



# NWO

## Humanities

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### INTERVIEW PUBLIC PRIVATE PARTNERSHIPS IN THE HUMANITIES

#### *Playfully, the persuasive power of gaming* by Joost Raessens

**Persuasive games are serious games used in sectors such as healthcare or education to encourage people to acquire a healthier behaviour or more knowledge. In his research project, media theoretician Joost Raessens (Utrecht University) is working together with media companies to develop a dynamic model for the design of these games. The research will provide a theoretical basis for the design, functioning and effectiveness of serious games. That will increase their quality and enhance the competitive strength of this young sector. Raessens' partners, IJsfontein and Submarine, are companies with considerable experience in development of multimedia and serious games.**

#### **How did you find your partners?**

'Via the network I have built up since game studies was recognised as an academic discipline 15 years ago. You visit congresses and workshops, subscribe to newsletters designers read as well, and visit students doing internships. Internship students provide a superb entrance into companies. It takes time and effort to develop such a network but the investment is certainly worthwhile. And once you have a concrete research objective you can find partners in no time. If you want to improve games then you need to know the objectives of the games, how they work, and how you can measure the effects. So collaboration with companies is essential.'

#### **Which agreements did you make?**

'Agreements about concrete issues such as research questions, input from our private partners, which games are eligible, and what our PhD students can do. Together with our research partners at Erasmus University Rotterdam and Eindhoven University of Technology we are itemising the characteristics and strategies of games. We are linking these to the design

principles of games and investigating what does and does not work. We interview games designers, players and our partners' clients. Our partners are very interested in the development of theory but lack the time and knowledge to do this. Academic research provides them with many valuable insights and can contribute to a sort of quality mark for games.'

#### **How does public-private partnership work in practice?**

'Without many problems, as long as you are flexible. For example, if your partner suddenly wants to investigate a different game or add another focus to the research then that's fine. As long as the research plan agreed upon at the start is adhered to then everything can be pragmatically solved. Companies work and communicate quickly and knowledge must be directly applicable, whereas academics usually work with a long-term perspective. Nevertheless, academic and commercial interests can go well together. The idea that academics sell their souls to commercial interests if they participate in public-private partnerships is simply not true. Fundamental research has proven to be perfectly possible in these partnership projects. Companies appreciate it if you not only come to gain knowledge but to give something back as well. For example, for a game studies manual that I edited an internship student at IJsfontein jointly wrote a chapter with the company's director.'

#### **Tips for fellow researchers?**

'Be genuinely enthusiastic, show interest in what companies are doing, work on gaining their confidence, and make sure you know both the national and international fields of theory and practice. Otherwise it is hardly worthwhile knocking on their doors with a research proposal. If you try to, you will probably hear that the research question is not interesting or that it has already been solved.'