"Showing what we can do and who we are."

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With the new "Games & XR Central Germany" association *(Games & XR Mitteldeutschland)*, the industry has a mouthpiece

Computer games no longer purely serve the purpose of entertainment. They form a bridge to our technology-based world. Their potential makes them pioneers for the use of virtual reality, augmented reality, mixed and extended reality - things that are increasingly becoming tools in other economic sectors. The recently-founded "Games & XR Central Germany" association supports these developments in our region and is set to give the industry a higher profile in Germany.

Friedrich Lüder is no longer able to imagine everyday life without media and virtual reality. He is part of the team at the Magdeburg-based company "Silver Seed Games", which was founded in 2013 and is known for its development of interactive entertainment applications with added social value. In the "Experimental Factory" on the university campus, the team of nine develops concepts for the digitalisation of processes, and develops software-supported solutions in its office. In this respect, it makes frequent use of innovative technologies from the games industry. Its latest "coup" is its very first self-developed game, which addresses the topic of sleep and dreams. Right now, it is still in the prototype phase. At Silver Seed Games, trying out things that are new and thinking without limits have always been the order of the day. "We have always believed in bringing know-how together and thinking outside of the box," explains Friedrich Lüder, before adding: "This motto can be extended to include the whole of the games industry in Germany, which finally needs to demonstrate where it is and what it is capable of."

Central Germany: a hotspot for innovative technologies, computer games and XR

Friedrich Lüder remembers that about three years ago, he saw the "games map" of the Federal Association of the German Computer Games Industry*(Bundesverband der deutschen Games-Branche)* which shows the locations of companies that deal with computer games and their distribution. "I immediately noticed that some of the businesses from Saxony-Anhalt were missing," he says. Lüder, who hails from Magdeburg, collected contacts, cooperated with partners from the region and added to the map. "I then realised that although the industry is established in Saxony-Anhalt, it has a very low profile," explains Lüder. Other games enthusiasts in the neighbouring East German states thought the same thing. In response, some 40 industry stakeholders from Central Germany gathered at a meeting in Leipzig and decided: "We need a platform, a network, and we don't want to think in terms of borders."

Therefore, at the start of the year, the "Games & XR Central Germany" association was founded in the Designhaus in Halle. Games developers, representatives from universities, stakeholders from the world of "eSport" and the cultural sector in Saxony-Anhalt, Thuringia and Saxony are all represented. Friedrich Lüder discusses his most important objective as chairman of the executive committee: "We want to establish this region as a hotspot for innovative technologies and companies for computer games and XR applications." This will mean that such businesses won't just have to draw on their own experience, but will also be able to cooperate closely with stakeholders from outside the sector - from the worlds of industry, research and politics. "The good thing," says the chairman, "is that we can integrate ourselves into the existing networks and ecosystems, resulting in better discussions at the regional level. On this basis, the association intends to "help shape the structural changes in the region of Central Germany". Friedrich Lüder explains why this is important: "Computer games play an important role in the use of virtual reality, augmented reality, mixed and extended reality - XR for short." These have long since arrived in our everyday lives, explains Lüder. Whether it is the fitness sector, shopping, operational applications or learning: games and XR applications are always there when playful elements are used to convey knowledge, train in behaviour or increase levels of motivation. "All of this is already playing an important role in our region, even if the density of the games companies needs to increase further," explains Friedrich Lüder. "After all, we can score points here in Germany with an excellent university education and excellent universities, as well as a start-up friendly business atmosphere. And now, in addition, with an association which is committed to the interests of the industry."

There is a lot going on here - such as the creation of more funding offers for computer games start-ups and established companies in all three federal states. As ever, the interdisciplinary cooperation between the worlds of industry and science is also being supported. Support is being given to the training and recruitment of skilled workers. In addition, computer games should increasingly be appreciated as a cultural technology with which the world can be explored and understood. "eSport" should also to be developed further as a popular sport. The executive duo, consisting of Friedrich Lüder and Jana Reinhardt of "Rat King Entertainment" from Halle (Saale), are working to achieve these objectives in Saxony-Anhalt. In the position of state spokespersons, each of the three participating federal states is represented in the "Games & XR Central Germany" association by two experienced entrepreneurs and networkers. The new association is being supported, among others, by Leipzig Economic Development Agency, the Central German Media Promotion Agency and the Macromedia University of Applied Sciences in Leipzig.

A good response to the launch of the association: increasing numbers of stakeholders want to get involved

Over 160 participants, of whom 30 are members, are currently working to ensure that the sector for games and XR is strengthened and its profile is raised. Working groups have been established. "We share ideas and we network. Things are really happening," says Lüder. The chairman is happy to point out more than once that "with potential partners from the worlds of business and politics, with its know-how, the region's sector can be strengthened on a sustainable basis." The wider resonance has proven the chairman from Saxony-Anhalt right. "We've had a lot of positive responses about the foundation," he says. "The stakeholders offer to cooperate or come forward with projects - and that's the way it's supposed to be."

Author: Manuela Bock

Saxony-Anhalt at gamescom for the first time!
Where & When: 20 - 22 August 2019 in Cologne
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Jana Reinhardt and Friedrich Hanisch develop indie games. Their company, "Rat King Entertain-ment", is based in the hub for entrepreneurs at Burg Giebichenstein University of Art and Design in Halle (Saale). Their products have won several awards and have been shown at festivals. The developers want to help shape the industrial revolution 4.0 in Central Germany.