

PLAYFUL BY DESIGN: TRANSFORMATIVE APPROACHES TO GAME STUDIES

Creating valuable experiences that can entertain us, teach us, and make us think about the joyful side of living is something that many creators, educators and game designers aim at. No matter the way we get there, we feel the urge or need to create something meaningful and *Playful by Design*.

This was the title of an international conference we've held in ISLA Gaia - Polytechnic Institute of Management and Technology in a collaboration between Lusófona University – Porto University Center, University of Illinois and Alumira Ida, in January 10th 2023. It proved to be the stepping stone of a partnership between these entities as, one year later the second edition of the conference is about to occur.

The focus of this first conference was on transformative approaches to game studies where we had a group of presentations by teachers, professionals and researchers that approached the theme based on their own experiences.

We got to know more about the *Illinois Model for interdisciplinary Game Studies* by PhD Judith Pintar as a Keynote Speaker that let us better understand some particularities and differences in each country educational institutions that teach and research about games, but also identify many similarities. More important than that, we got to realize what inspires each other: *Play*.

In the first round of talks of *Playful by Design* conference, I've presented my perspective on my own reality as the director of the bachelor in Video Games and Multimedia Applications in Lusófona University – Porto University Centre. I've focus on the opportunities and challenges on training the next

generation of Portuguese game developers and how it can consolidate the emergent game industry in Portugal, still not well known for its game development ecosystem, even though we have the expertise and talent but not a flagship title that we can hold on to.

In a segway to Dr. Ricardo Mota's presentation, teacher and Communications Manager at Krafton, he centred his speech on the Portuguese games industry, still composed by several indie and hobbyist projects in development but also attracting some big international gaming companies such as Miniclip and Krafton, with offices and effective development in our country.

Dan Cermak, with 30 plus year experience in the video game industry working with Volition (developers of Saint Row series) and also games studies coordinator at University of Illinois Champaign-Urbana, shared his knowledge regarding the same subjects comparing it with some of USA's current teaching methodologies and games industry.

Conclusion? The same as Judith Pintar: even if Portugal has still a long way to catch up, similar challenges happen on both countries when we talk about teaching about games and game design and applying it in the games industry. It is even more challenging when we talk about serious games and how to apply gamification in other activities... but it doesn't means it's less important.

There's a need to create a playful gameful pedagogy that Judith Pintar and David A. Hopping consider *rests on the insight that some of the design elements that produce a satisfying*

game are analogous to the design elements that make an effective course. Katryna Starks adds that cognitive behavioural game design can help us make *serious games for serious fun*. It lends and uses this type of design theory to determine the serious goal of a game and how can we manage to seemingly *incorporate learning theory and fun into the design*.

So, this comes full circle. We are *playful by design* beings creating *playful by design* learning experiences that help us create *playful by design* experiences, games and serious games.

In my own experience as a teacher/ researcher/ professional I felt the same urge to pursue this relation. It can happen in the way I choose to teach and mentor my students, with a project-based learning methodology, in researching about game design and serious games and, even on personal projects.

Inspired by the topics of the conference I've studied, conceptualized, designed and published an agenda/ notepad/ planner named *Play Design Document* where the gamified playful experience is applied to something as simple (and, in some ways, as hard) as planning of our daily routines and completing tasks. I've included and adapted character creator menus, skill trees, quest logs, side quests, boss battles, achievements and even a pause/options menu in that agenda, so that the playful experience can enhance the engagement and productivity of making our everyday work or even maybe planning our big playful project.

This is just another example of a transformative approach to game studies and applied gamification, such as the selected articles included in this current GLOW issue, directly

addressing the representation of various shapes and meanings of playful experiences.

From education to health, accessibility and game studies, playful can be anywhere, anytime, anyhow... but is usually comes by design.