



## **Annual Report 2019 -2020 and Policy Plan 2020 – 2021: An ISAGA with a future: Relevant, Connected, and Communicating**

This report and policy plan are written during what may be one of the most disruptive years globally since the start of ISAGA, over half a century ago.

Buzzing after the 50<sup>th</sup> conference, the Executive Board saw a major impulse to the dialogue about the role of simulation and games in society, an increase in academic scholarship on new and exciting topics, and more (inter-)national projects that embrace the method.

Unfortunately, many of the plans formulated in our vibrant community were heavily affected by the outbreak of the global pandemic. Conferences and summer schools globally came to a stand-still. Face to face gaming became difficult, and for many the pandemic also incurred personal losses, difficult job situations due to either under- or overloading, and social isolation. First and foremost, our thoughts are with those who suffered or are still suffering.

At the same time, the world sees a digitalisation at an unprecedented pace. It enables new forms of gaming, meeting and exchange of ideas. This document is written at a moment where we know many of the downsides, but see emerging upsides too.

### **Reporting Period**

Over the reporting year 2019-2020, the ISAGA EB has further normalised the role of ISAGA as a hub of contacts, and has been trying to manage the challenges of the pandemic in the best possible way. This work is certainly not finished, and this Annual Report and Policy Plan are therefore integrated as it is reporting and future steps on the direction decided in 2018 in Bangkok and further specified in 2019 in Warsaw.

#### **Policy priorities reporting period**

Over the period, the EB members were Heide Lukosch, Helmut Wittenzellner, Hidehiko Kanegae (Secretary), Sebastiaan Meijer (Chair), Nettie Wester (treasurer), Marcin Wardazsko, Elena Likhacheva

There have been 6 full meetings, with full attendance. The EB members had numerous smaller meetings on smaller action items.

The returning discussion items considered:

#### **1. Connections to other SAGAs and relevant communities**

Over the almost 1.5 years since this topic has been defined as an aim of ISAGA EB activities, various actions for establishing new and strengthening existing connections have been made.

The EB took the approach of building more personal connections, with many from the EB in good contact with for instance JASAG, NASAGA, SAGANET, and SAGSAGA, but also emerging initiatives in Brazil, Singapore and China, South Africa, amongst others. We feel that effective personal connections are a first step towards more institutionalised exchanges. The broader global composition of the current board has certainly contributed to this mission.

## **2. Membership fees**

For 2020, the EB decided to have a zero membership fee for existing members, to facilitate the tough situation for many of our members.

## **3. Future conferences**

Looking beyond the 50<sup>th</sup> conferences, we have liaised with many potential locations for future conferences, like France, Boston USA, Christchurch NZ, China, Sweden, Norway and Brazil.

Following the 2019 discussions, the EB sees the urge to engage better with members worldwide, and to use conferences as an enabling tool for emerging SAGAs.

In the light of the pandemic, the organisation of the 51<sup>st</sup> conference in Indore, India has been changed to the 52<sup>nd</sup> conference at the same location. Websites for the conference have been enabled, and the conference submission system ConfTool is arranged.

The submissions for the 51<sup>st</sup> conference were few, but of good quality. The uncertainty of the first COVID wave made for a similar trend across many conferences with submissions only by people who need it for their own progress now, typically PhD students and similar.

Therefore, the EB made connections with a few not-too-distant conferences and found the Joint Conference on Serious Games willing to bundle the efforts. Papers from ISAGA 2020 have been invited to that conference, and a few have been presented online. This proved to be a functional solution for those who needed progress to their publications.

We strive to maintain the high quality of the ISAGA conference, with its interdisciplinary character and constructive culture of exchange between academia and industry. In an evolving conference landscape, with a growing number of high-quality conferences in the gaming space, we'll have to maintain our hard work to secure the vital role the ISAGA conference plays for its community. We aim for high quality proceedings that are produced based on a transparent and critical peer-reviewing process, and published by accepted publishing services, such as Springer LNCS. With the global pandemic as well as actions towards climate protection in mind, we will be in an ongoing discussion with ISAGA members on the format of future conferences. We made a very good start to this discussion at the ISAGA conference in Warsaw already.

## **4. Summer school**

The enthusiast organisation of the summer school of 2020 in Hokkaido came to a grinding hold due to the pandemic too. Luckily, the organisers are willing to continue the same effort for 2021. For the longer future, several people have expressed their interest in providing a more distributed solution to enable more global participation. This is a solution under current investigation but proved impossible for 2020. Such a solution could even provide certified university study credits.

## **5. Publication landscape**

For decades, there has been an intimate relation between the SAGE journal Simulation & Gaming, and the ISAGA community. Unfortunately, a recent change of editorship has made this relation problematic, to put it mildly. The board has engaged with several key stakeholders on this matter, and finally decided to send a letter to SAGE publishing pointing out to some

issues authors as well as guest-editors experienced in the last months, with explicit support from SAGSAGA and JASAG. This topic is developing.

## **6. EB composition**

With a broader and more diverse (gender, nationality, age) representation, the board was clearly better equipped to handle the range of questions presented. It helped particularly when doing personal reach out to other SAGAs and initiatives.

Much work went into taking over the functional platform from Vincent Peters. Nettie Wester as new treasurer has taken a deep-dive and things are working well.

For 2020, one EB position is up for election, as the period for Helmut Wittenzellner ends.

Voting will be online during the membership meeting.

Sebastiaan Meijer has expressed to switch responsibilities after serving years as chair of the EB. He will remain active, particularly to drive the operations and digital platforms, and to further develop the summer school. According to the byelaws, the new board will elect a new chair among its members.

## **7. Communication**

In line with the discussion at the 2019 membership meeting, the newsletter has been upgraded and is now sent out almost monthly, with thanks to Elena Likhacheva, who is the responsible contact person for this from the EB. It now also includes some relevant other events that we want to bring to the attention of members and friends of ISAGA. The newsletter has about 300 subscribers, and is well read.

Websites for the conferences are now facilitated by the EB as well. This means better collaboration between organisers and EB, easier integration of ConfTool, and backups that exist in multiple places. This has proven valuable in collaboration with SVVV Indore already.

Unfortunately, the website is very stable but not regularly updated. Content exists, but the promised support unfortunately not. We have recently received the old content (Wordpress format), and currently work on one where we have similar control as for the conference websites. The goal is to make the switch to a new environment that we can better maintain and easier update over the Christmas break.

## **8. Proposed future activities**

The EB proposes the following priorities for the forthcoming period:

1. To continue the improved communication lines with other SAGAs and to establish a regular exchange of information, potentially including mutual announcements in newsletters.
2. To immediately revive the website in active status similar to the newsletter.
3. To further develop the idea of remote summer school facilitation, in minor or major format, supported by a strengthened curriculum development.
4. To take the lead in the problematic publication environment, together with active members of the ISAGA community.
5. To maintain the high quality of the annual ISAGA conference and its proceedings, especially in the light of a growing international competition of game-related conferences.

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