

A SURVEY OF THE IRISH GAMES INDUSTRY & THE ETHICS OF POLICY RESEARCH (CALL 5)

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What size is the Irish games industry? How many people work in the industry? How many games studios are there in Ireland? We don't really know. But why might it matter? It matters because government policies are being made based on assumptions on the size, scale and needs of the sector. Policymaking is not a science, but an art. The policymaking process is subject to multiple influences (Cairney 2019). It is a complex process to get a policy action onto a government agenda. From an Irish perspective, it has been challenging to persuade policymakers to take the digital games sector seriously and to bring in policy measures that support the industry.

It is contended that there is insufficient knowledge of the scale of the Irish games sector, partly due to lack of funding of comprehensive surveys. This paper examines the need for data on the Irish games industry from three perspectives. The first is as an academic specializing in the political economy of cultural and creative industries. The second is as a policy researcher and consultant. The third is as an industry advocate and board member of Imirt, the Irish games representative body. Imirt is the Irish for play.

The introduction of a digital games tax credit in Ireland in December 2022 has come about because of the persuasive work of multiple stakeholders. Part of the challenge in ensuring that tax credits make it onto the agenda is in persuading policymakers that the industry needs supports. The Irish digital games industry has historically been one of much rhetoric but little policy action. A 2011 policy report from Forfás predicted significant growth in jobs. However, the figures used by creative industry consultants Olsberg SPI with Nordicity for their report on the Irish audiovisual industries hold that the direct and indirect employment in the sector is very low (Olsberg 2017). These low employment figures were part of the evidence justifying the need for the introduction of the digital games tax credit at both national level and under the European Union's state aid requirements. The digital games tax credit will lead, it is believed, to an increase in industry participation and direct employment, and such an increase is considered a key measure of success. However, basing the success or value of the sector simply on industry and employment figures fails to acknowledge the problems identified with work practices in the games industry and wider creative industries ((Banks, 2017; Bulut, 2020).

This paper will discuss the need for granular knowledge of the industry in the light of the recently introduced digital games tax credit in Ireland (December 2022, effective January 2023). It interrogates how such research might be carried out and reflects on

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the authors position as academic, policy researcher and industry advocate. It unravels the reflective ethical issues of carrying policy research from these distinct perspectives and question what value such research might have within the wider context of creative industries discourse.

There is an increasing tendency in creative industries discourse towards metrification and datafication which reduces the value of culture to what is countable (Meyrick et al 2018). From an academic perspective, there is an uneasiness around such quantification of value. However, from an industry representative perspective, knowledge of the sector is important to ensure continued support through policy measures. This paper considers the metrification of the Irish games industry and the introduction of new state supports for digital games production. It places this analysis into the wider discourse around the role of state aids for cultural and creative industries (Kerr 2017; Mayer 2017; Primorac 2020; Webber, 2020), an analysis which uses the problematization of cultural and creative industries discourse. I then acknowledge the need for robust industry data on the games industry to influence the policy agenda around supports for the development of the industry. With a dual perspective of academia and industry, this paper interrogates the ethical and moral challenges arising from policy research on digital games.

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