

# The Future of Location-based Gaming Research

## DiGRA 2019, Kyoto

**Date and time:** 6 August, 09.00-15.50

**Room:** Zonshin 202, Ritsumeikan University Kinugasa Campus

We are seeking participants for a one-day workshop to be held during the pre-conference program of DiGRA 2019 in Kyoto, focusing on the future of location-based games research. Interested participants should send an approx. 400 word bio, including a description of their previous or current research on location-based games and their specific interest in attending the workshop. Participants will be selected on the basis of their contribution to the field of location-based gaming research, with an emphasis on those with diverse backgrounds and cultures, gender diversity, and a mix of established and early career/emerging scholars. We are particularly looking forward to including a diverse and mixed group of researchers from east and west.

To apply, please send your bio with requested information to Dale Leorke ([dale.leorke@tuni.fi](mailto:dale.leorke@tuni.fi)) by **4th June 2019**. Below, please find a more detailed outline of the workshop:

### INTRODUCTION

Location-based games incorporate their players' location and actions in physical spaces into the game through location-aware, networked mobile devices. Location-based games were once a niche practice associated with early experimentation with GPS technology. But they now reach a larger, global audience of players since the advent of smartphones and the release of popular games like *Hakken Nippon no Shiro meguri (Discover! Nippon Castle Tour)* (2010), *Shadow Cities* (Grey Area, 2011), *Ingress* (Niantic, Inc., 2012), and *Pokémon Go* (Niantic, Inc., 2016). This mainstream popularity reached its peak with the phenomenon of *Pokémon Go* – one of the most downloaded smartphone apps ever, attracting equal amounts of acclaim (e.g. Farley, 2016; Sparrow, 2016) and criticism (e.g. Davies & Innocent, 2017; de Souza e Silva, 2016; Winegarner, 2016).

Now, game developers are seeking to capitalize on the success of *Pokémon Go*, with numerous location-based and augmented reality games connected to popular franchises either already released or on the horizon. Examples include *The Walking Dead: Our World* (Next Games, 2018), *Jurassic World Alive* (Ludia, 2018) and *Harry Potter: Wizards Unite* (Niantic, Inc., forthcoming). Meanwhile, artists, academics, and amateurs still continue to experiment with location-based gaming, through festivals, art events, and city-funded initiatives (see Leorke, 2018: Ch 6).

Location-based games have been the subject of academic scholarship since the early 2000s (e.g. Benford et al, 2003; de Souza e Silva, 2006; Sotamaa, 2002). In the years since, they have attracted interest from researchers from a wide array of disciplines – game studies, media studies, computer science, education, urban studies, psychology, and other health-related disciplines. Given these recent shifts and ongoing developments in location-based game development and players' experiences with

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them, there is a growing need to bring together researchers on location-based games to evaluate current and possible future trends in research. This workshop aims to accomplish this by gathering both leading and emerging researchers on location-based games to discuss methods, approaches, and theoretical frameworks for studying them as they continue to evolve.

Each participant will each briefly outline their research interests before working in small groups to discuss four core themes:

- Games: focusing on the technology and gameplay design of location-based games
- Play: focusing on studying location-based game players and player experiences
- Making: focusing on the production process and funding models for location-based games (commercial and public)
- Cultures: focusing on their impact across local and global cultures, comparing and contrasting different countries and cultures

The workshop findings and discussion will be entered into a website and publicly distributed after the workshop's conclusion to spur further discussion around research on location-based games and to help forge potential future research partnerships. We expect the workshop and post-workshop discussions will lead to cross-institutional and international co-authored publications, knowledge exchange, and research collaboration. We also intend to pursue the possibility for a journal special issue on location-based gaming research (e.g. ToDiGRA). Lastly, there will also be a Discord hub to connect interested researchers and practitioners in the field.

## **WORKSHOP ORGANIZERS**

**Kati Alha** is a University Teacher at the Game Research Lab at Tampere University. Her research interests include free-to-play revenue model, location-based games, player experiences, and game creation processes. She has studied games and play from multiple perspectives since 2009, most recently focusing on Pokémon Go.

**Nobushige Kobayashi** is an Associate Professor at Tohoku Gakuin University, Japan. He has studied game developers in Japan, especially hobbyist and indie developers, and players of mobile and location-based games from mainly sociological perspective. His recent interest is comparative research about differences of game cultures between Japan, China and Finland.

**Yuhsuke Koyama** is a professor at Shibaura Institute of Technology. He was also a member of the IGDA (International Game Developers Association) in Japan, and vice chair of the Indie game group. He wrote a book about the history of the Japanese video game industry. His book, "Nihon Digital Game Sangyoshi (History of Japanese video game industry)" got the excellent literature award in the society of socio-informatics in Japan.

**Dale Leorke** is a Postdoctoral Researcher at the Centre of Excellence in Game Culture Studies at Tampere University, Finland. His research interests include mobile and location-based media; the intersection of games, play and urban policy; and participatory planning and civic engagement. He is the author of *Location-based Gaming: Play in Public Space* (Palgrave, 2018).

**Frans Mäyrä** is a Professor of Information Studies and Interactive Media at Tampere University. He is also the Director of the Academy of Finland funded Centre of

Excellence in Game Culture Studies. He has taught and studied digital culture and games from the early 1990s, including research into location-based games from the early 2000s. He is author of over 160 scientific publications and he had led 45 externally funded games research projects.

**Janne Paavilainen** is the Main Scientific Coordinator and games researcher in the Centre of Excellence in Game Culture Studies, Tampere University, Finland. He has studied casual, social, multiplayer mobile games since 2006. Focusing on playability and player experiences, he is interested in the design and evaluation of location-based games.

**Emma Tanaka** is a senior assistant professor of School of Global Japanese Studies at Meiji University from April 2019 and a visiting researcher of FMMC (Foundation for Multi-Media Communications). Recently she is engaging in several game related research projects on location based games and Gacha. Research outcomes have been published mostly as academic conference papers which are co-authored by Yuhsuke Koyama, Nobushige Kobayashi and Marco Koeder.

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