SUJET PROPOSÉ POUR UN CONTRAT DOCTORAL D’ÉTABLISSEMENT

ANNÉE 2020

UNIVERSITÉ
Université de Brest/Université de Bretagne Occidentale

UNITÉ DE RECHERCHE
Nom complet (sigles ou acronymes développés) :
Numéro de l’unité de recherche : LABERS EA 3149
Directeur de l’unité de recherche : Thierry MICHOT

SUJET DE THÈSE

Intitulé du sujet de thèse (en Français)
Les métiers de l’industrie de jeux vidéo : entre créativité et contraintes.

Intitulé du sujet de thèse (en Anglais)
Jobs in the video game industry: between creativity and organizational constraints

Mots clés (en Français)
Créativité, jeu vidéo, organisation, conditions de travail, activité

Mots clés (en Anglais)
Creativity, video game, organization, working conditions, activity

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<th>Discipline</th>
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<td>Spécialité d’inscription en thèse (à choisir exclusivement dans la liste des spécialités de l’ED)</td>
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# DIRECTEUR DE THÈSE

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# CO-DIRECTEUR DE THÈSE éventuel

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Scientific arguments presenting the challenges of the thesis:

- For the past few years, working conditions in the video game industry have been publicized, often by scandals that occurred in certain companies during the development of a game (for example Rockstar for Red Dead Redemption 2, or Naughty Dog for Uncharted 4). The problem that comes up most often is that of crunch, defined as a period of "extra work" often seen as necessary, which can be planned, in order to be able to release the game on the scheduled date. Jason Schreier, a journalist specializing in culture and the gaming industry in the United States, has published a book recounting the difficulties of several studios and sometimes reporting a period of substantial overwork: "to complete the first Age of Empires, the Ensemble team […] worked almost 100 hours per week for almost a year "(Schreier, J., 2017, p.68). The stories he collected from a dozen studios show that this practice is widespread, whether it is a renowned studio or a single person who wishes to create his own game. There would therefore be a culture crunch in the video game industry, already present in the training of schools specializing in this field. However, what is put forward by some studios is the "profession passion" aspect (Legault and Ouellet, 2012), workers would agree to work as many hours out of passion for video games. What must therefore be questioned here is therefore particularly the commitment to work, in these trades where indeed, it would go without saying that people work there out of passion. This question leads us to question the boundaries of work (Simonet), what does passion produce at work? And vice versa? But as Marie-Josée Legault and Kathleen Ouellet underline in their article on overtime (2012), naming “crunch time” what we call in labor law “overtime”, accentuates the fact that it would be specific to the video game sector and this would normalize this phase of development. What we can already see is the average age of employees in the video game industry, the workers are young, few people manage to last in this sector and they are considered as “seniors” after 5 to 10 years of seniority, there is therefore a low transmission of know-how to newcomers. In addition, women (14%) and non-binary people (2%) are still too little present in companies and when they are there, it is not necessarily in creative or technical positions (SNJV, 2019).

Contextualization of the thesis project and Problematical:

When you look at research on video games, you quickly notice that video games are not thought of in terms of work. What is called game studies is mainly interested in video games as a medium, medium, it is studied for its content (what is it said about? How does it tell it? 'it broadcasts in terms of representations?') or for its practice (who plays it? How? What effect does it have on the players?). However, video games represent the first cultural market in France, it is a growing sector and Ubisoft, French publisher with studios all over the world, presents itself as the 3rd independent video game publisher worldwide. In addition, when certain disciplines are interested in video games from a work perspective, sociology remains absent. The work that can be found is done in economics (Cocq M., 2019; Banks J., Cunningham S., 2016), in management and management (Légault M.-J., Ouellet K., 2012, Weststar J., 2015), in information-communication (Dyer-Witheford N, de Peuter G., 2006).
In addition, this doctorate will take place in a particularly important context for the video game industry since a whole new generation (next gen) of consoles will be marketed at the end of 2020, by the two major console manufacturers: Sony with the PS5 and Xbox with the Xbox Series X. The arrival of new machines, more and more powerful, has an impact on the development of games; this year 2020 marks a turning point in technical evolution (like the arrival of Ray-Tracing). Another technical parameter completes the services offered by the manufacturers, that of the development of 5G which makes it possible to offer streaming games available on servers (the cloud) as well as the generalization of dematerialized video games. The arrival of GAFA in the video game industry like Google with its Stadia, Apple offer and its € 2.99 subscription for mobile games, from Amazon and its first-party studios to feed their Amazon Prime or Facebook subscription with the acquisition of Occulus and the proliferation of games dedicated to the site, offers new possibilities to studios.

If the work in France, notably by M. Lallement (2015 and 2018), has renewed the interest in exploring and analyzing the IT sector, there is little work on the creation of video games and especially on the creative process articulated with questions on working conditions.

**Methodology envisaged:**

The proposed thesis subject mobilizes an essentially qualitative methodology. However, the organizational dimension being predominant in the reality of the work to be analyzed, it will be a question of:

- Consider a comparison between classic forms of organization (including the creation, production and distribution of the game); forms of outsourced organization and cooperative forms of game creation.

- The qualitative inspiration method will favor = interviews and in situ observations.

- Given the international dimension of the creative activity, a stay abroad could be envisaged. We are thinking here of Quebec, which hosts the UBISOFT company.
Insertion of the subject in the laboratory axes; possible research programs

This thesis project is part of a field of sociology of work at the crossroads of a sociology of professional groups, working conditions and activity analysis. Work in this area has focused more particularly on the field of software creation, in addition to video games, and especially on players. This thesis project aims to try to fill in knowledge on a sector little studied by sociology. Doing so to better understand and explain the working conditions in this sector. It fits in the health and societies axis of our research unit and in two transversal axes namely: work and digital. Indeed, the project leaders have already organized work and summer universities on similar topics in the past. For example, in September 2018, a summer university was organized on "digital professions. Between commitment, passion and constraints ". Partnerships have been established with the M @ rsouin network, the work psychology chair at Cnam, and also with the company Orange in terms of research and projects.

Bibliographie sur le sujet proposé


**Expected profile**

The candidate must have a good mastery of sociological investigation techniques, in particular qualitative techniques (in situ observation, conducting interviews, documentary analysis). He/she should be able to develop in-depth analyzes of the interviews but also articulate them with an observation of the activity of the personnel of the organizations in the field of video game production. We will emphasize here an approach to the activity taking place and an ethnographic approach in the matter.

However, to carry out these observations and interviews, it will also be necessary to make good statistical use of the data on the subject to circumscribe and contextualize the subject.

A master's degree in sociology or/and with knowledge of working conditions is highly desirable.

Knowledge, even practical, of the sector is desirable in order to begin research operationally quickly.

**Professional integration**

The supervision of the thesis aims to train researchers in sociology. Within the Labers, such a project makes it possible to continue work on working conditions and digital technology. In this way, we are targeting the possibility of developing these areas and promoting the professional integration of the researcher.