Titre: The Video Game Industry, Cities and Neighbourhoods: Spatial, Socio-Economic, Cultural and Political Dynamics in Montreal and Düsseldorf

L'industrie du jeu vidéo, les villes et les quartiers: dynamiques spatiales, socio-économiques, culturelles et politiques à Montréal et à Düsseldorf

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Introduction

This research aims at identifying and understanding the dynamics between the video game industry and its neighbourhoods in the area of Mile End in Montreal and Flingern-Nord in Düsseldorf, Germany, since the 1990s when the French video game company Ubisoft settled in both areas. It aims to determine the spatial, socio-economic, cultural and political relevance in the locale, via the daily (working) routine of video game developers in the neighbourhood. The dynamics to be analyzed are identified by the perception and interpretation of people involved in these dynamics: people working in the video game industry and cultural actors who have their studio or business in the neighbourhood under research.

The research is a comparison of the dynamics in Montreal as one of the world's most important video game centres and Düsseldorf as one of the most important video game centres in Germany.

Literature review

In the scope of this research are the workers of the video game industry and their related dynamics in the neighbourhood. The development of the video game industry and its location in specific neighbourhoods has to be considered not only under the aspect of cultural and creative industries, to which the video game industry belongs, and neighbourhoods, but also in connection with the changing economic structure. With the emergence of the so-called 'New Economy' in the 1990s, the significance of culture and the cultural and creative industries has grown and thereby also the discussion about the creative class and the creative milieu. The way these new industries settle in (former) industrial districts and in clusters gained attention, and their development might be influenced by policies. The characteristics of the industry's location, the neighbourhood, are specified and coined by interrelation of the new economy and culture. These spaces inspire the new economy workers, who change the places over time by taking possession of them. Groups and individuals form places and spaces in the process of responding to places, and build their own sense of identity related to place and space. That might be new types and places of consumption and spectacles, seen between positive and negative. The correlation between the neighbourhood and the people living and working there differs in effect, dependent on the initial positions, such as housing structure, labour markets, or industry types.

Objectives

The objectives are to find out about the dynamics going on between the video game industry workers and the company's neighbourhood in two selected neighbourhoods, how the workers perceive themselves as creative and creative acting and how this influence the way they see the neighbourhood around the office associated with their lifestyle, aspects that haven't been researched so far. Besides the cultural dynamics, I will regard also spatial, technological, socio-economic and political dynamic to complete the picture because dynamics are connected with each other.

Research Questions

The questions guiding this research are

- What are and how can we understand the relationships between the video game industry and a specific neighbourhood, in particular the relationship between the video game industry workers and the neighbourhood around their work space?
- What is the role of cultural dynamics in the relation of the video game industry workers and the neighbourhood, in particular, what is the role of cultural practices in the neighbourhood for creative workers?

The following hypothesis are based on the research questions:

i) The creative class of the video game industry workers may have an impact, various in nature and scope, on the environment of the video game industries' neighbourhood, and vice versa.

ii) The dynamics involved, are detectable by means of cultural, spatial, socio-economic, technological and political ones.

iii) The cultural dynamics and more specifically the cultural lifestyle are important to understand the relationships between the video game workers and the neighbourhood, how they perceive themselves as creative acting individuals and in relation to the neighbourhood.

Conceptional and Operational Framework

To study these aspects, I introduced three main concepts: the cultural and creative industries of which the video game industry is part of, neighbourhoods as the place where the dynamics, specified in the third concept, occur. These concepts had to been complemented by sub-concepts. I included the concepts of the creative class of which the video game developers are part of, the

concept of lifestyle because the lifestyle determines what someone is doing, and the concept of amenities, entities where they can perform their lifestyle. The last sub-concepts are the creative milieu, social interactions and networks as the way and place they interact with each other. The cultural dynamics connected with cultural lifestyle and amenities serve as the heuristic guideline. For the operational framework I integrated these concepts to three blocks that built the base for the questionnaire. They cover 'Lifestyle, Dynamics, and Amenities', "Creative Milieu, Social Interactions, and Networks', and 'Connection to the Neighbourhood and Neighbourhood'.

Methodology

My research is based on interviews in Montreal and Düsseldorf. I regard two groups in which I took semi-structured interviews online. One group consists of people working at Ubisoft, such as gameplay programmer or designer, level artists or narrative designer, and the second group are cultural actors, such as artists or people of cultural institutions working in the neighbourhood. Between February 2020 and February 2021, I took 33 interviews in Montreal and Düsseldorf with employees of Ubisoft (12 in Montreal, 10 in Düsseldorf) in different positions, of different age and different job tenure, and with cultural actors (6 in Montreal, 5 in Düsseldorf) who have their studio or cultural institution in the neighbourhood.

My research is further based on newspaper articles of each three regional newspapers regarding the neighbourhood and the video game company Ubisoft since the 1990s. Their content is analysed to find out how the dynamics in the neighbourhood are seen in there, and if the representation corresponds to the perception of the video game developers and the cultural actors.

Research Area

My research is a comparison of the neighbourhood of Mile End in Montreal and Flingern-Nord in Düsseldorf. I have chosen these two neighbourhood because the video game industry in Montreal is inextricably linked with the Mile End and in the Mile End with the French-based company Ubisoft. On that basis, the choice of the second neighbourhood, Flingern-Nord was given, because Ubisoft German head studio is there. Researching the same company is a basis for a comparison because they have the same work philosophy and in this case, both studios opened at around the same time, in 1997 in Montreal and in 1996 in Düsseldorf.

Mile End, part of the arrondissement Le Plateau-Mont-Royal, is centrally located in the city of Montreal. The Mile End neighbourhood used to be an old industrial area, but today it is one of

the most diverse neighbourhoods in terms of concentration of creative industries and workers. Mile End is further considered as one of the most creative clusters worldwide in the field of the video game. Flingern-Nord is centrally located in the city of Düsseldorf. Flingern-Nord, a former working-class district, has nowadays the image of an attractive and trendy neighbourhood. It is the preferred neighbourhood of young people and artists who sell their craftwork in the area and it is home to a creative scene in Düsseldorf.

Results

I will present the first results of the interview analysis.

In the center of this presentation are the employees of Ubisoft in Mile End and Flingern-Nord and the aspects of creativity and cultural engagement in the neighbourhood, to picture a first connection to the neighbourhood with the cultural and creativity line.

In particular, I focus on the following points:

- how they see themselves as creative workers and culturally engaged,

- how they described their lifestyle culturally speaking,

- how they perceive the neighbourhood around Ubisoft,

- what they do culturally in the neighbourhood around Ubisoft, and finally

- how important is the neighbourhood around Ubisoft for their cultural and creative way of life.

Literature (selection):

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