

# Who We Are and Where We're Going?

Researcher Identities, Cultural Contexts, and Knowledge Production in Game Studies

## Workshop Overview

While the DiGRA 2026 call for papers invites us to explore the ways in which games are pleasurable, we as game scholars are currently living through an era of global unrest, uncertainty, and violence. Each day, we are skimming through a constant stream of updates on war, genocide, and governments suppressing their citizens' voices with arrests, violence, and death. These pieces of news may concern our home countries, our families, our friends, our colleagues, and students.

New Scholars-at-Risk programmes and activities are initiated to pull individual researchers into safety, yet constant fear and worry remain. At the same time, academic freedom, too, is under many threats (see: The Academic Freedom Index 2025). Books are banned, courses are cancelled, grants taken back, keywords removed from university websites. Freedom to choose our research topics and methods, to express our identities and opinions in our professional environments, and to advocate for our students, is limited in many ways. Significant grant proposals with external partners demand new kinds of vetting practices, and travelling for conferences is not simply a question of money or environment but that of safety. In the precarity of academia, our power and grit required to fight against institutional demands is also limited.

The DiGRA 2026 conference encourages participants to register at the event as independent scholars 'to distance themselves from governments and institutions which support war and genocide.' Yet we all come from somewhere carrying the traces of our histories, identities, and experiences with us. Who we are as people defines our research work: what fields and topics are available to us, what kinds of questions we may ask, how we interpret our materials, and how we write about our findings (e.g. Leorke, 2025; Richard, 2021). In addition to our research topics, our positionalities also place us against the hegemonic, often unspoken, expectations of our field, related to significant research topics, appropriate methodologies, literary and cultural points of reference, and choices of publication venues and languages (e.g. Karabinus et al., 2025; Laiti, 2025; Malazita et al., 2024; Poirier-Poulin, 2025; Rizvi & Mukherjee, 2023).

**In this workshop, we invite the DiGRA 2026 participants to share how who they are has affected their research and professional journeys, in pleasurable ways but also by limiting their opportunities.** We invite participants to discuss how their cultural, linguistic, and social backgrounds have shaped their work and opportunities for belonging in academic environments. Our aim is to create a space for reflection, dialogue between different types of positionalities, and insights that participants can take back to their own research, teaching, and societal interactions. Importantly, we wish to critically explore how our identities and environments are affecting not only our individual research practices but the global field of game studies at large, and what is needed to dismantle existing barriers and hegemonies.

## Target Audience and Workshop Goals

This workshop is open to everyone interested in discussing intersections of researcher identities and knowledge production within game studies. We wish to include researchers with different career stages (PhD students included), backgrounds, and perspectives.

Our goal is that this workshop will support participants in 1) developing greater awareness and understanding of how identity and context could shape their own research practices; 2) connecting with other scholars across different cultural and geopolitical contexts, and 3) sharing ideas on how to make game studies more inclusive and reflective as a field.

### **Submissions and Participation Format**

Please submit your proposal at the latest on **Wednesday 6 May** (AoE time zone) through this form: <https://forms.office.com/e/dX5cWyx9j7>

Participants will be selected based on the following criteria: 1) relevance to the workshop theme; 2) diversity of perspectives, contexts, and career stages; and 3) balance across cultural, linguistic, and research approaches. We will notify about the decisions at the latest on Wednesday 29 April.

The workshop will be organised in thematic sessions, each including a series of short (10-minute) presentations and a following longer discussion. The workshop begins with an introduction from the organisers and ends with a final discussion.

### **Organisers (Members of the DiGRA Diversity and Inclusion Subcommittee):**

- **Yekta Kalanatar Hormozi:** Yekta Kalantar Hormozi is a researcher, lecturer, and visual designer based in Ireland. She is an Assistant Lecturer at TU Dublin and a PhD candidate at Maynooth University, where her research focuses on cultural adaptation in video game production. She currently serves as Diversity Officer for DiGRA. Yekta has also worked as a cultural advisor on games including *30 Birds* (Ram Ram Games, 2023) and *1001 Nights* (Ada Eden Studio, pre release).
- **Carlos Gabriel Kelly González:** Dr. Carlos Gabriel Kelly González is the 2024 Gold Medal Award-Winning Author of the International Latino Book Award for Best Academic Themed Book at the College Level in English for *Ready Player Juan: Latinx Masculinities and Stereotypes in Video Games*. He is an emerging scholar and one of the critical voices at the helm of US Latinx/e Video Game Studies. His research infuses Latine ways of seeing to analyze the storytelling in video games, relying on the insights and perspectives gained through living and growing up in the borderlands of Tijuana, Baja California, and San Diego, California.
- **Usva Friman:** Usva Friman is an Assistant Professor of Game Studies and Co-Director of the Game Research Lab at Tampere University, Finland. She is also a Docent of Game Culture Studies at the University of Turku. Her research focuses on cultural participation and agency, as well as DEI (diversity, equity, and inclusion) questions, in digital gaming and esports.
- **Stanisław Krawczyk:** Stanisław Krawczyk is an Assistant Professor at the Institute of Sociology, University of Wrocław, Poland. He serves as Inclusivity Officer in DiGRA's Central and Eastern European chapter and is the lead editor of an upcoming special issue of *Open Library of Humanities* devoted to language diversity in game studies. He is also interested in the connections between video games and national cultures.

### **Contact**

If you have any questions regarding the workshop, please contact Usva Friman: [usva.friman@tuni.fi](mailto:usva.friman@tuni.fi).

## References:

Academic Freedom Index 2025. <https://academic-freedom-index.net>

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