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Playing the Anthropocene: Interdisciplinary Perspectives on Ecogames

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Video games have become one of the most widespread and culturally significant media of our time. Beyond their role as entertainment – and despite frequently being targets of moral panic – they increasingly serve as spaces where players encounter, engage with and make sense of broader political and social questions (Soriani et al., 2026), including climate change and the ecological crisis. Ecogames (also referred to as green games, sustainability games or climate games) constitute a conceptual umbrella term encompassing games which aim to foster sustainability-oriented attitudes and behaviours among players and/or to reduce their ecological footprint through sustainable production, distribution, and gameplay practices (op de Beke et al., 2024). They address a wide range of themes, from climate change mitigation and adaptation to resource and energy management, pollution and waste, biodiversity conservation, deforestation, sustainability, and human–nature and more-than-human relationships. Although evidence on their effects on attitudes and behaviours remains mixed (op de Beke et al., 2024), ecogames can also be approached as spaces for critical reflection and meaning-making. In this view, they allow players to raise ethical questions, imagine alternative ecological futures and explore new relationships between humans, nonhuman beings and the environment (Grattarola, 2026; Ruffino, 2024). Ecogames are shaped by a diverse ecosystem of actors, spanning industry, academia and international organisations. At the industry level, the Playing for the Planet Alliance, launched in 2019 and facilitated by the United Nations Environment Programme, brings together game companies and trade bodies around measurable commitments. These concern both the sustainability of production, such as reducing carbon emissions, and the environmental content of games. The latter is promoted through the Alliance's annual Green Game Jam, a challenge in which studios implement themed "green activations" in popular titles, often linked to fundraising for conservation organisations. The Alliance also makes resources available to the industry, including an annual report documenting members' commitments and activations. Alongside this initiative, the Sustainable Games Alliance (SGA), a non-profit cooperative of developers, universities and associations, has introduced an industry standard for sustainability reporting and coordinates a network of academic researchers. Similarly, the IGDA Climate Special Interest Group, itself a member of SGA, is an open community of game developers and researchers which promotes grassroots climate action within studios and shares practical resources such as the "Environmental Game Design Playbook" (Whittle et al., 2022). Funded European programmes and academic collaborations are also contributing to this landscape, such as the Horizon-funded project STRATEGIES (Sustainable Transition for Europe's Game Industries), which supports the sustainable transition of the game industry.

Mirroring this diverse scenario, existing scholarship spans several interconnected research strands. Systematic and scoping reviews have mapped research on ecogames (e.g. Fernández Galeote et al., 2025; Ahmadov et al., 2025), highlighting a literature long centred on serious games and gamified interventions aimed at individual attitudinal and behavioural change. More recently, this literature has broadened to include commercial entertainment titles and goals such as critical reflection, community action and speculation about the future (Blake et al., 2026). A smaller set of mapping studies has instead catalogued the games themselves, classifying their design features, purposes, and audiences (e.g. Moossdorff & Vervoort, 2026; Stanitsas et al., 2019; Fernández Galeote & Hamari, 2021; Fernández Galeote et al., 2022). Ecocritical and environmental humanities, for their part, examine games as environmental texts that shape representations and imaginaries of nature, nonhuman life and ecological crisis (Ruffino, 2026; Chang, 2019; Aliano & Crowley, 2024). Empirical studies, in turn, investigate how gameplay relates to environmental knowledge, attitudes, perceptions and behaviours, drawing on survey-based, experimental, quasi-experimental and mixed-method designs (e.g. Ho et al., 2022; Janakiraman et al., 2021; Fernández Galeote et al., 2023).

Pedagogical research adds a further angle, investigating how playful experiences become meaningful learning opportunities. Drawing on experiential, situated and critical approaches, it examines how players engage with complex socio-ecological systems and how learning emerges from game design, user agency, social interaction and critical reflection (Dieleman & Huisingh, 2006; Marín-Rubio et al., 2026).

Community-oriented research shifts attention to players, with a specific focus on collaborative play, ecomodding and critical metagaming practices, exploring their potential to foster ecological reflection, sustainability discourse and climate communication (e.g. Lamerichs, 2024; Werning, 2021; McDonald et al., 2026).

Widening the lens further, industry and material studies examine the environmental impact of gaming hardware and software, focusing on the material conditions of production and consumption (e.g. Abraham, 2022) as well as the working cultures, practices, and perspectives of game-industry professionals (Eggel & Fizek, 2026).

Complementing these perspectives, analytical and design-oriented approaches provide tools for interpreting ecogames and supporting their development. The former examine ecogames' design-related, cultural, communicative and contextual dimensions, enabling the assessment of their applications, strengths and limitations (e.g. Amadori, 2024, 2026; Kłosiński, 2025). The latter focus on how ecogames are conceived and built, identifying features that sustain engagement and learning and outlining procedures for designing and evaluating them (e.g. Bjørner & Schønau-Fog, 2024).

Taken separately, these strands illuminate only part of the picture. Putting them into dialogue is key to capturing the nuances of ecogames and the plurality of approaches that study them. This call for papers, entitled Playing the Anthropocene: Interdisciplinary Perspectives on Ecogames, aims to foster such dialogue and to draw the scientific community's attention to the field. It also invites a wider conversation on ecogames as spaces where responsibility and hope for the future are cultivated and alternative horizons can be critically interrogated.

To this end, ecogames are understood in a broad sense, encompassing three complementary logics. The first is content- and goal-oriented: games and playful experiences that engage with environmental issues or seek to foster critical reflection and/or sustainability-oriented attitudes and behaviours. The second is process-oriented: games whose 'ecological' character lies in how they are produced, distributed and

played. The third is reception-oriented: games that acquire an ecological meaning through players' (over)interpretations, even when their textual strategies contain no explicit reference to eco-themes.
This breadth calls for equally plural approaches. Contributions may be theoretical, empirical, critical or design-oriented, and may draw on sociology, pedagogy, media and communication studies, game studies, semiotics and related fields. Diverse methodological traditions are welcome in exploring the cultural, educational, social and representational dimensions of ecogames.

Within this framework, possible contributions include, but are not limited to:

- Analyses of how ecogames represent environmental issues, such as climate change, biodiversity, resources and human–nature relationships.
- Studies of players, communities and playing practices, including modding, streaming and online discussion.
- Research on campaigns and "green activations" promoted by industry and non-industry stakeholders, including ambivalent cases where environmental engagement intersects with branding and corporate communication.
- Educational and pedagogical perspectives on ecogames and playful experiences, including experiential and situated learning, critical environmental literacy, sustainability education and environmental citizenship.
- Empirical studies of the relationship between play and knowledge, attitudes or behaviours, with attention to methodological design.
- Critical perspectives on sustainability in the game industry, including production practices, reporting and greenwashing.
- Regional and comparative perspectives on ecogames, including how they are produced, played, interpreted and used in different cultural, institutional and geographical contexts.

Submission details

December 13, 2026 – Deadline for abstract submission. Prospective authors are invited to submit an abstract of 300 to 400 words, accompanied by five keywords, the author(s)' name(s), affiliation(s) and contact details, and a short biographical note (max. 150 words), to the following email addresses: gaia.amadori@unicatt.it and redazione.cs@unicatt.it

December 30, 2026 – Authors will be notified of proposal acceptance.

April 30, 2027 – Deadline for submission of the full paper, if the proposal is accepted.

Submission of a paper implies that it is unpublished and not under consideration for publication elsewhere.

Articles must not exceed 5,000-6,000 words in English (including references). For editorial guidelines, please refer to the section “Guide for the authors” on the Comunicazioni Sociali website: https://comunicazionisociali.vitaepensiero.it/media/c49e263.pdf

Contributions will be submitted through a double-blind peer review process.

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