

Gotland Game Conference and HEVGA European Symposium¹

The Department of Game Design at Uppsala University, Campus Gotland, has been teaching Game design and development since 2001. The Gotland Game Conference (GGC) is annual conference, which presents and evaluates their work and the general public, international industry, academia and press are invited too. The conference aims to push the boundaries of the field, cares about the culture and human expression – so even the most far-reaching presenters remain accessible to a wide audience of non-experts. The students open the event with presentations of their projects, exposing themselves and the education to insightful critique from an experienced panel of developers, designers, thinkers and artists. It is then proceed with a two day conference. Wide-ranging talks from brilliant people are interspersed with networking on the show floor, among the student's games.

The GGC, held on June 5-6, 2018, invited speakers from Chicago, Pittsburgh, Berlin, Malmö and Warsaw and discussed empathy and emotion in video games. It focused on concepts like emotional intelligence, empathy, social interaction, identity and all sorts of personal- and human interaction. Heidi McDonald has looked at the narrative burden for creating empathy, Doris C. Rusch has talked about the existential game design and Bartosz Sobolewski has looked at the empathy of games through art. Albertina Sparrhult has talked about the practical leadership for a healthy and productive studio culture. Finally Malena Klaus has looked at the kick started intimacy of how to design intimate spaces for strangers.

Since 2017, the Department of Game Design also hosts the Game Educators Summit. In 2018, it was The HEVGA European Symposium that took place on June 7-8, 2018, as a part of the GGC. The Higher Education Video Game Alliance (HEVGA) supports higher education in digital games through information-sharing, resource development, and community engagement. In present, it has associates from 180 universities and other higher education institutions in the field of digital games from 18 countries around the world. Regarding Slovakia, the Faculty of Mass Media Communication at the University of Ss. Cyril and Methodius in Trnava is the only member of HEVGA, but it plans to expand in other Central and Eastern European countries in the near future, as mentioned at the Central and Eastern European Game Studies Conference 2018 in Prague.

The Gotland summit itself brought together educators from across Europe to discuss the structure of game educations. The first day featured presentations across a wide variety of areas such as research, game educations, pedagogy, game design, games, institutional barriers and successes, within and across borders barriers and successes, and programs or initiatives unique to Europe. The second day consisted of a working meeting designed to bring together diverse institutions and individual backgrounds to take stock of where games and game educations in Europe are at now. The working meeting explored how to create a platform that could further establish a European games community in higher education across borders. Specific topics included: how to secure funding, creating a network that connects educations, amplifying local achievements globally, and avenues for unified advocacy.

¹ Information is published with permission of the official conference organisers from Uppsala University.

Slovakia is Finally Jammin'

Game jams are popular and well established forms of creating games in a fun and accessible way. During a game jam, similarly to a music jam, people from all kinds of environments from within and outside the industry gather to develop games in a short time period. There are thousands of different jam types (vary in size, rules, etc.) and dozens of them are happening around the globe at any given time.

In Slovakia, game jams have a rather short history. Although, some people participated in international events, Slovakia didn't organize any on its own. There were a few company based jams and creative happenings tied to other events, especially on the demo scene, but generally, there is a great gap behind the 'western world', including the Czech Republic or Poland. For example, the biggest worldwide happening Global Game Jam (GGJ) started in 2009 with 53 participant countries. The Czech Republic joined in 2011, Slovakia in 2018 together with 11 African countries. The first GGJ took place at the University of Ss. Cyril and Method in Trnava in January 2018, and the next one is planned for January 25-27, 2019.

However, Slovak jamming has not started there. The first event solely dedicated to creating games during a short period of time was the Bratislava Game Jam (BGJ) in 2015. This year, it took place for the fourth time with 23 teams and an international jury. The main theme was 'Weather control' and all 17 finished games are available at www.bgj.sk. After the success of BGJ and an increase in overall awareness about game jams they quickly became a part of game related festivals. In 2016 there was the first jam connected to Game days of Fest Anča Festival in Žilina, and from 2018 there is the jam associated with the Comic Salon in Bratislava. In 2019, Game Days will become a separate event that will take place in Trnava, accompanied with a game jam and hardware hackathon.

It seems that Trnava, partly due to having the first game related academic study program, is becoming a hub for most of the game related events. Regarding game jams, it is worth mentioning that, in May, Trnava hosted the so far biggest international jam, as a part of the LAG Festival, connecting almost 100 students from Poland, the Czech Republic and Slovakia. Eight teams worked on their games based on a randomly generated theme for 5 days and the results were presented during the game festival in Cieszyn.