

2 | FROM SG FOR CRIME SCENE COORDINATION TO A REFLEXION ABOUT THE ROLES OF IMAGES IN POLICE ACTIVITY

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CONTEXT

CrimeSim is a serious game that has been developed in collaboration by the École des sciences criminelles (ESC) of the University of Lausanne, and the Haute École d'Ingénierie et de Gestion du Canton de Vaud at Yverdon-les-Bains. Based on the WEGAS platform developed by the HEIG-VD, HES-SO, *CrimeSim* runs a scenario setup and implemented by the ESC from an actual situation. This serious game is used within the framework of the course of crime scene coordination in the Master degree in Forensic science at the ESC. It aims at providing an environment where students can deploy their knowledge and professional skills in a collaborative problem-solving approach, recreating the interactions and constraints of an actual investigation process following the unlikely discovery of an unidentified dead body.

THEME & OBJECTIVES

CrimeSim puts a team of players in the position of the head of a forensic police unit that is faced with the choices to provide clues and intelligence to assist a criminal investigation. Mirroring constraints of real situations, the players have limited resources in terms of time and money at disposal, and they are not able to process all the items. Moreover, the time required by the analytical process to extract information from a sample is also considered. Taking into account all the constraints, a team of players has to extract information from samples collected at the crime scene and to put it in perspective with the elements that other types of investigations (testimonies, hearings, etc.) may reveal. Interactions with investigators and other specialists involved in certain stages of the investigation is implemented through a service of emails integrated into the serious game platform.

The objective to use *CrimeSim* is to go beyond the strict professional knowledge and deploy it to a real context. Upon the bed of forensic-led decisions that students are used to taking to orientate the traces detection, the serious game adds a layer of operational decisions that are driven by constraints and needs of the investigation. In order to provoke fruitful reflexion among students, two levels of discussions are implemented in symbiosis with the serious game. First, as the role of the head of the forensic unit in *CrimeSim* is attributed to a team of players, a dialogue among them precedes any decision. Then, at specific milestones during the course of the game, the different teams have to meet in plenary sessions to compare their strategies and choices. These meetings, taking place in the real world, represent activities that encompass the simulation of the serious game and provide an evident pedagogic added-value.



RESULTS & PERSPECTIVE

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So far, about a hundred or so students have played with *CrimeSim*. The usage of this serious game has largely met the expectations of both tutors and players. Yet, unlike suggested by its name, *CrimeSim* is far from a “simulation video game”. It is mainly based on reflexion and abstraction and almost totally proscribes the use of images. At first glance, this concept may seem weird both for a game and an application in forensic science (images are a core element in forensic science). But on the contrary, this near absence of visual information supports forces the players to reflexion and mutual exchanges, while images tend to favour personal interpretation and projections.

CrimeSim also brings some contribution to a more general thinking about the multiple roles of images in relation to police activities. Whether serving surveillance, documentation, testimony, evidence or promotion purposes, images play an increasingly important part in police actions. This pivotal role of images — of, in and for police — constitutes a challenging field of study, which has attracted the interest of researchers at the University of Lausanne in a transdisciplinary perspective.