Videogame culture provides overlooked opportunity to engage with climate change, says new report

Tuesday 29 March, 2022

Organisations wishing to have an impact on climate change shouldn't overlook the opportunities presented by working with the breadth of videogame culture, according to a report from the global entertainment and research charity OKRE and commissioned by UKRI.

Iain Dodgeon, Director of OKRE, said: "Videogames are a global cultural force. Relentless technological and creative innovation alongside the core consideration of the player in the game design process has propelled the sector's expansion. No other media exhibits quite such a mutability of form and purpose."

And indeed as videogames have evolved, so too has how people engage with them – not just playing videogames, but playing *with* them in other media and in other areas of our lives.

Iain Simons, co-author of the report and curator-at-large for the National Videogame Museum, said: "Because so much of the industry marketing around them is about technology – 'faster! more realistic! better than last year's model!' - it's tempting to think that games are just hardware and software. The most interesting and important part of videogames is how we live with them. They're a fantastically rich place for public engagement, both in the games themselves and in the cultures we build around them."

As games such as Fortnite have become social destinations in their own right, they provide a significant and mostly untapped opportunity for public engagement. However rather than focusing on developing a single game with climate themes, the report, *Playing With Videogame Culture*, identifies seven broader strategic opportunities for public engagement with climate science through videogames

These opportunities include embracing the breadth of videogame culture in both digital and non-digital spaces. This culture includes streaming, fan communities, fan-fiction and cosplay, and provides a rich and collaborative space that can reach diverse audiences.

Harnessing interest in videogames to inspire engagement with a wide array of STEAM skills and careers is another area of focus, and the report says practitioners should particularly try to understand their potential applications in other sectors, such as future innovation around climate change.

Enabling a more diverse range of communities to creatively explore opportunities for climate action is also key, and one recommended way to go about this is by utilising no-code game design tools to open up participation and creative expression, removing a requirement for technical skills. Organisations should also prioritise local and hyper-local engagement, focusing on social and environmental concerns of more direct relevance to these communities who are often underrepresented in public engagement work.

One opportunity for doing this is through the creation of site and time-specific games – projects that are uniquely relevant to different communities and calendar events, and which can enable people to interact with their area in new and exciting ways.

Digital exclusion is a key concern, and OKRE's report recommends that both digital and non-digital access points should be included in any programme, with public engagement practitioners embracing board games, card games and other physical games alongside videogames to maximise engagement and access.

Iain Dodgeon said: "By embracing the breadth of opportunities available to engage with videogame culture, organisations can create lasting impact in their public engagement work. This is an area that has been overlooked until now, and so there is really exciting potential for organisations to work in fresh ways."

The report brings to light past and present examples of videogames engaging with climate change and work being done within the industry in a bid to mitigate its own carbon footprint. It concludes that engagement with climate change should not focus on the development of a single game with climate themes, but rather consider the opportunities available within wider videogame culture to engage diverse communities and increase impact.

OKRE is a new charity providing a global centre for collaboration and knowledge exchange across

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research, the entertainment industry, and the social impact sector. The charity runs the OKRE Network, which connects professionals across sectors, as well as curating events such as the OKRE Development Rooms, and providing funding and resources to catalyse the creation of entertainment that benefits from alternative insights brought via research and lived experience.

To read the full report, click here: https://bit.ly/3vMLxvV

Notes to editors:

For more information or interview requests, please contact Kat Harrison-Dibbits. Head of Communications at OKRE on 07833 523295 or email **k.harrison-dibbits@okre.org.**

The seven opportunities identified within OKRE's report are:

1. Embracing the breadth of videogame culture
1. Harnessing interest in videogames to inspire engagement with STEAM skills and careers
1. Utilising no-code game design tools to open up participation and creative expression
1. Prioritising local and hyper-local engagement
1. Incorporating digital and non-digital access points
1. Deploying site and time-specific games
1. Improving understanding of the potential of videogame culture to engage underrepresented audiences

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About OKRE

OKRE: Opening Knowledge across Research & Entertainment is a new charity and unique, global hub of expertise bringing together research, entertainment and personal lived experience. Through facilitating better cross-sector collaboration, OKRE supports the creation of compelling content that expands our understanding of the world.

OKRE works with organisations including UKIE, UKRI, BBC, BFI, Brown Girls Doc Mafia, Bond International, Cannes Festival, Counterpoints Arts, Science Entertainment Exchange and Think-Film Impact Production, and is supported by partners including Unbound Philanthropy, Joseph Rowntree Foundation, Esmée Fairbairn Foundation and Wellcome.

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