

# The Right to Play, The Right to Pleasure.

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## ABSTRACT

This paper explores how pleasure in and through games becomes a political terrain in contemporary Italy, where moral panic, demographic anxiety, and hetero-cisnormative discourses restrict non-normative desires. Drawing on feminist, queer, and transfeminist theory, it introduces the concept of intersectional pleasure as a collective, embodied practice shaped by regimes of normativity yet capable of resisting them. The paper examines IN/VISIBIL3, a grassroots transfeminist and queer convention, showing how its 2025 edition—centred on Bodies, Sex, and Consent—aims to reimagine play as a relational, accessible, and community-based practice grounded in care and iterative consent. The paper argues that intersectionality is a precondition for shared pleasure and proposes that designing for collective pleasure constitutes a form of cultural and political emancipation.

## Keywords

feminist game, intersectional games, queer gaming, game design, community

## Trigger warning

This article includes explicit references to discrimination, marginalisation, and violence affecting LGBTQIA+ people, women, and people with disabilities. Readers are advised that some examples may be distressing.

## INTRODUCTION

In contemporary Italy, socio-political discourses increasingly revolve around the regulation of bodies, family structures, and sexual morality (Prearo 2025). Public rhetoric—driven by nationalist, conservative, and hetero-cisnormative currents—frames desire as a source of risk, deviance, or moral decay. Within this climate, bodies perceived as non-normative (queer, trans, fat, disabled, racialised) encounter heightened scrutiny and surveillance, while state and media narratives promote restraint, purity, and reproductive productivity as idealized forms of citizenship. Pleasure, under these conditions, becomes both a forbidden horizon and a terrain of struggle. Against this backdrop, play offers a critical alternative. Theorists such as Huizinga (1938), Sicart (2014), and hooks (1994) remind us that play is fundamentally non-productive, voluntary, and rooted in freedom. Huizinga conceptualises play as a space outside ordinary life, while Sicart emphasises that play is an ethical, relational practice shaped by imagination and resistance. bell hooks situates pleasure as a site

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of transgression capable of disrupting normative forms of knowledge and power. Bringing these ideas together, pleasure in play becomes a counter-narrative to the aproductivity-driven logics that dominate late capitalist and conservative societies. This paper argues that, in the Italian context, play can function as a political and affective mechanism for reclaiming pleasure, desire, and embodiment—especially for marginalised communities who are denied access to joyful, safe, and self-determined forms of expression. Rather than treating pleasure as frivolous or private, we position it as a form of resilient resistance that intersects with gender, sexuality, race, class, and ability. In this sense, pleasure constitutes what DiGRA 2026 frames as a radical affective terrain: a space where identities and communities can negotiate meaning, build solidarity, and resist normative constraints. To explore this claim, we focus on IN/VISIBIL3 ([www.invisibil3.it](http://www.invisibil3.it)), an annual transfeminist and queer convention in Italy dedicated to rethinking play, games, and players communities. Emerging from grassroots activism and collective organising, IN/VISIBIL3, born in 2023, has grown into a community-driven laboratory where participants experiment with ludic forms of knowledge, care practices, co-creation, and embodiment. The 2025 edition, centred on Bodies, Sex, and Consent, serves as a particularly strong example of how play can be mobilised to reclaim pleasure as a political force. IN/VISIBIL3 does not simply “include” marginalised identities into existing play cultures; rather, it reimagines the conditions under which pleasure and play can occur and how it can be (co)designed. The event operates as a counter-hegemonic space: one that challenges both the conservative Italian socio-political context and the normative structures of mainstream game cultures (which often reproduce heteronormativity, rigid gender roles, and exclusionary aesthetics). At IN/VISIBIL3, pleasure becomes a shared practice grounded in embodiment, trust, negotiation, and vulnerability. This collectivised approach to pleasure diverges markedly from the commodified, individualistic pleasures often indexed in game design, replacing them with relational, affective, and community-centered modes of play.

Thus, the introduction sets out three core premises:

- Pleasure is political in contexts where desire and bodies are regulated.
- Play provides a site for reclaiming pleasure as a resilient, collective, and embodied form of resistance.
- IN/VISIBIL3 functions as a living example of intersectional pleasure, merging feminist and queer game studies with grassroots activist praxis.

In what follows, Section 2 contextualises the denial of desire within contemporary Italian socio-political dynamics. Section 3 develops the concept of intersectional pleasure as a critical theoretical tool. Section 4 analyses the 2024 edition of IN/VISIBIL3 as a case study of ludic resistance. Section 5 argues that intersectionality is a precondition for equitable access to pleasure and play. Finally, Section 6 articulates the rights to play and to pleasure as intertwined forms of political and cultural emancipation.

## **THE DENIAL OF DESIRE IN THE ITALIAN SOCIO-POLITICAL LANDSCAPE**

Italy’s contemporary socio-political landscape is characterised by an intensifying regulation of bodies, identities, and desires (ILGA 2025). The ILGA Rainbow Map (see Figure 1) ranks 49 European countries based on their legal and policy practices

regarding LGBTI people, with scores ranging from 0 to 100%. Italy in 2025 has a score of 24.41%, compared with an EU average of 51.13%.

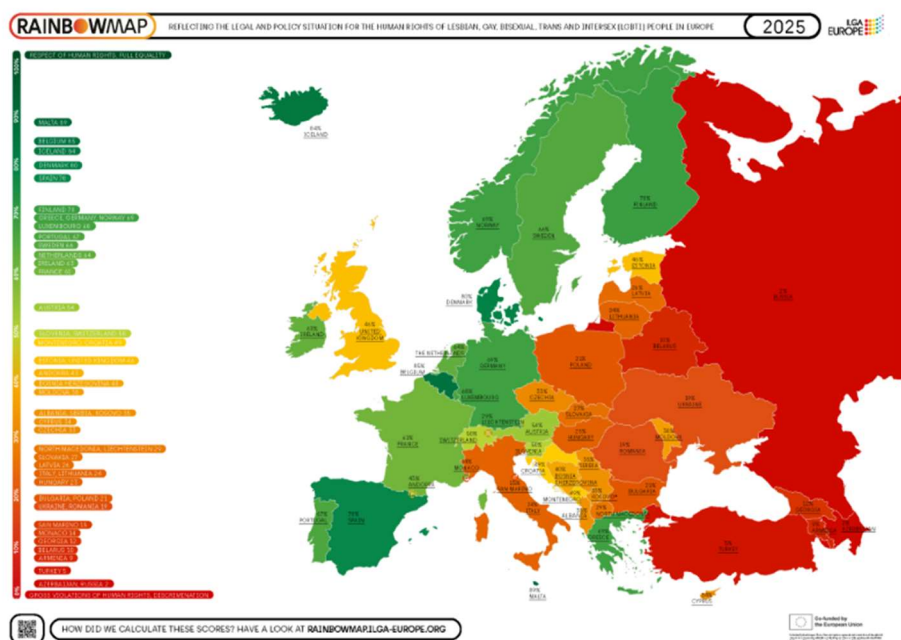


Figure 1: ILGA Rainbow Map 2025

Over the last decade, multiple governments—across conservative, centrist, and nationalist coalitions—have mobilised narratives **centered** on traditional family models, biological essentialism, and moral discipline (Graff, A. et al., 2021, Kuhar & Smrdelj 2025). These narratives rely on a moral economy that frames sexuality as a private, reproductive matter tied to national identity and demographic anxiety (De Zordo et al., 2022). Public discourses emphasise the preservation of the natural family, the sanctity of motherhood, and the need to protect children from imagined threats posed by queer, trans, and feminist communities.

Within this ideological climate, pleasure itself becomes a suspicious category: something to be monitored, restricted, or morally justified.

### Purity, discipline, and body control

The rhetoric of purity plays a significant role in this moral architecture. Political and religious authorities increasingly invoke the innocence of childhood (Gusmaroli et al., 2021) and the integrity of the family (Winkler 2023) as core values that must be defended from corruption—especially sexual, queer, and gender-nonconforming forms of embodiment. These narratives construct pleasure as inherently dangerous, aligning it with deviance, disorder, or moral collapse.

This dynamic is not new in Italy, but the last decade has seen its intensification. Legislative efforts to undermine gender education in schools (Atto Camera n. 2423), restrict access to reproductive healthcare (Aborto senza Numeri, 2025) and censor public discourse around sexuality have grown stronger. Attempts to pass anti-discrimination laws have been met with fierce resistance, revealing a systemic hostility toward minority and queer people, especially the full recognition of trans women. The result is a socio-cultural atmosphere in which non-normative forms of

desire, love, and relations are positioned as inherently problematic. An illustrative example of this broader problem can be found in a public statement<sup>1</sup> made by Carlo Nordio, currently the 43rd Minister of Justice of the Italian Republic.

*« Per esempio il concetto di “orientamento sessuale” è troppo omnicomprendivo e paradossalmente anche chi va contro i pedofili potrebbe incorrere in sanzioni, poiché sappiamo che la pedofilia, per quanto aberrante e abominevole, è un orientamento sessuale. Un orientamento appunto deviato, ma pur sempre un orientamento. ».*

In the context of criticising the proposed Zan anti-discrimination law, Nordio described paedophilia as a sexual orientation. This statement not only reveals a profound lack of conceptual and scientific literacy within segments of the Italian political class but also points to a more insidious tendency: the conflation of non-heteronormative sexual orientations with pathology and deviance. Such rhetoric contributes to a discursive climate in which queer identities are implicitly framed as dangerous, abnormal, or morally suspect.

Moreover, the control of bodies and sexual freedom in Italy is particularly visible in debates surrounding abortion and gestational surrogacy. Conservative and anti-choice movements frame both issues through moralising narratives centred on purity, protection, and the defence of the “natural family,” portraying reproductive choices as threats rather than expressions of bodily autonomy. In the case of surrogacy, the widespread use of the term *utero in affitto* (“womb for rent”) deliberately evokes the idea of commodified and exploited bodies, reinforcing restrictive understandings of kinship, sexuality, and reproductive freedom. (see Figure 2).



**Figure 2:** Billboard by the anti-choice group ‘Pro Vita & Famiglia’ “Would you ever take poison? Stop the abortion pill RU486 – it puts women’s health and lives at risk and kills the child in the womb.”

Parallel to this moral discourse, biomedical frameworks continue to regulate and classify bodies, contributing to the historical pathologisation of queer and trans identities and the enforcement of normative models of health (Foucault 1973;

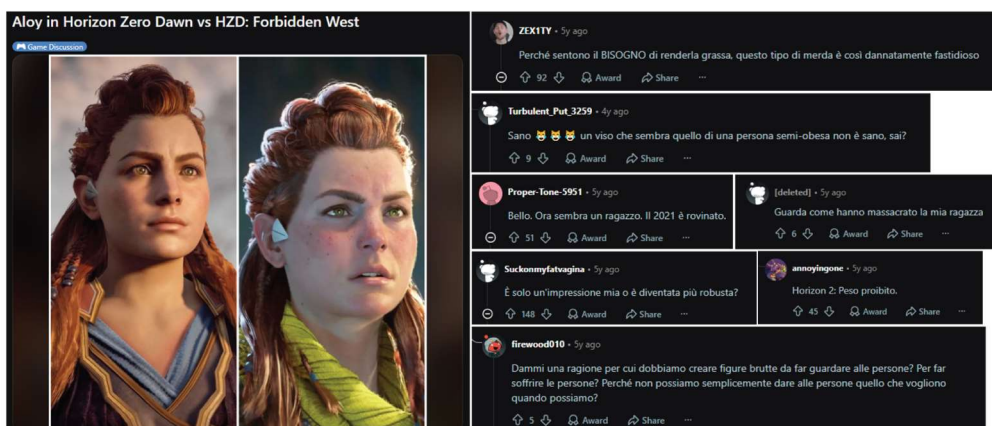
Mauriello 2013). Although progress has been made, these dynamics persist within trans healthcare, sexual education, and public narratives around fatness and disability. As Preciado (2013) argues through the concept of the “pharmacopornographic regime,” pleasure and bodily autonomy are legitimised only insofar as they conform to dominant norms of health, functionality, and productivity.

The restriction of pleasure is also evident in the growing censorship of cultural and educational initiatives addressing sexuality, queer identities, and affective education. Recent political measures such as the DDL Valditarà seek to limit discussions of gender diversity and LGBTQIA+ issues in schools under the rhetoric of protecting minors and defending family values. At the same time, anti-gender organisations such as ProVita & Famiglia have intensified public campaigns against the so-called “gender ideology,” portraying queer and trans identities as threats to children, family stability, and national identity. These dynamics reflect what Ahmed (2010) describes as the “politics of happiness,” whereby institutions regulate which forms of pleasure are socially acceptable and which are framed as dangerous or destabilising.

### Mainstream Game Cultures and the Reinforcement of Normativity

While mainstream game cultures globally reproduce normative bodies, pleasures, and identities, these dynamics acquire a distinct resonance within the Italian context. Here, debates around character design, accessibility, and queer representation reveal how the political denial of desire mirrors itself in the discourses of online gaming communities. Italian gamer cultures often amplify conservative anxieties surrounding gender, sexuality, and embodiment, turning design choices into battlegrounds where normative values are defended through harassment, moral panic, or appeals to realism. To illustrate this phenomenon, we analyse three emblematic controversies that unfolded within Italian gaming communities—each highlighting how national socio-political tensions are reproduced, negotiated, or resisted within play cultures.

#### *Aloy and the policing of femininity*



**Figure 3:** Some comments posted on a Reddit post<sup>4</sup> after the release of the *Horizon Forbidden West* trailer.

The Italian controversy surrounding Aloy’s appearance in *Horizon Forbidden West* (Guerrilla Games, 2022) can be read as a symptomatic episode of how game publics police femininity through visual regimes historically theorised as the male gaze

(Mulvey, 1975). Rather than functioning as a neutral debate over aesthetics or realism, the backlash—focused on the protagonist being “not sexy enough,” “too fat,” or “unkept,” reasserts a normative grammar in which women’s bodies are expected to remain legible as aesthetically compliant and erotically available (see Figure 3). Such discursive practices are indicative of a wider Italian cultural tendency to enforce hyper-femininity and aesthetic discipline on women, reflecting the intersection of the male gaze with conservative gender norms and moral expectations surrounding female respectability (Valtorta et al., 2016; Capecchi et al., 2023). Importantly, feminist game scholarship cautions against reducing this dynamic to a simple opposition between male and female gazes. As Shaw (2014) and Ruberg (2020) argue, what is at stake is not only how bodies are seen, but how desire, agency, and affect are structurally organised within game systems and player cultures. The controversy around Aloy thus exceeds the level of individual misogynistic commentary: it exposes how mainstream game cultures continue to naturalise a narrow horizon of acceptable femininity, within which women characters are tolerated only insofar as they conform to established codes of desirability, visual pleasure, and gendered decorum.

### The D&D wheelchair backlash and ableist gatekeeping

Another illustrative case involves reactions to the inclusion of wheelchair-using characters in *Dungeons & Dragons* (Wizards of the Coast) sourcebooks released internationally in 2020. Italian communities on social media and local forums mocked the design choice as “forced inclusion,” “ridiculous” or “politically correct.” Critics framed disabled characters as incompatible with medieval fantasy settings—overlooking both the imaginative flexibility of the genre and the lived presence of disabled players within gaming communities<sup>5</sup> (see Figure 4).



**Figure 4:** Some comments posted on Facebook post<sup>4</sup> after the release of 2024 *Dungeons & Dragons* players handbook.

These reactions expose deeply rooted ableist imaginaries within Italian tabletop communities, where heroism and agency are still closely associated with able-bodiedness. Disability in games is often either erased or compensated through exceptional powers, reinforcing the idea that disabled bodies must be overcome or spectacularised to be acceptable within play. This mirrors broader Italian socio-

political dynamics, where structural exclusion—such as inadequate welfare, inaccessible urban spaces, and insufficient support services—is frequently obscured by narratives celebrating individual resilience and “overcoming” disability. At the same time, responses to these representations remain complex: while some players perceive mobility aids as forced or disruptive, others—particularly disabled players—describe them as enabling recognition, comfort, and imaginative access. The controversy surrounding wheelchairs in *Dungeons & Dragons* therefore reveals less a debate about mechanics than a broader resistance to expanding who is considered compatible with adventure, agency, and pleasure in play.

### *Baldur’s Gate 3, Queer desire and moral panic*

In 2023, the Italian release of *Baldur’s Gate 3* (Larian Studios) prompted another wave of controversy, this time around the sexual agency of its companions. The fact that characters could initiate romance regardless of the player’s gender identity triggered moral panic in Italian online spaces. Commenters criticised the game for promoting gender ideology “fluidità sessuale forzata” [forced sexual fluidity] or “scene inappropriate” [inappropriate scenes] framing queer desire as intrusive or immoral. The reflection on *Baldur’s Gate 3* and its relationship to romance, sex, and sexuality also opens a broader question that cuts across the landscape of mainstream game design: what kinds of relationships are we accustomed to seeing in videogames, particularly in AAA productions? Who is allowed to desire whom, and under what conditions? Which bodies are legitimised as sexual, as desiring subjects, or as objects of desire? And, no less importantly, who writes these scenes—speaking from which cultural positions and drawing on which imaginaries?

*“Il mio problema non è il sesso, è che ci sono tre tizi e solo due tipe, e una delle tipe se la fa con tutti. Quindi, a meno che tu non sia uno a cui piace l’NTR, l’unica opzione se giochi un tizio etero è il mezzelfo.”<sup>6</sup>*

Here, the anxiety is not merely about romance mechanics, but about the visibility and validity of queer pleasure itself. In a cultural context where LGBTQIA+ rights are contested and sometimes openly attacked, the idea that characters might express bisexual or pansexual desire without justification destabilises the normative hierarchy of sexuality. Italian discourse often reframed the game’s queerness as an ideological imposition, echoing political debates that portray queer rights as threats to tradition. In this way, play becomes a site where national ideological tensions are performed, resisted, and re-inscribed.

### **Play as Counter-Space: Toward Freedom, Subversion and Community**

Against this backdrop, play functions as what Lefebvre (1991) and Foucault (1986) would describe as counter-space: a site where alternative social relations, forms of embodiment, and modes of desire can be enacted. Unlike normative structures, play is inherently open-ended, improvisational, and relational. It allows participants to step outside ordinary constraints and rehearse forms of life that deviate from the social norm. Queer play spaces and transfeminist communities, such as those developed within IN/VISIBIL3, operate precisely in this register. They repurpose play, games, and game design not as consumption, competition, or productivity, but as:

- a method of collective world-building,
- a vehicle for relational pleasure,
- a practice of care and co-responsibility,
- a safe but not sanitized environment for exploring vulnerability,
- a medium for destabilising normative assumptions about bodies and desire.

In such contexts, pleasure becomes an embodied, political act. It is no longer something permitted within narrow moral frameworks but something reclaimed, reimagined, and redistributed across lines of identity and experience. IN/VISIBIL3 emerges as a direct response to the socio-political climate described above. By creating a space where pleasure, play, and embodiment intersect outside normative expectations, the convention acts as a counter-narrative. It is not only a cultural event but an advocacy intervention: a living alternative to the moralising and restrictive frameworks that dominate Italian public discourse. The political significance of IN/VISIBIL3 lies in its intention to:

- center marginalised bodies and desires,
- promote pleasure as an ethical and communal practice,
- challenge normative game cultures through critical play,
- foster community-based care infrastructures,
- model intersectional approaches to design and participation,
- offer tools for imagining non-normative futures.

Where mainstream cultural institutions and game industries restrict the field of possible pleasures, IN/VISIBIL3 tries to expand it. Where the socio-political climate imposes silence, it facilitates expression. Where dominant discourses punish deviation, it celebrates and performs it.

## **THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK: INTERSECTIONAL PLEASURE AS A CRITICAL CONCEPT**

Pleasure is often framed as private or apolitical, yet feminist, queer, and intersectional theorists have shown how it is deeply shaped by structures of power, bodily regulation, and social hierarchies. From this perspective, pleasure is not escapism but a collective, embodied, and relational practice, making it central to understanding play within transfeminist and queer communities. Play, in turn, offers a space where these dynamics can be reimagined and transformed. As Preciado (2013) and Haraway (2016) argue, bodies and desires are shaped by biopolitical and cultural regimes that determine which forms of pleasure are considered legitimate. Through avatars, rules, and social interaction, games allow players to explore identities and desires that may be constrained in everyday life.

This positions play as a method for enacting intersectional pleasure through vulnerability, interdependence, and shared creation rather than competition or productivity. Queer and feminist game scholars such as Ruberg (2020) and Shaw (2014) further emphasise that meaningful pleasure in games depends not only on representation, but on creating conditions in which diverse players can engage without fear or shame. In this sense, pleasure becomes not simply an outcome of play, but a design principle shaping the relational and affective dimensions of game

experiences. This orientation can be articulated through three interconnected considerations:

**Designing for relationality** invites designers and communities to imagine play as something produced between players, rather than for them—emphasising collaboration, collective presence, and shared vulnerability.

**Designing for vulnerability** and safety reframes pleasure as the outcome of negotiating boundaries, trust, and emotional attunement rather than as reward or achievement.

**Designing for difference** acknowledges that pleasure is not experienced uniformly and requires accessible, diverse, and culturally situated points of entry into games and play spaces.

These principles resonate with hooks' (1994) commitment to joy as a pedagogical and emancipatory force, where transformation arises from shared risk, care, and imagination. They also align closely with trans and queer theoretical approaches that treat desire as a vector of political resistance. In particular, the work of Zappino (2019) in *Comunismo queer* is especially relevant: Zappino argues that queer desire is not simply a deviation from heteronormativity but a practice capable of dismantling the very structures that sustain it. Queer desire, in this sense, is a material, affective, and collective force that disrupts existing social arrangements and opens the possibility for forms of life grounded in reciprocity, tenderness, and non-normative embodiments. Seen through this lens, intersectional pleasure becomes inseparable from resistance. Reclaiming the right to desire—whether in everyday life or within the speculative spaces of play—means refusing the moral, political, and aesthetic regimes that define some pleasures as legitimate and others as deviant, excessive, or impossible. As Lorde (1984) reminds us, reclaiming the erotic is an act of defiance; as Ahmed (2010) notes, refusing normative happiness can itself be a political gesture; and as Muñoz (2009) argues, queer pleasure gestures toward futures that have not yet arrived but can be rehearsed, tentatively, within collective play.

### **IN/VISIBIL3 AS A CO-CREATED SPACE OF LUDIC RESISTANCE**

IN/VISIBIL3 occupies a distinctive place within contemporary Italian play cultures. Unlike institutional events, industry-oriented conventions, or commercial fairs centred on product consumption, IN/VISIBIL3 is conceived as a grassroots community-driven gathering. It is designed, curated, and inhabited by transfeminist, queer, and intersectionally minded participants who collectively shape its ethos, logistics, and content. This bottom-up configuration is not a decorative detail but the foundation through which the event produces, not merely discusses, intersectional pleasure as a political, relational, and ludic practice. Founded in 2023, IN/VISIBIL3 emerged from the convergence of activist networks, queer and feminist play communities and designers, cultural associations, and the lived experiences of individuals navigating increasingly hostile socio-political conditions. From its inception, the event has functioned simultaneously as a festival, a pedagogical laboratory, a community infrastructure of care, and a site of experimental game culture. Its third edition (2025), centred on *Bodies, Sex, and Consent*, offers an especially compelling lens through which to examine how intersectional pleasure can be enacted through play, design, conversation, and collective presence.

A defining aspect of IN/VISIBIL3 is its explicitly collective mode of organisation. Rather than being structured around a central authority or hierarchical decision-making process, the event is built through shared labour, mutual aid, and ongoing negotiation of needs and capacities. Once a central theme has been selected, each organizer (6-8 people) is invited to propose names of people who could be involved in the panels. At this stage, the group also exercises a form of political and ethical responsibility in deciding whom to invite, prioritising individuals who are knowledgeable and experienced on the topic while at the same time lacking established platforms through which to speak and be heard. Influencers or public-facing testimonials are deliberately avoided in favour of activists and practitioners who have meaningful insights but limited access to institutional stages. Additionally, particular attention is paid to the relationship between identity and topic. For example, during the first edition, which focused extensively on gender representation, most invited speakers were people socialised as women and queer activists. This approach reflects a commitment to situated knowledge and embodied expertise rather than abstract commentary. Those involved in panels or activities during the event (such as workshops, focus groups, or collective discussions) become an integral part of the organisational process itself. Thematic working groups are formed, allowing participants to engage not only with the content of their sessions but also with the modes and formats through which these sessions are conducted. In this phase as well, the organising team intervenes primarily as facilitators, limiting their role to logistical coordination rather than content direction. The event does not operate through a fixed set of rules, but through a code of conduct outlining shared good practices. This code is published on the event's website and made available throughout the event itself. It addresses a range of issues, from the use of inclusive language—an especially complex matter in the Italian context, given the binary nature of the language and its grammatical structures—to the respect of pronouns and personal spaces, both physical and in terms of proxemics.

During the event, many volunteers are involved alongside the organising group, taking care of reception, logistics and facilitating play activities. Work shifts are collaboratively organised to ensure that everyone involved can also take part in the programme's activities, rather than being confined to support roles throughout the event. Additionally, designated "backup" or substitute volunteers are arranged so that any participant can step away from their responsibilities whenever needed, without creating disruptions or pressure. This organisational structure recognises fatigue, emotional labour, and bodily needs as integral aspects of participation, reinforcing a model of care in which engagement is sustainable, flexible, and responsive rather than extractive. This distributed approach reflects a broader politics of care: a refusal to reproduce the top-down power dynamics that often permeate both gaming spaces and activist contexts. Care here is not reduced to safeguarding or paternalistic protection but is understood as a relational practice grounded in interdependence, vulnerability, and responsiveness (Tronto, 1993).



**Figure 5:** Badges given to participants.

To better accommodate diverse identities and needs, a system of participant badges (see Figure 5) has been developed and progressively refined over the years. These badges allow participants to indicate their chosen name, pronouns, preferred physical distance, and current social energy levels. Importantly, this information can be updated throughout the duration of the event, enabling participants to adjust how they present their needs and boundaries as these change over time. This latest version of the badge also stems from an effort to make the event increasingly sustainable, replacing the use of adhesive labels with wooden badges designed to be reused in future editions of IN/VISIBIL3 and other events.

A dedicated decompression space is always provided and remains accessible throughout the entire event. This area is designed with comfortable seating, low lighting, fidget toys, and stimming tools, offering all participants a sensory-regulation environment where they can rest, self-regulate, and step away from overstimulation when needed. Pleasure is not conceptualised as an individual entitlement or a reward for correct behavior, but as a collective condition that must be co-created, protected, and sustained. The event's structure reflects this conviction: mutual check-ins, open communication about sensory and emotional needs, explicit invitations to articulate boundaries, and collective discussions about safety and accessibility all work together to create a space in which participants can inhabit their bodies and desires without fear of scrutiny or dismissal. Accessibility needs are gathered in advance, discussed and integrated into the event's design, signaling that participation does not require masking, self-correction, or the endurance of discomfort. Event spaces are selected based on physical accessibility: venues are either free of stairs or equipped with ramps to ensure access for all participants. Seating is chosen without armrests, allowing bodies of varied sizes, shapes, and mobility to sit comfortably. Lunch is provided free of charge, and the event does not require the purchase of a ticket or registration fee.

Panelists do not receive a performance fee; instead, travel expenses are reimbursed. This choice reflects a deliberate effort to reduce economic barriers to participation while avoiding extractive logics of cultural labour. Taken together, these practices articulate an approach to event design that treats accessibility, comfort, and material support not as optional accommodations, but as foundational conditions for collective participation and shared pleasure.

IN/VISIBIL3 becomes a space in which alternative ways of living and playing can be rehearsed, provisional, situated, affectively charged, and grounded in shared vulnerability. Community meals (vegan & vegetarian with gluten free options), plenary sessions, laboratories and informal networking moments serve not as logistical add-ons but as essential components of the event's relational architecture. They cultivate trust, belonging, and relational pleasure outside the more structured confines of workshops or panels. Participants are not treated as passive audiences, but as active contributors to the event. Beyond the panels, most activities are structured as collaborative, workshop-based learning moments designed to foster transversal forms of knowledge. These activities are developed in collaboration with other associations and subject-matter experts and address topics that are often marginalised or overlooked within mainstream game-related contexts. Through this participatory and laboratory-oriented approach, the event positions play as a collective process of learning, exchange, and critical engagement rather than as a unidirectional transmission of content.

Throughout the event, a large, shared board is available for participants to exchange recommendations related to videogames, reading materials, and audiovisual content, as well as to provide feedback on the organisation of the event itself. These recommendations are collected and later made available online, extending the exchange beyond the temporal boundaries of the event. Feedback gathered during the event constitutes the primary foundation for planning and designing subsequent editions, ensuring that each iteration of the event emerges from a process of collective reflection and continuous improvement. To ensure participation also for those who are unable to physically reach the event's location, panels are broadcast via live streaming. Remote participation is actively facilitated by volunteers who monitor the online channels and manage questions or interventions from off-site attendees. This hybrid format extends the event's accessibility beyond physical presence, reinforcing its commitment to inclusive participation and distributed forms of engagement.

In this way, IN/VISIBIL3 becomes a material example of how pleasure can be cultivated through structure as much as through content. It translates feminist pedagogies of joy (hooks, 1994) and queer frameworks of care (Zappino, 2019; Haraway, 2016) into organisational practices, spatial configurations, and interpersonal relations. The event does not treat pleasure as something that simply happens; it is actively built, negotiated, and held by the community. What results is a ludic environment in which play becomes a method of resistance and pleasure becomes a shared, interdependent, and politically meaningful experience.

### **The 2025 Edition: Bodies, Sex, Consent**

The thematic triad of Bodies, Sex, and Consent was not selected to provoke controversy, but to address what organisers identified as urgent, interwoven dimensions of lived experience. In a socio-political context marked by increasing

control over bodies, moral panic around sexuality, and widespread misunderstanding of consent, these three axes offer a prism through which to explore pleasure as both a site of oppression and a possibility of liberation.

The structure of the 2025 edition demonstrates how these themes were approached: through participatory workshops, collective conversations, and talks that brought together designers, activists, scholars, and players. Rather than treating these topics abstractly, each session invited participants to engage bodily, affectively, and relationally with the subject matter. Below, each of the three thematic pillars is analysed in relation to how it enacted intersectional pleasure.

### *CORPI: The Body as Political and Imaginative Interface*

The Bodies pillar framed embodiment not as a neutral or secondary aspect of play, but as a contested and political terrain shaped by moral, medical, and aesthetic norms. Discussions focused on how games reproduce or challenge dominant assumptions about which bodies are visible, playable, and allowed to experience pleasure, highlighting the persistent exclusion of fat, disabled, trans, racialised, and non-normative bodies from mainstream game cultures. Participants emphasised that bodies are not simply present in games but actively shape play through movement, sensation, vulnerability, and social interaction, challenging the myth of disembodied play. Building on the themes introduced in the promotional materials for the event, the discussion highlighted three interconnected dimensions of embodiment:

**Bodies as sites of imagination:** Games offer opportunities to inhabit alternative embodiments, explore unfamiliar identities, or subvert restrictive expectations. Yet these opportunities are limited when design choices reproduce the same normative scripts that structure everyday life. Participants discussed the importance of asking: Which bodies are systematically excluded from games? And what would it mean to create mechanics and narratives that centre bodies currently erased or pathologised?

**Bodies as relational infrastructures:** In tabletop, LARP, and community-based play, bodies are constantly interacting—sharing space, negotiating consent, establishing trust, and affecting each other in ways that exceed language. This relational dimension underscores that embodiment is never purely individual; it is always co-constituted through others.

**Bodies as political territories:** Participants reflected on how the policing of bodies in Italian socio-political discourse—particularly queer, trans, fat, migrant, and disabled bodies—echoes within gaming cultures that narrowly define what a “valid” or “capable” body looks like. Reclaiming one’s body in play becomes inseparable from reclaiming it in everyday life.

The Bodies pillar functioned both as a critique of normative representations in game design and as an invitation to imagine more embodied forms of play. Participants were encouraged to consider corporeal experiences—such as sensation, vulnerability, comfort, and fatigue—as active elements of design rather than invisible background conditions. In this way, embodiment was reframed not as an obstacle to pleasure, but

as its very condition of possibility: pleasurable play can only emerge when bodies feel safe, recognised, and respected.

### *SESSO: Pleasure and Desire as Knowledge and Agency*

The Sex pillar approached sexuality not as spectacle or narrative reward, but as an embodied, political, and relational practice shaped by structures of power. Discussions highlighted how games often frame sex through heteronormative, cisgender, and male-gaze assumptions, reducing intimacy to transactional romance mechanics or visual titillation. Against this model, participants explored how games might represent sexuality as plural, queer, tender, ambivalent, and non-linear, foregrounding agency, reciprocity, and exploration over conquest or performance. Drawing on queer theory, lived experience, and game design practices, the panel reframed sex as an epistemic tool capable of generating knowledge about identity, consent, and relationality, echoing feminist approaches that connect the erotic to political imagination (Lorde, 1984). Participants also reflected on the Italian socio-political climate, where sexuality is simultaneously hyper-visible and heavily censored, making it difficult for marginalised players to recognise their desires within mainstream play cultures.

These reflections pointed toward a vision of sexuality in games that centres agency over performance, exploration over mastery, and intimacy over conquest. Crucially, the discussions emphasised that reclaiming sex in games is inseparable from reclaiming pleasure more broadly. Sex was not isolated as a biological or functional topic but understood in its entanglements with embodiment and consent—the other two pillars of the edition. In this context, sex becomes not only a theme within gameplay but a generative force for community-building, solidarity, and collective imagination.

### *CONSENSO: Trust, Negotiation, and Affective Safety in Play*

The Consent pillar approached consent not as a bureaucratic safeguard, but as a relational, embodied, and ongoing practice shaped by power relations and collective expectations. Drawing from videogames and analog role-playing, the panel highlighted how mainstream game design often reduces intimacy to transactional reward systems, offering fixed and simplified forms of consent that leave little room for negotiation, uncertainty, or withdrawal.

The panel then turned toward analog play to examine another layer of complexity: the widespread reliance on formalized safety tools such as the X-Card (Stavropoulos, 2013) or Open Door Policy. While these tools aim to create safer environments, the discussion highlighted how they can inadvertently suppress communication by offering mechanical shortcuts in place of dialogue, reflection, and relational negotiation. Consent in play, the panel argued, cannot be reduced to a single gesture or tool. It must be iterative, contextual, and collective held together by trust, empathy, and the willingness to navigate discomfort through communication rather than avoidance. Even in digital spaces, players bring bodies, emotions, and vulnerabilities into play, making consent not only a protective measure but a necessary condition for shared pleasure, creative risk-taking, and meaningful relational engagement. Consent therefore involves capacities such as sensing one's

boundaries, reading relational cues, communicating needs, and acknowledging that these can shift over time. Far from being merely protective, consent becomes a precondition for shared pleasure, enabling players to take creative risks, express desire, or explore difficult themes while feeling held by the community around them.

### **What Did These Panels Teach Us About Building Pleasure In And Through Games?**

Taken together, the discussions on Bodies, Sex, and Consent at IN/VISIBIL3 reveal a shared insight: that pleasure in and through games is not a spontaneous outcome but something collectively crafted through relational, political, and structural choices. The Consent panel underscored how pleasure requires conditions in which agency can be expressed, boundaries can be negotiated, and vulnerabilities can be acknowledged without fear. When games (digital or analog) reduce desire to a reward or flatten consent into a binary mechanic, they not only distort intimacy but constrict the possibilities for meaningful play. Conversely, when communities treat consent as an iterative, embodied, and co-created practice, they generate spaces where exploration, uncertainty, and joy can flourish. Across all three pillars, participants learned that reclaiming pleasure means reclaiming the material and relational infrastructures that make play possible: bodies that are recognised rather than disciplined, sexualities that are expansive rather than normative, and consent that is negotiated rather than assumed. IN/VISIBIL3 underlines that when these conditions are cultivated intentionally, play becomes a site of collective world-building; a place where participants can imagine and inhabit modes of being foreclosed in everyday life. What these panels taught is that pleasure itself can be designed: not as an achievement unlocked, but as a shared, interdependent process rooted in care, openness, and the political courage to play otherwise.

### **DISCUSSION: INTERSECTIONALITY AS THE CONDITION FOR SHARED PLEASURE AND PLAY**

The reflections emerging from this research suggest that pleasure in games cannot be separated from the material, relational, and structural conditions that make it possible. From this perspective, intersectionality is not simply an analytic lens or a matter of representation, but a necessary framework for designing and sustaining play spaces where pleasure can be collectively experienced. This requires addressing accessibility, emotional safety, cultural legibility, and economic participation as concrete design concerns. When these conditions are ignored, games and play communities tend to reproduce exclusionary models of pleasure rooted in normative assumptions, competition, and performance.

From a design perspective, pleasure emerges not only from mechanics or aesthetics, but from the relational infrastructures through which players interact, negotiate meaning, and co-create play experiences. This includes practices such as consent, shared decision-making, accessibility, rest, and attention to embodied needs. IN/VISIBIL3 illustrates how these principles can be embedded into community design through bottom-up organisation, collective negotiation, and care-based infrastructures. Rather than functioning as a universal model, the event demonstrates how intersectionality can operate as a practical framework shaping the design and facilitation of more accessible and transformative play spaces.

Crucially, intersectional pleasure also challenges dominant assumptions about conflict, discomfort, and risk in games. Instead of imagining safety as the absence of tension, it reframes it as the presence of negotiated conditions through which tension can be navigated collectively. This reframing aligns with queer and transfeminist critiques that see vulnerability not as a weakness to be eliminated, but as a shared condition of relationality. Pleasure becomes resilient not when it is insulated from conflict, but when the structures of play allow participants to express boundaries, renegotiate expectations, and explore desire without fear of punitive consequences. This orientation positions intersectionality as a catalyst for rethinking ludic design itself. It extends beyond the inclusion of diverse bodies in character creation screens or the addition of accessibility settings, demanding instead a transformation of how games conceive of agency, embodiment, intimacy, and relationality. It prompts designers and communities to ask: Who is this play for? How is pleasure distributed? Which bodies can rest here? Which forms of joy are enabled, and which are foreclosed? These questions are not peripheral to game design; they are central to understanding the affective and political potential of play.

As players, designers, activists, queers, we honestly believe that pleasure should be approached as a complex, effective, and radical terrain, shaped by power relations and open to transformation through intentional design. Intersectionality, rather than functioning as a corrective lens, becomes a blueprint for expanding what games can do and who they can be for. It shifts pleasure from a reward to a shared capacity, from an individual achievement to a collective world-building practice, from a private experience to an ethical commitment toward others.

## **CONCLUSION: THE RIGHT TO PLAY, THE RIGHT TO PLEASURE**

This paper has argued that pleasure in games is not a peripheral outcome of play but a political and design-oriented concern. When pleasure is framed as unstructured, universal, or naturally accessible, it becomes easy to overlook the power relations, material conditions, and cultural narratives that determine who can experience it. By reframing pleasure as intersectional, we shift from understanding it as a private sensation to recognising it as a relational and infrastructural matter—one that depends on how play spaces are designed, facilitated, and inhabited.

A design-oriented perspective makes clear that play does not begin with mechanics but with the social, spatial, and affective frameworks that shape players' capacity to enter a state of pleasure. These frameworks include the physical accessibility of spaces, the cultural legibility of narratives, the emotional safety of interactions, the distribution of agency within game systems, and the capacity for players to negotiate boundaries and desires. When these conditions are absent, pleasure becomes a privilege. When they are intentionally designed, pleasure becomes a collective resource.

Understanding pleasure as a political right reframes play itself as a terrain of emancipation. If pleasure can be withheld, regulated, or reserved for a normative few, then enabling it becomes an act of redistribution and resistance. In this sense, pleasure is not merely an affective state but a political resource: a means of accessing joy, agency, imagination, and relational belonging. Designing for pleasure is therefore inseparable from designing for justice. Within this framework, intersectionality emerges as the ethical infrastructure of participation. It demands that game design and play communities account for the diverse ways bodies, identities, histories, and

social positions shape one's capacity to play. Intersectionality shifts the focus from inclusion-as-tokenism to the creation of conditions in which people can meaningfully inhabit play spaces—where their needs are recognised, their boundaries are protected, and their forms of pleasure are legible. It positions play not as neutral ground, but as a space that must be actively constructed to resist normative defaults. A transfeminist approach to game cultures further extends this argument. Transfeminism insists that pleasure and play are inseparable from struggles over autonomy, embodiment, and recognition. It centres the experiences of those most frequently denied access to pleasure—queer, trans, disabled, fat, racialised, neurodivergent players—and treats their perspectives not as add-ons but as generative sites of design insight. A transfeminist ludic framework exposes how power operates within games and offers practices for redistributing that power, enabling new forms of agency and relationality.

Taken together, these perspectives point toward a broader imperative: the need to design for collective pleasure. This is neither a stylistic choice nor a purely aesthetic gesture; it is a commitment to building play spaces that sustain joy, curiosity, mutual care, and shared resistance. Designing for collective pleasure means designing with and through communities, attending to material conditions, enabling fluid negotiation, and embracing vulnerability as part of the play experience. It requires shifting from the logic of optimisation to the logic of relation, from performance to interdependence. Ultimately, treating pleasure as a right, and designing for it collectively, invites us to imagine new ways of playing and new ways of living together. It asks us to create worlds, both inside and outside games, where everyone can access the transformative possibilities of pleasure.

## **ACKNOWLEDGMENTS**

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## ENDNOTES

1 reported on 3 giugno 2021 on <https://webtv.senato.it/webtv>

“There are, in this bill, terms and statements that are too ambiguous and could even backfire against the lawmakers themselves. For example, the concept of ‘sexual orientation’ is far too all-encompassing, and paradoxically even those who oppose pedophiles could incur sanctions, since we know that pedophilia, however aberrant and abhorrent, is a sexual orientation. A deviant orientation, certainly, but still an orientation. Therefore, my view is that certain ambiguities need to be substantially corrected.”

2 The Zan bill, approved in 2020 but later blocked in the Senate, sought to extend hate-crime and anti-discrimination protections to include gender identity, sexual orientation, and disability. It also proposed harsher penalties for homotransphobic and misogynistic violence. Its rejection became a key flashpoint in Italy's broader conflict over LGBTQ+ rights and public speech.

3 DDL Valditara draft law presented on 23 May 2025 [full text](#)

4 Translation of the comments shown in the figure

- “Why do they feel the NEED to make her fat? This kind of shit is so damn annoying.”
- “Healthy XD XD XD A face that looks like that of a semi-obese person is not healthy, you know?”
- “Nice. Now she looks like a boy. 2021 is ruined.”
- “Look how they massacred my girl.”
- “Is it just me or has she gotten bulkier?”
- “Horizon 2: Forbidden Weight.”
- “Give me one reason why we have to create ugly figures for people to look at. To make people suffer? Why can’t we just give people what they want when we can?”

From:

[https://www.reddit.com/r/PS4/comments/nnc80w/aloy\\_in\\_horizon\\_zero\\_dawn\\_vs\\_hzd\\_forbidden\\_weight/?t=it](https://www.reddit.com/r/PS4/comments/nnc80w/aloy_in_horizon_zero_dawn_vs_hzd_forbidden_weight/?t=it)

5 Translation of the comments shown in the figures

- “\*\*\*, if you want to be disabled, then one of two conditions applies:  
1 you have body integrity dysphoria in real life, because no mentally healthy disabled person who woke up tomorrow perfectly healthy and in full possession of their physical abilities would be upset about it;  
2 the other party members decided to play on hardcore mode, because a wheelchair is not exactly functional when you’re risking your life in situations where a normal level-0 inhabitant would die instantly.  
The presence of this kind of disability AND the decision to go risk your own neck — and other people’s — only makes sense if that person made some kind of equivalent trade-off. Like, I don’t know, I lose the use of my legs forever but gain Professor Xavier-style psychic powers.  
Let’s be honest: a level-1 adventurer in a wheelchair is basically extra inventory space and a constant source of jokes for the campaign.  
Now, anyone is free to create a shitty player character and die in their first RPG session if they want. But let’s not pretend this is some ethical or inclusive issue, because the freedom to roleplay whatever you want has always existed, and shoving this in people’s faces today only serves to attract a certain kind of audience who, until yesterday, thought a D20 was a McDonald’s sandwich.”
- “It only takes a moment to go from ‘Magic Barrier’ to ‘Architectural Barrier.’”
- “The first boss of the Temple of the 10,000 Steps.”
- “And then Minoriel, because she’s *minorata* (Italian for cognitive disabled person)! XD XD XD”
- “To everyone writing ‘but it’s just a choice’: the answer is yes, it’s a choice. A shitty choice.”
- “At least in the AI-generated versions, your Minoriel looked like a really beautiful girl! And above all, she had a sense of self-preservation. Do they realize that even progressives make fun of them and consider them ridiculous? Or do they live in a world of their own?”
- “What a colossal load of bullshit. All this nonsense in the name of ‘inclusivity’ madness. As if some poor paraplegic person would long to be disabled even in a fantasy world, right?! What a bunch of idiots.”
- “Anyway, not to take it out on people who are unfortunately forced to use a wheelchair, but this idea that every tiny facet of the human condition —

whether physiological or pathological — must be represented by a specifically designed fictional character is reaching unimaginable levels of ridiculousness. I mean, if I were paraplegic, Professor Xavier would already be enough for me to dream that you can still be incredibly powerful in a wheelchair, but I wouldn't be offended if there weren't a wheeled character in every possible group of heroic characters the human imagination can conceive."

From:

<https://www.facebook.com/photo/?fbid=1030478875778327&set=a.55849190297702>

6 "My problem isn't sex; it's that there are three guys and only two women, and one of the women sleeps with everyone. So, unless you're into NTR, the only option if you play a straight guy is the half-elf."

From:

[https://www.reddit.com/r/pcgaming/comments/iyeddk/you\\_can\\_have\\_sex\\_in\\_baldurs\\_gate\\_3/?t=it](https://www.reddit.com/r/pcgaming/comments/iyeddk/you_can_have_sex_in_baldurs_gate_3/?t=it)