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EDITORIAL

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Board games, tabletop games, and analogue games in the hobby sphere have changed considerably in the last few decades. Marco Arnaudo (2023) describes this transformation as so significant, that he calls it a revolution. Hobby gamers perceive this sense of novelty, even if they cannot fully explain why.

From an anecdotal perspective, visiting a typical board game shop, we can clearly perceive this shift. Older game designs, based on roll and move mechanics, still occupy shelf space. But are these older designs still being played? Do people play Monopoly as much as its sales numbers suggest? Despite these fundamental doubts, modern designs are both visible and popular. Players are beginning to recognize alternatives, even if they think these games might be more complex or apparently not for them. This barrier remains in the minds of non-gamers. However, the notion of games for “geeks” is changing partly because “geek culture” is becoming more mainstream, due to innovative game designs that are breaking traditional barriers. These new approaches introduce diverse themes, increase inclusivity, and engage a wider audience.

The age of modern board gaming, emerging in the wake of its revolution, is moving into unknown territory as more people embrace this “old” new habit of playing face-to-face games with physical components. Communities and events are springing up everywhere where passionate gamers gather. Digital technologies have played a crucial role in connecting hobby gamers, fostering dynamic hubs that are actively contributing to the growth of new players. Advancements in digital tools, along with accumulated game design knowledge

and processes, have led to building better games from a product perspective. The collaborative nature of board gaming, where social interactions between players are a constant, led to formal and informal associations of board game fans. Paul Booth (2021) explores this phenomenon in detail. As the hobby of modern board gaming reaches a broader audience, hobby communities face the challenges of accessibility, as examined by Michael Heron (2024), and the inequalities and privileges associated with access to these games, as analyzed by Aaron Trammel (2023).

Within this context, the current edition of the *International Journal of Games and Social Impact* reflects the experience of Portugal's most significant and longest-running board game convention—Leiriacon—held in the beautiful Region of Leiria.

During this three-day event, a dedicated segment called LeiriaTalks, an academic and scientific initiative fostered discussions and presentations on the serious dimensions of board games. The following articles are drawn from some of the most insightful presentations at the 2024 edition of LeiriaTalks.

The first paper - *Sketch First, Play Later* - by Anni Paz provides some canonical advice for game design. A game can start with illustrations and art. Successful games have inverted the traditional process of starting from the mechanical game system. This option opens new creative paths but demands that the designers be the creators or involved directly with the art creation. The following research - *Board Games on the Path to Environmental Education for Sustainability* - Maria Antunes, Aurora Moreira, and Catarina Reis presented the

work developed for the UC Exploratório –Centro de Ciência Viva. The study focuses on using and adapting simple board games for a science museum with interactive exhibitions associated with the University of Coimbra. These authors argue that board games can serve as effective tools for engaging with STEAM (Science, Technology, Engineering, Arts, and Mathematics), particularly in these contexts for environmental education and sustainability. Paulo Antunes presents *Huizinga and "Everything is Play"*, a philosophical approach, critically examining the formalism in game studies, focusing on Johan Huizinga's notion of "play" and its relationships with "game." Huizinga's role in game studies is immense, but it is still held after almost a century of research in the game field. This article offers a necessary critical analysis of this seminal work and how researchers can effectively apply it today. In *Enhancing the Learning of Students with Specific Learning Disabilities in Resource Rooms: An Educational Game to Teach the Concepts of Expansion and Contraction*, Havva Yaman and Sibel Er Nas, address inclusion and accessibility, specifically how board games can support students with specific learning disabilities (SLD). The presented case study - "The Carpet Game" - elaborates how an example of adaptation and modification addresses the serious side of the game application for SLD. In the last paper of this edition, *Existential Love: Romance in single-player RPGs*, Anubhav Anand and Ajay Kumar propose how romance unfolds in Role-Playing Games (RPGs). Narrative development and its ability to trigger emotional reactions and attachments can facilitate approaches such as romantic exploration in games. This concept applies to digital, hybrid, and analogue games. Although the authors addressed video games, the same approach can be applied to analogue RPGs. After the third year of article publications

emerging from LeiriaTalks, this journal edition reveals the relevance of fostering discussion spaces and opportunities to publish on board games and tabletop research topics. The board game industry is thriving, and the academic community and research projects are gradually following these post-digital trends (Cramer, 2015).

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