Interactive Storytelling through Games:

Hands-on Prototyping Workshops

Galleries, Libraries, Archives, and Museums (GLAMs) exist as spaces of profound cultural power within society, as places that control, create, and tell stories about our past and present (Jackson, 2016, as quoted in Cairns, 2018). They are seeking new and exciting ways to reach their audiences, both existing and under-serviced, and often operate under foundational remits to engage with communities. Our research into the use of games in the GLAM sector indicates that cultural institutions have a strong impetus to create games specific to their contexts and audiences (Seale, 2023; Booij, 2024), but a key barrier to this is a lack of knowledge and experience with the game design process. Given that many GLAM professionals are excellent research communicators, storytellers, and experience designers by trade (Bedford, 2001), we believe there should be a lower skill barrier in designing games in-house than what we have observed. Games are able to give rise to interactive and emergent storytelling through play, and there are many parallels that may be drawn between designing for the visitor experience and designing for the player experience, particularly in the context of narrative and storytelling.

Drawing on our respective doctoral research and a range of game design theories (Schell, 2019; Salen & Zimmerman, 2003; Zubek, 2020) this workshop bridges theoretical frameworks in game studies and storytelling with practical applications for GLAM organisations, focusing on low-cost and low-tech strategies for translating cultural collections into games.

It will cover the genres of interactive fiction (also known as choose-your-own-adventure), scavenger hunts, escape rooms, board games, and roleplay, as well as how these simple approaches could work across different modes (physical, digital, hybrid) or be scaled up with time and funding. It will also briefly cover ideas of 'success' and strategies to measure your game's impact with its intended audience.

This workshop is aimed particularly at those who work within or engage regularly with cultural collections, and who wish to diversify their content and engagement strategies through games and playful experiences. Or just as an introductory dip into the world of low-tech game design techniques for those with no time and no money.

Delegates will leave this workshop with:

- a game prototype idea specific to their collection or area of interest.

- an idea of how games could be used and developed in their institution.

- an understanding of different ways to translate stories from the gallery/library/archive/museum into games.

This session will run as an interactive workshop, where participants can work individually or with colleagues to create a game prototype relevant to their museum/centre/interests. The authors propose that this workshop runs as two sessions (either synchronous or asynchronous) facilitated at both the main conference site in Waterloo and the satellite site in Melbourne, by one presenter each - depending on acceptance and funding to attend in-person in Canada. Otherwise, this workshop could work well online and in-person in Melbourne.

There is no cap on numbers, however delegates will need to bring a pen and paper to facilitate prototyping (with extras provided by the facilitators for those who forget). They will also be asked to opt-in or -out of being a part of the facilitators research, through a consent form. Ideally, this and an information form will be distributed before the session, but can easily be done on the day as well. A loose outline of the session is as follows:

00:00 Introduction of topic and researchers

10:00 "Making Decisions" activity (choosing topics, game genre, story)

20:00 Paper prototyping session

35:00 Break

40:00 Test your prototype and get feedback from other teams

55:00 Conclusion by facilitators and links to further resources

Accessibility requirements/preferences:

A room with a shared screen

References

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Author Bios

Nellie Seale is a PhD candidate at the University of Melbourne, researching how museums can use games for community engagement, visitor experience and educational outcomes, as well as the intersections of technology, communication, accessibility and education. Her academic background is in museum studies and world heritage, with a focus on Indigenous cultural heritage in Victoria. Nellie is also the director and co-founder of Melbourne Megagames where she runs large-scale role-playing events. She is interested in improving accessibility and diversity in games, as well as understanding how games are being used to drive change and how they can be used to communicate and motivate people on issues like sustainability. She is also a Teaching Associate at the Science Gallery Melbourne.

Sophia Booij is a PhD candidate in the University of South Australia's Creative faculty, researching strategies to promote the development of narrative-based learning games by and for Australian collections. She is currently working on an introductory 'how-to' game development guide for industry professionals, in partnership with the History Trust of South Australia. Her work is informed by a background in interactive fiction, digital humanities, museum studies, collections management, and digitisation. She is particularly interested in enabling and encouraging games that tell regional and rural Australian stories.