

## Dossier

# 30 Years SAZ – A Success Story!

**In 1991, twelve game designers founded the Game Designers Association (SAZ). In the following 30 years, it has become a powerful interest group with 550 members from 21 countries, which also has a political impact. Its successes are impressive. Today, game designers have a stronger position vis-à-vis publishers and can act with greater confidence.**

In October 1991, the *Spiele-Autoren-Zunft e.V.* (Game Designers Association) was founded in Essen at the public SPIEL game fair. The goal of the association was to represent the interests of game designers and to promote games as a cultural asset. This was preceded in 1988 by **the famous beer coaster** on which well-known game designers declared that they would no longer publish a game with a publisher that did not mention their name on the game box. So, there were good reasons to exchange experiences and join forces in order to and achieve more together. In the meantime, the twelve founding members (including Hajo Bücken, Max J. Kobbert, Wolfgang Kramer, Alex Randolph, Klaus Teuber, Knut-Michael Wolf) have grown to 550 members from 21 countries, and in Italy there has been a separate national group since 2017, SAZ-Italia, with about 50 members.

The now widely recognized status of game designers as authors did not come without a fight. The Beer Coaster Proclamation of 1988 was only the beginning. In 2011 the SAZ launched the international PR campaign, "Games also have authors", but in 2012, the then managing director of the *Fachgruppe Spiel* (association of German game publishers, today: *Spielverlage e.V.*) still doubted that game authors could be authors in the sense of the German Intellectual Property Act. He instead classified them as only "suppliers". Then in 2014, Parliamentary State Secretary and MdB Christian Lange confirmed on behalf of Justice Minister Heiko Maas that *"games and game rulebooks can be covered by intellectual property protection."* *"Whether this is the case, as with other forms of work, is a question of the individual case."*

The acceptance of game designers as authors in their contracts with publishers and the addition of their names on the game box and in the rules are now largely standard. However this is often only lip service, as many publishers still insist on being the sole decision-makers in the content and the thematic design of the work.

## A few key points from our success story:

- In the early years, the **SAZ Points** series of publications was created, including sample contracts, to provide members with orientation in terms of content. An agreement was reached with the Spielwarenmesse toy fair in Nuremberg for free admission tickets. The SAZ parties during this fair were legendary as an industry networking event.
- In 2001, the SAZ received a special award for its ten years of successful advocacy as part of the **Deutscher Spielepreis** (German Game Award).
- 2004–2015, in memory of the famous game designer Alex Randolph, SAZ awards the **ALEX Media Prize** to journalists who convincingly portray the experience of playing together and the social significance of board games.
- In 2008, the SAZ became a member of the *Sociocultural and Cultural Education Section* of the **German Cultural Council** and has since been actively involved in various committees.
- In 2013, SAZ also became a member of the **Initiative Urheberrecht** (copyright initiative), in which over 40 associations and trade unions campaign for fair intellectual property rights in Germany and Europe.
- In 2015, the German Cultural Council supported the demand of SAZ in a resolution to include analog **games in the collection catalog of the German National Library**.
- In 2016, after several years of effort, game designers were officially included in the list of "artistic/public activities" at the **KSK (German Social Insurance for Artists)**. Also in 2016, we succeeded in convincing the Ministry of Finance and the German tax authorities that games are intellectual property-based works and that, for example, Italian game designers will no longer have **withholding tax** deducted from their German royalties.
- In 2017, SAZ - together with the City of Göttingen - became the official organizer of the **Göttingen Game Designer Convention**. SAZ replaced Reinhold Wittig, the initiator of the convention, which first took place in 1983.
- In 2018, in cooperation with the German Cultural Council, the SAZ invited representatives of the political parties for the first time to a **panel discussion on the topic of "Games as a cultural asset"**, which took place in Essen at the public SPIEL game fair.

- In 2020, SAZ took over the organization of the **German Young Game Designer Scholarship** from the Spiel des Jahres jury. In the same year, SAZ published a new **Model License Agreement** for games, which provides game designers and publishers with guidance for fair cooperation. In 2021, SAZ followed this with a **position paper on the participation of game designers** in the editing of their works by publishers.
- In 2021, an international group of game designers worked out a "**Code of Respect and Responsibility**" on the initiative of SAZ and with the participation of the French *Société des Auteurs de Jeux (SAJ)*, which should lead to more reflective action as a personal declaration of intent by game designers, but also by other participants like illustrators and editors in the creation of games.

From 2009 onwards, the **professionalization of the association** was strongly advanced. This included two comprehensive relaunches of the website with discussion forums and member profiles in 2009 and 2017. The *SAZ Points*, a six-part series of publications with basic knowledge for game authors, was completely updated. Since 2012, specialist lawyers for intellectual property have served as legal advisors of SAZ during contract consultations with members. In addition, various guides and informational publications on tax issues, social security (e.g. KSK), contract consulting, and library royalties from *VG WORT* have been produced. Continuing education events such as the "Game Development Symposium" at the *Remscheid Academy* or the new online format "SAZ Academy" are designed to professionalize members in their creative work. This considerable workload led to some restructuring, e.g., the hiring of a manager in 2015. All these tasks were also made easier by the fact that it was possible to achieve more continuity in the Board.

Although **game designers and game publishers** have different interests in certain areas, a very **positive and trusting communication** has developed with many publishers over the years. SAZ is perceived as a serious representative of game designers' interests. Publishers are important partners for us in the marketing of games. Unfortunately, however, we have also noticed that there is still a level of inequality, e.g., in contract negotiations with individual game designers. Here, the consulting services for our members plays an important role, usually leading to improvements in contracts. This alone is a good argument for membership in SAZ!

Since 2014, the SAZ has been campaigning for the **inclusion of games in the German National Library's collection catalog** to achieve official recognition of games as a cultural asset and to create a comprehensive database for the distribution of library royalties by *VG WORT*. Even when the mills of politics are

slow, but we continue to persevere on this issue. In 2019, SAZ presented a legal opinion to the parties in the Bundestag that establishes a legal claim to library royalties. Currently, this is only rudimentarily honored due to a lack of data. In 2020, the FDP (Liberal Party) then submitted a corresponding motion in the German Bundestag, but this was unfortunately rejected in 2021 in the *Committee for Culture and Media* by the governing parties. Even more gratifying, then, are the responses of the parties to **election test questions by SAZ for the 2021 Bundestag elections**, all of which responded positively in principle to our demand. This is a starting position that makes us optimistic for the coming legislative period.

Further details on the development of SAZ and its activities can be found on our [website](#).

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