

Approaching gameplay process documentation

Olle Sköld

Department of ALM, Uppsala University

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Presentation preference:

- My preference would be to present this contribution in-person on either Tuesday 20 June, 09:00-12:00 CET or Wednesday, 21 June 13:00-16:00 CET

STRUCTURED ABSTRACT

Aim of your contribution

The aim of this contribution is to shed light on gameplay process documentation by (1) empirically examining what process information is present in two key instances of videogame documentation (wikis, discussion forums) and (2) discussing the significance of gameplay process documentation in relation to the ventures of videogame preservation and research.

Value of your contribution

The value of this contribution is that it proposes and explores the novel concept of 'gameplay process documentation' as a means to gain insight into what process information is present in trace data and player-generated documentation in the videogame domain, an important area of present-day cultural production, multidisciplinary research including information-science inquiry, and activity for LAM and heritage institutions. A better understanding of what processes are traceable in gameplay documentation, and how these processes emerge and are accessible for analysis and use, would significantly benefit simultaneously LAM preservational efforts and videogame research by indicating what documentation would be important to collect for specific purposes and what process information that can be expected to be found there.

Research outline

Alongside videogame software and hardware, documentation emanating from gameplay and gameplay-related activities of videogame players is one of the key underpinnings of preservational initiatives, ranging from videogame archives to

museum exhibits to 'fan'-driven repositories and websites, and videogame research with both historical and current interests. This documentation can be in the form of e.g., videogame photography (Urban, 2023) and video capture (Švelch & Švelch, 2020) enacted and disseminated by players and articles, player-generated discussions, and log data on videogame wikis (Sköld, 2017). Although the usefulness of documentation created by player actions for both research and preservational purposes is widely recognized to stem from its ability to offer insights into the sociotechnical settings and modes of document creation (e.g., Newman, 2011; Švelch & Krobová, 2016; Sköld, 2018), the literature shows that there have been few attempts to map what processes that gameplay documentation actually informs about.

The aim of this contribution is to fill this research gap by shedding light on gameplay process documentation by (1) empirically examining what process information is present in videogame documentation and (2) discussing the significance of gameplay process documentation in relation to the ventures of videogame preservation and research. The contribution reports on two case studies of videogame documentation—focusing on videogame discussion forum Reddit and a videogame wiki respectively—conducted in 2012 and 2014 using document analysis and ethnographic methods. An analytic framework drawing on research literature on paradata (data describing data-creation processes; Couper, 2000) was used to identify and analyze instances of process information in the gameplay documentation collected in the case studies (e.g., Börjesson et al., 2022; Huvila, 2022; Sköld et al., 2022).

The findings show that gameplay process documentation is complex in terms of formats, content, findability, and that it informs about many kinds of processes. Seven principle instances of process information were identified in the studied gameplay documentation. These instances of process information pertained to the (i) purpose and scope; (ii) environmental characteristics and functionalities; (iii) epistemic and methodological characteristics; (iv); variables and concepts; (v) data selection and collection procedures; (vi) data processing and handling; and (vii) auxiliary resources of the sociomaterial context in which the gameplay documentation was created.

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