

Game Studies in Latin America: Reflections about a growing field and gamer/player counter hegemonic identities

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In Latin America, the increase in interest in games as a field of study occurs in a diversity of academic fields of local researchers, mainly from the areas of education, psychology, art, literature, and other social sciences (Barbabella & García, 2015; Berner & Santander, 2012; Carvajal & López, 2011), as well as the interest generated by researchers from outside the region (Penix-Tadsen, 2019).

Between 2019 and 2021, the first magazines specializing in game studies in Latin America emerged in order to consecrate the local field. To mention some examples: in Chile, SEK University launched its first issue of the magazine "Ludology" in 2019, in the spring of 2020, the first edition of the Argentinian magazine "Ludorama" came out, which seeks to compile essays on the science of the game, and in 2021, the University of Palermo in Argentina, together with "Game on! The Art at Stake", published its first issue of "Game Studies Notebooks" (Oulton, 2021). The latter is where debates about games were opened in the Latin American academic field, recognizing that there is a lack of spaces dedicated to the study of games in the region and a high interest on the part of researchers (Oulton, 2021). In addition to the above, there are also some works that seek to reconstruct the history of the video game industry in the region, such as "América Latina Juega" (Wong, 2021), and others that analyze Latin American culture and its relationship with video games, such as "Cultural Code: Videogames and Latin America" (Penix-Tadsen, 2016).

Despite the existing works and the interest in games, it has not been possible to characterize the field of game studies in the region. In Latin America, the study of technologies and games implies the understanding of situations defined by asymmetries and tensions in the economic, social, and political systems, among which the unequal distribution of capital stands out in the economic, cultural, and symbolic dimensions, as do gaps in access to technology, gender violence, and linguistic, ethnic, and racial exclusion (Ricaurte, 2018). The known academic production comes from referents from countries of the Global North, where definitions have been built around the field and the identities of players (such as gamer or geek), which are adopted in regions or countries of the Global South

without being problematized in different contexts (Penix-Tadsen, 2019) and sometimes also not accounting for the identity definitions generated by the communities of players and video gamers themselves. There is also no consensus on what types of studies are considered within this field; studies that could be considered within this category due to how they approach games are not categorized as such, and there is no formal academic development of these topics, so that the consolidation of the field and/or discipline of game studies is an issue.

Based on the aforementioned and the development of two investigations on games conducted by the authors, one from the study of video games and the other from role-playing games, the field of game studies is problematized with respect to both approaches. As a methodology, a systematic review of the bibliography on games in Latin America in the last 10 years (from 2013 to 2023) is being developed, particularly in Spanish-speaking South American countries, with the aim of characterizing and problematizing gaming, academic production around game studies, and games at a Latin American level. We aim to reflect on what is meant by "game studies" and how researchers who work in Latin America position themselves in the field in relation to the existing academic tensions, the regional characteristics of the field and players, as well as how they link with communities of gamers and players.

Some of the assumptions that are presented in this regard and to which an answer is sought through the methodology are: (1) Games are usually not studied or understood as a socio-cultural artifact in regional academic production, where games continue to be perceived as methodologies or means to respond to particular interests of the disciplines that generate academic works. (2) There is a lack of identity in relation to the study of games in the region, which also does not allow the characterization of local identities of players, where verticality is perceived in the research developed to approach games. (3) There are difficulties in academic production, where the need to read, write, and publish in English persists as a barrier to access, production, and dissemination of knowledge, creating a major obstacle to the consolidation of a local field. Finally, adding to the previous point, (4) the approaches around games are not considered relevant by the regional academic communities because they are linked to leisure, where only research that makes use of games as a means for other purposes is validated (linking with assumption 1 but from the academic perspective).

As a summary, game studies as a disciplinary field presents many challenges in Latin America in terms of its definition, ways of understanding and approaching games, as well as acceptance and dissemination in academic communities. The authors hope that this text can open questions and highlight the importance of working around the ways of playing and the identities of the players and gamers in Latin America.

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