

International Networking and Serious Gaming meets the French Way of Life

A travel report on the ISAGA Conference 2023 in La Rochelle from a SAGSAGA perspective

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After last year's hybrid conference in Boston (US), this year's ISAGA conference took place in presence again in beautiful La Rochelle (France). Even a few days before the conference started, two online sessions were organised as part of a pre-conference activity with numerous contributions and participants from all over the world. Also, numerous serious gaming enthusiasts from all over the world made the journey to France. Mixed with the French community, about 200 participants attended the 54th ISAGA conference. It was hosted by Nicolas Becu (CNRS-La Rochelle University) and his team.



La Rochelle railway station (Photo: Maria Freese)

The theme of the conference was "Simulation and Gaming for social and environmental transitions". Accordingly, there was a versatile programme.

Already on Monday evening, a cocktail reception was held. Many participants who had already been there made use of this fantastic opportunity to get to know each other and to meet again. The event took place on a ship and, with the sunset at the same time, it offered a perfect space to linger.



Location of the Cocktail Reception (Photo: Maria Freese)

During the opening of the conference, Nicolas presented a lot of content-related and organisational information.





Impressions of the Conference Opening (Photos: Maria Freese)

Each day started with an inspiring keynote. A panel discussion was also organised by ISAGA to honour Richard Duke and Cathy Greenblat who sadly passed away last year. Friends and colleagues from the community paid tribute to their achievements, but also looked to the future.



Panel discussion organized and given by ISAGA for Richard Duke and Cathy Greenblat (Photo: Maria Freese)

After the keynote sessions and refreshing breaks, one had to choose between different parallel tracks. The programme itself consisted of paper presentations, workshops, poster and gaming sessions, which were offered in up to four parallel tracks. A special item on the programme was an exhibition of gaming vendors, where the public of La Rochelle was invited to try them out. A very nice way to bring the simulation method to the (French) world.

We were very pleased that so many SAGSAGAs from Germany, Austria, Poland, and the Netherlands made their way to La Rochelle and that we were well represented at the conference.



Group photo of the SAGSAGA crew (Photo: Maria Freese)

The SAGSAGA crew also contributed significantly to the programme. In total, we were involved in more than 12 programme items - presentations, workshops, and also as track chairs. We would like to mention a few highlights here. Friedrich Trautwein in cooperation with Tobias Alf from the Centre

for Management Simulation (ZMS) in Stuttgart (GER) presented two papers. In their first paper, they focused on the role of the facilitator for students' learning and satisfaction in simulation gaming courses. Their second paper was about the transition from face-to-face to online teaching. Marcin Wardaszko (PL) and Helmut Wittenzellner (GER) addressed the role of complexity and time in economic modelling of simulation games in their presentation. Martin Gerner (GER) addressed the topic of sustainability through simulation games and focused on the design of a research agenda for transformative learning. Maria Freese (GER) and colleagues (NL) focused on the design of roles in simulation games using the example of a simulation game for campus development at Delft University of Technology. Isabella Fischer (GER) from the ZMS presented the results of her Master's thesis and gave an exciting talk on the topic of current and future competences of game facilitators. A paper that received one of four Best Paper Awards (category: other topics). Congratulations!

Francien Baijanova (and colleagues, NL), one of the winners of the German Simulation and Gaming Award, also gave a presentation based on her Master's thesis (Talk That Talk - Design and evaluation of a persuasive card game against sexually transgressive behaviour) and also received a Best Paper Award. The ISAGA Summer School took place at the ZMS last year. Based on this, a group of enthusiastic simulation gaming researchers (David Luidold, Meike Belter, Éléonore Sas, Weronika Szatkowska) from different countries wrote a publication about the evaluation of a game about sustainability and cooperation played with German logistics students and gave an interesting presentation about it.

The colleagues from SAGSAGA were also represented in numerous workshops. For example, Andreas Gerber and Markus Ulrich (and colleague, CH) presented their game postfossilCities - The Game for a Post-fossil Future and another workshop was dedicated to the question of how to achieve impact with sustainability games. Maria Freese, Birgit Zürn (GER), Simon Hahn (GER) and Isabella Fischer also moderated a workshop in which analogue games were developed together with the participants based on a rapid prototyping approach. Among others, the groups focused on the development of a card game that addresses topics around artificial intelligence. e of ChatGPT). They won the Best Workshop Award at the end of the conference. Congratulations for this as well!

On Wednesday evening, a gala dinner took place at the restaurant of the Aquarium in La Rochelle. An amazing location that invited to experience an excellent evening together. In addition to a 3-course menu from the French cuisine, the Best Paper Awards were presented. There was also a preview of the 2024 conference, which will take place in Christchurch (New Zealand) in July 2024. In addition, the new ISAGA mascot in the shape of an octopus was presented. The octopus was not to remain nameless, so suggestions for names were collected during the gala evening. Another highlight were the social events on Thursday. Here, the participants could choose between a guided tour through La Rochelle, a boat trip around Fort Boyard and a bus tour to Ré Island.



New ISAGA mascot (Photo: Maria Freese)



Impression Ré Island (Photo: Maria Freese)

And of course, as with every ISAGA conference, THE ISAGA tradition was not to be missed. On the last day and as a finale, the "Tree planting ceremony" took place. As this could not be realised in La Rochelle due to the weather conditions, a correspondingly large amount was donated to have numerous trees, i.e. an entire ISAGA forest, planted.

And of course, the ISAGA community voted collectively for the name of the new ISAGA mascot. May we introduce Mrs (at least Dr) Octoludus.

La Rochelle has a lot to offer. Even if there is always too little time to visit the cities at the conferences themselves, you could already take a photo or two.



Port in La Rochelle (Photo: Maria Freese)

What remains as a conclusion? After the hybrid conference in Boston, it was great to meet so many ISAGAs from all over the world in person again. The exchange with the French gaming community resulted in successful synergies. We very much hope to meet the French community again at ISAGA conferences in the near future.

The idea of sustainability was evident in many of the contributions. We learned a lot and took many impulses home. We would like to thank this year's organisers and, of course, everyone who contributed to making the week in La Rochelle a worthwhile event! We are already looking forward to the upcoming ISAGA conference in New Zealand and say: Kia Ora!



Announcement of the next ISAGA conference (Photo: Maria Freese)