Serious Games- Essay By Eric Ruts

Introduction

This essay is dedicated for the course serious games at the Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam lectured by Anton Eliens. Within this course I participated into individual assignments and group assignments. That is why you are able to find separate topics about individual and group work within this document.

The individual assignments consisted of creating a webpage wherein you keep your personal and group work. I have created a personalia, a description of an utopia and potential of serious games in it, a moodspace, and this essay.

The group assignment was to develop a serious game for the children of Terragon. The developed serious game is an application created in Ximpel including a component to combine the serious game with the physical world such as nature.

Within this essay, I will talk about the used technology to create our serious game, which is Ximpel. I will discuss the technology itself but also the application and comparison of other tools. Besides that I tell you about our project itself. That includes the process, goal, and team coordination. Furthermore I would like to discuss serious game iSn general and the potential impact to society. Herein I will also discuss the course itself. To finalize this essay I will end with a personal reflection on the complete course which includes my personal development. I hope you will enjoy reading this essay!

Ximpel

Ximpel is a framework that is used to easily create interactive media presentations. It is a framework created in JavaScript. The usage is this framework is very ximpel. On the basis of a playlist the developer is able to place videos and images. Each of the components have a unique identifier and you are able to link certain buttons, questions, or just based on a timer to other contents within the playlist. I would like to simply call it a decision dungeon. You are able to create all kind of structures.

A. Linear B. Linear with sidetracks   C. Branching   D. Circular routes
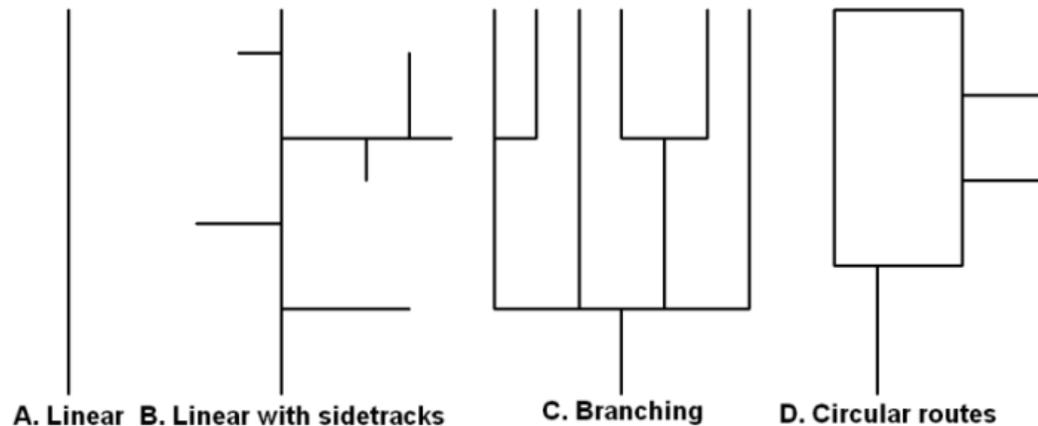
Since you are able to ask questions to the user, and keep a score variable, it is quite easy to make a concept of a serious game. However, you are very limited to implement game elements which do not fall in the parameters of asking questions or simply linking.

In order to be more informative about Ximpel and the opportunities of Ximpel, I would like to compare it with other applications wherein you are able to make serious games. Unity is a game engine wherein developers are able to make digital applications, especially

perfect for games. It is a 3D engine which means you need 3D assets. The possibilities of this engine is nearly unlimited which makes it perfect for creative development such as a serious game. However, it takes a bit of time before you are able to use the engine due to learning curves. Another applications to develop serious games is Unreal Engine. The core principle is the same as Unity, however if you got a very good understanding of the engine you are able to make use of some very important advantages such as blueprint scripting and object oriented use of your code. Unreal engine take a whole lot longer to learn then Unity.

If I compare Ximpel with those other applications, I am able to conclude that Ximpel is a very good tool for certain usages. Because the learning curve is not that big and you are limited to certain options, it is an amazing tool to rapidly make a proof of concept. Especially in comparison to Unity and Unreal Engine. And that is just the kind of thing you need when you are developing a game: Rapid prototyping, testing, adapting. However it is a great tool, I personally think that if you have developed your idea and want to actually make it, you should not use it. With Ximpel you are always limited to certain aspects such as deploying, only video and images etc. Of course you are able to add code to the framework, but eventually you probably wind up developing a complete game engine. With the use of professional game engines such as Unity and Unreal Engine, you are able to make a serious game of quality.

Project

Wat je van het project vondt en wat je bijdrage is geweest binen het team. En het process in het team. De goals de we hebben gesteld, hoe we daarnartoe hebben geweerkt en hier een reflectie op. En onze game vergelijken met bestaande games en hier wat over vertellen.

Besides my induvial assignments, such as this essay, I have engaged in a group project creating a *very* serious game called Harvest Chef. Harvest Chef is our serious game project. In this game, you take on the role of a chef who visits the Terragon yards to gather ingredients for a master dish.

Our goal was to create an entertaining experience for kids to learn about how food makes it from the soil to our plates, while also making them more aware of the importance of proper nutrition and the quality of produce.

We engaged in this goal by first learning for ourselves first about food and experience the game for ourselves. Since our goal indicated that we want the kids to learn while having fun, we needed to test our game. So we went to Terragon to gain knowledge about our game so we were able to improve it based on the feedback of the kids themselves. This process has resulted in our game Harvest Chef.

The game can be found on our project site or even be downloaded for *free* so you are able to host the game yourself!

So how did we approach this project? Since we created a game in a matter of 2 months including all the processes such as idea generation, branding, developing, testing, adapting etc. we were forced to work together as an perfectly oiled machine. Everyone in our team has his own unique expertise which is perfect for creating a game in such a narrow time period. With the combination of creative, direct, perfectionist, friendly, and technological team members we had a diverse and multidisciplinary team which we certainly used within this project! I myself contributed with my direct character and a bit of creativity. This was very helpful within the idea generation phase of the project since we needed to make decisions and make the best use of our time as possible due to the limited timeframe.

Serious games

Besides talking about Ximpel, our project, and about myself, I would like the chance to talk a bit more about myself and what I think about serious games in general and the potential role in the community. Also, I am going to talk about what I thought of the course serious games from Anton Eliens, and why I chose this course.

As described in my description of the Utopia, I believe in the potential of a serious game in order to support my Utopia, wherein everyone may experience their Utopia of their own. However, I do not want to use the term serious games for this matter. I think the word serious is way to overrated and way to serious. Why force someone to learn something serious that is defined in a framework by an individual with their own view of reference? Why not simply experience the view of reference of a group of individuals and learn what you decide you want to learn. Learn by playing… Not by playing very serious. Or if you want to, play serious. Play a game… the biggest game in life is life itself. That is why I do not want to call it serious games but simply: "Games".

My apologies for being so serious. Let's be a bit more serious and talk about something very serious which is the serious course serious games. I chose this course because I wanted to experience something different. In my last study, industrial engineering and management I was very serious. I was vice president of the advisory board, I graduated nominally, got an honors, started multiple companies, created a network, gained experience in multiple multinationals, etc. The moment I graduated I thought of myself, what do I want to do know? One thing I knew for sure that I did not want to get a mortgage, marry a wife, define my live in WORK and PRIVATE and build up a pension so I have some money to spend in the old days and die. So I signed up for a the master information sciences so I was able to gain a broader view of reference and in the meantime have time to think about *things.* Since I came from a completely different study I was obliged by the process of the VU to do a pre-masters. 30 ECT's in a whole year and following courses which do not per see broaden your mind but more like narrow your mind. So that meant for me that I had a bit of a year of. So I decided to develop a game, because I loved the idea of entertaining people. So after thousands of hours of work in a game I got to the point that I was able to start with my masters. Within the masters I was able to choose courses. And I thought, what do I want to learn? But then I thought, what do I want to experience? Because of this reason, I chose to follow the course of Anton Eliens. A course where I was able to seriously experience a not so serious course about serious games. And this was perfect for me, since I was/am way to serious.

Reflection

Personally I am able to say that with this course, I contributed to my personal learning goals. I have set a goal to broaden my mind and be less restricted to my conventional thoughts. Within this course, I had the opportunity to listen Anton Eliens and be confronted with my closed mind. In the very first lecture, Eliens told me that I was restricted to develop the serious game ONLY with the use of Ximpel and not with a game engine such as UE4. Since I am very good with UE4 and not with Ximpel I thought that I would perform the best if I was able to use UE4, AND Eliens told us about that I should not let my mind be poisoned by others I concluded that Eliens is a hypocrite. I have to be creative, and not be restricted by views of others but create my own BUT I MUST do it within Ximpel… So I asked Eliens: "You want me to be creative, and not let people poison my mind, but still you give me a closed border of your own view of reference by giving me a strict restriction with Ximpel, why?" Eliens answered: "I think you need re-education." And the thing is, he was right. The reason why I already had set my personal goal to broaden my mind and accept thoughts of other people is because I always find it hard if someone sets restrictions for me, especially if I am not able to find a good reason. Within this course I learned that even I am not able to find a good reason, maybe others do. And if others do not, maybe there is another reason, such as fun. The point is I don't know. And that is OK. And that is also the thing with serious games. Learning should be fun, bringing messages should be fun and most important, not everything needs to be always so serious. I would like to thank Anton Eliens for this amazing course. I have learned a lot and broadened my view once again.