

# This is Fine: a megagame about heat in western Sydney

**Sophie Poisel**

Lang Walker Family Academy, Powerhouse  
Parramatta, Sydney, NSW  
[sophie.poisel@powerhouse.com.au](mailto:sophie.poisel@powerhouse.com.au)

**Nellie Seale**

Melbourne Megagames  
Melbourne, VIC  
[nellie@melbournemegagames.com](mailto:nellie@melbournemegagames.com)

**Tom Lang**

Melbourne Megagames  
Melbourne, VIC  
[langetc@gmail.com](mailto:langetc@gmail.com)

**Emily Gregg**

RMIT University  
Melbourne, VIC  
[emily.gregg@rmit.edu.au](mailto:emily.gregg@rmit.edu.au)



Figure 1 'This Is Fine' placard used at the Sydney Climate Strike made by Quinn Chen, Powerhouse Collection

## Keywords

Museum game, sustainability, heat, megagame, education

## Format of work

Paper prototype of an educational megagame

Proceedings of DiGRA Australia 2025

© 2025 Authors & Digital Games Research Association DiGRA. Personal and educational classroom use of this paper is allowed, commercial use requires specific permission from the author.

## DESCRIPTION OF WORK

*This is Fine* is a megagame<sup>1</sup> designed for stage 5 (year 10) students in Western Sydney. The game was commissioned by the Powerhouse's Lang Walker Family Academy as part of the *50°C: Climate, Heat & Resilience* project, which is an interdisciplinary program that will run in schools in term 1 of 2025, and will begin with the students playing *This is Fine* in their classrooms, facilitated by their teacher. The megagame is designed to support groups of 21 to 38 players, arranged across 7 teams: three local government areas (City of Parramatta, City of Blacktown, and City of Cumberland), a team representing the NSW Government, and three university teams (University of Technology Sydney, Western Sydney University, and the University of New South Wales). *This is Fine* uses conventional megagame spheres: a map game, a council game, and a science game to divide play, and runs for six 30-minute rounds, followed by a facilitated debriefing.

Gameplay is primarily focused on a deck of heatwave cards, which are dealt out to the LGAs at the beginning of each round. Player goals are focused on both responding to the immediate impacts of the heatwaves and constructing solutions to mitigate future, more serious heatwaves.

## RESEARCH STATEMENT

**Background:** The climate crisis is one of the most pernicious challenges facing us, with temperatures from July 2023 to June 2024 reaching the highest ever recorded, a full year for which the Earth was 1.64°C hotter than the preindustrial average (Niranjan, 2024). Extreme heat is acute in urban environments like western Sydney, where inequality magnifies vulnerability. While climate change engagement is often challenging due to the issue feeling far away – both in time and space (Maiella et al., 2020) – heat impacts on a local scale provide a tangible example of the effects of climate change that individuals are likely to directly experience and relate to, and therefore feel capable of taking meaningful action to address. Cultural institutions such as museums are well-placed to engage individuals with these issues (McDowall, 2019; Cain & Rader, 2017). The Powerhouse's *50°C: Climate, Heat & Resilience* program is part of the museum's approach to addressing climate challenges. The megagame commissioned as part of the program builds on the museum's previous experience with games (Appleby, 2022) and use of megagames for student engagement, extending this through bespoke design.

The use of games for education has been widely examined (Backlund & Hendrix, 2013; Breuer & Bente, 2010; Shah, 2018). Roleplaying games in particular are unique in their ability to reduce the distance between players and the issue, foster care and connection, and develop a shared schema from which complex issues can be dissected and understood (Brom et al., 2016; Mochocki, 2013). However, megagames are significantly underexplored in games studies, despite their lineage from wargaming and simulation gaming and the general popularity of these topics in the field. The academic literature comprises only a handful of academic works (Axby, 2022; Janné & Fredriksson, 2023; Kowalski & Von Seth, 2023; Ludert et al., 2023; Murray, 2020) dating back to 2020. Of these, most exist in a serious games context, with several focusing on the same example at Linköping University, which is also a climate change megagame (Johansson et al., 2023; Chow et al., 2023). Games such as *Lakeville* (Aloba et al., 2017), *Reto Global* (Barcena-Vazquez & Caro, 2019), *The Living Forest Game* (Pereira & Roque, 2009), and *Keep Cool* (Meya & Eisenack, 2018) have demonstrated the potential for serious games to communicate climate change's complexities.

**Contribution to field/industry:** A key challenge for educational games, particularly in schools, is their accessibility to teachers, resulting in an abundance of games that

are generic, off-the-shelf products (Mochocki, 2013). Alternatively, highly specialised, facilitated experiences are often too expensive, and therefore inaccessible. *This is Fine* seeks to bridge this gap. It is designed for classroom use but emphasises accessibility, usability, teachability, and critically: fun. We are applying our team's extensive experience designing and running large-scale games to create a game that is both educationally rigorous and engaging for students.

The school context often combines climate change's serious mental health impact on teenagers with a culture of silence. Many people have significant thoughts, questions, and worries about climate change, but feel uncomfortable or are discouraged from voicing them (Leiserowitz et al., 2022). A game environment offers students a safe space, allowing them to engage with the issue in a structured and supported way. By dedicating a full term to exploring climate change through the rest of the program, students can continue these conversations over an extended period. This integration into a full term's curriculum further distinguishes *This is Fine* from other climate games, which are often designed to be played as an isolated experience (Crookall, 2013).

**Significance:** *This is Fine* takes its place alongside other Australian climate game projects, including Amble Studios' *The Adaptation Game* (TAG) (Amble Studios, 2023) and *CO2peration* (Harker-Schuch et al., 2020). These games are both future-thinking and grounded in research, however, *TAG* stands out for its localisation to different LGAs. This represents a perpetual design challenge for climate change games: balancing localisation's high effort requirements with its critical importance for behaviour change. Conversely, *CO2peration* is a digital game, allowing it to reach a wider audience, but lessening its connection to community and local relevance. While localisation's high design burden is also a challenge for *This is Fine*, it is nonetheless designed to be played across the curriculum, with strong integration of place-based learning, research, and First Nations perspectives and their care for Country.

As a megagame, *This is Fine* is unique in structure and mechanics. Conventional boardgames focus on mechanical interaction, using pieces as abstract proxies for real-life concepts. While megagames feature boardgame mechanics, they focus more heavily on the discussion, negotiation, and relationship building between players. Megagames encourage players to put themselves in a situation, explore it alongside others, raise discussion questions, and work through scenarios, which in turn fosters community, collaboration, and support – qualities that underpin our chances of surviving the climate crisis.

## EXHIBITION

There are two options for exhibiting *This is Fine*. The physical prototype may be displayed as a static artefact. Individual game spheres may be playable in this version, but it will not necessarily communicate the experience of playing the game, as for this to be accurately conveyed, at least two rounds of play with multiple teams are needed. An artefact display would require a large table to lay out one of the maps for the LGAs, as well as the components for the science game.

Alternatively, the game could be facilitated, which could accommodate 21 to 38 players, for either half an hour (one round) or an hour (two rounds) of gameplay. This would allow attendees to experience the game as intended.

## BIO

**Sophie Poisel** is the Head of the Lang Walker Family Academy at Powerhouse Parramatta, opening in 2025. She is an award winning innovative learning specialist

with experience in Department of Education and independent schools in NSW. Sophie is an advocate of learning opportunities that foster student agency, skill development and a close connection to our world.

**Nellie Seale** is a PhD student at the University of Melbourne researching how museums can use games for community engagement, visitor experience and educational outcomes. Nellie is also an artist and game designer, and the director and co-founder of Melbourne Megagames. Her other research interests include accessibility in games and games as cultural heritage.

**Tom Lang** is a science communicator, museum educator, and award-winning game designer. He has created education programs for Museums Victoria, and game-based climate activities for Hepburn Energy and CERES Environment Park. His work explores concepts of system change, and the interactions and experiences of people within systems.

**Emily Gregg** is a conservation campaigner at Zoos Victoria and environmental social scientist. She is interested in creative and empowering community engagement approaches that support a future of vibrant ecosystems alongside equitable outcomes for people. She is an Adjunct Industry Fellow at RMIT University.

## **ACKNOWLEDGMENTS**

The *50°C: Climate, Heat & Resilience* project is funded by the NSW Office of the Chief Scientist and Engineer. *This is Fine* was commissioned by the Lang Walker Family Academy, Powerhouse Parramatta. We thank the councillors at City of Parramatta, City of Blacktown, and City of Cumberland who generously contributed information about their work to the design of the game, and everyone else who collaborated on the 50°C program.

## **ENDNOTES**

1 Megagames are large roleplaying games for 20-200 players that typically run for an entire day. They combine elements of live action roleplay (LARP), boardgames, and strategy, deriving from a tradition of wargaming but having evolved into a social hobby game. Players are often organised into teams and are given a briefing or set of goals to work towards through play. Comparative to LARPs, megagames have less of a focus on character roleplay. While they provide the flexibility for players to lean into this element if they wish, there is often more of an emphasis on team identity and collective narrative. Notably, megagames seldom have a definitive winner. Rather, players derive satisfaction from achieving their goals and the emergent narrative. Most megagames are also subdivided into game spheres, which may be thought of as a set of inter-connected big boardgames that share common resources but offer different opportunities for gameplay. Players on a team will typically split up during a round to spend time at different game spheres.

## **BIBLIOGRAPHY**

Aloba, Aishat, Gabriel Coleman, Triton Ong, Shan Yan, Dehlia Albrecht, Marko Suvajdzic, and Lisa Anthony. 2017. "From Board Game to Digital Game: Designing a Mobile Game for Children to Learn About Invasive Species." In Extended Abstracts Publication of the Annual Symposium on Computer-Human Interaction in Play, 375–82. CHI PLAY '17 Extended Abstracts. New York, NY, USA: Association for Computing Machinery. <https://doi.org/10.1145/3130859.3131326>.

- 
- Amble Studios. n.d. "The Adaptation Game - Prepare for Climate Crisis in Your Town." TAG Climate Drill. Accessed October 22, 2023. <https://www.tagclimatedrill.org/>.
- Appleby, Chloe. 2023. "Gaming After Dark: How Contemporary Institutions Can Support Gaming Industries and Communities." In *DiGRA Australia 2023 National Conference*.
- Axby, Albin. 2022. "Collection of Game States during a Megagame." <https://urn.kb.se/resolve?urn=urn:nbn:se:liu:diva-186645>.
- Backlund, Per, and Maurice Hendrix. 2013. "Educational Games - Are They Worth the Effort? A Literature Survey of the Effectiveness of Serious Games." In *2013 5th International Conference on Games and Virtual Worlds for Serious Applications (VS-GAMES)*, 1–8. <https://doi.org/10.1109/VS-GAMES.2013.6624226>.
- Barcena-Vazquez, Jorge, and Karina Caro. 2019. "Designing a Video Game to Support Climate Change Awareness in a Museum Exhibition Context." In *Proceedings of the IX Latin American Conference on Human Computer Interaction*, 1–4. Panama City Panama: ACM. <https://doi.org/10.1145/3358961.3358972>.
- Breuer, Johannes S., and Gary Bente. 2010. "Why so Serious? On the Relation of Serious Games and Learning." *Eludamos: Journal for Computer Game Culture* 4 (1): 7–24. <https://doi.org/10.7557/23.6111>.
- Brom, Cyril, Vít Šisler, Michaela Slussareff, Tereza Selmbacherová, and Zdeněk Hlávka. 2016. "You like It, You Learn It: Affectivity and Learning in Competitive Social Role Play Gaming." *International Journal of Computer-Supported Collaborative Learning* 11 (3): 313–48. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11412-016-9237-3>.
- Cain, Victoria, and Karen A. Rader. 2017. "Science Communication and Museums' Changing Roles." In *The Oxford Handbook of the Science of Science Communication*, edited by Kathleen Hall Jamieson, Dan M. Kahan, and Dietram A. Scheufele, 0. Oxford University Press. <https://doi.org/10.1093/oxfordhb/9780190497620.013.23>.
- Chen, Quinn. 2019. "This Is Fine" Placard Used at the Sydney Climate Strike. Powerhouse Collection. Accessed September 24, 2024. <https://collection.powerhouse.com.au/object/590134>.
- Chow, Jessie, Jenny Rudemo, Lena Buffoni, and Ola Leifler. 2023. "Visualisation of System Dynamics in Megagames." In *Serious Games*, edited by Mads Haahr, Alberto Rojas-Salazar, and Stefan Göbel, 370–76. Cham: Springer Nature Switzerland. [https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-031-44751-8\\_30](https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-031-44751-8_30).
- Crookall, David. 2013. "Climate Change and Simulation/Gaming: Learning for Survival." *Simulation & Gaming* 44 (2–3): 195–228. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1046878113497781>.
- Harker-Schuch, Inez EP, Franklin P Mills, Steven J Lade, and Rebecca M Colvin. 2020. "CO2peration – Structuring a 3D Interactive Digital Game to Improve Climate Literacy in the 12-13-Year-Old Age Group." *Computers & Education* 144 (January):103705. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.compedu.2019.103705>.
- Janné, Mats, and Anna Fredriksson. 2023. "Teaching Supply Chain Management through Megagames." In *IPSERA 2023: 32ND Conference of the International*

- 
- Purchasing and Supply Education and Research Association*.  
<https://urn.kb.se/resolve?urn=urn:nbn:se:liu:diva-193071>.
- Johansson, Björn, Peter Berggren, and Ola Leifler. 2023. "Understanding the Challenge of the Energy Crisis – Tackling System Complexity with Megagaming." In *Proceedings of the European Conference on Cognitive Ergonomics 2023*, 1–7. ECCE '23. New York, NY, USA: Association for Computing Machinery. <https://doi.org/10.1145/3605655.3605689>.
- Kowalski, Stewart, Eduard Von Seth, and Erjon Zoto. 2023. "C.S. Technopoly: A Megagame for Teaching and Learning Cybersecurity." In *14th International Conference on Applied Human Factors and Ergonomics (AHFE 2023)*. <https://doi.org/10.54941/ahfe1003724>.
- Leiserowitz, Anthony, Edward Maibach, Seth Rosenthal, John Kotcher, Jennifer Carman, Liz Neyens, Teresa Myers, et al. 2022. "Climate Change in the American Mind, April 2022." *Yale Program on Climate Change Communication*. Yale University and George Mason University. <https://climatecommunication.yale.edu/publications/climate-change-in-the-american-mind-april-2022/>.
- Ludert, Edgar, Elsa Catalina Olivas Castellanos, and Leticia Isabel Ramírez-Cavazos. 2023. "Kuxtal: Student Motivation Through Megagames in Higher Education Design Students." *European Conference on Games Based Learning* 17 (1): 390–400. <https://doi.org/10.34190/ecgbl.17.1.1518>.
- Maiella, Roberta, Pasquale La Malva, Daniela Marchetti, Elena Pomarico, Adolfo Di Crosta, Rocco Palumbo, Luca Cetara, Alberto Di Domenico, and Maria Cristina Verocchio. 2020. "The Psychological Distance and Climate Change: A Systematic Review on the Mitigation and Adaptation Behaviors." *Frontiers in Psychology* 11 (November). <https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2020.568899>.
- McDowall, Georgina. 2019. *From Information to Imagination: The Role of Museums in Tackling Climate Change*. University of Amsterdam.
- Meya, Jasper N., and Klaus Eisenack. 2018. "Effectiveness of Gaming for Communicating and Teaching Climate Change." *Climatic Change* 149 (3–4): 319–33. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10584-018-2254-7>.
- Mochocki, Michal. 2013. "Edu-Larp as Revision of Subject-Matter Knowledge." *International Journal of Role-Playing* 4:55–75.
- Murray, Jack. 2020. "Super Baguettes, Space World Cup, and Moon Pope: Collaborative Storytelling in Megagames through Metaplay." *Electronic Literature Organization Conference* 2020, July. <https://stars.library.ucf.edu/elo2020/asynchronous/talks/5>.
- Niranjan, Ajit. 2024. "Temperatures 1.5C above Pre-Industrial Era Average for 12 Months, Data Shows." *The Guardian*, July 8, 2024, sec. Environment. <https://www.theguardian.com/environment/article/2024/jul/08/temperatures-1-point-5c-above-pre-industrial-era-average-for-12-months-data-shows>.
- Pereira, Luís Lucas, and Licínio Gomes Roque. 2009. "Design Guidelines for Learning Games: The Living Forest Game Design Case." In *Proceedings of DiGRA 2009 Conference: Breaking New Ground: Innovation in Games, Play, Practice and Theory*. <https://dl.digra.org/index.php/dl/article/view/482>.

---

Shah, Mamta. 2018. "Creativity as a Lens to Frame Teachers' Use of Games for Learning." *In ICLS 2018 Proceedings*. International Society of the Learning Sciences.

Uhrqvist, Ola. 2021. *Citizens' Views on Climate-Change Adaptation: A Study of the Views of Participants in the 2020 Climate Change Megagame*. Linköping: Linköping University Electronic Press.