International Toy Research Association

9th – 11th August 2023
The Strong National Museum of Play
Rochester, New York USA

Toys Matter:
THE POWER OF PLAYTHINGS
9th ITRA World Conference

CALL FOR PAPERS
Submission Deadline: 31st December 2022
The 9th World Conference of the International Toy Research Association will be held in collaboration with the Strong National Museum of Play in Rochester, New York, USA.

The International Toy Research Association (ITRA), founded in 1993, will celebrate its 30th anniversary during the 9th World Conference. ITRA is an interdisciplinary organization devoted to the scientific study of toys in all their facets, bringing together toy researchers from around the world to discuss research, collaborate on international projects and exchange information with other researchers, students and leaders in the toy industry (see www.itratoyresearch.org for more information). More than 80 international delegates attended our 2018 meeting in Paris, France.

The Strong National Museum of Play (www.museumofplay.org/) is a highly interactive, collections-based museum devoted to the history and exploration of play. It is one of the largest history museums in the United States and one of the leading museums serving families. The Strong houses the world’s largest and most comprehensive collection of historical materials related to play and is home to the International Center for the History of Electronic Games, the National Toy Hall of Fame, the World Video Game Hall of Fame, the Brian Sutton-Smith Library and Archives of Play, the Woodbury School, and the American Journal of Play. Together, these enable a multifaceted array of research, exhibition, and other interpretive and educational activities that serve a diverse audience of adults, families, children, students, teachers, scholars, collectors, and others around the globe.

Conference Theme

The overarching theme for the 9th ITRA World Conference is Toys Matter: The Power of Playthings. The conference also marks the 30th anniversary of ITRA’s founding.

From ITRA’s beginning, the idea that toys mattered was a fundamental principle that put the toys themselves on centre stage. During the first world conference, ITRA co-founder Brian Sutton-Smith highlighted the importance of toy research, quipping that, “we’re not just toying around here.” Rather, he argued that toys and toy research mattered because it was only by carefully examining the contexts in which we find toys, the worlds of discourse created from them, and their power to shape our private and collective imaginations that we could comprehend the power of the toys with which we play.

As the tools of serious fun, toys have the power to inspire, to promote learning and skill development, to forge and maintain connections with others, and to open new worlds of possibilities. At the same time, it is not always fun and games in Toyland. Toys are also used to grieve, to console, and to cope. They can afford comfort during lockdowns or in the aftermath of natural and human-made disasters.
In the face of social unrest or geopolitical turmoil, they can be transformed into instruments of protest and resistance. The power of playthings is multi-layered and multi-faceted. Toys empower and heal. However, they can also oppress and harm. From safety concerns, to environmental and psychological impacts, to the question of who is represented and how, the quality and characteristics of toys matter.

The 9th ITRA World Conference provides opportunities to not only reflect on the last 30 years of toy research but to also look forward in order to broaden the scope of what counts as a toy, and to expand our understanding of the power of playthings and the many ways they matter - for both children and adults. This conference is a timely opportunity for toy researchers, designers, inventors, advocates, archivists and other toy professionals to discuss the role toys play in our individual and collective identities, and the various ways they reflect and shape our worlds (both positively or negatively), as well as the impact of technology, environmental concerns and societal/cultural crises on toy design, manufacture and use. We invite work that examines the power of playthings both historically and in our ever-changing worlds, especially as we navigate these precarious and even perilous times.

All play objects, whether physical, digital or hybrid, are included in the scope of toys to be discussed at this conference. This includes games, as well as indoor and outdoor play spaces.

The scientific committee encourages submissions of abstracts that relate to the main conference theme from all disciplines, as well as other toy related topics including but not limited to:

- Art & Artistry of Toys
- Collecting, Collections & Preservation - from Toy Boxes to Exhibitions
- Indigenous and Folk Toys
- Intersectionality, Inclusivity and Intergenerational Toys
- Games and Gamification
- Multi-modal Toys, the Metaverse and Hybridization
- Outdoor Toys, Playspaces, and Toys in Nature
- People behind Playthings
- Socialization, Identity, and Development through and with Toys
- Toy Advertising, Markets & Trends
- Toys As and Through History
- Toy Design, Safety & Sustainability
- Toy Innovations, Transitions, and Subversions
- Toys for Teaching, Learning, and Social Justice
- Toys and Technology including Digital, Electronic and Virtual Toys & Games
- Toys Throughout the Lifespan
- Trauma Responsive and/or Therapeutic Toys

We welcome abstracts of completed research, case studies and development projects, including those in process or development, as well as ideas for future research in order to generate discussion and feedback.
To submit a paper, symposium, workshop, or poster

To present a paper, organize a symposium/panel or workshop, or present a poster please submit a complete abstract in English, with all requested information as described below by 31st December 2022. All submissions must be made within our online portal at: https://app.oxfordabstracts.com/stages/3899/submitter

The first time you access the submission portal you will be asked to register as a user. Please note that the contact information entered in the registration process will only be used by ITRA for the purposes of managing your submission and contacting you about its status. Only complete submissions will be considered for acceptance to the conference. Questions or issues regarding the submission process should be directed to the Conference Chair, Greta Pennell (gpen nell@uindy.edu).

**Papers**: This submission category is intended for individual papers that are being submitted independently by its author(s). Papers that are part of a panel/symposium should be submitted as a package by the session organizer (see below). The abstract must include a brief introduction or purpose statement, concise description of the methodology/inquiry approach, data/results, discussion and/or conclusion (400 word limit). Please note, that in the case of projects still in progress, tentative or anticipated findings should be described. In addition, the title of the abstract, names, affiliations and email addresses of all authors/contributors must be provided. Authors should also provide up to 3 keywords that best describes their paper. Keywords are used to organize presentations into appropriate sessions, so please choose words that clearly describe the focus of your work. Paper presentations are limited to 20 minutes, with an additional 10 minutes for questions and comments. Submission deadline: 31st December 2022.

**Symposia/ Panels** are designed to address an important topic, issue and/or to highlight new advances, methods/approaches, or emerging areas of interest. Symposia generally feature 3-4 presentations by people from different institutions, perspectives, and/or traditions in toy research, design and/or industry. Sessions will be limited to 2 hours and must include dedicated time for question/answer and discussion. Submissions should include an overall title for the symposium. The abstract should clearly communicate the importance of the main topics addressed, overall goals for the session, and brief description including each participant’s contribution to the symposium and individual titles if appropriate (400 word limit). Submission Deadline: 31st December 2022.

**Workshops** are highly interactive sessions focused around an activity or problem-based discussion that provides useful and/or tangible takeaways for participants. Submitted abstracts for workshops must describe the workshop’s importance/relevance, outline its overall structure, learning objectives/goals, and intended audience and key takeaways (400 word limit). In addition to the abstract, a list of expendable materials and/or any special requirements (e.g., space or equipment) is also required. Workshop leaders should plan on providing all materials needed for the workshop. Workshop activities must be able to be completed within a 2-hour session. Submission Deadline: 31st December 2022.

**Posters** are 2-dimensional displays with a high level of visual interest presented during a 90-minute, regular session. Poster presenters are expected to be at their poster throughout the session to interact with and address questions from interested conference attendees on a one-to-one basis. As with submissions of papers, the abstract must include a brief introduction or purpose statement, and concise description of the methodology/inquiry approach, data/results, discussion and/or conclusion (400 word limit). In addition, the title of the abstract, names, affiliations and email addresses of all authors/contributors must be provided. Authors should also identify up to 3 keywords that best describes their paper. Keywords are used to organize posters into appropriate sessions, so please choose words that clearly describe the focus of your work. Submission Deadline: 31st December 2022.
The scientific committee will review your abstract or proposal for its suitability to the conference. You will receive a reply by **1st March 2023**.

Conference registration opens on March 1, 2023. Participants must register for the conference prior to the deadline of **1st May 2023** in order to take advantage of the early registration fee. Registration closes **1st July 2023**.

**Publications**

Conference proceedings will be published in the open archive HAL. HAL is an online scientific research document repository. It is on this platform that the proceedings of the 8th ITRA World Conference (Paris 2018) have been published. They can be found at: [https://hal-univ-paris13.archives-ouvertes.fr/ITRA2018/](https://hal-univ-paris13.archives-ouvertes.fr/ITRA2018/)

Participants who wish to have their full paper published in the HAL must submit it to Greta Pennell (gpennell@uindy.edu) by **15th October 2023**.

Additional publication opportunities in the form of special issues within a journal may be possible as well. Conference presenters will be notified of any additional publication opportunities that become available.
2023 ITRA Prize for Outstanding Toy Research

The ITRA Prize has been established with generous support from the British Toy and Hobby Association (BTHA; www.btha.co.uk/). The first ITRA-BTHA Prize was awarded in July 2008 during the 5th ITRA conference in Nafplion, Greece.

ITRA expects to give two awards at each ITRA World Conference. One award of US$650 will be given for the best student research on toys and one award of US$1,300 to a senior scholar or practitioner on the uses, design and effects of toys.

The Prize recipients will also receive a travel stipend of US$600 each toward the ITRA Conference and will present their research at that conference.

**Purpose:** The purpose of the ITRA Prize is to recognize outstanding research in the field of toy research. To qualify for the Prize, the work must have been conducted or published since the previous ITRA Conference in 2018 and be submitted by the researcher or nominated by a member of ITRA.

**Eligibility:** Papers, either published or unpublished, in any area of toy research, are eligible. Submissions should be in English (original or translation). Research on the uses, design, and effects of toys in child development, education, science, and medicine will be considered for the awards. Theoretical and historical papers will also be considered as long as these are linked to potential research.

Submissions of postgraduate dissertations or books are also welcome. These should be accompanied by a summary of 2500-3000 words. Hard copies of books should be provided to each prize committee member upon request.

**Submissions:** ITRA Prize papers should be submitted directly to Greta Pennell (gpennell@uindy.edu) as a PDF attachment before **31st December 2022**. The Awards Committee consists of Mark Allen (UK), Barry Kudrowitz (USA), Koumudi Patil (India), and Lieselotte van Leeuwen (Sweden).

**Evaluation:** The Awards Committee of ITRA will evaluate applications on the basis of originality, the significance of the work, creativity, methodology, clarity of presentation, and importance.

*The 2023 ITRA prizes will be awarded at the 9th ITRA World Conference in Rochester, New York USA 9th – 11th August 2023.*
Registration and Fees

Registration for the conference will be available online only, opening in spring 2023. The conference fee must be paid in connection with the registration through an online portal hosted by The Strong Museum at: https://store.museumofplay.org/Webstore/shop/ViewItems.aspx?CG=ITRA&C=ITRA2023

Secure electronic payment may be made by credit card (VISA, MasterCard or American Express). Please make sure you have your credit card on hand before you start the registration process as the portal may timeout after a certain amount of time has passed. Your registration will not be valid until you have successfully completed the entire process and received confirmation of registration and payment.

- Early registration until 1st May 2023 US$350.00
- Late registration until 1st July 2023 US$425.00
- Student (status confirmation required *) until 1st May 2023 US$175.00
- Student (status confirmation required *) until 1st July 2023 US$225.00
- Single Day Professional/Student/General Public ** US$90.00

* Student fees are applicable only to full-time high school/university or college students who present a copy of a valid student ID or an official certificate of their student status signed by their supervising faculty member when they arrive at the conference.

** Single Day registration does not include lunch or evening programming and is only available space permitting. Single day registration doesn’t open until 2nd July 2023.

Registration fee includes all conference sessions, conference materials, daily lunches, refreshments at breaks, the special anniversary dinner, and membership to ITRA.

The fee does not include accommodations, travel expenses or optional pre/post conference excursions (details regarding these events are forthcoming, watch the conference website for more information).

Online transactions might not always go as planned. Payments by bank transfer directly to ITRA are accepted ONLY in exceptional circumstances. If you are unable to register through the Strong Museum store with your credit card, please contact the conference chair: Greta Pennell (gpennell@uindy.edu).

Special Anniversary Dinner

During the 2023 World Conference, ITRA will be celebrating the 30th anniversary of its founding. All fully registered conference attendees are invited to join us at a special dinner the evening of Thursday, 10th August 2023 at The Strong Museum. Dinner is included in the full conference registration fee for both professionals and students. Fully registered conference attendees may purchase an additional guest registration for the anniversary dinner (US$65 including tax), space permitting, during the online registration process.

In conjunction with the Anniversary Dinner, participants will have the opportunity to tell their toy stories to become part of the collection at The Strong. Participants are invited to bring a toy/game from their home country or childhood along with a written story about what makes the toy special. These personal toy stories are especially important for archival purposes, to bring the toys to life, and for preserving elements of play history around the world. The donated toys and stories will be prepared for display for a Festival of Toys “gallery walk” during the anniversary dinner.

If you have pictures from past ITRA conferences, we’d love to include them in our celebration. Kindly send them to Greta Pennell (gpennell@uindy.edu).
Thirty Years Ago

The International Toy Research Association was founded by an energetic and innovative group of 16 toy scholars from 11 countries in 1993. Led by Professor Brian Sutton-Smith, Professor Jeffrey Goldstein, and Jorn-Martin Steenholdt the founders recognized the rich and well-established tradition of play research. However, research focused on the toys themselves, their material qualities, their role in development, play, and society itself was limited. Further, the gap was especially notable for toys from developing worlds. The founders recognized the need for a multi-disciplinary network of researchers, designers, and other toy industry professionals who together could expand knowledge about toys and play materials with an aim of informing development of good toys, games and other playthings/spaces. And so ITRA was born. Three years later the first world conference was held in Halmstad, Sweden.

Over the years we have lost three of ITRA’s founders, Birgitta Almqvist from Sweden, Greta Fein from the USA and, most recently, Brian Sutton-Smith also from the USA. They left an impressive body of work and a firm foundation for future scholars to build upon. We are inspired by their passion, collegiality, creativity, and ever-questioning minds. Looking forward, ITRA intends to continue and nurture the study of toys by connecting and supporting new and established researchers in all phases of their work, promoting toy study and design through our world conferences and newsletters, and extending our reach to more parts of the world.

Financial Support

Limited financial support is available to participants for whom registration fees and travel costs would present a hardship. Please submit your request for financial consideration before 31st December 2022, along with your abstract to ITRA Board, email Greta Pennell (gpennell@uindy.edu).

Cancellation and Refund Policy

Cancellations must be made through the same system that was used to register for the conference. Cancellations received prior to 1st July 2023 will receive a full refund, less a small administration fee. No refunds will be made for cancellations after this date or for no-shows.

Conference deadlines

Proposal/Abstracts Submission Deadline for all papers, posters, symposia, & workshops – 31st December 2022
Request for financial assistance – 31st December 2022
Response from review committee – 1st March 2023
Early registration until – 1st May 2023
Late Registration until – 1st July 2023
Cancellation Deadline for full refund – 1st July 2023
Hotel Reservation for special conference rate until – 15th July 2023
Host City details - Rochester, NY

The family-friendly city of Rochester is built on a long history of innovation and activism. Its nickname as “The Flower City” stems from the 1850s, when it boasted the world’s largest seed company and is evident in its more than 12,000 acres of parks, some designed by famed landscape architect Fredrick Law Olmsted, who is perhaps most well known for his design of Central Park in New York City. The influence of other industry leaders like George Eastman and Kodak can be seen throughout the city via the Eastman School of Music, the Eastman Theatre, and Eastman Museum. Rochester has a rich history of social justice activism. Home to abolitionist Frederick Douglass and suffragette Susan B. Anthony, their legacy provides a bridge to our conference as expressed by Douglas’ famous quote that, “It is easier to build strong children than to repair broken men.”

Rochester is the 3rd largest metropolitan area in New York State and the cultural capital of upstate New York. Its premier universities such as the University of Rochester and the Rochester Institute of Technology are drivers of innovation and research. Rochester also serves as the gateway to the Finger Lakes, home to the Haudenosaunee (Ho-den-o-SAW-nee), a group of Native American tribes. The Finger Lakes is a famous wine-growing region. With so much to see and do within the city and its surrounds why not consider coming early and/or staying a few days after the conference.

Travel Information

Rochester is located in upstate New York, USA about 75 miles (120 km) east of Niagara Falls and Buffalo, New York. The city is situated at the intersection of the Erie Canal and Genesee River on the southern bank of Lake Ontario. Frederick Douglass Greater Rochester International Airport (ROC; [https://rocairport.com](https://rocairport.com)) is currently served by American, Delta, Frontier, Southwest, JetBlue, United, and Allegiant Airlines with nonstop service to major hubs in the USA including Chicago, Minneapolis/St. Paul, and Atlanta.

Rochester may also be reached by train (Amtrak/Via Rail) or by bus (Greyhound or Trailways). Please be advised that most of these routes do NOT connect directly to major international airports like JFK or Newark; and generally run only a few times per day.

Most visitors travel to Rochester by air or personal car. For those staying at the conference hotel, a free shuttle bus from the Rochester airport will be provided. Others may take a bus or cab to get to their lodging from the Rochester airport.

Conference attendees are advised to take out adequate personal insurance to cover travel, cancellation and personal effects.
**Accommodation**

The Hampton Inn & Suites in the Neighborhood of Play next door to the Strong is offering special conference room rates of US$159/night excluding taxes. The hotel is offering this special rate for up to 2 days before and 2 days after the conference. The rate includes free wifi and breakfast. The hotel will also provide a free airport shuttle and shuttle to local attractions for guests. Conference participants will book their rooms directly with the hotel starting in 2023. Details on this process will be provided with conference registration materials.

A limited number of dormitory rooms at a local university may be available. More information on alternative accommodations will be provided closer to the date of the conference.

**Committees**

**Scientific Committee**
Mark Allen, Serious Fun Research Labs, UK
Anna Beresin, University of the Arts, Philadelphia, USA
Doris Bergen, Miami University, USA
Gilles Brougère, University Sorbonne Paris Nord, France
Véronique Dasen, University of Fribourg, Switzerland
Miriam Forman-Burnell, University of Missouri-Kansas City, USA
Jeffrey H. Goldstein, University of Utrecht, The Netherlands
Cleo Gougoulis, University of Patras, Greece
Stephen Kline, Simon Fraser University, Canada
Greta Pennell, University of Indianapolis, USA
Jeffrey Trawick-Smith, Eastern Connecticut State University, USA

**Organizing Committee**
Greta Pennell, Conference Committee Chair & ITRA Board Member, University of Indianapolis, USA
Mark Allen, ITRA President, *ex officio*, Serious Fun Research Labs, UK
Suzanne Seriff, ITRA Board Member and Secretary; University of Texas at Austin, USA
Kathleen Alfano, University of Buffalo Early Childhood Research Center Advisory Board, USA
Chris Bensch, The Strong National Museum of Play, USA
Mary Couzin, Chicago Toy & Game Group *dba* People of Play (POP), USA
Kati Heljakka, University of Turku, Finland
Steve Jacobs, Rochester Institute of Technology, USA
Karl Rosengren, University of Rochester, USA
Guangyu Tan, State University of New York-Fredonia, USA

**Contact us**
Email Greta Pennell: gpennell@uindy.edu
Follow us on Facebook: [https://www.facebook.com/itratoyresearch/](https://www.facebook.com/itratoyresearch/)