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3° CONFERENZA INTERNAZIONALE SUL GAME DESIGN



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Novembre 21 | 22, 2026
Zagarolo Game City ZGC

Programme | English Version

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SATURDAY 10:30 — **Conference Opening**

Institutional Welcome Remarks

Introduction to the Conference
Claudio Pollina – Artistic Director, International Conference on Game Design

SATURDAY 11:00 — **Against Standardization: Production, Risk, and Identity in the Case of Disco Elysium**

In an increasingly standardized industry, building a radical identity is a fragile choice. Starting from the case of Disco Elysium, the panel explores the relationship between art, writing and production, showing how a game's identity also emerges from the decisions that allow an unconventional vision to survive the realities of development.



Kaur Kender is an Estonian writer and video game producer, best known as Executive Producer of Disco Elysium, one of the most acclaimed role-playing games of recent years. A key figure in the creation of ZA/UM, he contributed to the project's financing and production. He is currently Executive Producer of Tangerine Antarctic, the new investigative RPG developed by Dark Math Games.

SATURDAY 12:00 — **Being a Publishing Producer (and how I got into the games industry at 43)**

Tony got his first Games industry job at 43 years old. He talks briefly about his long journey to finally landing the job he craved. Tony then breaks down the role of a producer at a publisher - what they do, the benefits they bring and how the job changes depending on the needs of the game / studio. Tony will also talk about how he maintains and cultivates the relationship with developers using the recent release, REKA as the main focal point.



Tony Evans Tony is a producer at the UK based publisher Fireshine Games, best known for publishing the Core Keeper and recent hits Far Far West and Denshattack. Tony is the current lead producer on REKA, Shadows of Doubt and the forthcoming Food Truck Empire and Husk Protocol.

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SATURDAY 14:30 — **The Present and Future of Video Games and Indie Studios in Italy**

What is the current state of the Italian video game industry, and what opportunities lie ahead for independent studios? Davide Mancini from IIDEA offers an overview of the evolution of the Italian gaming ecosystem, highlighting its growth, current challenges and emerging opportunities. The session explores the key issues facing Italian developers today, from strengthening their position in an increasingly competitive environment to expanding internationally, attracting new opportunities and building sustainable growth. A closer look at the potential of Italy's independent studios and the conditions needed to compete successfully on the global stage.



Davide Mancini is Developer Relations Manager at IIDEA, where he manages relationships with Italian development studios and initiatives dedicated to the national games industry. After ten years as a specialist journalist for publications including The Games Machine, IGN Italia and Ultimo Uomo, he now works to support and promote the Italian video game ecosystem.

SATURDAY 15:30 — **Education, Portfolio, and Access to the Games Industry**

How can new professionals enter today's games industry amid growing competition and increasingly limited opportunities? This international discussion examines education, portfolios, skills and access to employment, asking what studios genuinely look for and how universities, companies and accelerators can better prepare the next generation of professionals.



André van Rooijen*With a background in fine art, Andre has been leading and coaching game art teams from concept to release on original IP as well as licensed products for brands like Adidas and Sony across all major interactive platforms, including PC, Consoles and Mobile. Passionate about teaching the future generation of game developers, Andre moved into higher education and is now Head of Games Design & Development at the National Film and Television School.*

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SATURDAY 16:30 — **Betting on Originality: How Publishers Recognise an Indie Game's Potential**

What makes a publisher believe in a game that does not fit an established formula? Jónas Antonsson, Co-Founder of Raw Fury, explores how to recognize the potential of an independent project, assess its team and creative vision, and navigate commercial risk without sacrificing the originality that makes the game distinctive.



Jónas Antonsson Founded Raw Fury and ran it for a decade — one of Metacritic's top rated publishers three years in a row, 50+ titles, fun rides and good times. Board Member & Second-Largest Shareholder at Combined Effect. A lifetime in the games industry: founder, operator, contrarian by conviction, builder by default. Available for the conversations worth having.

SATURDAY 17:30 — **From Junior to Lead**

A provocative masterclass on the lessons you will not find in game design textbooks. Drawing on real-world experience, Manos Agianniotakis explores the human and professional challenges of building a career in the games industry. From navigating difficult working relationships and learning from mistakes to dealing with compromise, feedback and collaborative development, the session offers honest, practical advice for aspiring designers seeking to grow into stronger and more adaptable professionals.



Manos Agianniotakis Manos Agianniotakis is a game designer whose credits include The Inpatient, Man of Medan, Still Wakes the Deep, Bloodlines 2 and Reach. His design interests lie at the intersection of gameplay and narrative.

SATURDAY 18:30 — **Networking Reception & Aperitif**

Art Performance & Visit to the Italia Media Art Festival (IMAF) International Exhibition “The Energy That Transforms”: Artists and creatives from diverse backgrounds engage with one of the most pressing questions of our time: the relationship between energy, responsibility, technology and social transformation. What does it mean to have energy today? Not only in terms of resources and infrastructure, but as a force capable of shaping choices, inspiring responsibility and enabling change.

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SUNDAY 10:00 — **Going Global: Festivals, Showcases and Opportunities for Studios**

How can an independent studio successfully reach the international market? Diego Grammatico explores the role of festivals, showcases and acceleration programmes as strategic opportunities for studios seeking to expand beyond their domestic market. The session examines how developers can prepare for meetings with publishers and investors, present their projects effectively and turn international visibility into meaningful industry connections, partnerships and concrete opportunities for sustainable growth.



Diego Grammatico Diego is Business Development Manager at Games London, the organisation supported by the Mayor of London and the UK government. He works to deliver the yearly London Games Festival, the largest video games event in the UK, as well as international partnerships and acceleration programmes for indie studios.

SUNDAY 11:00 — **Technical Debt in Contemporary Game Development**

Through two real-world case studies, ranging from the porting of a complex sandbox game to the development of a AAA shooter in Unreal Engine 5, Andrea Sancio examines how teams can respond to impossible deadlines, production compromises and technological challenges, preventing today's decisions from becoming tomorrow's problems.



Andrea Sancio Andrea Sancio is a Technical Director with 16 years of experience in the games industry. He founded Piwot Games in Sicily, then moved to the UK, where he has spent the past six years leading technology across very different kinds of projects. At Double Eleven he led challenging console ports such as RimWorld Console Edition. At The Chinese Room he worked on narrative games, including the Vampire: The Masquerade IP. Today, at Take-Two / Zynga, he builds AAA mobile games that bring Take-Two's best-known IP to mobile.

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SUNDAY 12:00 — **People Over Processes**

What truly makes a producer effective? John Lau explores the less visible but most important aspects of game production: understanding people, anticipating problems and enabling collaboration across teams, beyond processes, documentation and deadlines.



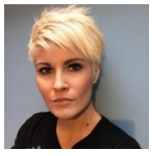
John Lau is Lead Producer at ustwo games, where he worked on Monument Valley 3. With nearly 15 years of experience in game development, he was Creative Producer on South of the Circle and has contributed to interactive projects for Disney, the BBC and Tate Modern.

SUNDAY 15:00 — **Building the Road Ahead: How a Game Studio Takes Shape**

How do experienced professionals move from major AAA productions to founding an independent studio? Christian Cantamessa and Cristina Nava share the story behind Day 4 Night, exploring the creative ambition, entrepreneurial decisions and production challenges involved in turning a vision into a sustainable company.



Christian Cantamessa is an award-winning filmmaker and renowned videogame creator. He was the writer and lead designer of *Red Dead Redemption* and has written and directed for franchises like *Grand Theft Auto*, *Tomb Raider* and *Middle-earth: Shadow of Mordor*. In film, he directed *AIR* starring Norman Reedus and Djimon Hounsou, and co-created the graphic novel *Kill the Minotaur*. As Founder of *Day 4 Night Studios*, he continues to push the frontier where story meets interactivity.



Cristina Nava is Co-Founder and COO of Day 4 Night, with more than 25 years of experience across television, film, comics and video games. After beginning her career as a writer for RAI and Disney, she became a producer at Ubisoft, contributing to franchises including Mario + Rabbids, Ghost Recon and Star Wars Outlaws.

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SUNDAY 16:00 **Stop porting video games. Start Reinventing Them**

How can a video game be transformed into a tabletop experience without losing its identity? Paweł Samborski and Gonzalo Aguirre Bisi explore the relationship between video games and board games, from reinterpreting atmosphere and mechanics to designing systems capable of evolving across physical and digital formats.



Paweł "Sambor" Samborski was trained to dig up the past and ended up building worlds on a tabletop instead. An archaeologist turned board game designer, he has spent almost whole decade at Awaken Realms working on some of the most celebrated games in the hobby. He developed *Nemesis*, *Nemesis: Lockdown* and *Tainted Grail*, designed for *ISS Vanguard*, and led the design of *S.T.A.L.K.E.R. The Board Game*. He also contributed to *This War of Mine: The Board Game*. His archaeology background still shapes his work, from art direction to the design choices underneath it. Much of his imagination runs on the computer games of the late '90s and early 2000s.



Gonzalo Aguirre Bisi Gonzalo Aguirre Bisi is the founder and Game Director of ThunderGryph Games, now part of Awaken Realms. His work spans game development, creative direction, and publishing, with a portfolio of over 30 titles, including Darwin's Journey and Etherstone. He also teaches game design.

SUNDAY 17:00 **Tools and Tips for Studios Seeking Publishers, Partners and Investors**

Finding a publisher means making a project clear, credible and sustainable. In this masterclass, Ilja Rotelli approaches publishing from the perspective of someone who evaluates projects and business opportunities, offering practical tools for building an effective pitch, understanding publisher expectations and recognizing what to promise, protect or refuse before entering a partnership.



Ilja Rotelli is Global Head of Business Development & Investment at Amazon Games. With more than 30 years of experience in the games industry, he has held leadership roles at Blizzard Entertainment, Riot Games and Wizards of the Coast, contributing to franchises including World of Warcraft, StarCraft, Diablo and League of Legends. He also created the StarCraft II World Championship Series, supporting the international development of esports.