Understanding People through Video Games

Fortnite, Minecraft, League of Legends, World of Warcraft or Just Dance. Video games are very popular and the number of players is still growing. These games have a large impact on the world’s culture as they support the spread of different ideas, cultural beliefs, political and ethical stances. However, there is still a lot of exploration and research to be done at a social, cultural, didactic and psychological levels regarding how video games are impacting society. To find answers, TU/e-researcher Carlos Pereira Santos (Industrial Design) designed several games that focus on studying the player itself.

Since the launch of the first video game, around fifty years ago, the video game industry rapidly expanded. With billions of players worldwide, it is not surprising that video games currently represent the fastest growing segment of the entertainment industry. Still, the video-game landscape is far from defined. It is only in the last few years that the scientific world has come to realize how games are changing the entertainment landscape and impacting individuals, enterprise, social constructs and culture.

To be able to conduct such research, there is a need to better understand the dynamics between the player and the games. Pereira Santos wondered how games could be designed and used to profile players’ characters, traits, experiences and social behavior and designed a game that focuses on studying the player. Identifying stable and transferrable traits could, once characterized, be used in other contexts and for other applications such as social settings, healthcare, business and research as well.

This research successfully demonstrated the feasibility of purposely design games to profile players, however they also identified the necessity of scalable solutions to support the evaluation of player experiences and the development of player models. Therefore, we designed the Games User Research as a Service (GURaaS) platform, to improve the relationship between game developers and researchers by supporting the collection of player in-game behaviour and embed research instruments in games.

Overall this work contributes by demonstrating the potential of developing games to profile players, and assess the feasibility of using all games as research instruments.