

# A Brave New World: Game Industry and Education in Utrecht

There are many features about the province of Utrecht to draw visitors and investors alike; from its landscape to its history, to its centrality with regards to major transportation networks within the Netherlands as well as Europe, to its educational opportunities.

For the business investor, Invest Utrecht, the province's foreign investment agency, has a dedicated staff available to provide answers and assistance to those interested in setting up or expanding their European operations in the province. The province's USPs (unique selling points) are quickly and clearly highlighted on their website, [www.investinutrecht.com](http://www.investinutrecht.com), and the staff at invest utrecht is more than happy to answer any of your questions and provide tailored advice, free of charge, and with full confidentiality.

## Utrecht's Rising Star

In this issue of *The XPat Journal*, dedicated to Education in the Netherlands, it seems only fitting that the educational character of the province be highlighted. With 43% of the province's labour force in possession of at least one post-secondary degree, it is far ahead of the next runner-up at 37.3%. The prestige and variety of post-secondary facilities are a huge attraction for local as well as international students, and, as Ms. Ardi Eleveld of Invest Utrecht points out "...a large percentage of the students remain in the province upon completing their studies". They do so for many of the same reasons investors choose Utrecht: its location, the opportunities and the quality of life. Among the diverse variety of study programmes on offer in the province, one stands out as par-

Hogeschool Utrecht, Photo Els Zweerink



ticularly relevant and interesting, namely, the game industry. The adage: '...it does not matter if you win or lose, but how you play the game...' is perhaps of more relevance to today's 'games' than those of an earlier era. In fact, with today's electronic games, it is almost irrelevant whether you win or lose, it is advancing to higher levels of difficulty and competence that keeps gamers going. And, in order to provide higher levels of challenge, dazzling creativity as well as technological skills are required - in playing the games, but more importantly in

designing them; for play or work.

According to the Fact Sheet on The Dutch Game Industry prepared by handelsroute.nl in 2009, "...the growth of the games industry in the Netherlands is enormous; 50% faster than any other industry in Holland". This growth encompasses design, production, and distribution, as well as the educational and research facilities that support the industry. Utrecht is increasingly becoming the centre of all this, due to a variety of factors: an encouraging environment; countless educational opportunities; incubator support for



*Wilhelminapark, Photo Willem Mes*



new developers and initiatives, and relevant research projects.

### **Students, Synergy and Creativity**

Among the highly-skilled and motivated professionals contributing to this upward trend many can be found in Utrecht - as students, researchers and entrepreneurs.

The Utrecht School of the Arts (HKU) is nationally and internationally recognised for its undergraduate and post-graduate programmes in digital and interactive media. It is

one of the largest Universities of Applied Sciences in Europe specialised in Arts and Culture, which besides teaching also has an active knowledge and research organisation. One of its six research groups focuses on Games and Interaction Design. The University of Utrecht (UU) is also at the forefront of teaching and researching information and computing sciences, and is the home base for the multi-partner programme Game Research for Training and Entertainment (GATE) which aims to extend the benefits of game technology beyond the entertainment industry and demonstrate its relevance to the public sector. Added to the opportunities for studies in this field are those also on offer from Utrecht University of Applied Sciences (HU).

The HKU, together with the UU as well as TNO (an independent research institute), have combined their creative talents and professional skills in the fields of computer science, information science, psychology and game design to create the Centre for Advanced Gaming and Simulation (AGS). The aim of the AGS is to create technology for effective learning and training experiences by applying gaming technology to the simulation of events, thus bringing the application of game technology to a more 'serious' level.

The learning and research environment in Utrecht for the game industry is further complemented by the growth of small game developers who have been creating games for local and international markets. In order to support this increasing trend, the Dutch Game Garden has evolved as an incubator for the many small entrepreneurs in the field. Their aim: to accelerate the growth of the Dutch game industry. They do this through



Gaming Industry - Photo Els Zweerink

Francisco in the Spring and the Tokyo Game Show in the Fall of 2010.

### Science and Society

In many of his novels, Aldus Huxley, author of *A Brave New World*, explored the diverging paths of science and society. While by no means suggesting that Utrecht is that brave new world, there is a link: not in the divergence of science and society but in how science is being used to contribute to society. Besides the application of the advances made in the gaming industry to projects that could benefit society as a whole, such as anticipating and preparing for natural disasters through simulation games or allowing current generations to relive history through the simulation of historical events, Utrecht has one other 'science'-based

a variety of initiatives, such as the Developers Club, the Game Company and Incubator, as well as the Game Business Centres. Together, the latter two house 13 organisations; the biggest concentration of game companies in the Netherlands. According to the Dutch Game Garden, the unique feature of the Dutch games sector is that the companies in the games industry cooperate constructively - rather than considering each other as enemies - creating an ongoing synergy, and making the Dutch Game Garden a natural home for like-minded entrepreneurs.

There are countless supportive, related game industry partners located in and gravitating towards Utrecht, and the rate at which the industry is growing gives no indication that this trend will be slowing down in the near future. There are many factors that contribute to this, not the least of which are the Dutch out-of-the-box media design, excellent training and top-notch scientific research, resulting in innovative entertainment and excellent casual as well as serious games. Invest Utrecht is looking forward to representing this particular USP of their province at the Shanghai World Expo in May 2010 and are proud of the impression Utrecht will be making with its game companies at such international events as the Game Development Conference in San

sector that is also a draw for the province.

Time and space make it impossible to present a thorough analysis of the opportunities within the life sciences in this article, but as is the case with the game industry in Utrecht, the same synergy of partnerships exists for the life sciences sector. Here too, academia joins with research and development and industry to contribute to one of the fastest-growing industries in the Netherlands, including the widest range of life sciences education in the Netherlands, the only Dutch University to offer Veterinary Sciences as a degree, and the National Vaccine Institute, making the province the European headquarters of a growing number of related industries with plans to expand the existing Science Park as well as extend the incubator centre for the life sciences.

Utrecht: not to be overlooked if your interest lies anywhere near tomorrow's technology today.

To further explore the opportunities, or to enquire about doing business in Utrecht, contact Invest Utrecht at 030 - 258 23 96.

For a complete listing of all the Game-related websites in Utrecht, you can download *Dutch Games Go Global Utrecht Edition* from [www.investinutrecht.com](http://www.investinutrecht.com).