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VALUE: Videogames and Archaeology at Leiden University

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Citation

Ariese, C. E., Boom, K. H. J., Mol, A. A. A., & Politopoulos, A. (2015). *VALUE: Videogames and Archaeology at Leiden University*. Retrieved from <https://hdl.handle.net/1887/45967>

Version: Not Applicable (or Unknown)

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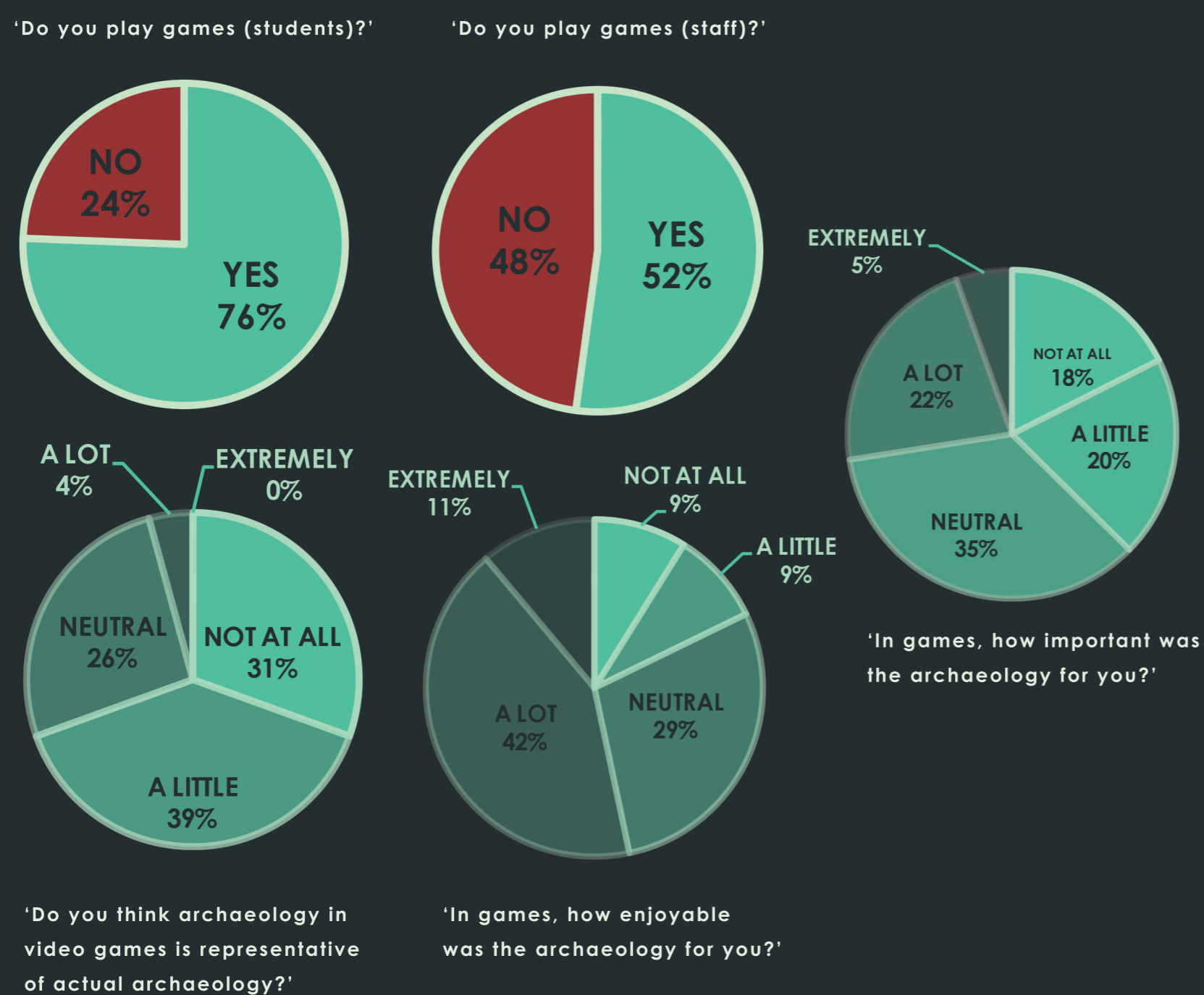
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Note: To cite this publication please use the final published version (if applicable).

ORIGINS

The research group VALUE was set up in the beginning of 2015 by four researchers from Leiden University's Faculty of Archaeology. We are focusing our efforts, within the growing field of archaeology and videogames, on the academic side of this discussion where there is still plenty of unexplored terrain. To the right you can see a small taste of the research and public outreach that has already been happening by others. Below you will find more information on what we have done to date and where we plan to go from here.

We began our research by doing a survey within the faculty of students & staff. We wanted to test the relevance of our research and identify the basis of support within our faculty. Some results are figured below, showing firstly the high amount of students and also staff who play videogames. These gamers cover a spectrum from extremely casual to hardcore gamers. A second observation relates to games with archaeological elements, such as *Tomb Raider* or *Age of Empires*. Respondents indicated that they felt largely neutral about the importance of any archaeological elements, but they highly enjoyed them. Finally, the majority of respondents indicated that archaeology in videogames is not representative of actual archaeology.



RESEARCH FOCUS

From the outset of the project, VALUE's aim is to do research into four different focus areas. The first of these is **Representation & Narrative** where we can explore how the concept of archaeology or how archaeological concepts are portrayed in videogames. This thread will centre on archaeology within the narrative, story lines, game play and the game world. The second area is **Virtual Material Cultures**, looking at the relation between players and virtual objects. The exchange of virtual loot or understanding the value of rare virtual items are examples of this focal area.

Thirdly, we are taking an interest in **Online Communities**, their characteristics and the way members interact within them. For instance, why do certain games encourage collaboration while other games lead to social conflicts and 'bad' communities? Our final area of interest is in **Realizing Digital Spaces** which looks at the ways in which archaeologists can contribute to the representation of archaeological landscapes, spaces and objects in videogames. In addition, digital spaces can be used to test archaeological models of human interaction or spatial use.



VALUE is:

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'It's even more real when it's digital'

RESOURCES

We would like to showcase a few academic publications from this field:

M. Kapell & A. Elliott 2013 *Playing with the Past: Digital Games and the Simulation of History*.

A. Mol 2014 Play-things and the Origins of Online Networks: Virtual Material Culture in Multiplayer Games. *Archaeological Review from Cambridge* 29.1

C. Morgan 2009 (Re)Building Çatalhöyük: Changing Virtual Reality in Archaeology. *Archaeologies* 5.3

T. Selliaas Thorsen 2012 *Greek and Roman Games in the Computer Age*.

A sizeable portion of the new developments takes place in the blogosphere such as on *Archaeogaming* (by Andrew Reinhard), *Electricarchaeology* (by Shawn Graham), *Gamingarchaeo* (by Tara Copplestone) and the collaboratively edited *Playthepast*. Through these social media channels, the broader public is getting involved with this new field of interest and is steering the research with their feedback.

INITIAL PROGRESS

After completing the survey, VALUE has continued in two directions. First of all we have presented our investigations and worked towards getting wider approval for our line of research. We are attempting to engage an ever wider network of archaeologists to think about the value this field of research may have for them. Secondly we have started playing and streaming a few games to discuss their archaeological and historical aspects with a wider audience. This is one way in which we can identify key games to research more extensively and it is also a useful public outreach method.

We welcome archaeologists, game developers and others to join our streams and the discussions surrounding them - either in person or virtually. We began with two platform puzzle games, *Valiant Hearts* (set in WWI) and *Apotheon* (Inspired by Greek mythology). For our second session we explored the topic of colonialism with a demo of the game *Herald* and *Sid Meier's Civilization*. Along with planning more streams, we are currently working on a paper to publish the results of our survey. Finally, we would like to announce that we will be organizing a conference on this subject, set to take place in early December 2015.

If you would like to participate in any aspect of the VALUE project please reach out to us! We would love to get in touch especially for our upcoming conference!

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