Beyond the Studio: Long-term Career Trajectories of Swedish Game Graduates

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INTRODUCTION

The Swedish games industry tells two parallel stories: booming revenues and shrinking opportunity. Between 2020 and 2024, revenues grew 66% (from approximately €2 to €3.37 billion), yet employment increased by only 38% (6,596 to 9,130 employees). With over 1,500 students entering game education annually in Sweden (Marklund 2016), and mass layoffs affecting one-fourth of developers globally in the last two years (GDC 2026), game graduates face structural barriers to employment in an oversaturated labour market. Without enough jobs to absorb all, what are the actual career trajectories of those who complete these programmes?

While industry reports track total employment, few map long-term career trajectories. Australian research examining 119 higher education game programmes found graduates' options limited to small studios with minimal hiring capacity (Keogh and Hardwick 2024). Analysis of 11 Purdue University game graduates revealed career diversity across games, simulation, advertising, architectural visualisation, film, and freelance work (McCord and Exter 2025). Such studies remain limited and focus primarily on immediate post-graduation outcomes.

This work investigates how game graduates navigate long-term career pathways in an oversaturated market, using Sweden as a case study for a retrospective analysis. It draws on creative labour studies documenting structural precarity (McGuigan 2010; Hesmondhalgh and Baker 2011), and boundaryless career theory framing cross-sector mobility and continuous learning as self-direction (Arthur 1994).

The pilot phase presented here used LinkedIn data to map career trajectories across Swedish game design graduates (2014-2017), addressing: (Q1) What proportion enters the games industry, and what is the retention rate? (Q2) For those not in games, what industries and roles do they pursue? (Q3) What relationships exist between internship, further education, geographic location, and games employment? These patterns will inform subsequent survey and interview phases examining career

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decision-making, professional identity formation, and subjective definitions of success. LinkedIn data carries inherent limitations (self-reporting, presentation bias, platform adoption patterns), which subsequent phases will mitigate.

METHODS

This pilot focuses on Bachelor of Game Design graduates (2014-2017, n=200) from Uppsala University, Campus Gotland, providing approximately 10-year career trajectories. The program, established in 2001, offered at the time a Major in Game Design with Minors in Game Programming or Graphics. Focusing on a single program provides a homogeneous baseline.

For this phase, publicly available LinkedIn profiles (n=154, 77% of graduates) were coded on: current role and industry sector, internships during studies, additional education, geographic location, and whether they had professionally worked in games through registered companies (regardless of size, excluding hobby and unpaid roles). Analysis employed descriptive statistics (frequency distributions, cross-tabulation) examining relationships between categorical variables (internship, further education, geographic location) and binary outcomes (ever worked in games, currently in games). Retention rate was calculated as the proportion no longer in games according to employment status at the time of analysis relative to those who entered the sector.

RESULTS

Of 154 graduates analysed, 98 (63%) worked professionally in games at some point. However, only 67 (43%) currently work in games, representing 31% attrition (Q1) and confirming patterns of job mobility. Gender could not be determined from LinkedIn profiles; subsequent phases will examine gender-employment relationships.

Current employment shows diversity beyond traditional game roles (Figure 1). 43% work in game development, 26% in IT/Programming, 10% in other creative industries, 6% in producer/management positions, and 1% in education. Only 13% work in unrelated or unknown sectors. This distribution supports a boundless career trajectory and suggests significant skill transferability, particularly into adjacent technical fields (PQ2). Subsequent phases will investigate whether skills acquired during game design education enabled lateral transitions or whether graduates required additional training.

Concentration of games and creative roles in Stockholm, compared with broader geographic distribution of IT/Programming positions (Figure 2), suggests industry clustering creates structural barriers (Q3). 64% of Swedish game developers work in Stockholm (Dataspelsbranschen 2025); graduates unable or unwilling to relocate to the capital face limited opportunities, potentially driving transitions to geographically distributed sectors. This pattern reflects international clustering of digital technology and creative sectors in large urban centres (Zukin 2020). Further investigation will examine the impact of geolocation on game career opportunities.

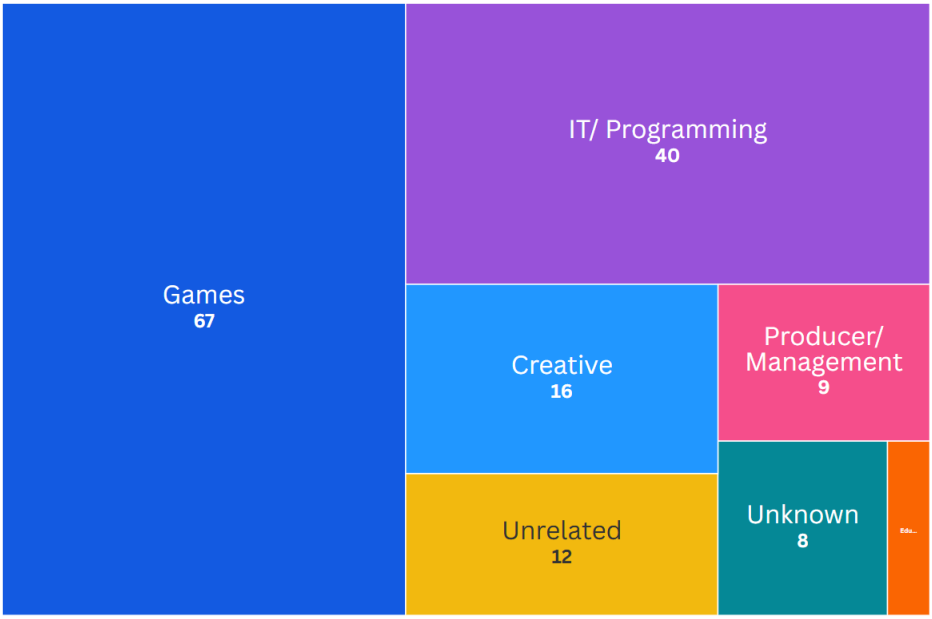

Figure 1: Employment of Swedish game graduates across sectors in early 2026

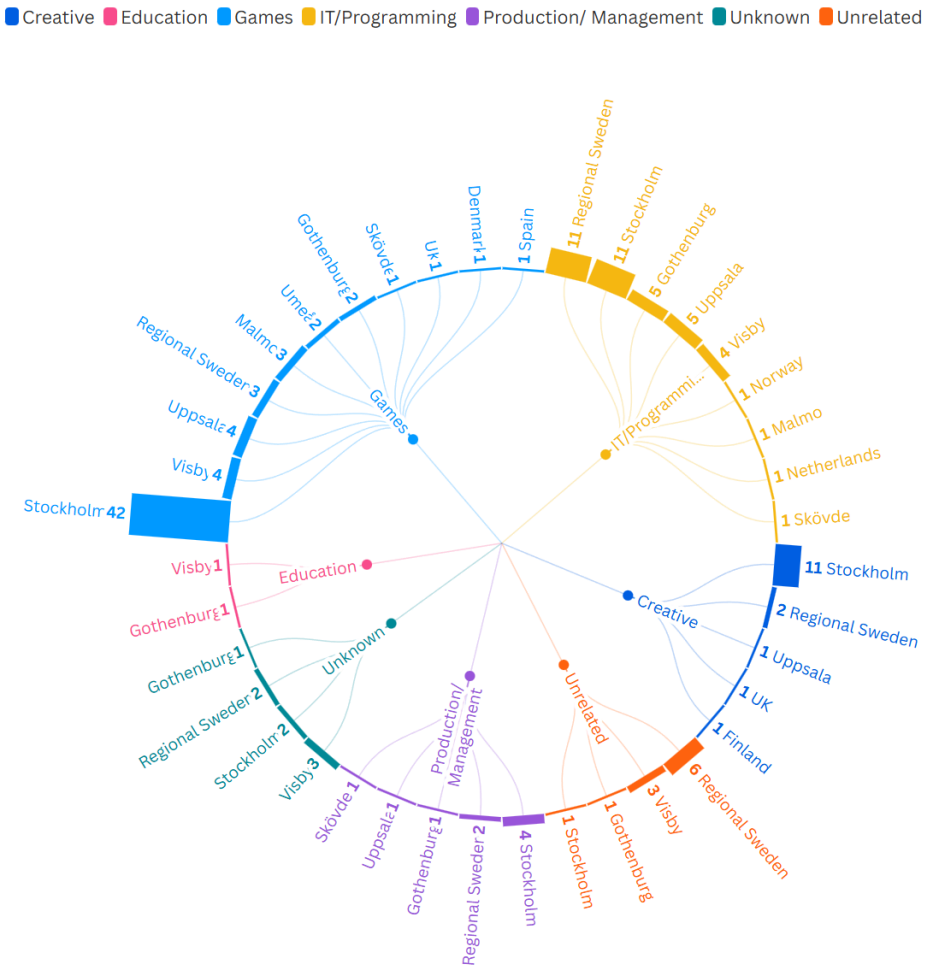

Figure 2: Geolocation breakdown by current job role

Internship completion (n=18) suggests positive association with both game industry entry (89%) and retention (72%), compared to graduates without internships (60% entry, 40% retention). However, small sample size limits firm conclusions. Further education shows no clear association with games employment (Q3), warranting investigation into the motivation for further education (Figure 3). Survey and interview phases will examine these patterns.

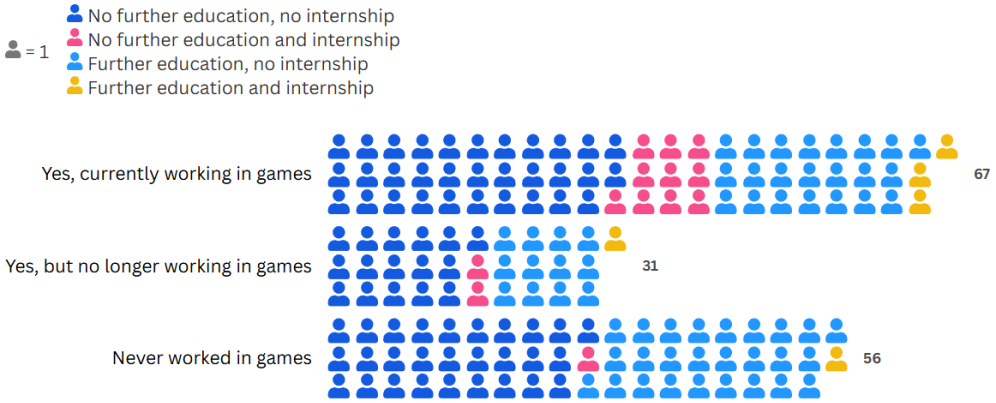

Figure 3: Association between games employment, further education, and internship

DISCUSSION

With only 63% ever entering games and 43% remaining employed in the field after approximately ten years, findings confirm that the market is structurally unable to provide sustained opportunities for all graduates. Yet a 68% retention rate suggests the industry retains the majority of those who do break in.

This pilot study further demonstrates that game graduates successfully secure positions in adjacent sectors, particularly IT/Programming and creative media, challenging simplistic success and failure narratives. However, lateral movement is uneven: IT/Programming offers greater mobility and geographic reach, while creative roles exhibit less mobility and concentrate in Stockholm. Geographic location emerges as a key factor, suggesting that graduates unable or unwilling to relocate to the capital have limited career options.

Future phases will clarify emerging patterns and address questions unclear from LinkedIn data: How many not currently in games have permanently exited versus temporarily transitioned? What role does gender play? What motivates graduates to remain or leave? What relationships exist between company size, job security, and satisfaction? What is the role of networking? And how effectively did an education in Game Design prepare graduates for current roles?

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