

# 13 | LAUSANNE 1830: HISTOIRES DE REGISTRE

**Yannick Rochat, Saara Jones**

Department of Language and Information Sciences, Faculty of Arts, University of Lausanne, Lausanne, Switzerland

yannick.rochat@unil.ch

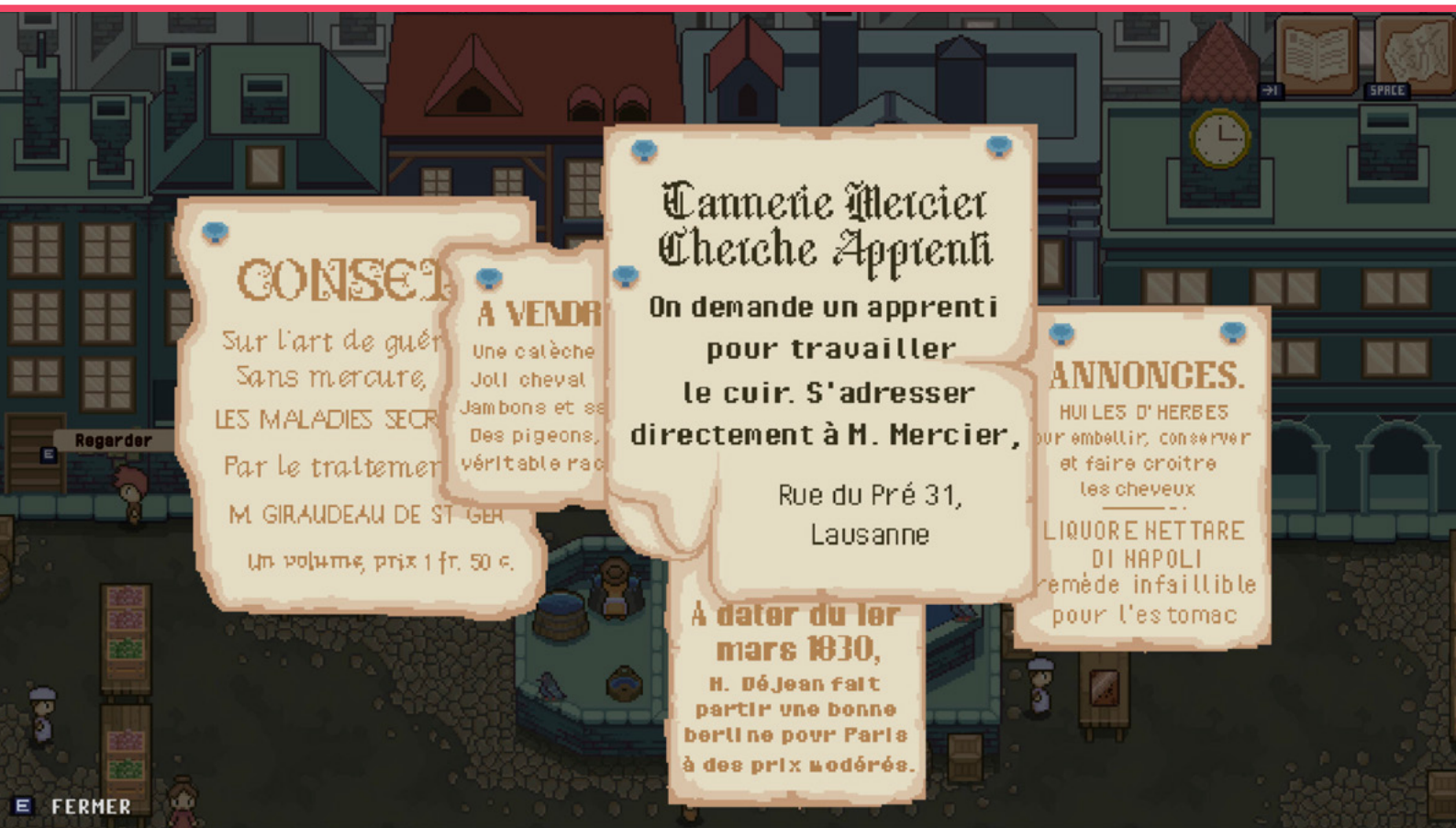
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## KEYWORDS

Education, city, history, public history, Lausanne, Switzerland

## ABSTRACT

“Lausanne 1830: Histoires de registre” is a video game that serves three main objectives. Firstly, it showcases the digitised archives of the city of Lausanne. Secondly, it offers to explore historical heritage through a video game that draws aesthetic inspiration from colorful action role-playing games of the 1990s. Lastly, the creation of this video provided a platform to train local students in game development by involving them in the game’s creation in collaboration with a game development company





## CONTEXT

This project is the result of a collaboration between game studies scholars (GameLab UNIL-EPFL), digital humanists and historians (Lausanne Time Machine, Laboratory for the History of Science and Technology, EPFL), and a local Swiss game development company (Digital Kingdom Sàrl). It was funded by the College of Humanities of EPFL. While the Canton de Vaud has taken a significant digital turn by introducing programming courses at a young age, video games remain absent from these although they are one of the most popular media among school kids. It has been shown that video games can be relevant tools to learn and transmit knowledge (Gee, 2007), as demonstrated in the early days of democratized computing (Papert and Solomon, 1971), as well as today in the context of public history (Cauvin, 2016). Consequently, this project gives an exciting opportunity to bridge this gap and bring together education and entertainment by integrating video games into educational programs.

## TARGETED ISSUE

The creation of “Lausanne 1830” – <https://lausanne1830.ch/> – presented a unique challenge as we wanted to develop an educational game that did not compromise its gameplay and entertainment value. Our aim was to create a video game that would not only be enjoyed within the confines of a school environment but would also be engaging to players outside the classroom. We observed that many serious games have a pedagogical purpose that is often obvious. Some would for example take the form of gamified quizzes, where players are forced to memorize specific information or rely on general knowledge, leading to a lack of engagement.

During a playtesting session in a classroom, one of the students even asked if “Lausanne 1830” was a

gamified quiz. This further underscored the importance of our goal to create a game that would engage players through the entertaining aspects of gameplay while still achieving our educational objectives. We wanted to create a different type of game that would generate curiosity and encourage players to ask questions about history rather than merely memorise facts.

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## PROPOSED SOLUTION

The game mechanics in Lausanne 1830 come from an emerging type of game sometimes called “information game”, or “MetroidBrainia” (Gray, 2022). One of our main inspirations from this genre was “The Return of the Obra Dinn” (Lucas Pope, 2019), where the player’s objective is to uncover the events that led to an abandoned ship’s demise and fill in a notebook with missing information, such as the passengers’ names and the causes of their deaths. This game genre allowed us to use historical archives, including registries, newspapers, books, iconography, and other documents, to create settings and puzzles that serve our educational objectives.

In addition to the game mechanics, a crucial aspect of our development process involved crafting pixel art characters and environments that pay homage to classic video games from the 1990s, such as “The Legend of Zelda”, “Final Fantasy”, and “Dragon Quest”. This design choice helps players identify the game’s intentions as similar to a commercial and entertaining game that can be found on the market, often close to their taste. By combining historical archives and classic game design elements, “Lausanne 1830” offers a gameplay experience that blends education and entertainment.



## RELEVANT INNOVATION

In “Lausanne 1830”, we wanted to create an immersive experience by directly incorporating historical content into the game. The different clues found in-game are based on archives or old documents that have been adapted to fit the puzzles while keeping the facts untouched. The registry also plays a central role in the game, as completing it is the main objective, with all characters appearing in the game also coming from the historical registry.

Our target audience was both a general, heterogeneous audience, who discovers the game through media and social media, and school children, who were our primary focus. In the case of school children, teachers who used the game in their teaching would present it, allow the children to play alone or in groups, and then open a discussion and ask questions about the experiences they had in the game. By exploring the recreated environment, children can look for answers to questions such as “What were the jobs of the people who lived in Lausanne around 1830?”, “Where were they living?”, “What was their daily life like?”, and “What was happening in Lausanne at that time?” This approach encourages children to engage with historical content in a pleasynt and interactive way, enabling them to learn in a manner they can easily relate to.

## PROJECT OUTCOMES & RESULTS

We quickly realized the importance of user testing during the development of “Lausanne 1830” and created a functional prototype early on in the process. By conducting thorough testing, we were able to focus on the player’s experience and ensure that the game was enjoyable and educational. One challenge we encountered was that players were initially confused about the game’s objectives and would wander aimlessly without direction. To address this, we developed a tutorial to provide clear instructions and set goals for players. This proved to be effective, as we received positive feedback from players who were engaged in the game and actively discussing the historical events and information they were discovering with their classmates and teachers. Eventually, this hard work and dedication paid off, as “Lausanne 1830” was awarded the Swiss Game Award in the “serious game” category on November 11, 2022.

## CONCLUSION

“Lausanne 1830: Histoires de Registre” is a video game that uses elements of popular action role-playing games from the 1990s to explore the transmission of historical heritage. It is an “information game” that integrates video games into educational programs, offering a pleasant and interactive way to engage with historical content. User testing was positive, with users (general audience, school kids, teachers) finding it both enjoyable and educational.



## PERSPECTIVES & NEEDS

A teacher has been recruited to develop educational resources based on the game. While some teachers have already incorporated the game into their classrooms, the majority of educators who are open to digital teaching, but not necessarily pro-active, are eagerly awaiting resources that provide guidance on how to utilize the game effectively in their lessons. These resources will include information on how to lead a session, as well as examples of evaluations.

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