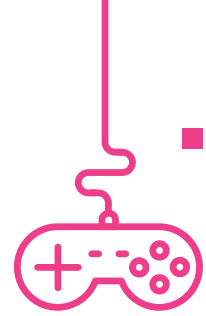
Editorial Board

Journal Orientation



Acta Ludologica is a scientific journal in the field of games and digital games. The journal contains professional scientific reflections on digital games; it also offers academic discourses on games, especially media and digital competencies, creation, design, marketing, research, development, psychology, sociology, history and the future of digital games and game studies.

Acta Ludologica is a double-blind peer reviewed journal published twice a year. It focuses on theoretical studies, theoretical and empirical studies, research results and their implementation into practice, as well as professional publication and scientific reviews of digital games.

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Editorial

Free Spins

Game studies rarely foreground gambling, yet the two are historically inseparable. From the *Royal Game of Ur* to *Mahjong*, our oldest and most enduring games were fundamentally wager-based. Even the word "hazard" (used in the meaning of gambling in Slovak) derives from the Arabic "al-zahr" (the dice), the same object used to advance pieces in family board games or introduce chance into a *Dungeons & Dragons* session. This prehistoric concept of *alea* (chance) existed long before loot boxes, but it relies on the same biological wiring. The attention economy now exploits this evolutionary trait. The urge to refresh a notification feed mirrors the pull of a slot machine, and profitable apps have mastered the "compulsion loop" just as effectively as casinos. The goal is not to promise the user a massive win, but to ensure repetition and retention.

The mechanisms driving season passes and virtual currencies are similar to those in regulated gambling, blurring legal and ethical lines. We must ask if children should be shielded from these mechanics to prevent early-onset pathology, or if we can even distinguish between entertainment and exploitation anymore. For Gen Z, the gateway is not a smoky backroom card game; it is unregulated esports betting or a 'skin gambling' site linked to *Counter-Strike*. When streamers scream in ecstasy over a rare drop, they are performing unpaid marketing for the mechanics of chance. Gambling seems to be normalising as a component of digital culture, teaching teenagers that the only way to win is not to practice, but to pay.

In recent years, Slovakia appeared to be on the right track. We established strict legislation, banned slot machines in pubs, and implemented a register to protect vulnerable communities and people who expressed a wish to stop their addiction. However, these safeguards are dissolving. Recent legislation seems to be designed to consolidate the market under the influence of the state-owned lottery giant, effectively overruling regional bans. The state has always peddled pure chance, such as lottery tickets, the profit from which has been a part of the state budget for centuries.

However, a sharp line historically separated these random number games from sports betting, which involved a degree of analytical skill. That distinction is now collapsing as every betting service now promotes slots directly on its home page, funnelling sports fans into hard gambling. The only institutions that seem to be fully aware of this are the banks, which swiftly flag connected accounts during mortgage and loan applications. Previously, the state fought its online gambling competitors so strictly that it threatened to block specific foreign IP addresses in a move that created a censorship tool and inadvertently promoted VPN use. Now, we see a proliferation of billboards promoting slots in public spaces, often intertwined with sports promotion.

Ad-driven platforms even compound the issue. While they claim to prohibit unauthorised gambling content, they often turn a blind eye to lucrative commercials that violate their own community standards. Ironically, their algorithms can detect a copyrighted song in a fraction of a second yet remain blind to predatory campaigns with "casino" in their name, long enough for the damage to be done. As lobbying efforts to blend games, gambling, and sports intensify, the definition of "play" is at risk. Academics, industry representatives, and legislators must work together to hold the line. We need legislation capable of distinguishing between game culture eligible for state funding and harmful mechanisms that require restriction, even if they are an easy source of short-term economic gain.

This friction between commerce, psychology, and culture is not merely a subject for legislative debate but a catalyst for rigorous research. The current issue of *Acta Ludologica* reflects this complexity. While several contributions directly interrogate the mechanisms of monetisation and influence, others explore the diverse emotional and historical landscapes that define the medium. Réka Törzsök explores the utilisation of language as a tool of deception in the context of the game *Firewatch*. In their study, Erik von Wangenheim, Eduardo Napoleão, Giorgio Gilwan da Silva, Tiago Vinícius Ficagna and Anita Maria da Rocha Fernandes systematically map non-digital games for the purpose of teaching sustainability. Radoslav Baltezarević and Ivana Baltezarević examine the effect of AI-driven personalisation in in-game advertising on player engagement and purchase intentions. Hana Pravdová and Monika Cihlářová focus on the integration of historical sources into the digital game *Kingdom of Come: Deliverance*. Dinko Jukić examines the *Assassin's Creed* game franchise in terms of branding and monetisation models. Michele Varini and Nicola Costalunga analyse the game *Blasphemous* in terms of medievalism, religion, and cultural memory. Lucia Novanská Škripcová employs a case study of the game *Clair Obscur: Expedition 33* to demonstrate the issue of coping with loss and grief in games. The Game Studies section is concluded with Siheng Zhu's analysis of Chinese gacha games from the perspectives of cruel optimism and precarious intimacies.

The following section presents the collective work *Asian histories and heritages in video games*, reviewed by Mohammadreza Golshani, the psychological horror game *Milk Outside a Bag of Milk Outside a Bag of Milk*, reviewed by Samuel Draxler, and the book *Girlhood games: Gender, identity, and coming of age in video games*, reviewed by Veronika Šašalová. In conclusion, in the Add-ons section, Denis Sedlák provides a reflection on the user perspective of media ownership in relation to the issue of the physical distribution of digital games.

Unlike the uncertainty of the mechanisms described above, we trust that the following pages of the latest issue of *Acta Ludologica* offer a guaranteed return on intellectual investment.

Mgr. Michal Kabát, PhD.
Acta Ludologica's editorial team member

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