

Introduction by the Special Editor to the Symposium on Gaming Futures

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The papers presented here within the journal symposium on *Gaming Futures* arose from another symposium, a live gather on *Gaming the Future(s): Pedagogies for Emergent Futures*, held at and hosted by Tamkang University, Taiwan, November 10-11 2016 (in association with Kyung Hee University and the Hawaii Research Center for Futures Studies). The symposium brought a wide variety of people together from many parts of the world, academics, futurist, game designers, researchers and others, in a warm and sunny autumn in Tamsui. Tamsui, located at the northern end of the island of Taiwan and at the mouth of the Tamsui river which snakes southward into the capital Taipei, is home to one of the longest futures studies program in existence at Tamkang University. Based on the leadership from founder Clement C.P. Chang, and Flora Chang, for over 40 years the university has been teaching futures studies, running conferences and research projects through the Graduate Institute of Futures Studies.

In this context, the rationale for both symposiums has been well summarised in the conference brochure and the subsequent call for papers:

Traditional pedagogical approaches to Futures Studies focused on expert-based lecture formats. Scenario planning opened up the process by using groups of experts. In the past few decades, however, the workshop format - futures workshops, knowledge labs, immersive futures - all have attempted to include participants in the futures process. During this process, the participants are not mere spectators or receivers of the futures, but active creators - mind, body, and spirit. The futurist becomes thus a content facilitator, helping participants explore alternative futures and create desired futures. It is in this context that gaming the future has become increasingly important. Futures games go further than the cognitive or the emotional, rather, they focus on embodied foresight.

Drawing from many approaches - gestalt, play, role-playing, board games - a number of games have become part of futures doxa. These include foresight card decks, immersive experiences, geo-location gaming, strategic gaming systems, the Polak game, the Sarkar game, the CLA game, the Time Travel game, etc. However, this is just the beginning. Games as apps, as virtual reality systems, indeed, the gamification of knowledge, process and action, is likely to grow as digital natives move to global and national decision-making and policy positions of defining how and what we learn.

The authors in this issue responded to the call for papers with a varied set of contributions, from academic papers to essays. James Dator, who gave the plenary address at the 2016 Symposium, reproduced it here in the form of an essay “*Why Gaming, Why Alternative Futures?*” In his essay, Dator provides yet another rationale to the use of gaming within futures studies. “The best way to learn”, he writes, “is to do actively, while the worst way to learn is to read or listen passively – like you are doing now. Games are the closest we can come to actually doing politics repeatedly, and to pre-experiencing alternative futures so as to have a wider

understanding of what might be viable preferred futures.” That is to say, continues Dator, “games are to the social sciences what laboratory experiments are to the natural sciences”. This point is best illustrated in the essay by José Ramos, entitled “*FuturesLab: anticipatory experimentation, social emergence and evolutionary change*”. “FuturesLab emerged as an experimental process” writes Ramos, and then proceeds to describe some projects and ideas that were implemented over the course of 2015-2017. In his contribution here, Ramos describes the process of FuturesLab engagement, stages, guidelines, cycle and then concludes with learning from these projects.

Other papers and essays in the special issue likewise summarise learnings and processes that futures practitioners engaged with over the years and, in some cases, decades. Peter Hayward and Stuart Candy, for example, describe “a dozen years of use to date” of The Polak Game, invented by Hayward. Their detailed description of the process as well as the reflections on the evolution and the context of the game are certainly going to be invaluable to all who wish to incorporate this game into their own engagement with students and workshop participants. Sohail Inayatullah similarly describes his own experiences in engaging various groups and participants with futures thinking in workshops over the course of several decades, providing a useful typology on the types of clients and gaming, as well as the sections on historical context of gaming, rationale for gaming and its utility.

Newer experiments are measured in years rather than decades, with specific processes described here in articles and essays by Alethia Berenice Montero Baena, Kuo-Hua Chen and Jeanne Hoffman, Diana Cheong and Ivana Milojević, Sascha Dannenberg and Nele Fischer, Sonja Schulze and John Sweeny. These contributions none-the-less provide diversity and novelty, and attest to many ways that futures thinking and gaming could be applied in a whole range of very different context. Taken together, papers and essays in the *Gaming Futures* Symposium confirm several important principles that most futures practitioners are very well aware of.

First, they confirm the importance of experiential and embodied learning. Participants who played, for example (and to name a few games not specifically covered in this issue), the *Time Machine Game* by Meimei Song, or participated in *The Toynbee Convector Experiment* by Maya van Leemput during the 2016 Symposium, not only had fun in the process but often came out transformed, with more insight and understanding of future possibilities. Games such as the *CLA Game*, *Sarkar Game* of and *Polak Game* (all also played at the 2016 Symposium) helped participants confront their own worldviews and beliefs and to see “where they stand” in relationship to others. Learning from other people’s perspectives is critical for the development of alternative futures, and negotiating these multiple visions and perspectives for the challenge of ‘used’ or ‘colonised’ narrow futures imaginings. Not uncommonly, such processes had a transformative impact on participants, for they not only had a particular futures in mind (consciously or subconsciously), they actually also lived and experienced it. As argued by Dannenberg and Fischer in their essay: “scenarios as games ... allow participants to feel free to experiment with different futures and development ... to play with alternatives ... and (re-)construct their reality”.

But to just play is not sufficient because, second, it is important to have a cognitive frame that makes sense of the experience. Having some sort of a ‘before and after’ explanation as to ‘why’ and ‘what next’ in relation to the game experienced is critical if the learnings are to be carried forward. Every single contribution here provides such ‘whys’.

Third, they also attest to the importance of cultural/local/language context and of reaching out to the local community. Games are transferable, as they are by their very definition loose and experimental. At the same time, fine tuning in terms of approaches and processes is critical, if these are to be relevant to the context of, for example, Taiwan (Chen and Hoffman), Brunei Darussalam (Cheong and Milojević), Bangladesh, Bosnia and Herzegovina, fYR Macedonia, Montenegro, Moldova, Thailand and Tonga (Sweeny), Mexico (Montero Baena), Germany (Dannenberg and

Fischer) and Australia (Schulze). So, in a nutshell, thinking-playing-contextualising-experimenting-reflecting-sensemaking- sharing and so on, are processes that go hand in hand and it is best if all of these processes are experienced if not simultaneously than in full eventually.

Of course, there is no alternative to the actual experience of gaming and participating in processes described in this issue. Reading about them here only provides the artefacts of the experience, not the experience itself. So I wholeheartedly encourage you to experience gaming the future yourself, through a skilled practitioner and also through your own experiments. At the same time, reading about them enables sharing and learning in different ways, and, perhaps more importantly, it allows for the recording of the collective memory and the future co-creation of further experimentations. The editors of this issue would thus like to thank all the authors for their time and effort in putting the symposium together, making this yet another shared asset for the community of futures thinkers and practitioners.

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