



Games and Learning Alliance (GALA) International Conference

"The Serious Games Society (SGS) is the think tank where the future of games for learning can be discussed and put in practice. SGS was designed to bring together cutting edge companies, institutions and individuals researching on and developing Serious Games."

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In December 2015, Policy Horizons Canada participated in an international serious games conference, as part of its innovation initiative in serious game design and capacity development in the field of gamification. The GALA conference brought together academic representatives from all across the EU, along with a few representatives from Korea, Brazil, US and Canada. Along with Horizons, l'Université Laval and l'Université du Québec à Chicoutimi represented Canada. In all, 54 papers, 12 project posters and 4 live virtual prototypes were presented during the three day event. While most participants were professors or PhD students, there were also representatives from the gaming and training industry, as well as government. Policy Horizons Canada was proud to share its recent experience in developing *Impact*, a foresight serious game. While most participants were there on behalf of a research team to explore theoretical questions that surround gamification, there were many projects gathering actors from public and private sectors.

The presentations shared in the main lecture hall demonstrated the progress and innovation in the field of serious games: improving educational performance; optimising military coordination; combating elderly cognitive and mobility decline; etc. Applications of serious games to various activities or conditions were also featured, such as post-traumatic stress disorder, disabilities, teamwork, human-computer interactions, and energy conservation. The EU has a large budget funding serious game research and development. Many research projects presented at the conference were funded by the European Commission Horizon 2020 research and innovation programme, the largest of which was the [RAGE project](#). Collaboration between academia, government and private industries is at the heart of this project that aims to promote the European serious game industry. The global serious game market is expected to grow to \$5.5 Billion by 2020. ¹

The Serious Game Society is encouraging its members to imagine the advancement of the field of serious games in parallel to new technologies. Many teams are using readily available technologies (e.g. Xbox, PlayStation, smartphones & PC) to prototype and launch their games. Others in the community are learning how to apply emerging technologies to their own research and development strategies. Crowdsourcing and open source coding was demonstrated as viable tools for developing virtual reality and digital simulation tools and games. Other projects explored how artificial intelligence and human interfaces might be integrated to rooms with Internet of Things technology to create entirely new types of environments, and how these new environments, featuring Ambient Intelligence, might be used to develop serious games.

1. <http://www.marketsandmarkets.com/PressReleases/serious-game.asp>

At the heart of all these presentations was the fundamental notion that the human element is the focus of game design. Octogenarians re-discovering the joy of mobility through virtual worlds gathered around a game console and encouraged each other as they took turns playing. Teachers and students discovering the possibilities of a gamified creation process, coding and making robots, demonstrated the collaborative aspect of working with computers. Similarly, the urban traffic simulation platform presented in a hands-on workshop was developed as a tool to facilitate transdisciplinary collaboration between municipal stakeholders.



Final Thoughts from the Author

Games help us lower our inhibition. They transport us into a different state of mind, one where we might more readily explore the unexpected. Serious games, by leveraging this unique quality, can lead to improved outcomes and more efficient problem solving. In order to fully leverage the promise of gamification, we need to become more comfortable with the idea that we can have loads of fun while doing real work.

Examples of Games Presented

The Wolf in Love

Online gamified book published by EDUS, a children's education initiative in Bosnia-Herzegovina
edusbih.org/book

Czechoslovakia 38-89

A complex educational simulation allowing high school students to explore difficult historical themes
www.youtube.com/watch?v=lfqycVlgD-8

PERGAMON – Pervasive Serious Games supported by Virtual Coaching

Pergamon aims to support the creative industries in the adoption of technology facilitating the gamification of everyday life

www.youtube.com/watch?v=zBZIkAgJYg0

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