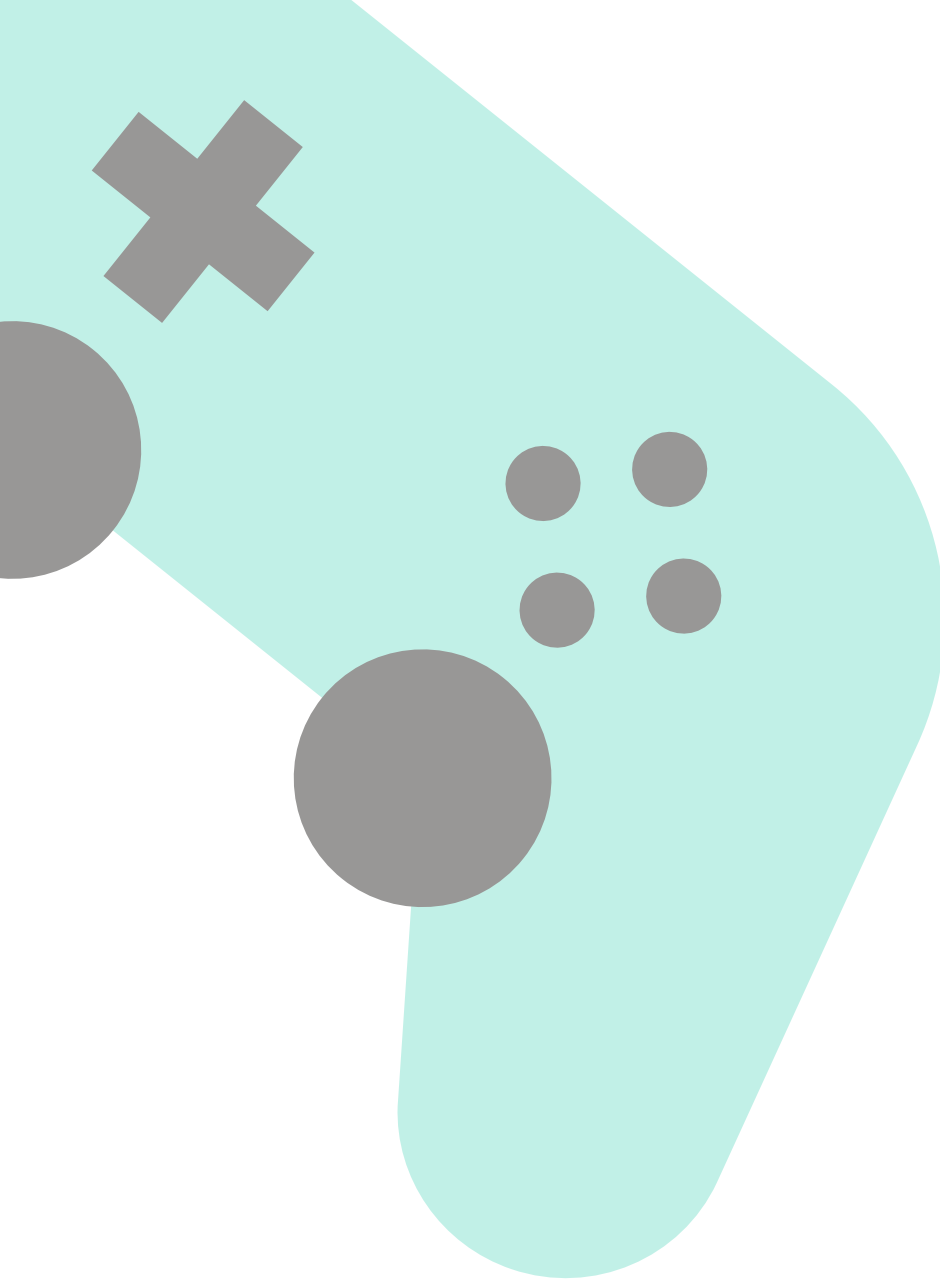
At the heart of *Convene the Council* is the concept of an interconnected world in which global challenges are solved primarily through diplomacy and international cooperation. In addition, iCivics director Louise Dubé says

the project aims to give users a playful way to understand how domestic and foreign policy processes are intertwined.

The application of “serious games” or technically based simulation exercises is not limited to a young target group of pupils and students. Specially tailored “serious games” can support foreign policy decision-makers in analysing possible (crisis) scenarios and drafting options for action in the event of an emergency, in the spirit of

¹³ Golebiewski, D. (7 November 2013), ‘There’s a Soldier in All of Us: *Call of Duty*’s Promotion of US Foreign Policy. <https://www.e-ir.info/2013/11/07/theresa-soldier-in-all-of-us-call-of-dutys-promotion-of-us-post-911-foreign-policy/>.

¹⁴ iCivics, *Convene the Council*. <https://www.icivics.org/games/convene-council>



a forward-looking foreign policy. For example, the Global Zero Initiative has developed a VR-enabled simulation that allows politicians and government officials to simulate decision-making in a nuclear crisis in real time.

Video games have foreign policy relevance – whether through implicit messages in the plots of commercial blockbusters like *Call of Duty* or the educational impact of “serious games” like *Convene the Council*. As gaming industry revenues continue to rise, video games are becoming an increasingly important soft power tool for governments. German foreign policy would also be well advised not to lose touch with the topic of “video games”.

09 Do the reward and sanction systems of a game mechanics reflect basic structures of foreign policy?

- Does a game include situations of justification or moderation, e.g. analogous to the UN Security Council, the European Court of Justice, or the UN Human Rights Council?
- How does a game evaluate actions when justification mechanisms are implemented or ignored?
- Is there material provided in or beyond a game for further study of foreign policy?

A contribution by Jan Wagner

Against a zero-sum logic of (digital) games



by French film director Albert Lamorisse as *La Conquête du Monde*.

In terms of game genres, foreign policy is the field of so-called global strategy or 4X games – and this genre designation alone refers to the basic theme of these games: The X's stand for Explore, Expand, Exploit and Exterminate. Classic 4X games such as *Sid Meier's Civilization* series or the *Master of Orion* series draw on older board game concepts as turn-based games, such as the popular *Risk*, first conceived and then further developed in the 1950s

By the way, this game was almost indexed in Germany in 1982 because of its militaristic wording, and only a court dispute led to the manufacturer changing the game description and instead of “conquering” and “destroying” it now talked about “liberating” and “disbanding” armies. Attack and defence became “diplomatic negotiations”. A similar development – although more solidly anchored in the mechanics – also took place in *Civilization* as a series, because the military or research or space victory was joined since *Civ3* (2001) by the culture victory and the diplomatic victory, as well as a supremacy with regard to the world population, later also the religious victory. The expanded victory options –

and neutral city-states to compete for the favour of introduced in the latest *Civilization* – make it clear that the understanding of foreign policy success or foreign policy victories has changed in the *Civilization* series.

Nevertheless, *Civilization* remains committed to the 4X principle, just like younger genre representatives such as *Humankind* (2021) or *Old World* (2022). A close linkage of economics, land grabbing and resource exploitation, and thus inevitable competition with other players, is the basis of the game's mechanics. It forces game players to always position themselves against each other – only the choice of weapons has changed. War remains the ultima ratio of conflict resolution in many of the games, even though the sheer state of war – which is both

costly and leads to discontent among the population – is often initially sanctioned negatively, especially for the faction that starts it. This makes other forms of confrontation and competition attractive – but here, too, the game always starts from a race, from which it draws its tension. Spreading one’s religion, building a dominant culture, gaining the most votes in the UN, first civilisation to spread into space: It is always a matter of keeping others down, pushing them back and slowing them down. Even with trade routes or barter – from which both partners benefit – the goal is always to gain an advantage, and diplomatic gifts only serve to advance the “favour” with the other. In the world of *Civilization*, the relationship with others is a zero-sum game – one’s advantage is another’s disadvantage and one’s actions always remain focused on dominance.

Thus, classic 4X games reward selfish action and sanction behaviour that does not aim to expand and push back the opponent – if you are late, the game punishes you. This assumption about intergovernmental relations and policy goals replicates the guidelines of the Cold War and the Truman Doctrine: In the competition of systems, all states were considered to be “for”

or “against” their own system, and the aim was to secure their own ideological, political and geographical dominance. In a globalised world, however, state and non-state actors are often confronted with solving supranational challenges that may involve balancing interests, cooperation, and compromise. From the EU to the UN to the climate conference – acting solely for one’s own benefit cannot be the goal of the “political game”.

A game that embeds these elements into reward and sanction systems of the game mechanics should therefore be oriented towards new goals. Many modern board games, such as *Pandemic* (2008) or *Spirit Island* (2017), task all players together to cooperate against the spread of a threat; other board games, such as *Castle of Loghan* (2022), offer both cooperative and cooperative-competitive game modes.

What are some ways for a game to reward cooperative behaviour or compromise? Must there always be a zero-sum game behind the winning logic? Can a game action benefit all participants and thus encourage cooperation, or are certain game goals only achievable together in the first

place? Games like *Minecraft* show that collaborative, non-profit projects can be powerful motivators in games and that “winning” is not the only measure of player behaviour. The conception of a game, which represents basic structures of foreign policy, can therefore also be about mutual safeguarding of one’s own or common interests. Game goals can be set that are only achievable in cooperation or serve to maintain an order that provides the basis of possible success, as found in building simulation games such as the *Animal Crossing* series. Such games don’t just have to be “nice”: a mechanic that depicts “win alone, lose together” can offer interesting options in which the individual interest (winning) and the interest of everyone (not losing) have to be weighed up.

Especially when these possibilities are combined with communication in online games, interesting aspects of a social and diplomatic nature can also be served here. In classic MMOs, players join together in larger tasks/raids to defeat coordinated opponents – global strategic or more political games can find numerous mechanisms and designs that regulate cooperation and communication, up to the distribution of the proceeds (loot) in the “need before greed” procedure, which regulates the possibilities of access to common loot.

A game does not have to belong to the global strategy/4X genre to depict basic structures of foreign policy. This is because the examples shown here and the thought patterns behind them, which define the incentives, mechanics and game objectives, can be found in a similar way in almost all game forms. Recognizing these assumptions and expanding the game’s reward and sanction design to include other paradigms offers the opportunity to better reflect the structure of modern foreign policy while trying out new, stimulating game mechanics.

10 Is a game itself subject to foreign policy discourses?

- Does a game offer spaces of experience and dialogue to discuss of foreign policy issues and mechanisms – in the game as well as between the players beyond the game?
- Can a discourse about value-based, interest-driven, and/or power-political interaction emerge from a gaming experience?
- Can the players themselves create their own content with foreign policy significance in a game or its ecosystem?

A contribution by Daniel Budiman

Any game can be the subject of foreign policy discourse



Have you ever tried to play a game of chess alone, against yourself, so to speak? I have tried this many times. Not because I wanted to get better at chess, I gave that up long ago... But because this little variation changes the actual game: Because now an incessant inner dialogue with oneself takes place and the game becomes a role-playing game: I myself jump into two different roles, one perhaps likes a more aggressive style of play, the other

chooses the moves more wisely. And all of a sudden, the actual competition component fades into the background (for the time being) and finding/testing undiscovered moves, weighing up possibilities almost like in a puzzle game becomes the actual game.

A game of chess with myself made me realise a few things:

A) I am really not good at chess and

B) an inner discourse with myself will never replace a real encounter with a co-playing person, but it allows me a theoretical approach of other ways of playing and could – at least theoretically – train and prepare me for an outer, interpersonal discourse. And this is precisely where a foreign policy

impact of digital games can connect. In the context of the “away game” and the core question of the extent to which (digital) games themselves can form the subject of foreign policy discourses, the consideration of the rules of the game and, in particular, the modification of these rules, whether intrinsically or extrinsically motivated, thus seems to be of particular importance. In particular, the “self-efficacy” of the players, i.e. the individual experience of digital worlds of experience, is in the foreground here: What does “the

game” do to me and other players? How do I play the game, can I modify the game, and does the game itself as an “object” provide me with a suitable platform, an experiential space, for foreign policy discourse?

So lastly, the game of chess with myself made it clear to me: **C)** Any game can be the subject of foreign policy discourse. An own understanding in dealing with game systems, rules and possible modifications of the same, as well as the ability to perceive differences of different ways of playing (any) game are the basis for being able to recognise real political systems, rules and different ways of seeing and functioning.

Does the game offer spaces of **experience and dialogue** for the discussion of **foreign policy issues and mechanisms** – in the game as well as **between the players** beyond the game?

Games like *Civilization*, *Crusader Kings* or even *Suzerain* offer immediate parallels to political topics in terms of content. However, important experiential and dialog spaces for discussing foreign policy issues and mechanisms for individual, intrinsic engagement can, of course, form around games without a substantive focus on political systems and issues.

In many single-player role-playing games, such as *The Witcher*, *Skyrim*, or *Cyberpunk 2077*, the focus is on the players’ own journey in the game world through a strong narrative and individual decisions within the game and narrative world. Serious decisions within one’s gameplay (Do I choose faction A or B) often has an immediate impact on the outcome of the game and individualises the gameplay expe-

rience immensely. A discourse on the different ways of playing the game with other players can and will also be used to exchange foreign policy issues.

If player A follows a more democratic path and tries not to influence different parties in a role-playing game too much by his own way of playing, player B may not be interested at all in what the respective parties are doing; he or she is only interested in his or her own well-being and progress. In modern role-playing games in particular, any moral debate about one’s own way of playing is motivated by appropriate consequences in the game, as well as by different game endings, and at best is deepened in discourse with other players.

Multiplayer games in particular, regardless of the type of game and their own game objectives (survival, creation, competition, etc.), focus primarily on interpersonal encounters and the corresponding real-time interaction with each other. A game of PUBG changes fundamentally whether you play alone (solo) or in a squad of four for survival and thus for victory. Without clear communication within a group, it is hardly possible to assert oneself among the other 96 players. If you play

alone, on the other hand, it depends solely on your own abilities whether you survive a round successfully.

Does “the game” therefore offer spaces of experience and dialogue for the discussion of foreign policy issues and mechanisms – in the game as well as between the players beyond the game? Yes, theoretically always. However, the effectiveness clearly depends on the game system, the rules of the game, the access and the interpersonal, content-related discussion.

Can a discourse about value-based, interest-driven, and/or power-political interaction emerge from a gaming experience?

The simulation game *Papers, Please* clearly triggered an inner discourse about morals, values and political systems in me at the time. Especially the conversations with other players, who also put themselves into the (involuntary) role of a border controller of the totalitarian state “Arstotzka”, often ended in mutual, appreciative and partly shocked gasps. And also the more modern *Suzerain* as a narrative role-playing game, in which we as players jump into the role of the President of the Republic of Sordlands, was able to bring me closer to

the political dimensions in an almost uncomfortable way, like no other game before. As a contrast to this, the game *Among Us*, which at first glance does not have much political content, has shown many millions of players in the past few years in the most entertaining way how important and difficult it is to correctly interpret interpersonal information and to track down possible hidden traitors in the fight for survival. Discourse is the central object of the rules of the game. Especially here, a large group of players experiences the handling of different interests (game goals) between the “survivors” and the “traitors”.

Any game can be the subject of foreign policy discourse. The question is how we ourselves respond to these games.

List of games from the contributions



Among Us

(Innersloth, 2018)

Animal Crossing

(Nintendo, 2001-)

Battlefield

(Digital Illusions & Electronic Arts, 2002-)

Call of Duty

(Sledgehammer Games & Activision, 2003-)

Castle von Loghan

(Underground Games, 2021)

Convene the Council

(iCivics)

Crusader Kings

(Paradox Development Studios & Paradox Interactive, 2004-)

Cyberpunk 2077

(CD Project RED & CD Project, 2020)

Humankind

(Amplitude Studios & Sega, 2021)

Herbst 89 – Auf den Straßen von Leipzig

(Playing History & Deutsches Historisches Museum, 2023)

Master of Orion

(Simtex u.a. & MicroProse u.a., 2016)

Minecraft

(Mojang Studios, 2011)

Nikhil Murthy's Syphilisation

(Why Not Games, 2021)

Old World

(Mohawk Games & Hooded Horse, 2022)

Pandemic

(Z-Man Games u.a., 2008)

Papers, Please

(Lucas Pope & 3909, 2013)

PUBG: Battlegrounds

(PUBG Studios & Krafton, 2017)

Sid Meier's Civilization

(MicroProse u.a. & 2K Games u.a., 1991–2016)

Skyrim

(Bethesda Game Studios & Bethesda Softworks, 2011)

Spirit Island

(Pegasus Spiele, 2017)

Stellaris

(Paradox Development Studios & Paradox Interactive, 2016)

StarCraft

(Blizzard Entertainment & Activision Blizzard, 1998-2016)

Suzerain

(Topor Games & Fellow Travellers, 2020)

The Witcher

(CD Project RED u.a. & Bandai Namco Entertainment u.a., 2007-15)

This War of Mine

(11bit Studios & Deep Silver, 2014)

Through the Darkest of Times

(Paintbucket Games & HandyGames, 2020)

Utopolis

(Reality Twist & Nemetschek Stiftung, 2015)

Victoria II

(Paradox Development Studio & Paradox Interactive, 2010)

**Foreign policy
game ideas –
results of the
Game & Mod
Jam „Auswärtig
gespielt“**

From the 09th to 11th of November 2023, 50 participants came together at the DE:HIVE at the Berlin University of Applied Sciences (HTW Berlin) for “Auswärtig gespielt – ein Game & Mod Jam zu Außenpolitik” (Away gamed – a game & mod jam on foreign policy). They set themselves the task to put the “Auswärtsspiel” catalog of guiding questions to an initial practical test. Using the catalogue as a tool of reflection the participants divided themselves into 12 teams, each of which developed a game prototype that deals with one of the following four foreign policy topics:

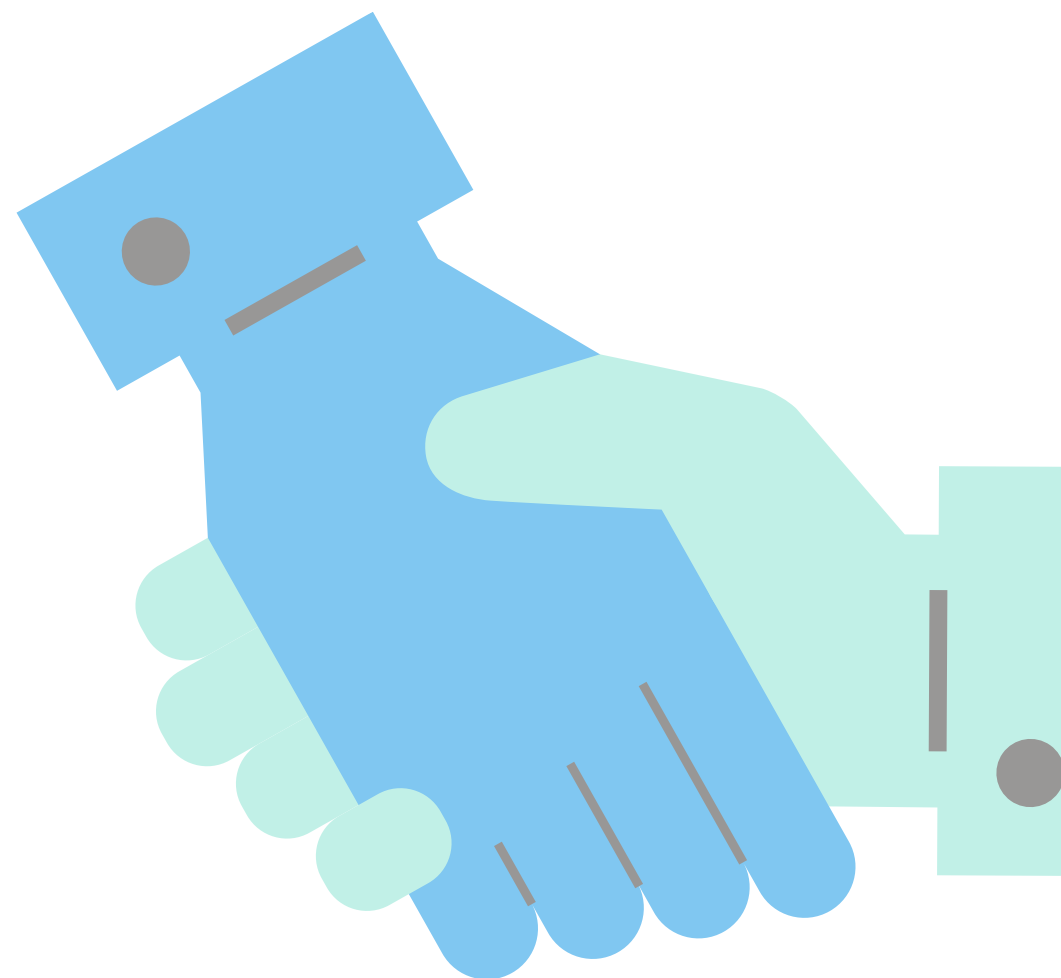
- Diplomatic negotiations
- foreign policy on climate change
- feminist foreign policy
- Dealing with colonialist pasts

Two keynote impulses, held by Laura Kotzur, research associate at the INTERACT Research Center for Interdisciplinary Peace and Conflict Research at Freie Universität Berlin, and Ilyass Alaoui, freelance editor, moderator and content creator in German games culture, provided a thematic introduction and inspiration. Twelve promising game concepts emerged from the jam, realized in ana-

logue and digital prototypes. They illustrate how fruitful the exchange at the interface of games and foreign policy can be. Additionally, the event showed how ideas and even already playable formats with mediation potential for foreign policy topics and structures can be created in a very short time.

The jury, which consisted again of experts from the “Auswärtsspiel” panel, awarded the three projects - *Mother Earth*, a board game about the dilemmas between climate foreign policy and economic interests, *Bee Cooperative*, a board game about cooperation and environmental destruction, and *Divide & Rule*, a digital strategy game about colonial policy - with 5,000 euros each. All twelve of the resulting projects are presented in the following as best-practice-examples, introducing the central conceptual ideas and basic game mechanics, following the alphabetical order of their titles. The following summaries were created on the basis of each team’s development documentation in consultation with them by Dr. Tabea Widmann.

The jury of „Auswärtig gespielt“



Michaela Bartelt

Electronic Arts

Thomas Bremer

University of Applied Sciences Berlin
(HTW)

Lena Falkenhagen

Freelance Author

Clemens Hochreiter

Fresenius Hochschule

Stefanie Kastner

Goethe Institut

Mirko Kruppa

German Federal Foreign Office

Ata Sergey Nowak

Torpor Games

Thomas Risse

Freie Universität Berlin

Benjamin Rostalski

Foundation for Digital Games Culture

Dr. Felix Zimmermann

Federal Agency for Civic Education
(bpb)



Bee Cooperative

Team

„Bee Collective“

Nadine Jachmann

University of Potsdam

Radim Jelinek

Cologne Game Lab

Elizaveta Kolpacheva

Cologne Game Lab

Ruben Schäfer

University of Bayreuth

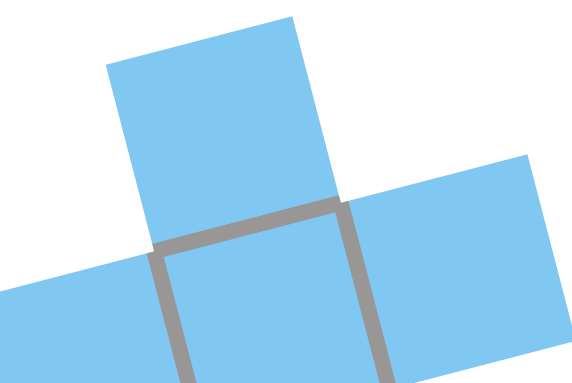
Game format

board game; print templates for the game elements accessible via <https://betelreg.itch.io/bee-cooperative>

Target audience

13+, interest in moderately difficult games with a social component

Bee Cooperative is a dynamic board game in which players control a bee colony facing the impending threats of climate change. Representing different bee factions, individual players must work together to make strategic decisions and vote on actions to secure vital resources for the bee swarm. Consensus must be reached quickly as the swarm continues to move inexorably across the board. Caught in the tension between personal interests and collective survival in the face of a permanent threat of extinction, the players must skillfully manage their resources and deal with the complexities of alliances and possible betrayal in the bee colony.



The game is played in three phases and several rounds. In each round, a direction card is drawn, a common direction for collecting resources is voted on and the swarm of bees is moved accordingly on the playing field. Players can use a veto coin and try to persuade their fellow players to change their preferred direction if a pending decision threatens the existence of their own faction. However, if the timer runs out without a decision being made, the next direction card is flipped over and executed. To win, players must work together to use the resources they have collected; this is the only way to avoid a tipping point,

following which the entire swarm of bees is destroyed by a man-made environmental catastrophe. Otherwise, everyone loses the game.

Bee Cooperative understands itself as an immersive approach to educating its players about the immediate dangers of climate change and the urgent need to act quickly but thoughtfully. It confronts the players with an experience of escalating danger and threat to their own living conditions. At the same time, it promotes a deeper understanding of the ecological challenges that the “human bees” have to face. The game thus serves as a medium for communicating foreign policy on climate change by drawing attention to the growing need for sustainable co-existence and a collective fight against climate change.



Culture Carom

Team

„Commitment Issue“

Ashhad Aziz

Cologne Game Lab

Sophie Fischer

University of Applied Sciences Trier

Friedrich Hanisch

Rat King Entertainment

Sara Kindschus

Cologne Game Lab

Thomas Thudt

GameDev Regensburg

Game format

digital game (PC); playable prototype
accessible via <https://ratrogue.itch.io/culture-carom>

Target audience

Indie-affine players

Culture Carom is a cozy-casual flow game with strategic and educational elements that deals with the beauty and mutual enrichment of cultural exchange. Set on a map with different cultures, players take control of their own culture and can follow its evolution in exchange with other cultures over the course of the game. At the beginning of the game, players can either move their own culture to free areas on the map or settle with an already established culture. Changes to their own life parameters are caused by migration or cultural convergence, which can result in the addition or exchange of cultural characteristics for their own original culture. If already connected cultures migrate to a free spot on the map, the players can ex-

pand both cultures at this location and thus create a hybrid culture that either has a balanced mixture of the cultural characteristics of the two original cultures or develops new characteristics. Even secret, previously forgotten characteristics can be revived.

The game setting of *Culture Carom* is free of aggressive gameplay. Rather, the simplified but fruitful intercultural processes of exchange and connection are intended to draw attention to the topic of cultural exchange and emphasize that this enriches coexistence and forms a process in which everyone can actively participate. Accordingly, *Culture Carom* does not pursue a final goal. When players finish the game, they are rewarded with an overview of their own unique culture and its “family tree”. From this, they can understand which different cultures have contributed to their own and how these have shaped them over the course of the game.

The simplified mechanism of exchange and contact in *Culture Carom* is intended to show the extent to



which cultural encounters are always beneficial on the one hand. On the other hand, the game conveys that while cultures and their traditions may change or seem to fade, they are never completely lost. Rather, they can reappear in a different place – changed or even in their original form.

In this way, the gameplay of *Culture Carom* illustrates how cultural exchange does not mean a loss of culture, but that cultures can influence each other in a mutually enriching and harmonious way.

Divide & Rule

Team

„TBD“

Housein Asadi

Cologne Game Lab

Farid Behrouzi

Cologne Game Lab

Bertram Hein

Freelance 3D-Artist

Pragya Mukherjee

Cologne Game Lab

Game format

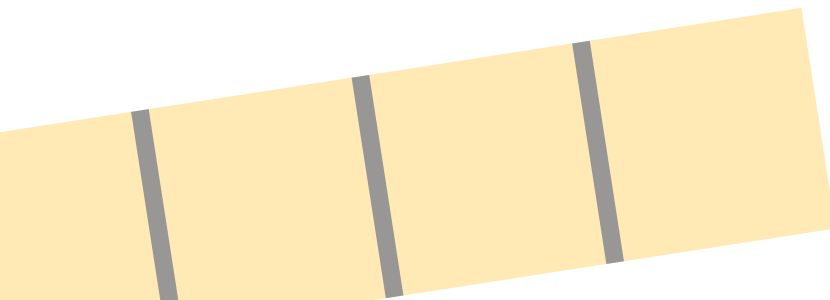
digital game (PC); playable prototype
accessible via <https://housein.itch.io/dividerule>

Target audience

Players interested in political activism,
students and teachers of geopolitical
history

Divide & Rule is a turn-based strategy game inspired by the colonial policies of European powers in Africa, Asia and the Middle East. It simulates the political strategy of “divide and rule”, which has resulted in many of today’s border disputes and conflict zones. In *Divide & Rule*, players take on the role of a colonial power pursuing its economic interests by building and maintaining a network of mines and roads in an occupied territory. Their goal is to keep the local populations divided so that they remain incapable of opposition.

In *Divide & Rule*, the players are presented with a top-down view on a map of the conquered region, where



the hexagonally shaped districts with their different characteristics can be filtered according to their ideology and culture. In each round, the player can draw freely on this map to create new political states. Each round represents 50 years of progress and costs the players a fixed amount of gold. In order to increase their wealth, they must use their road network to secure intact connections between their mines and ports, canals and harbours. However, states with similar cultures or ideologies quickly develop into consolidation zones in each round, strengthening local resistance and cutting off players' access to the resources they need.

To maintain control, players must observe the population-traits and carefully draw their borders to split up culturally uniform spaces as much as possible and keep them in different territories. It is important to separate cultures with common characteristics, i.e. to divide them into smaller states and sow discord. Alternatively, players



can pay money to change the identity of a region through military intervention, propaganda or bribery to ensure the preservation of its supply routes. Reaching a certain wealth threshold leads to victory regardless of the caused damage, while players lose once all their wealth is used up.

Divide & Rule thus forces players to engage with the lasting geopolitical *impact* of colonial interference. It makes players aware of the long-term consequences of interest-driven interventions of foreign powers that spurred some current local conflicts. It also demonstrates the extent to

which geopolitical control in other regions and the resulting wealth have shaped foreign policy actions over a long time and served as a justification to colonize other countries, overthrow governments, manipulate elections and ultimately suppress local populations through propaganda.

Impact

Team

„Fantastische Vier“

Maureka Calvin

Cologne Game Lab

Leili Moradikouchi

Cologne Game Lab

Erce Subasi

Cologne Game Lab

Yamanefe Ugurlu

Cologne Game Lab

Game format

digital game (PC); playable prototype
accessible via <https://yamanefe.itch.io/impact>

Target audience

13+ players with political interests

The fictional world of *Impact* confronts the players with problems that shape real-world foreign policy decisions and discourses. During the game, the players move across a globe with different continents and countries. There, they have to resolve conflicts and build (diplomatic) bridges between different countries in order to create a peaceful world. However, all decisions sometimes have far-reaching consequences and, in the worst case, can cause global chaos.

Round-based, with each round representing a day's progress, players have to face three global problems each round and distribute "impact points". Thereby, they strive to keep the health status of every country in the green zone of a scale so as not to endanger the country itself and its neighbours. The aim of the game is to leave the game world after a week in a better condition than it was found. The gameplay consists of constantly finding compromises and sometimes face decision-making dilemmas.

In its setting, *Impact* deals with real-world foreign policy fields of action and conflicts. At the same time, its options for decision-making also include approaches that have proven



to be effective solutions in real-world situations. The game offers its players the opportunity to deal with processes of diplomatic decision-making in the context of foreign policy issues and to gain a deeper understanding of today's foreign policy issues from the experience of responsibility for action. The game is aimed at people who don't deal much with foreign policy in their everyday lives and seeks to educate individuals on critical matters that might be unknown to those unfamiliar with foreign policy and political discussions, such as the veto right in the United Nations. This way, the game as a medium tries to raise awareness and education about foreign political diplomacy.

Liar, Liar, Forest Fire!

Team

„Cursed Creations“

Nic Schilling

Cursed Creations & University of
Bayreuth

Daniel Schulz

Cursed Creations & University of
Bayreuth

Tina Wolfrum

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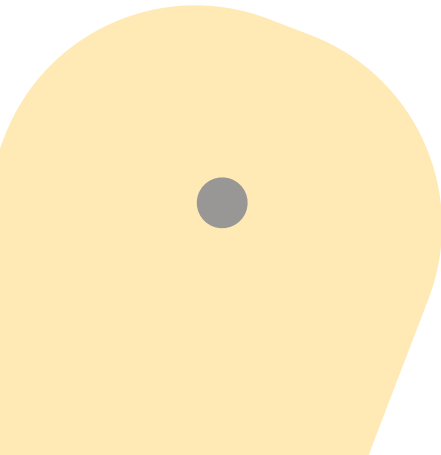
Game format

digital game (PC); playable prototype
available via [https://faulo.itch.io/
liar-liar-forest-fire](https://faulo.itch.io/liar-liar-forest-fire)

Target audience

teenagers & young adults with political
interests

Liar, Liar, Forest Fire! is a satirical game about misinformation and political decision-making pressure in the context of climate change. As a member of a semi-fictional International Climate Council, the players have the decisive vote to decide on foreign climate policy measures. They receive suggestions for action from apparent experts and reporters. It is important to decide which source you want to believe - because a wrong decision can quickly lead to the destruction of the planet. This is illustrated schematically by the gradual destruction of an initially idyllic landscape, whereby the type of destruction is based on the environmental catastrophe to be averted (e.g. floods or forest fires).



While the other members of the council, seemingly disinterested, always vote unanimously, the burden of responsibility for action lies solely with the players. But the advising reporters also pursue their own interests, which can be figured out through subtle visual clues. Depending on these interests, their recommended course of action may represent the truth or be a lie that contributes to a disadvantageous player decision and thus to the increasing destruction of the environment.



Liar, Liar, Forest Fire! understands itself as a satirical commentary on the inertia of foreign climate policy decision-making as well as on the structures of expertise and discourse that lead to decisions. The optimal course of the game is correspondingly unattractive: While players lose the game as soon as the entire landscape depicted has been destroyed, they win if they reach a certain level of progress over time - but this leads to the sobering punchline that only a large part of the planet has been irreversibly destroyed.

At the same time, *Liar, Liar, Forest Fire!* offers a space for experience to deal with disinformation and the promotion of critical reflection in times of digital and social media. Not least because the players have to make a decision in each round, the game also addresses the political responsibility of all people to act.

mitMACHTmuseum

Team

„Cargo“

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University of Bayreuth

Felix Kalchschmid

Serious Games Lab Trier

Lena Müller

University of Potsdam

Gereon Plättner

University for Applied Sciences Europe

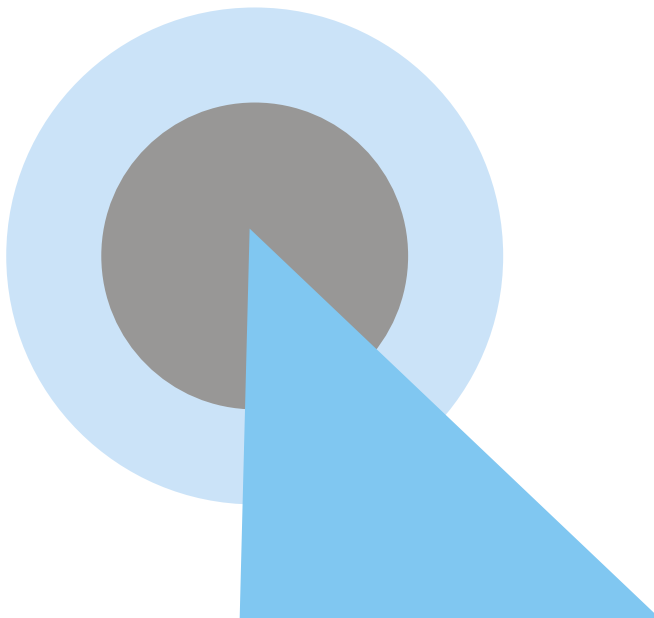
Spielformat

Mixed Media-Installation (VR & real space); more material accessible via <https://fluppi.itch.io/mitmachtmuseum>

Zielgruppe

Museum educators & visitors

As a VR escape game for two people, *mitMACHTmuseum* makes it possible to experience the mechanics of oppression and cooperation between two opposing parties in a playful way. The information that this is a self-experiment in political education is initially withheld from both players. While one person with VR glasses solves a puzzle, but has to do without some of their own senses, the other person is encouraged to manipulate the surrounding space and thus prevent the solution process. If the person with VR glasses still manages to regain more and more of their senses by progressively exploring the room and frees themselves from the manipulation of



the second person, they must then work together to escape a great-er threat. Only by overcoming their conflict and collaborating under time pressure can they successfully complete *mitMACHTmuseum* and escape the escape game.

The game is divided into three phases: In the first phase, person A has to solve the set puzzles (e.g. find the source of a sound), while person B has the opportunity to move this source several times. This phase focuses on the experience of helplessness in the face of dominance and power imbalances. In a second phase, person B can once again hinder person A in solving a puzzle. Here they are even allowed to deprive person A of possible senses that have already been regained. The power imbalance between the two people is further exacerbated.

However, if player A can still successfully complete both phases, the game ends in the third phase: Here, person A takes off their glasses and recognizes the other player as an antagonistic manipulator. At the same time, the players are given the puzzle task of transporting “toxic waste” from one container

to another using a rope. Only if they manage to do this within 2 minutes do they win the game, otherwise they lose together.

As an installation in a museum’s educational context, *mitMACHTmuseum* can make abstract concepts such as oppression, abuse of power, but also (enforced) cooperation directly tangible and perceptible and demonstrate a connection to their *impact* in foreign policy decision-making processes. The game offers necessary space for reflection, especially for an understanding of feminist foreign

policy and the breaking up of colonial structures. Without limiting itself to a specific political scenario, the game allows participants to try out different roles and to experience a vivid change of perspective in the interweaving of analog and virtual space.



Mutter Erde

Team

„Mother Earth”

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Tim Junge

University of Applied Sciences Berlin (HTW)

Marc Kupecek

University of Applied Sciences Trier

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Weißensee School of Art and Design Berlin

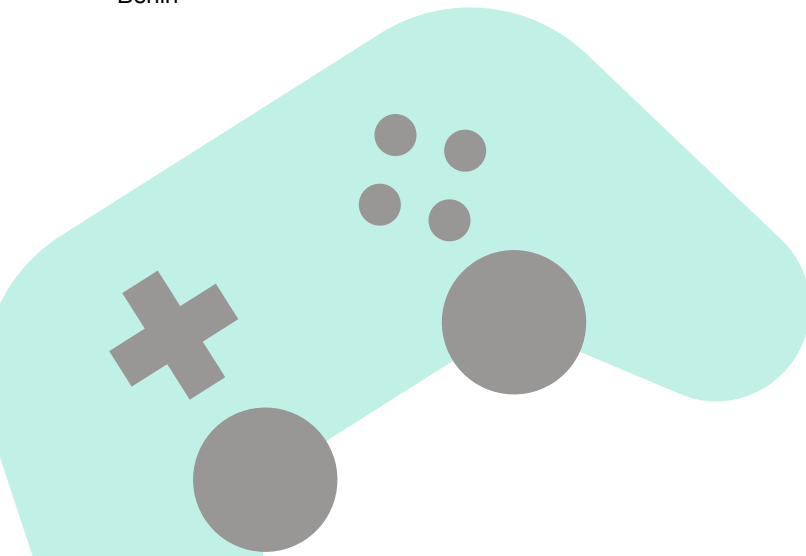
Game format

board game for 4 players

Target audience

young adults with political interests

Mutter Erde is a turn-based strategic board game that conveys climate foreign policy decision-making processes in the tense relationship between ecology and economic growth. 4 players take control of individual states in different climate zones – represented by small quadrants with different resource and landscape allocations. Here, the players drive forward the expansion of their respective territories. They can choose between tactical actions such as tilling and harvesting fields, increasing their own population or felling forests. At the same time, the player's actions have an *impact* on the climate of the game world; in *Mutter Erde*, this is caused in particular by deforestation and the cultivation of monocultures. This leads to crop failures and climate-induced forced migration.



In order to counter these catastrophic consequences, climate conferences are held regularly, whereby the players are given various options for action to avert the climate catastrophe through environmental prizes or renaturalisation projects. They have to discuss and vote on these together – if they fail to do so, the disasters will still occur without them being able to counter them through a game action. As the players are affected to varying degrees by the consequences of their collective actions depending on the climate zone of their own territories, conflicts of interest increasingly arise and make it difficult to develop joint solution strategies. Additionally, the conferences only take place every two rounds. Consequently, even successful diplomatic solutions are increasingly delayed in comparison to the urgency of the need for action. If the players want to win, they must also pay attention to their advantage and the accumulation of wealth; however, their most sustainable possibilities to act occur during the conferences. Here, the players must discuss with each other without any game specifications and find the best possible solution to go forward. In this way, conflicts of action and decision-making dilemmas repeatedly arise



MOTHER EARTH

during the course of *Mutter Erde*. The game ends after five climate conferences or ten rounds.

Mutter Erde thus holds the potential to highlight the inertia of political decision-making processes and at the same time convey to the players that real power to act is only possible through dialogue, negotiation and cooperation.

Niemand hat die Absicht eine Mauer zu bauen

Team

„MauahbreakaZ“

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IU International University of Applied Sciences

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Humboldt University Berlin

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University of Applied Sciences Munich

Katharina Ziolkowski

Edurino

Game format

digital game (PC); playable prototype accessible via <https://kahzn.itch.io/niemand-hat-die-absicht-eine-mauer-zu-bauen>

Target audience

15+ with an affinity for politics and/or history

In *Niemand hat die Absicht eine Mauer zu bauen* (Nobody has the intention of building a wall), the players take on the role of an employee of the Federal Ministry for All-German Affairs (BMG) at the time of the Second Berlin Crisis up to the construction of the Wall (1958–61). The aim is to de-escalate the threatening situation between the two German states in a series of unofficial talks with a representative of the GDR and, in the best (but unlikely) case, to dissuade the SED government from building the Wall.

Designed as an interactive visual novel, the players help shape the course of the game's plot, in particular by selecting questions and answers; their decisions directly influence the course of the narrative. Complex characters as well as dialogues, which illustrate misinformation, the pressure of different interests and conflicts between public opinion and personal convictions, characterise the game's approach to the historical topic. *Niemand hat die Absicht eine Mauer zu bauen* opens up a space for the players to experience the uncertainty and the consternation during the German-German division, while also conveying the various facets of authentic situations of diplomatic exchange.



The necessary preparations for diplomatic negotiation processes are taken into account as well as effective public follow-up. The elements of possibly erroneous, culturally and personally relevant information, the use of different negotiation strategies and their balance play a central role. Additionally, the power of public opinion-forming and the publicity-generating communication of negotiation results make up the decisive factors in the course of the action.

Depending on the decisions made within the game, the story ends in the escalation of the negotiation talks between the FRG and the GDR, the player's own expulsion from the BMG and the building of the Wall or – in the counterfactual ideal case – in its prevention. In order to do justice to the complexity of the historical topic and also to create an authentic setting, the characters in *Niemand hat die Absicht eine Mauer zu bauen* are inspired by real historical biographies.

Special Cargo

Team

„Special Cargo“

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Alexander Roos

Julius-Maximilians-Universität of Würzburg

Irtaza Wadood

Cologne Game Lab

Game format

digital game (PC); playable prototype accessible via <https://ditziedoodle.itch.io/special-cargo>

Target audience

16+

Special Cargo confronts players with a dark twist: the initially seemingly harmless setting, in which the players transport crates from one area of land to another by guiding their own boat, turns out to be a simulation in the context of refugee migration as the game progresses: your own role is revealed as the position of a “smuggler”, while the supposed “crates” gradually turn into people who need to be ferried across. In this task, the players face numerous natural, coordinative and political obstacles, while an approaching war on the one hand and their own



monetary dependence on a superior on the other exert increasing pressure on the players and their pace of play.

A maximum of six “crates” can be loaded at once and set down on the other bank. However, if a period of time is exceeded during which the crates have been stored on one bank, they can no longer be loaded. With each crossing, border controls become more stringent, while an approaching storm complicates the coordinative mouse & drag or touch & drag control of the ship and causes delays. In addition, the player’s own economic interests come into play: they receive 10 euros for each successful crossing; however, if they collide with an obstacle, they lose their entire fortune.

Special Cargo deals with the catastrophic humanitarian conditions faced by refugees in the Mediterranean region. Based on the real-life biography of a Syrian refugee, the game addresses the politicisation of refugee migration as well as border structures that despise human rights and inhumane economic profit systems that feed on the lives lost. *Special Cargo* therefore not only places the breakdown of a real tragedy at the centre of the game. But furthermore, players can use their own role as a smuggler to reflect on their own privileges and responsibilities in order to take a critical look at where they themselves (in)directly benefit from such real-world conditions.

Spilled Milk

Team

„Laktose“

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(HTW)

Thanh Dang Duc

University of Applied Sciences Berlin
(HTW)

Anatol Glebov

SAE Institute

Ben Magnus Häusler

SRH School of Popular Arts

Marius Tressat

SRH School of Popular Arts

Fabian Wislsperger

Paintbucket Games & University of
Applied Sciences Berlin (HTW)

Game format

digital game (PC, Controller & Mobile);
playable prototype accessible via
<https://tdariusb.itch.io/spilled-milk-an-auswrts-gespielt-game-jam-project>

Target audience

15+, casual gamers with an affinity for
politics

The interactive chamber play *Spilled Milk* deals with the topics of climate change and inadequate international climate foreign policy in its ostensibly non-political setting. From the perspective of a child, the players experience how a carton of milk falls over on the breakfast table and constantly leaks, so that the play space increasingly fills up with milk. However, the two parental figures do not react appropriately at all, but become entangled in increasingly absurd dialogues and mutual accusations, while ridiculing the child's concerns and failing to react to the threat of the rising milk level.

The players have the option to attract the attention of the parent figures by throwing objects or splashing milk. Through dialogue options, they can then try to develop fruitful solutions to the situation. Ultimately, however, all attempts at communication fail and the game always results in the entire play area inexorably filling up with milk.

In a cynical tone, *Spilled Milk* places helplessness in the face of paternalistic political rhetoric, paralysing intergovernmental conflicts of interest and a lack of collaboration in the face of worsening climate change at the centre of the player's experience.

The rising milk level adds a vivid sense of urgency and fear of survival, while contact with the ultimately useless parental figures creates frustration and helplessness. The pessimistic ending of *Spilled Milk* is intended to inspire



reflection beyond the game setting and ex negativo motivate people to look for new paths of action that have not yet been explored in terms of foreign policy.

The Blessings They Brought Us

Team

„Procedural
Historians“

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Katia Sophia Ditzler

Freelance Media Artist

Eric Jannot

Fresenius Hochschule Berlin

Shuyang Song

Freie Universität Berlin

Game format

digitales Spiel (PC)

Target audience

14+, Indie-Gamer*innen mit Affinität zu
Strategiespielen

In the strategy game The Blessings They Brought Us, players take control of the Nayara, an indigenous population, and their contact with a colonial power. While the exchange may initially be peaceful and seemingly favourable, the colonial power develops into an increasingly demanding and ultimately abusive antagonist. No matter which strategy the players use, the game always results in the conquest, sometimes even complete annihilation, of their own game culture by the colonialists. The Blessings They Brought Us thus places the structural power imbalance of colonial pasts at the centre of its game setting.



The course of the game is organised in different phases: In the first phase, the focus lies on shaping your own culture with specific characteristics and resources. In the second and longest phase, players can make various tactical decisions when dealing with the colonial power, e.g. to assimilate with them or to enter into active, ultimately military, confrontation. If they achieve a high cultural value, for example, this can lead to temporary strategic advantages in the organisation of their own village. Ultimately, however, all game rounds result in victory for the colonial power. The end of the game changes depending on the decision in favour of assimilation or aggression; however, the colonial power always emerges victorious, while the player's own cultural attributes continue to exist only as cultural appropriations in a dystopian forecast into the future.

In order to convey the theme of colonisation and the plundering of resources on a meta-level, *The Blessings They Brought Us* also draws on AI-generated aesthetics - which are ultimately produced by rigorous algorithms that cannot be stopped in the space of the internet or from whose access intellectual property is always unprotected. The fact that these generators produce problematic, stereotypical images of the indigenous culture of the Nayara also shows how complex and enduring colonial power relations have also become anchored in the digital sphere.

On the one hand, *The Blessings They Brought Us* aims to raise awareness in game culture of where genre conventions, such as strategy games, thoughtlessly utilise colonialist tropes and frame them positively as fantasies of exploration and conquest for their

players, thereby perpetuating them. Thereby, it positions itself quite explicitly in contrast to the successful series *Sid Meier's Civilization* and the staging of "barbarians" in it. On the other hand, *The Blessings They Brought Us* refers to the ongoing cultural appropriation of indigenous populations and thus a trivialisation of the inhumane and brutal colonial system. The game sees itself as a motivator for acquiring critical knowledge about the exploitation, responsibilities and crimes of former colonial powers and at the same time paving the way for discourses on reparations and reconciliation.

Zombie Attack!

Team

„Zombie Attack!“

Leonie Klose

SRH School of Popular Arts

Lukas Krähn

CybernautX

Julian Röth

Freelance Game Designer

Jan Schulz

Jaschu Motion

Game format

card game

Target audience

gamers with an affinity for card games

In the post-apocalyptic setting of the card game *Zombie Attack!* for 2 – 4 players, each player takes on the administration of a colony of survivors that must defend itself against the attacking waves of zombies in each round. While ensuring the survival of their own population is at the centre of the players' actions, the primary collective goal of the game is to work together to advance research into a vaccine. During the game, players must constantly weigh up whether they want to cooperate with each other and work towards the common goal or prioritise their own interests. The constantly shifting balance of power leads to different and changing alliances, diplomatic negotiations and moral dilemmas.

Each round, an event card determines the specific challenges of the next turn. Players can then take turns to draw cards, send the survivors of their colony, pick up other survivors or play action cards. Each round ends with an attack by the zombies, with a zombie card and several dices deciding the intensity and target of the wave. If players lose all their survivors, they must now fight on the side of the undead. In *Zombie Attack!* the game ends when either a cure has been found, all players have been forced to switch to the zombie collective or all event cards have been played. The player who is on the tactically right side – because depending on the course of the game, this can also mean the side of the zombies – and has collected the most

victory points during the course of the game, wins.


With its post-apocalyptic setting, *Zombie Attack!* offers players the opportunity to experience the tensions between the interests of individual states and the collective goals of a community of states. Although the discovery of the vaccine is the common goal of the game, the players are always in competition with each other. If you decide in favour of a cooperative strategy, you have to coordinate your own intentions and joint tactical approach with your fellow players. The aim here is to balance out each other's strengths and weaknesses and keep an eye on a collective power balance. Those who decide to go it alone, on

the other hand, must assert themselves against the resistance of others. It is precisely the social component and the spaces for dialogue that *Zombie Attack!* opens up that can act as a fruitful experience for foreign policy diplomacy and cooperation.



**At a (foreign
political)**

**glance – games
profiles for the
application of
the guiding
questions**



The following seven games profiles each present a digital game and its points of contact with foreign policy topics and issues. The selected games convey a wide variety of scenarios, utilise various game mechanisms and rules and come from different genres. As an exemplary selection, these game profiles illustrate where points of contact can be found in a game for a foreign policy perspective and thus the “Auswärtsspiel” catalogue of guiding questions. The questions in turn can open up fresh perspectives on the game scenarios. Some of the guiding questions were explicitly assigned to each profile. The profiles are intended to serve as an orientation on how the “Auswärtsspiel” catalogue of guiding questions can be applied to a selected digital game. They were conceptualized and written by Luise Rehme and Dr. Tabea Widmann.

Call of Duty Modern Warfare 2

Developer: Infinity Ward

Publisher: Activision

Year: 2022

Country: USA

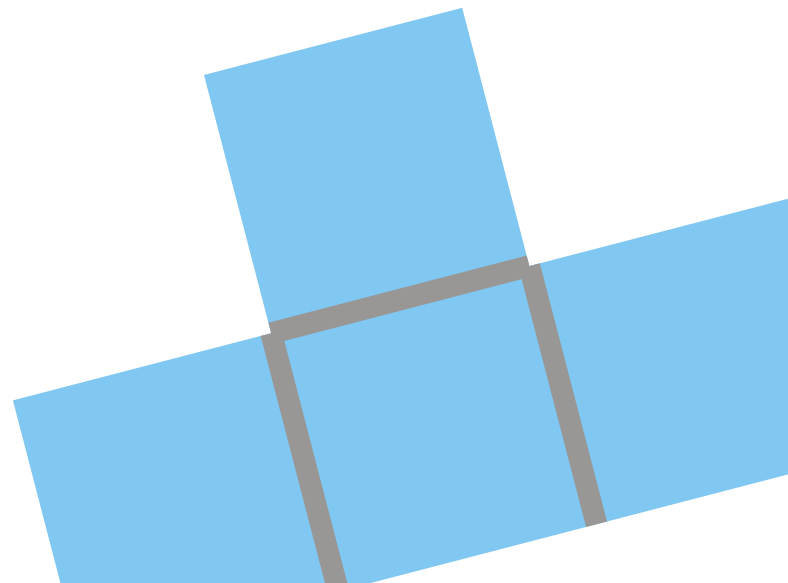
Language: German, English,
French, a.o.

Available for: Xbox · PS4 · PS5
· PC (Windows)

Genre: Ego-Shooter

Rating: USK 18

Foreign policy focus:
international conflicts, terrorism,
international co-operation



Synopsis:

In *Call of Duty: Modern Warfare 2*, the players are members of an elite unit of the US Marines tasked with preventing a terrorist organization from attacking the USA with stolen nuclear weapons. In addition to various other international military units, they cooperate with the private security company “Shadow Company”, which later also turns into an enemy. The aim is therefore not only to bring the globally relevant military operation to a successful conclusion, but also to understand which party is pursuing which interests.

Connection to foreign policy:

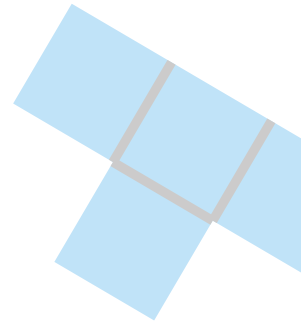
The missions in the playable campaign of *Call of Duty: Modern Warfare 2* take players to locations around the globe as different characters, but always as male gendered soldiers. The game consistently suggests that the player's decisions and their success have an *impact* on world events. The emerging conflicts between the superiors and the mission teams on the ground thematize the complex interrelationships between decision-making power on the one hand and executive power on the other. Particularly since *Call of Duty: Modern Warfare 2* uses problematic stereotypes, especially in the staging of the main antagonist, and creates fixed friend/enemy schemata in the tradition of the game genre, it can – if contextualized correctly – open up possible spaces for reflection on them. The plot also shows how interwoven foreign policy and economic interests can become and how complex even initially one-dimensional good/bad binaries can develop as a result.

Assigned guiding questions:

Guiding Question 2: What are the interrelations between foreign policy references, formats, and actors in the game?

Guiding Question 3: What foreign policy themes and narratives are represented in the game?

Guiding Question 6: Can the players shape the story, game world and game mechanics in a self-effective way?



Chants of Sennaar

Developer: Rundisc

Publisher: Focus Entertainment

Year: 2023

Country: France

Language: German, English,
French, a.o.

Available on: Xbox One · PS4 ·
PC · Switch

Genre: Adventure

Rating: USK 6

Foreign policy focus: cultural
exchange, language barriers,
diplomatic negotiations for
humanitarian aid

Synopsis:

Chants of Sennaar is one of the few (entertainment) games that manage to show exploration and puzzles through one of humanities most important communication avenues: our language..

Players attempt to climb the proverbial Tower of Babel and will, throughout the game, meet different groups with their own distinct culture and language. The player's aim is to reach the peak of the tower, learn the languages of all groups encountered and help them reconnect.

Connection to foreign policy:

International politics of any kind are impossible, if the involved parties cannot communicate. Players in *Chants of Sennaar* learn this very directly – they start the game without any knowledge of the languages spoken and need to first learn how to communicate. This gives the first words taught to players even more weight: An “open” or “closed” “door”, “Me”, “You” and “helping”.

What could be perceived as mainly a decision based on the mechanical puzzle aspects, reads more like a 101 on diplomacy: language opens the door between us, and allows us to help each other.

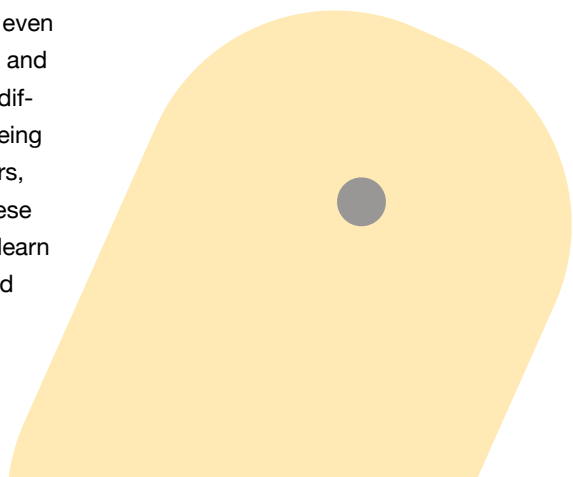
Aside from the language barriers, *Chants of Sennaar* also examines cultural differences. Players are confronted with opposing and sometimes even antagonistic attitudes and beliefs, and experience directly how seeming different and wordless can lead to being ostracized. In the role of translators, players actively work to bridge these chasms between the groups and learn how important communication and diplomacy really is.

Assigned guiding questions:

Guiding question 1: What potential links does the game offer for foreign policy content and structures?

Guiding question 6: Can the players shape the story, game world and game mechanics in a self-effective way?

Guiding question 8: What foreign policy scenarios does the game setting convey?



Crusader Kings III

Developer: Paradox
Development Studio

Publisher: Paradox Interactive

Year: 2020

Country: Sweden

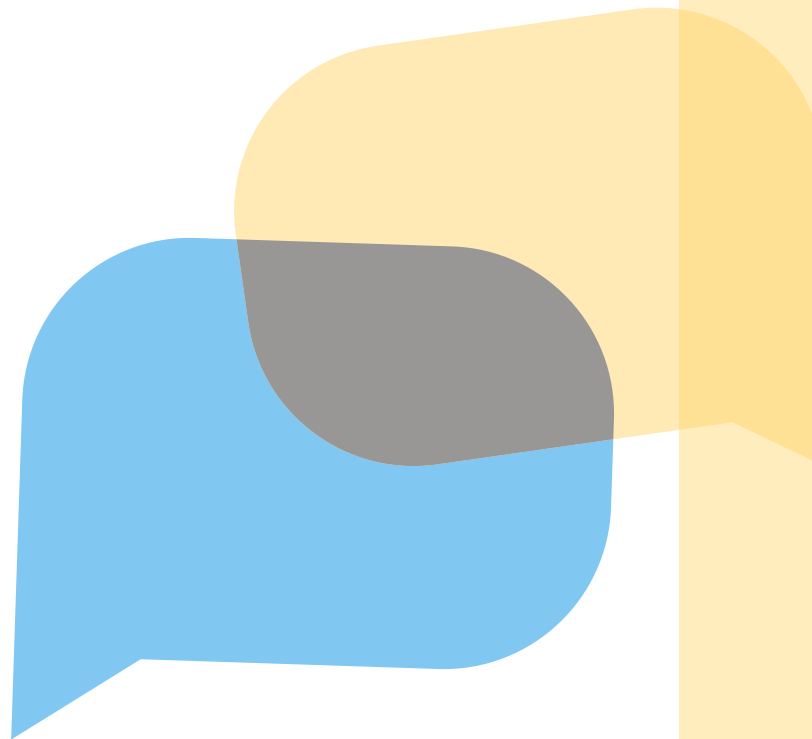
Language: German, English,
French, a.o. .

Available on: Xbox · PS5 · PC

Genre: Strategy, Simulation

Rating: USK 12

Foreign policy focus:
diplomacy, history



Synopsis:

Crusader Kings III is the latest addition in the identically named series of complex and realistic global strategy games. In contrast to similar games, players in *Crusader Kings III* do not just take up the crown of immortal rulers guiding their realms from up high. Instead, they carry the responsibility for a whole dynasty and its rise or fall.

Players are not only tasked with developing the qualities of their own current character, but also preparing for the future: Descendants need to be born, receive adequate training and finally be married off. This is especially important, as players will take control of said descendant after their current character dies.

Connection to foreign policy:

Taking place in the Middle Ages, *CKIII* allows players to meet and play known and unknown figures of history, recreating their journeys – or deviating from them completely.

Meanwhile, the game doesn't concentrate solely on military actions. Instead, players are encouraged to approach situations through diplomacy, intrigue or cultural exchange. Even when actually attacking and annexing another kingdom, players will learn quickly that new territories can't just be occupied easily – a fair bit of tact, careful communication with the locals and even learning new languages can be necessary to build a thriving and peaceful empire.

And since players will potentially reign over this empire for several generations, *Crusader Kings III* manages to show how even small political decisions can, over time, have far-reaching consequences for whole continents. Additionally, *Crusader Kings III* also offers roleplaying aspects, since each character comes with their own preferences and behaviors. These personal mannerisms can influence the

wider political field, for instance when a peace-loving ruler gets stressed after too many conflicts got resolved through war. Therefore, *Crusader Kings III* shows foreign policy as being both strategical but also influenced by personalities, and thus a deeply interpersonal process.

Assigned guiding questions:

Guiding question 2: What are the interrelations between foreign policy references, formats, and actors in the game?

Assigned question 3: Which foreign policy themes and narratives are represented in the game?

Assigned question 5: What are the origins of the aesthetic elements of the game world and what emotional worlds do they transport?

EVE Online

Developer: CCP Games

Publisher: CCP Games, et al.

Year: published 2003, last updated 14.11.2023

Country: Iceland

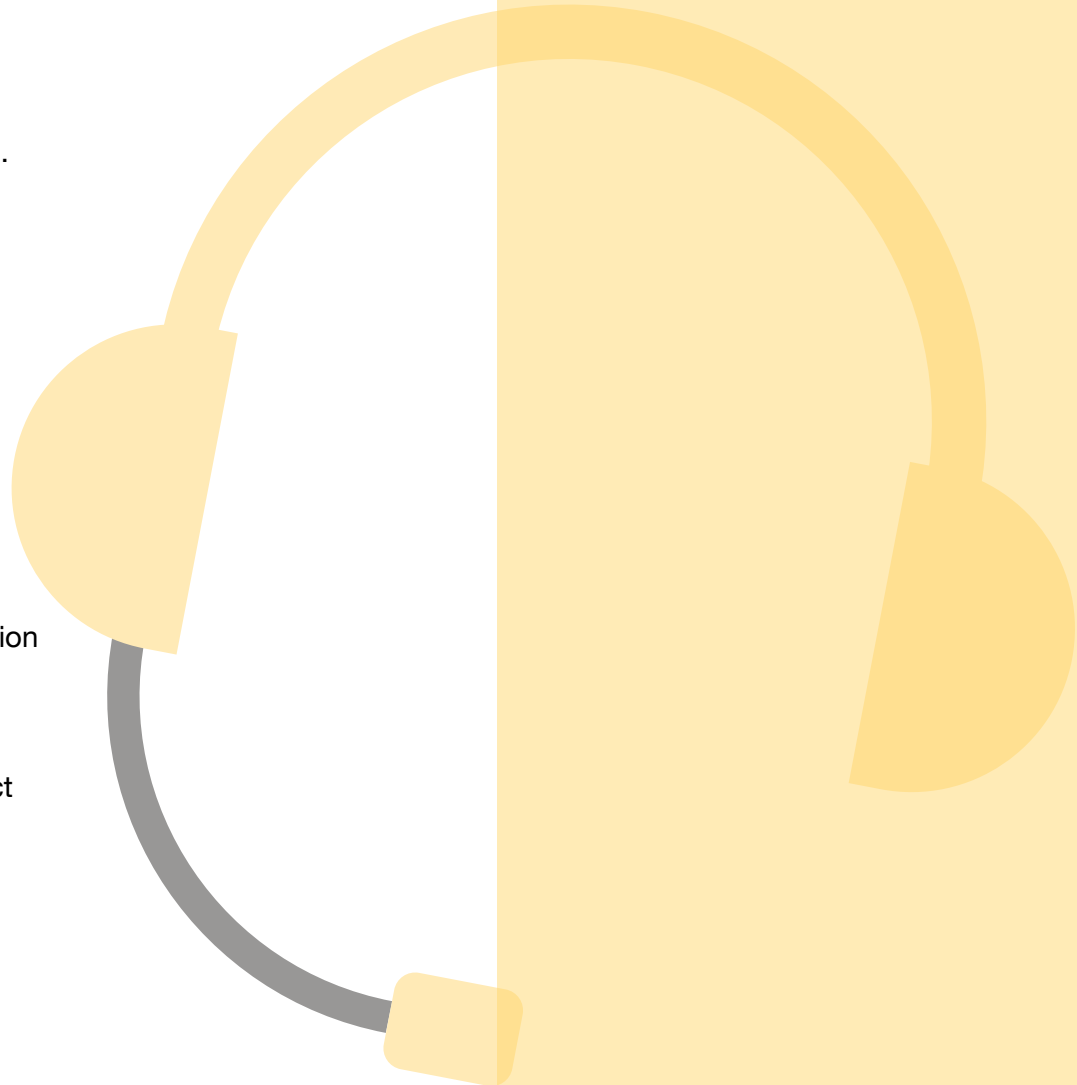
Language: German, English, French, a.o.

Available on: PC (Microsoft Windows & macOS)

Genre: MMO, Space Simulation

Rating: USK 12

Foreign policy focus: conflict mediation, economic growth and global trade, setup and management of political alliances and relations



Synopsis:

The massively multiplayer online game (MMO) *Eve Online* pulls players into its futuristic space simulation for the past 20 years – into a galaxy far away, disconnected from the rest of humanity by both time and space. As a sandbox MMO, *Eve Online* specifically emphasizes its player freedom. From the political power structure to the universe’s economy – everything is in the players’ hands.

That does not mean that there is not a clear goal set by the developers, but this great amount of freedom in the game has, over the years, led to a highly active community of motivated and engaged participants.

Connection to foreign policy:

As an established sandbox MMO with a high number of active players, *Eve Online* offers an almost unique platform to experience the development of economy and politics in a free, detached territory, separate from our real world. As a space simulation, *EVE Online* allows its players to directly experience and shape diplomacy and foreign policy in its depiction of an “unencumbered” world without the historical or recent political baggage of our reality. What is more, the game encourages players to develop and establish their own rules and codes and to anchor them in joint play.

While this is less likely to sensitize players to current real-world political issues, it is instead a proverbial sandbox for trial and error: How does it feel when your decisions potentially affect thousands? How do you navigate the political arena and how do you avoid diplomatic missteps? How closely are politics and business really interlinked? Players can explore these and other questions directly in *EVE Online* and experience politics in a playful way in the truest sense of the word.

Assigned guiding questions

Guiding question 1: What potential links does the game offer for foreign policy content and structures?

Guiding question 4: Does the game offer collaborative, confrontative, and/or multi-perspective elements in its rule-based representation?

Guiding question 6: Can the players shape the story, game world and game mechanics in a self-effective way?

Guiding question 10: Is the game itself subject to foreign policy discourses?

Plague Inc. Evolved

Developer: Ndemic Creations

Publisher: Ndemic Creations

Year: 2016

Country: UK

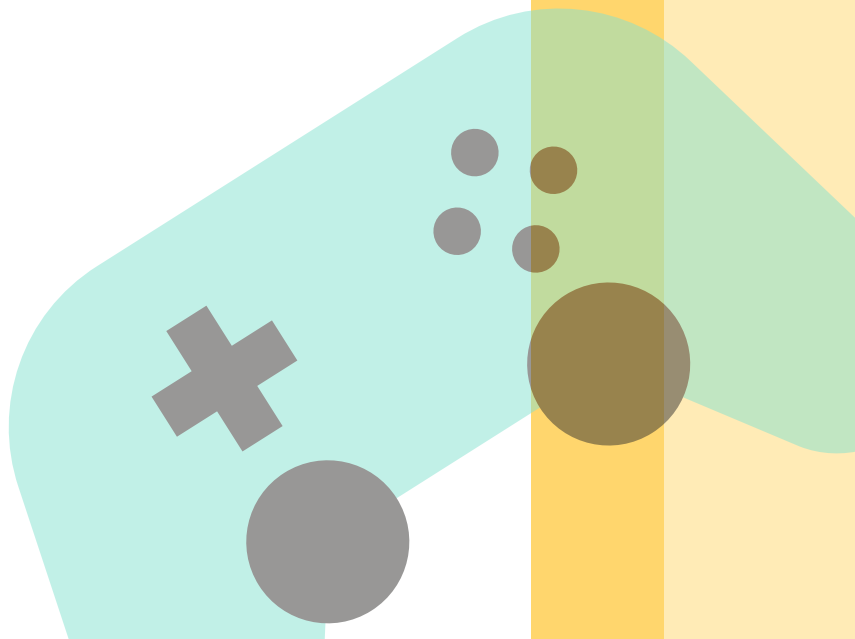
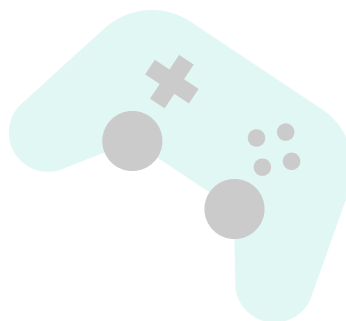
Language: German, English, French, a.o.

Available on: iOS & Android · Xbox One · PC · Switch

Genre: Strategy, Simulation

Rating: USK 16

Foreign policy focus:
humanitarian aid, global health,
international exchange and
cooperation



Synopsis:

Plague Inc. Evolved and its mobile predecessor have made a name for themselves in the realistic simulation genre - at the very least, since the game felt like a prophecy of the global coronavirus pandemic.

Plague Inc. was originally developed as an epidemic simulation. As the personification of a virus, players try to spread more and more and infect the entire world before a vaccine can be developed and distributed. However, the new game mode “The Cure” turns the perspective 180° and instead presents players with the challenge of preventing such an outbreak.

Connection to foreign policy:

The developer Ndemic Creations rightly points out that the game is not a scientifically correct simulation - however, “The Cure” was also created in close cooperation with the WHO and CEPI. *Plague Inc. Evolved* is therefore a very good example of how games can be used as tools to raise awareness of global political problems and their solutions.

Both the standard mode of the game and “The Cure” allow players to experience the possible global actions available to nations and supra-regional cooperations to limit the spread of an epidemic.

At the same time, the game sensitizes players to the effects of such actions; especially in “The Cure” mode, players must pay attention to the reactions of individual countries and their populations, to e.g. far-reaching quarantine orders, while trying to launch a global rescue operation. From riots to the refusal of medical instructions – and thus the temporary collapse of diplomatic negotiations – players will learn that they not only have to fight against the

pandemic itself, but also show political tact.

Assigned guiding questions:

Guiding question 2: What are the interrelations between foreign policy references, formats, and actors in the game?

Guiding question 7: According to which ethical principles does the game function?

Guiding question 8: Which foreign policy scenarios does the game setting convey?

Guiding question 9: Do the reward and sanction systems of the game mechanics reflect basic structures of foreign policy?

The Witcher III: Wild Hunt

Developer: CD Projekt RED & Saber Interactive

Publisher: Bandai Namco Entertainment u.a.

Year: 2015

Country: Poland

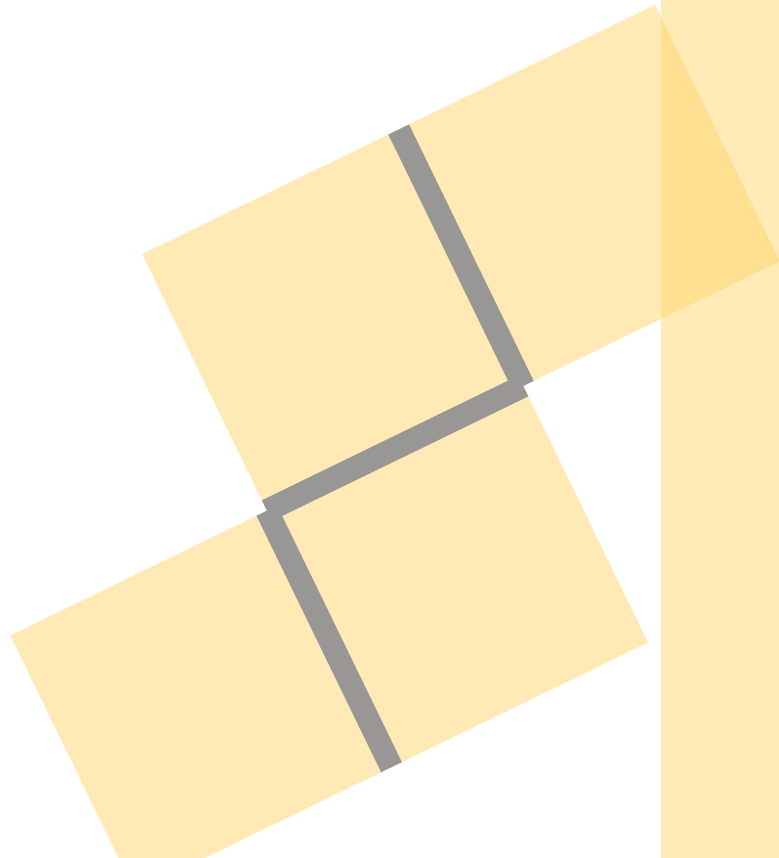
Language: German, English, French, a.o.

Available on: Windows, Xbox One, PlayStation & Nintendo Switch

Genre: RPG

Rating: USK 18

Foreign policy focus: diplomacy, political alliances, intercultural exchange



Synopsis:

In this third part of the *Witcher*-series, players once again embark on adventures as *the witcher* Geralt of Rivia in a medieval fantasy world, which in particular references Slavic mythology. While the hunt for monsters and other, sometimes personally motivated quests dominate the gameplay, the main story increasingly turns out to be a (foreign) policy-driven narrative. The aim here is to navigate the interests and conflicts of various parties and guarantee the protection of Ciri, a young royal with magical abilities entrusted to Geralt.

Connection to foreign policy:

From the very beginning of the game, it becomes clear in *The Witcher III* that the seemingly clear profession of *the witcher* (“kill monsters and get paid for it”) only accounts for a fraction of the player’s responsibility. Rather, *The Witcher III* repeatedly confronts them with highly political decisions, the consequences of which often only become apparent later in the game. Geralt’s close ties to Ciri in particular repeatedly bring him into conflict with various monarchs, their advisors and other political decision-makers, who often pursue very personal motives in addition to the interests of their kingdom. *The Witcher III* challenges players’ tactical skills not only in battle, but also in diplomatic negotiation processes. Individual (foreign) political decisions have a direct influence on the ending of the storyline and how the future of the entire continent will be shaped. In addition to this direct involvement in political events, *The Witcher III: Wild Hunt* also addresses the fragility of the *Conditio Humana* itself, especially in the repeated hostilities against your own character and the encounters with other, socially marginalized figures; the question of “human or monster?” is

one that the player encounters again and again and can only rarely be answered unequivocally in the game.

Assigned guiding questions:

Guiding question 4: Does the game offer collaborative, confrontative, and/or multi-perspective elements in its rule-based representation?

Guiding question 6: Can the players shape the story, game world and game mechanics in a self-effective way?

Guiding question 10: Is the game itself subject to foreign policy discourses?

Valiant Hearts: Coming Home

Developer: Ubisoft Montpellier

Publisher: Netflix Games

Year: 2023

Country: France

Language: German, English,
French, a.o.

Available on: Android & iOS

Genre: Puzzle, Adventure

Rating: --

Foreign policy focus: global
history, war, reconciliation work



Synopsis:

Valiant Hearts: Coming Home deals with the history of the First World War in the form of a tap & drag game for mobile devices. Like its predecessor, *Valiant Hearts: Coming Home* also follows the fates of four protagonists from different nations during the war.

The game focuses on destitution and trauma as well as overcoming them through humanity. By experiencing the multinational perspectives of the various protagonists, the game opens up the possibility of empathically understanding their motives, desires and experiences, thus creating fruitful spaces for reflection on foreign policy.

Connection to foreign policy:

Valiant Hearts: Coming Home breaks with a traditional depiction of the First World War in which a hostile nation has to be defeated. Instead, the experience of war and its horrors are to be brought closer in a multi-perspective way, with the plot drawing on the experiences of four protagonists. Instead of the overpowering commander's perspective of a strategy game or the almost super-human soldier, who is often the main protagonist in first-person shooters, the protagonists' respective influence remains limited; they are sometimes condemned to inactivity and powerlessness.

Not only does *Valiant Hearts: Coming Home* use multinational perspectives to address the grey areas of international conflicts, which even in acute states always exhibit complexities beyond one-dimensional friend/foe schemes. However, by also deliberately addressing diverse or marginalized life experiences during the war or racism, *Valiant Hearts: Coming Home* also hints at the connection between foreign and domestic policy issues. In addition to the actual game experiences, collectibles and codex entries offer

players the opportunity to learn about the actual historical conflict. This provides further starting points for tracing the connection between global history and today's foreign policy structures beyond the game setting.

Assigned guiding questions:

Guiding question 3: Which foreign policy themes and narratives are represented in the game?

Guiding question 4: Does the game offer collaborative, confrontative, and/or multi-perspective elements in its rule-based representation?

Guiding question 5: What are the origins of the aesthetic elements of the game world and what emotional worlds do they transport?



List of authors



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Prof. Thomas Bremer is co-founder of the DE:HIVE Institute at the Berlin University of Applied Sciences, where he also initiated the course of study for game design in 2008. He works continuously in advancing the areas of innovative game development and technology.



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Lena Falkenhagen works as a freelance writer (e.g. “Die Lichtermagd”, Heyne Verlag, DeLiA Prize 2010) and computer game author (e.g. “Beholder 3”, Painbucket Games/Alawar). She has also worked as a professor of game design and specializes in stories and games that hold up a critical mirror to our society.



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Daniel Budiman is a concept developer, presenter, content creator and long-time part of the German media landscape, working at NBC GIGA, GIGA eSport, Game One, Viacom and Rocket Beans TV, among others. He is interested in developing formats and finding modern ways to try out broadcast technology, understand game design, tell stories, and share human experiences.



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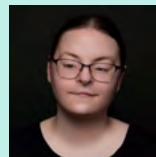
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**Luise
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Luise Rehme has been working as a project manager for the "Auswärtsspiel" pilot project at the Stiftung Digitale Spielemekultur since August 2023. Previously, the trained archivist studied Creative Writing at the SRH Berlin University of Applied Sciences.



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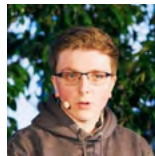
Çiğdem Uzunoğlu

Çiğdem Uzunoğlu has been the managing director of the Foundation for Digital Games Culture since February 2018 and previously worked in the foundation sector for many years, including as the managing director of “Die gelbe Villa” at the Jovita Foundation and as a member of the management board at the Walter Blüchert Foundation. She is a member of the Goethe-Institut’s “Information and Library” advisory board and is co-head of the diversity working group at the Association of German Foundations.



Jan Wagner

Jan Wagner heads the team Digital Games at Ulisses Spiele. He has been working in the video game industry for over 30 years in production, product management as well as game and narrative design and has been involved in the development of titles such as Diablo 2, Warcraft 3 and the Shadowrun Chronicles. He is also co-founder of Owned by Gravity and Underground Games.



Dr. Felix Zimmermann

Dr. Felix Zimmermann works as a program manager for games culture, civic education and extremism at the Federal Agency for Civic Education/ bpb. He studied communication science, history and public history in Münster and Cologne and completed his doctorate with his dissertation on the atmospheric experience of the past in digital games. The monography was published by BÜchner-Verlag in early 2023 under the title “Virtuelle Wirklichkeiten”.



Dr. Tabea Widmann

Dr. Tabea Widmann has been leading the pilot project “Auswärtsspiel” at the Foundation for Digital Games Culture on digital games and foreign policy since September 2022. Previously, she worked as an academic staff member in the MEMOZE research project on memory cultures and media testimony at the University of Konstanz. She received her doctorate in Konstanz with her dissertation “The Game is the Memory” on digital games and memory-cultural testimony.

Further information



In addition to this handbook, the catalogue of guiding questions, the conference “Gaming und Außenpolitik”, the prototypes of the jam “Auswärtig gespielt - ein Game & Mod Jam zu Außenpolitik” and various interviews with experts from the field of foreign policy and the games industry are the results of the pilot project “Auswärtsspiel”.

The catalogue of key questions “10 Guiding Questions on the Potential of Games at the Interface with Foreign Policy” can be downloaded here in German and English:

<https://t1p.de/meph2> (German version)

<https://t1p.de/rnhfy> (English version)

You can find the stream of the conference “Gaming und Außenpolitik” as a YouTube video with German and English subtitles here:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XEG7ZgheckY>

A brief overview of the prototypes developed for “Auswärtig gespielt - ein Game & Mod Jam zu Außenpolitik” can be found in German at:

<https://www.stiftung-digitale-spielekultur.de/modjam-aussenpolitik-auswaertig-gespielt/>

The expert interviews can be found as blog posts on the website of the Foundation for Digital Games Culture at

<https://www.stiftung-digitale-spielekultur.de/blog/>

For further information on the “Auswärtsspiel” pilot project, please visit the project website:

<https://www.stiftung-digitale-spielekultur.de/project-auswaertsspiel/>

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What role can digital games play as mediators for foreign policy topics and practice? To what extent can they contribute to a deeper understanding of German foreign policy beyond their fictional game worlds? And how might players be sensitised to foreign policy narratives in games at the same time? With ten guiding questions and accompanying expert contributions, the “Auswärtsspiel” handbook offers a fundamental orientation for approaching the potential of digital games to convey foreign policy themes and practices.

In addition to the guiding questions and their discussion by experts from the fields of foreign policy, academia as well as games development, the handbook also offers innovative game concepts from the Game & Mod Jam “Auswärtig gespielt” as well as seven game profiles for exemplarily applying the guiding questions.

www.stiftung-digitale-spielekultur.de/en/



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