Our experiences at the Designing Serious Games summer school at the HSLU in Switzerland

Day 1 – Sep 5th

Many of us have arrived by train at the lucerne main station in the early afternoon. Lucerne provides an astonishing view and incredible atmosphere for tourists but coming at its own cost as we were soon to notice. Traversal in the inner city is easy on foot. Public transport on the other hand was very unintuitive, as their connections and applications do not work the same as in Germany. One massive burden to carry was the pricing. Lucerne – alike most of Switzerland – comes in quite expensive at around 24 CHF for a standard meal. This is equivalent to around 26 Euros.

On our first day, we were introduced to the topic of serious games and their purpose of delivering fun/entertainment as a secondary objective, and the incorporation of clever solutions to problems you would not normally elaborate upon within gaming. We were greeted with a nice and slow approach as to how *"play"* has its fair role in our daily lives and learning, as it's a strategy to study and master our instinctive skills.

The highlight of the day, however, was our hands on approach to proper game-design. In a workshop on the idea/theory of so-called "Triadic Game-Design" we were challenged to make our own first game concept, proving to be fun but also difficult, as the topics and other factors like genre etc. were directly assigned to us and we were bound to come up with ideas for our group's theme. As we were piecing together our concept, we were tasked to divide our research into three distinct but connected/balanced categories (Reality – Meaning – Play), each presenting their own difficulties. Mastering their essential role is key for successful serious game design and proved hard to maintain, but also fun to balance out. This being the basis for the rest of the week, we started the get an understanding of how Gamed Design is more than Story and Gameplay, but also the whole foundation behind everything.

Day 2 – Sep 6th

On this day we got to use our freshly received knowledge and put it into the context of *"Histotainment"* (the balance between historical education/education about the past and the entertainment-factor of play). Our class was visited by Professor Peter Gautschi, who taught us the seven principals of how to educate people about the past in a playful way. It was interesting

to learn in which way we need to deal with it and how to make people reflect on it and bring it into a present context. One important step being the distinguishment between history and the past as terms themselves. We were then introduced to the Bourbaki-Panorama from the likewise named museum. Previously, the museum used an application to make the panorama and its stories interactive and better understandable. We were tasked to come up with a game that substitutes this app in the future, as the attraction was no longer up to date and visitor numbers began to stagnate.

Not only did we get hands on with triadic game design, yet again, but also started prototyping and documenting our games mechanics. It was very exciting to see what all the different groups have come up with. Our professor taking close note of everything proofed to be very motivational as, well. Our newest challenge was to incorporate history, meaning getting the user into a context to interact with the past and bring his reflection into a present context, realizing what it means for us now. But in the end, it felt kind of strange and rewarding being put into a position close to an actual contract. It was a great deal to learn from this day and we are happy to have learned about the dealing with the past in this aspect.

We were excited to show of our augmented reality Prototype to the rest of the course. It served as an interactive card game, with characters that could communicate with each other by placing the cards into different zones and tell their perspective of the past events.

At the end of the day, we all visited escape rooms at Escape-quest. Everyone was put into groups of four and assigned different rooms. It was quite a fun and new experience, as it was the first or second escape room for many of us. Teamwork was encouraged and it was nice to see how our different personalities worked together in solving these puzzles.

Day 3 – Sep 7th

The previous evening proved to be the basis for our third day of this journey. Two new tutors introduced themselves to us as experts in the field of designing escape games for museums (Company – Enigma Games). They taught us to use the play-principal of the Escape Game Genre and how to combine it with knowledge and education. We were tasked to follow these principals and design "Escape/puzzles"-Games around the topic of Crows/Ravens. Our team built a structure to immerse users into the life of a raven (well, kind of). We planned on putting participants into the role of a crow, limiting their movement, and restricting them to using a crow mask to pick up and use objects. We then altered already existing crow puzzles and made

them a bit more challenging. It taught us to engaged on a physical level in the spectrum of games outside of VR, being able to be used in Museums or other cultural prentices.

While it was fun to come up with an attraction that can be implemented into a museum it was missing some of the theoretical parts of game design. We did get some tips but no real insight into the planning of a whole puzzle.

On Thursday, shops in Lucerne are all open until 21:00, contrary to the usual closing time of 19:00. Therefore, many of us used the rest of the day for souvenir-shopping. Lucerne proves to be a very diligent and explorable place for this. Having own shopping miles and old Swiss souvenir shops, each with their own stories to tell.

Day 4 – Sep 8th

A new day, a new topic. One that proved to be more theoretical than the one before. We had a vastly different approach to games than the previous day. One of our tutors was an expert in Game-Design, while the other had nearly no experience in that field besides from the work with his partner. He originally professionalized in Cyber and Network security/safety. Therefore, we were not only introduced to mechanics on dismantling games design, but simultaneously learn about the topic of cyber security.

We essentially played THEIR Game. Both were working in a team on a project that aims to make people who already know about the topic discuss it with the unexperienced. We were given two games to play and then had to assign a deck of cards about cyber security to their content. These cards together with another three decks about the triadic game design theory, proved to be very well written, simple to understand and useful to work with. We were intrigued to find out that these cards were not in full production already. We would have liked to take a deck with us back home. Using them, we reconstructed the design behind the games and their relation to the security topic, step by step. It was most interesting, however, to then go through the actual whole process of designing these games. It showed us months of planning in its full extend, giving us nice insights into the workflow and difficulties of game design.

Day 5 – Sep 9th

On our last day we yet again worked on the topic of history, literature and culture. This time it was about the meaning and events behind the well-known book "Heidi". This time, we needed

to design an analog game for the topics of poverty, child-labor and slave-trade. It was a most exciting but challenging task since we are now focused on more realistic approach to gameplay because we are restricted to analog games. Moreover, we were really shocked by how dark Swiss history turned out to be. However, this proved to be just the right motivation for Tim to begin redesigning the structure of a monopoly like game to make you experience the difficulty of frustrating economical times and poverty. He managed to make a fully fleshed out prototype with a complex set of rules and already great game flow balance.

At the end of the day, we were all invited to be part of a so-called "Apero". It is a common and very institutionalized get-together in Swiss culture, often done in companies as well. It can consist of different stages and mostly includes light snacks and drinks. It was a well-planned conclusion to this week's summer school and a great way to learn more about the tutors and other students you otherwise wouldn't have met.

Conclusion:

The time in Lucerne was an amazing experience for us. We were able to learn essential knowledge in the field of game design and liked the structure and the direct interaction with the students. Though, some of the days felt like it wasn't clear at first what to take from it. Much was contributed to the experience itself, rather than the learning of pure theory. Yet, we consider ourselves lucky to have heard about this offer and having been able to participate. We can also imagine a workshop about serious games at the Augsburg University of Applied Sciences. Serious games are so beautiful and many still underestimate their importance for play factor substitution. In the end, it is not about getting rid of the entertainment aspect at its core, but rather restructuring it to implement educational values. If we do so, however, we think some restructuring could be useful. The Summer School primarily focused on one theory of game design. It should also include more theory on how to build a proper game loop and integrate meaningful play. The triadic game design is important, but only the foundation. It would have been nice to dive a bit deeper into concrete design methods and concepts.

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