

Beyond Subcultures. To study gaming communities through Bourdieu's cultural capital

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INTRODUCTION

This study strives to investigate models and theoretical frameworks that have been used for sociological analysis of gaming communities. Video gaming culture is a complex phenomenon affected by ongoing relevant changes. On the one hand, new technological devices and software have paved the spread of pervasive games (Capra et al., 2005; Mäyrä, 2015); on the other hand, the birth of live streaming, professional e-sports, and exploitation of workers represented the most evident part of an important turn in the relation between gaming culture and labour (Johnson & Woodcock, 2018; Woodcock & Johnson, 2019).

Moreover, scholars debated the nature of gaming communities adopting different perspectives and definitions. Gaming has hence been studied prevalently as a subculture (Krzywinska & King, 2005; Boellstorff, 2006; Williams et al., 2006; Crawford & Rutter, 2006; Downing, 2011; Ruffino & Carbone, 2014) or postmodern subculture (Hodkinson, 2002; Meikle, 2013;), and less often as a *lifestyle* (Dutra, 2021), a *youth scene* (Adamus, 2012), as a *tribe* (Maffesoli, 2008; Sánchez & Stevens, 2011) or as neo-tribe (Bennett, 1999; Bennett, 2005; Law, 2016; Hardy et al., 2018; Marechal et al, 2019), whilst the original definition of “virtual-culture” (Crowe and Bradford, 2007) seemed to not be common in academic literature. The use such categories is to be related to different contexts, since the relation between video games players communities and society can be articulated in different ways (Hjorth, 2011; Penix-Tadsen, 2019; Deshbandhu, 2020; Snodgrass et al., 2021).

Other scholars overcome the limitations of such categories adjusting Bourdieu's *cultural capital* to this context. The gaming capital (Consalvo 2007; Consalvo 2009; Walsh & Apperley, 2009) has been used to describe how video games players rely on instruments that are not part of video games: i.e., gaming magazines, electronic and printed strategy guides, cheat codes, and manuals. Consalvo define such instruments as paratexts. Gaming capital is indeed “a way to discuss the role knowledge, experience and skill have both for an individual, but also for the larger cultural and economical system that surrounds digital games” (Mäyrä, 2010). Moreover, other scholars have used Bourdieusian concepts to investigate video gaming cultures, although a general theory has not been elaborated: i.e., *habitus* (Crawford & Rutter,

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2006; Zhu, 2012; McNeish & De Paoli, 2016; Jaćević, 2022), *field* (Toft-Nielsen & Krogager, 2015; Keogh, 2019). In particular, cultural capital's theory could be adjusted to video games cultures and broadly explained.

Bourdieu “describes four kinds of capital: cultural capital, symbolic capital, economic capital, and social capital” (Walsh & Apperley, 2009, p. 6). For the French author, those are intertwined: “there are close connections between each of these forms of capital – particularly cultural and economic capital – and these directly reflect the class status of the individual” (Back et al., 2012, p. 23). Also, cultural capital can take different forms (Bourdieu, 1976). The *embodied* form of capital represents the “long-lasting dispositions of the mind and body” (Kraaykamp & Van Eijck, 2010, p. 210), cannot be transmitted immediately, unlike money, and it is strongly determined by one's origins and education. In gaming communities, such kind of cultural capital is represented by transmission of knowledge, habits, mentality vehiculated by paratexts. The *institutionalised* form of cultural capital is made up of titles created by the educational system (Throsby, 1999, p. 4). Cultural goods such as paintings represent the *objectified* form of the cultural capital (Kraaykamp & Van Eijck, 2010, p. 211). Furthermore, cultural capital may be exchanged into economic capital: the objectified capital is used as a ratio of convertibility between them (Bourdieu, 1979, p. 6). In the case of video games, the relation between gaming and social capital must be noted (Jung, 2022). It presents also political implications (Huang & Liu, 2022) that may involve the so-called political capital or *capital militant* (Matonti & Poupeau, 2004). Furthermore, we can recognise institutions that control both *institutional* and *objectified* capital, as in the case of Video Games Museums or universities (Eklund et al., 2019, p. 445; Metzidakos et al., 2021, p. 68).

BIO

Giulio Pitroso is a PhD student in Sociology at the Griffith University, his project is focussed on the way gaming communities articulate stereotypes tied to Italians and the Mafia. Giulio worked as a teacher and as a journalist in Italy. He has also been member of several academic and civil society organisations such as DiGRA Italia, Libera, Generazione Zero, Foreign Friends of Catalunya.

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