



## **Annual Report 2020 -2021 and Policy Plan 2021 – 2022: An ISAGA with a Future: Professional, Connected, and Communicating**

The annual report covers the period from August 2020 to August 2021. The report and policy plan of ISAGA are written during what may still be one of the most disruptive times globally since the start of the association, over half a century ago.

Buzzing after the 50<sup>th</sup> conference, the Executive Board (EB) 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, new special interest groups emerging, next to more (inter-)national projects that embrace the method of simulation gaming.

Unfortunately, many of us faced unknown challenges both professionally and personally. First and foremost, our thoughts are with those who suffered or are still suffering from personal losses, difficult job situations due to either under- or overloading, and social isolation that are related to the ongoing global pandemic. Many plans formulated in our vibrant community were heavily affected by the outbreak of the global pandemic. Like ISAGA events, conferences and summer schools globally came to a stand-still, and only slowly moved to new formats in 2020/21.

At the same time, the world sees a digitalisation at an unprecedented pace. It enables new forms of gaming, meeting and exchange of ideas. Virtual reality has seen an uptake as not known before, with possibilities for a new area of simulation games. This document is written at a moment where we know many of the downsides, but see emerging upsides too.

### **Reporting Period**

After many years of serving the ISAGA EB as chair, Sebastiaan Meijer has decided to retire from this role, while remaining to be an active member of the EB in his new role as secretary. Heide Lukosch has taken over the role of EB chair, elected as such by the EB in January 2021. The EB wants to express their gratitude to Sebastiaan. Sebas was not only the ever-optimistic face of ISAGA, he also put a tired-less effort into increasing and maintaining the quality of ISAGA's summer school and conference, and into the professional (online) representation of our association. Many members turned to him with their worries and thoughts, and could be sure to always find an open ear. Thank you so much, Sebas, and thank you for staying on board to keep up the amazing work!

Over the reporting year 2020-2021, 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. The EB has invested in a more professional web appearance of ISAGA, qualitative and quantitative improvement of the newsletter, and the initiation of Special Interest Groups

(SIGs). 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 reporting period, the EB members were

- Hidehiko Kanegae,
- Elena Likhacheva (Web/Newsletter)
- Heide Lukosch (Chair),
- Sebastiaan Meijer (Secretary),
- Marcin Wardaszko,
- Nettie Wester (Treasurer),
- Marieke de Wijse-van Heeswijk (Newsletter/Web),

Between August 2020 and August 2021, there have been 5 full meetings, with full attendance, except for one where one member was missing due to vacation. The EB members had numerous smaller meetings on diverse action items, such as the SIGs, the newsletter and the website. From the beginning of 2021, monthly meetings have taken place between the EB and the local organizers of the ISAGA conference in Indore, India.

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. As the conference will take place again in 2021, we decided to return back to invoicing membership fees this year.

#### **3. 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. We are happy to announce that the ISAGA EB has approved the application of Dr. Casper Hartevelde as organizer of ISAGA 2022 conference in Boston, USA. We also want to express our gratitude to the ISAGA 2021 organizers, who had to be very flexible, and moved the conference a year to enable at least a hybrid version of the event.

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 used to manage the paper and workshop contributions. At the moment of producing this report, more than 20 papers have been accepted for publication, along with a number of workshops. The number of submissions and registered participants for the 52<sup>nd</sup> conference were fewer than the years before, but contributions are of good quality. The uncertainty of the COVID pandemic, together with the nature of ISAGA conferences as being a place to meet, connect, and play (mainly physical) games, 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.

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. An application for proceedings in this series on the contributions to ISAGA 2021 has been accepted, with Sebastiaan Meijer and Heide Lukosch as EB members joining the editorial board, and a second reviewing round being part of this publication process. With the global pandemic, matters of inclusion, 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.

#### **4. Publication landscape**

For decades, there has been an intimate relation between the SAGE journal *Simulation & Gaming*, and the ISAGA community. After interventions of the EB with SAGE publishing pointing out to some issues authors as well as guest-editors experienced in 2020, with explicit support from SAGSAGA and JASAG, new editors in chief have been found with our long-standing and highly acknowledged member Toshiko Kikkawa, serving in collaboration with Marlies Schijven. They have our full support and trust, and we want to thank Toshiko for taking up this heavy role, and ensuring the high quality of the ISAGA-related scientific outlet for our work.

#### **5. 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 were 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. The local organisers in Japan have developed a format for a hybrid version of the summer school with three local teams (Japan, Sweden (Europe) and New Zealand (Australasia) and a global competition. This format will be reviewed with facilitators and participants of the summer school 2021 afterwards. The results will be taken into consideration for future versions of the summer school.

#### **6. Special Interest Groups (SIGs)**

A discussion around a more continuous exchange between ISAGA members, beyond the annual conference, has emerged from discussions at the Warsaw conference. The EB has taken up this idea, and reached out to its members to propose SIGs. At the moment of preparing this report, three SIGs were well underway and had their first meeting, and one was about to be initiated with an email conversation. The form of the SIGs is up to its active members. However, the EB requests moderation of the SIGs in line with the association's policies and bylaws, and regular reporting to the EB. The newsletter includes regular updates on the activities of the SIGs, which are open to all interested ISAGA 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 and Marieke de Wijse-van Heeswijk, who are the responsible contact persons for this within 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 slowly filled with updated and sometimes new content. The work on updating and maintaining an informative and professional website for ISAGA is still ongoing.

## **8. 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.

After Sebastiaan Meijer has expressed to switch responsibilities after serving years as chair of the EB, the EB elected Heide Lukosch as new chair, and Sebastiaan took over the role as secretary. With this process, continuity in the processes is guaranteed within the board.

## **9. 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. This includes news on events from related communities such as HEVGA, DIGRA, and GALA.
2. To continue updating, improving and maintaining the content of the website as an active status similar to the newsletter.
3. To continue the coordination of the SIGs, and to include any information relevant for other members through the newsletter.
4. To further develop the idea of remote summer school facilitation, in minor or major format, supported by a strengthened curriculum development, starting with a review process of the 2021 summer school, and its new format.
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.

- EOF -

Heide Lukosch, for ISAGA EB, 06-09-2021

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