



Migrancy, refugees and citizenship representations in video games

Overview

This EduTalk, made possible by the work of the Video Game Culture Working Group from the Council of Europe's Digital Citizenship Education project, explored different perspectives related to migrancy, refugees and citizenship representation in video games.

- Thanks to their narratives about migrants and refugees, video games can be used to foster **critical thinking** and to **avoid simplification and misrepresentation**: the key is fostering an **educational dialogue**.
- Video games are a **powerful media** which can make players experience a wide range of **emotions**: using these experiences to **exercise empathy** can be a meaningful way to deal with migrants' representations in video games.
- Digital experiences where stereotypes are dismantled should be incentivised: when migrancy or refuge are topics touched by a video game, it is important to **involve migrants directly** in the development of the game and of its narrative to ensure that the complexity of the situations and of the characters are maintained and respected.



"Simplifying is never a solution: showing the complexity is always the winning choice".

The witness from a Syrian refugee game developer: Jack Gutmann

- Generalist artist and game developer from Syria, Jack published in 2016 a game about his escape from the Country: **Path out**.
- He supports that games are one of the strongest cultural instruments in nowadays digitised society: *"All video games are political, in the sense that they are contributing to shaping how millions of players see the world"*.
- Therefore, it is important to **critically reflect** about the processes of video game development to limit the presence of stereotypes related to migrants and to other people. Jack is currently working on a new game about migration which actively involves several refugees because, he says *"it is the only way to do it. To ensure that their point of view is respected"*.

● Games to prompt engagement: Beatriz Pérez Zapata

- Beatriz talks about video games as a unique platform for unlearning biases, stereotypes, and beliefs. Images in games have the power to evoke fear or empathy, contributing to a broader dialogue about collective experiences.
- By influencing the choice of protagonists and exploring their consequences, games serve as more than mere information sources; they prompt engagement. They become a catalyst for generating dialogue, fostering nuanced communication about otherness, and dismantling prevailing perspectives that permeate our daily lives.

● Spatial Empathy: Nathan A. Jung

- Video games are a powerful platform for exploring complex concepts like empathy, particularly in the context of refugee experiences. The **spatial empathy** cultivated in these games not only raises awareness but also elicits genuine empathetic responses, with the potential to translate these into meaningful actions and support for refugees in the real world.
- What sets these games apart is their ability to recreate spaces, recognising that space is socially constructed and exerts a profound influence on us. Refugee games demonstrate how space can either foster or impede empathy. In the case of migration, narratives often centre on movement, while **refugee camps offer a different perspective—they are places of settlement and resilience**.
- "Resilience: the game" uses this understanding of space and spatial empathy to immerse players in the role of a refugee camp manager on the one hand, but also in the day-to-day challenges of camp life, on the other.

● Video games on the topic:

- 21 days - <https://21daysgame.itch.io/21-days>
- Bury me, my Love - <https://burymemylove.artetv/>
- Path out - <https://unric.org/en/path-out-video-game/>
- Resilience: the game - <https://www.sungrazerstudio.com/>
- Route 96 - https://store.steampowered.com/app/1466640/Road_96/

● The Speakers:

Beatriz Pérez Zapata is a PhD candidate in English Studies. She is lecturer of English for Specific Purposes at TecnoCampus (Universitat Pompeu Fabra) and English and Education at the Valencian International University. She is the current coordinator for the Degree in Video Game Design and Production at TecnoCampus. Her research focuses on video games and postcolonialism and the representation of diasporic subjects and refugees in media and video games.

Dr. Nathan A. Jung teaches in the Technical Communications Program in the College of Engineering at the University of Wisconsin-Madison. He has published widely in the humanities with a particular focus on the relationship between media, migration, and democracy.

Jack Gutmann is a generalist artist from Syria. Jack considers himself on a mission to push the boundaries of games beyond the realms of fun and profit. He sees games as an opportunity to learn and explore beyond one's limitations. In 2016 he worked together with Causa Creations on a game about his escape from Syria in the name of Path Out. Currently, he joined forces again with Causa to work on a new game project about migration.

Alessandro Soriani, PhD, is a researcher at the Department of Education Studies "G.M. Bertin", University of Bologna. His scientific interests are ICT and media, video games included, in educational and pedagogical contexts. He works as a consultant for the Council of Europe's Digital Citizenship Education Project, and he is the coordinator of the Council of Europe's Video Game Culture Working Group.