

The Young Academics Workshop 2025

Games, Politics & Psychology: Community Building in Games & Virtual Worlds

Estimated Date: March 18-19, 2025

Guest Scholar: The guest speaker will be announced at a later date.

Organizing Chairs: Katja Aller (Cologne Game Lab / University of Cologne), René Lang (University of Cologne), Su-Jin Song (Cologne Game Lab / TH Köln)

Advisory Board: Jimena Aguilar (IFS), Federico Alvarez Igarzábal (CGL), Vanessa Ossa (CGL)

Organized by the Cologne Game Lab of the TH Köln – University of Applied Sciences (Germany) and the University of Cologne (Germany)

We invite early career researchers and game designers to submit their work for an interdisciplinary workshop exploring the profound intersection between games, virtual worlds, psychology, sociology and the formation of communities. In an age where digital environments (VR, social media, video games) play an ever-increasing role in our lives, the impact of games on our sense of community cannot be overstated.

Our focus extends beyond traditional gaming communities, delving into communities of care, activism, queer groups, and political/ideological communities. We welcome contributions that explore both the positive and negative aspects of these communities in the realm of games and new media, and their social consequences, such as in politics and activism. On the one hand, online multiplayer games, social simulations, and virtual worlds create opportunities for individuals to form communities and social connections. On the other hand, the gaming industry and its communities have also been criticized for issues related to representation and inclusivity. Within gaming and digital communities, toxic behavior, cyberbullying, and harassment can have detrimental effects on the mental health of players and users. Contributions can investigate the prevalence of such behaviors, their impact, and strategies for fostering positive and supportive communities.

Topics may include, but are not limited to:

- Communities of Care: How games can foster empathy, support, and mental well-being in players.
- Activism in Virtual Spaces: The role of games and digital spaces in promoting social and environmental change.
- Queer Communities: Representation and inclusivity within digital spaces and game narratives and mechanics.

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Cologne Game Lab

Fakultät für
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- Extremism, polarization, sexism, and racism within gaming and digital communities.
- Social Interaction and Community Building: Exploring the dynamics of the virtual communities, how they impact players, and the potential for in-game relationships to translate into real-world support networks.
- Community Dynamics and Mental Health: Psychological approaches to (gaming- and online) communities.
- Diversity and Inclusion: Investigating the impact of diverse and inclusive game content and communities on players' mental health and well-being, as well as how these aspects can be improved in the industry.
- Innovative Design: Creating games that actively build and reflect diverse communities. They could have a focus on futuristic and speculative visions of community building in virtual spaces.
- Virtual Worlds beyond games: Digital spaces within VR and other immersive technologies that enable new forms of community building, both with positive and negative consequences.

The Young Academics Workshop is open to:

- Researchers studying communities in the context of games and new media
- Young scholars from all academic fields and disciplines (social science, social psychology, ethnography, anthropology, history, philosophy, media and game studies, etc.)
- Designers and creators, who have developed specific techniques or visions of community building in (digital) games, virtual spaces, and social media/streaming platforms, XR technologies
- Game developers and game development students (future game artists, game designers, game programmers, sound designers and all other students learning to make games)
- Immersive media developers and students (future creative directors, future XR creators)

As this is a Young Academics Workshop, we invite all those who have recently entered the academic world, including Bachelor, Master, and PhD students, as well as Postdocs.

Applicants should focus on the role of community from the unique perspective of their home discipline. We also highly encourage work-in-progress contributions.

In addition, we are planning to host a **game jam** accompanying the Young Academics Workshop to foster the interdisciplinary exchange and cooperation between academics and practitioners. For this reason, perspectives from game designers and academics in the field of political education are particularly welcome.

Format of the Young Academics Workshop 2025

The workshop is expected to take place in March 2025 at the University of Cologne (Germany), dedicated to presenting projects and papers and will leave room for discussions and feedback afterwards.

Applicants should submit abstracts (no longer than 300 words, excluding bibliography) along with a (preliminary) bibliography/ludography to youngacademics@clashofrealities.com

All submissions will be assessed by a peer-review committee.

Please Note

At the time of the CfP's announcement, funding for the game jam has not yet been finalized. We would therefore like to point out that the game jam may be postponed due to a lack of funding. Thus the acceptance of submissions does not guarantee the event's occurrence.

Important Dates

Publish CfP: **June 24, 2024**

Deadline for submissions: **August 05 (end of day), 2024**

Notification of acceptance/rejection: **November, 2024**

Publication of the Workshop Program: **December, 2024**

Young Academics Workshop: **March 18, 2025**

Game Jam: **March 19, 2025 (tbc)**

Contact

youngacademics@clashofrealities.com