

global network player authority PowerDieDie guilt god Let's Play andel lndead wri Authentic me uratiz on Skill contest  
game rule system gameplay avatar WoW blessing noob kills memor face body fight pop spe Ingame PST PVE digital  
religion game analysis representation healing Loreig o-scaps Soul diablo class tradition experience with rebirth rdi scusion wedding  
simulation ludology The Last of Us death resurrection funeral runes imer sion community symbol salvation genesis 360PVE  
narrative







last year’s event, when packed exhibition halls and colorful cosplay contests were still a physical reality. I spent one day at *gamescom* 2019, at *the heart of gaming*, as the organizers put it in their slogan, and what struck me the most was not only the sheer size of the event, but also the many questions it raised for me as a researcher regarding the complex and multifaceted relationship between (German) politics and gaming on several levels.

### **The Heart of Gaming**

One day is not enough to experience such a mammoth-event, as I discovered. Too little time on the one hand and too much on display on the other hand left me wandering around a little aimlessly and slightly overwhelmed. Besides the accompanying events such as eSports-tournaments or *gamescom congress*, a conference with panel discussions and workshops (more on that later), the fair itself consisted of eleven exhibition halls on two levels comprising not only the display of games, but also of technology, organizations and businesses.

Among the game-exhibitors were most of the world’s largest AAA-studios and producers promoting their latest or upcoming releases as well as small independent studios in a separate hall, the *Indie Village*. To me, this was by far the most rewarding part of the fair concerning actual game content: Not only were the games themselves more accessible to try out, but in many cases the developers were also there, which made it possible to find out more about a game and its specific production.







that this kind of equation of right-wing and left-wing extremism as two sides of the same coin is not only highly simplistic, but also problematic as it has the potential to relativize the former – an issue that demands particular watchfulness of in the context of German politics and society.

However, to take a step back, a central question remains: What is the *Verfassungsschutz* doing at a gaming fair, anyways? Other than the army, recruiting future personnel did not seem to be the major motivation, but rather educating the public. NRW's interior ministry argued that due to the large number of visitors, many of whom are younger than 24, *gamescom* is the ideal venue to directly approach a young audience (Wienand 2019). The booth featured a quiz designed to test the participants' knowledge about extremism and a virtual reality application that was supposed to provide insights into Salafist radicalization tactics.

The German podcast *Pixeldiskurs*, that dedicated an episode to NRW's *Verfassungsschutz* at *gamescom*, raised the question whether the aim of educating the public about anything other than their own work is actually within the scope of the defined tasks and purpose of the *Verfassungsschutz* (Klös, Balduf and Simond 2019). They point out that in Germany, such tasks are clearly attributed to organizations such as the Federal Agency for Civic Education (Bundeszentrale für politische Bildung 2018), that is specifically created for the purpose informing and educating the public on political and civic issues.







Georg Hobmeier and Abdullah Karam on the creation of *Path Out* (2017), a free-to-play RPG which is based on Abdullah’s experiences as he had to flee Syria, in my opinion would have deserved much more audience and attention. Overall, it appeared to me that despite being part of *gamescom*, discussions like these felt very far away from the great majority of visitors that were not professionals, journalists, or researchers, and many of whom did not attend *gamescom congress* because it required a separate ticket.

**Summary**

Although I only spent one day at *gamescom 2019*, I did learn a few things: First, I realized more than ever that gamers are a contested and much-courted target group, not only in an economical but also in a political sense. This indicates a long-overdue realization in many parts of society that gaming is not a niche phenomenon, but that wanting to reach out to young people means having to reach out to gamers. Second, I would argue that at *gamescom*, the critical reflection of sociopolitical issues connected to games and gaming mostly takes place at the margins of the event. This was in itself no surprise, but it was made so much clearer through the strange discrepancy between this lack of discussion in the course of the main fair itself on the one hand and the overwhelming presence of political institutions on the other hand. Third, I learned that gamers really love merchandise – a lot. And fourth, I also learned something about myself, which I should have already known before: I am far too impatient to wait in line for hours to try out a new game – or maybe just not passionate enough. In 2020, when nothing is the same as it was, a trip to *gamescom* will also look vastly different. It will be interesting to see what a completely online event will look like and, perhaps, in the specific case of *gamescom*, this will not only be a setback, but also an opportunity.

## References

Au, C. v., 2018. Bundeswehr provoziert mit verharmlosenden Werbeplakaten. *Süddeutsche Zeitung*, [online] 23 August. Available at <https://www.sueddeutsche.de/digital/gamescom-bundeswehr-provoziert-mit-verharmlosenden-werbeplakaten-1.4101641>, accessed 7 May 2020.

Baumsteiger, M., 2019. Der Dschihadist als Lachnummer. *Süddeutsche Zeitung*, [online] 18 October. Available at <https://www.sueddeutsche.de/leben/kampf-gegen-den-terror-der-dschihadist-als-lachnummer-1.4641265>, accessed 14 May 2020.

Benrath, B., 2019. Scheuer bringt den Gamern kein Geschenk mit. *faz.net*, [online] 20 August. Available at <https://www.faz.net/aktuell/wirtschaft/digitec/gamescom-2019-scheuer-laesst-videospielindustrie-foerderung-offen-16342591.html>, accessed 10 May 2020.

Bundeszentrale für politische Bildung, 2018. *Strengthening Democracy - Fostering a Civil Society: The Federal Agency for Civic Education: Our Mission and Activities*. Available at <https://www.bpb.de/die-bpb/138853/our-mission-and-activities>, accessed 11 May 2020.

*Call of Duty: Modern Warfare*, 2019. [video game] (Microsoft Windows, PS4, Xbox One) Infinity Ward, Activision.

*FIFA 20*, 2019. [video game] (Microsoft Windows, PS4, Xbox One, Nintendo Switch, Google Stadia) EA Vancouver / EA Romania, EA Sports.

gamescom, 2019. *Final Report 2019*. Available at <https://www.gamescom.global/the-fair/review/review-2019/final-report.php>, accessed 5 May 2020.

gamescom, 2020a. *gamescom congress*, 26 August 2020. Available at <https://www.gamescom.global/events-and-congresses/for-all/gamescom-congress-/gamescom-congress.php>, accessed 11 May 2020.

gamescom, 2020b. *Ticket private visitor gamescom*. Available at <https://www.gamescom.global/participation-and-planning/for-visitors/tickets-for-private-visitors/tickets-for-private-visitors.php>, accessed 5 May 2020.

gamescom congress, 2019. *gamescom congress Opening: Debatt(l)e Royale*. Available at <https://gamescomcongressen2019.sched.com/event/RYM7/gamescom-congress-opening-debatt-royale>, accessed 11 May 2020.

Gießler, D., 2019. Und dann hebt der Kampfjet nicht mal ab: Bundeswehr auf der Gamescom. *Zeit Online*, [online] 22 August. Available at <https://www.zeit.de/digital/games/2019-08/bundeswehr-gamescom-stand-rekruten-hacker>, accessed 5 May 2020.

Klös, T., Balduf, N., and Simond, S.H., 2019. *Gamescomdiskurs 2019 - Der Verfassungsschutz auf der Gamescom*, Pixeldiskurs. [podcast] 23 August 2019. Available at <http://pixeldiskurs.de/2019/08/23/gamescomdiskurs-2019-der-verfassungsschutz-auf-der-gamescom/>, accessed 10 May 2020.

*Path Out*, 2017. [video game] (Windows, Mac, Linux) Causa Creations.

Prinz, M., 2019. Online-Hate und Gaming: Well Played, Gamescom? *Belltower News*, [online] 26 August. Available at <https://www.belltower.news/online-hate-und-gaming-well-played-gamescom-90279/>, accessed 11 May 2020.

Schröder, F., 2019. Verfassungsschutz sorgt bei Gamescom für Diskussionen. *General-Anzeiger Bonn*, [online] 20 August. Available at [https://www.general-anzeiger-bonn.de/news/digitale-welt/verfassungsschutz-sorgt-bei-gamescom-fuer-diskussionen\\_aid-45198083](https://www.general-anzeiger-bonn.de/news/digitale-welt/verfassungsschutz-sorgt-bei-gamescom-fuer-diskussionen_aid-45198083), accessed 11 May 2020.

Wienand, L., 2019. Was macht der Verfassungsschutz auf der Gamescom? *t-online.de*, [online] 20 August. Available at [https://www.t-online.de/digital/id\\_86294940/gamescom-was-macht-der-verfassungsschutz-auf-der-spielemesse-.html](https://www.t-online.de/digital/id_86294940/gamescom-was-macht-der-verfassungsschutz-auf-der-spielemesse-.html), accessed 7 May 2020.