

Experience sharing about funding impact games and simulators

Serious games, or what we prefer to name impact games, are a particular type of video games. Their purpose is to cause a measurable effect in ordinary life. For instance, these games could aim to train people, to raise awareness on a topic, to help to diagnose and to treat health issues, to change a behavior, to impact the mental wellbeing, to raise funds for a cause (etc.). There are a great variety of possible measurable impacts. At the same time, these games try to provide a playful experience, to have all the benefits of playing, as the capacity to engage people. In addition to this type of games, the Cologne Game Lab TH Koeln (CGL) is sometimes committed to research projects involving the development of simulators with no actual gameplay. For these kinds of projects we are using methods and technologies inspired from video game design and development.

As far as we know, there is no such thing as a specific funding to develop impact games in Germany. But we have various strategies to generate partnerships and get projects on track using existing funding sources. Here are a few examples of successfully set up projects at the Cologne Game Lab THK (CGL). They illustrate well the various ways to do it.

International call

In certain domains we are monitoring international calls, but these are not regular. The CGL is involved in several humanitarian oriented initiatives and tries to apply with partners to international calls. A typical example of it is Antura & the Letters. The first version of it, for the Syrian refugees, was funded by winning an international call for projects from the ministry for foreign affairs of Norway. It was an unique call. In our experience of that type of call, The amount of funding could vary from a few thousands euros to a few hundreds of thousands.

<https://colognegamelab.de/research/projects/the-antura-initiative/>

Horizon European Call

On a regular basis we monitor all new European commission's calls. The work consists in identifying domains where impact games could be used. For instance, when we identified a call about new approaches to fight domestic violence, we immediately saw how we could help, by developing an innovative tool to train police officers or social workers, a victim interview simulator. This was the starting point of the project ISEDA, successfully funded in 2022 and now running for 3 years with a budget of 3 millions euros. The Horizon call does not refer to impact games. In this kind of call it is our task to show how they could be used in particular domains. The development of the impact game or simulator could only be a part of the overall proposition. In ISEDA, it is around 20% of the overall budget. A tip if you apply for a Horizon European call: it is really useful to work with agencies specialized in the application process. It raises the reviewer grades significantly and increases the chance of being funded.

<https://colognegamelab.de/research/projects/iseda2022-2025/>

Erasmus+ European call

As we do with the Horizon type of call, we monitor the Erasmus+ call on a regular basis. These are easier to get funded but it is limited to a few hundreds of thousand euros, shared

among several partners. Again, the application to these calls often imply that we have to demonstrate how impact games could help the purpose of the call. The CGL always has several Erasmus+ projects running, led by several Professors. imtech4ed is a typical example:

<https://colognegamelab.de/research/projects/imtech4ed-2021/>

BMBF German calls

Many calls from the BMBF are related to educational methodologies and to innovative solutions. Sometimes games for education or new technologies in a training context might be relevant approaches to apply to them. The process of application is lighter than the European call and the project has a better chance to get funded. Started in 2019, the project SOLVE is a BMBF project that helped several partners to have PhD positions funded.

<https://colognegamelab.de/research/projects/solve/>

Rhein Energy Local call

On a local scale it exists the RheinEnergieStiftung Jugend/Beruf, Wissenschaft. Again, it is not a serious game oriented call. Each year the THK can only have one proposal, so it means an internal competition to get funded. Last year the CGL in partnership with the Uni Köln got selected.

<https://colognegamelab.de/research/projects/masdigu-2022-2024/>

Internal project with specific partners

There is another approach that we use on a regular basis: set up projects with students who are doing their thesis (Bachelor or Master). We sometimes have several students from different specialties (art, game design, programming) sharing their practical project for their thesis. This way can allow us to develop prototypes of impact games that could be used to apply for funding in specific organizations, foundations, or other kinds of partners. The project Migrant's Chronicles, started as a student thesis project and is now a 2 years research project funded by a Luxembourgish foundation.

<https://colognegamelab.de/research/projects/migrants-chronicles/>

We should mention that we are facing constant challenges due to the nature of funding processes, whatever is the institution behind the call. Games are not anymore one shot tools (like: we release the 1.0 version of the game and forget it). Now they are services that need maintenance and support for years after the funding period. There is an actual difficulty to find resources for this particular aspect.

To end this article, here are a few take away and experience sharing:

- Even if there is a lack of funding exclusively for impact games, there are many possibilities to fund them (We currently have more than 15 running research projects funded in the institute)
- We try to capitalize and create projects within specific lines of research. In a EU call, having past experience in the domain you want to apply for is a critical aspect for success
- We take all the experience we could about the application processes, including the help of experts agency for EU call

- We need to partner with experts of the domain we want to create a game in. And so, in the long term
- As far as we can, we plan a marketing budget in your call. We need it to communicate about the game once we release the first version of it
- Find solution to keep your game alive in the long run

Professor Doctor Emmanuel Guardiola
Head of research
Cologne Game Lab
eg@colognegamelab.de
+33 612 952 094