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Migrated/ing game work: A case study of Korean game expats in Finland

Solip Park[a]

[a]*Aalto University School of Arts, Design, and Architecture, Otakaari 1 B, 02150 Espoo, Finland*

Abstract

The number of immigrant and expatriate game creators is steady on the rise, becoming one of the critical, creative experts in the video game industry. In Finland, 27% of the workforce in Finnish video game companies are coming from abroad. However, despite their growing numbers, little is known about these foreign workers' status and their experiences with cultural interpretations in game production. To fill this gap, in this research I interviewed and observed South Korean game creators who migrated to Finland, focusing on their motivation for relocation and experiences in country-to-country transition. Data revealed three (3) patterns of value clashes and two (2) contextual factors, as well as an indication of alarming obstacles that hinder the bilateral cultural exchange within game production. This paper offers a first in-depth analysis of one of the expatriate groups in Finnish video game industry, extending the existing discussion of game work in the contemporary multicultural society.

Keywords

Game Work, Talent Migration, Case Study, Creation and Production of Games

1. Introduction

Video games have become one of the most influential digital media in the 21st century, with more than 2.7 billion people playing video games on a daily basis [1]. Along the way, the game industry has established a complex global network of production and distribution, which impacts the demographic of its workforce. The survey from the International Game Developers Association (IGDA) in 2019 indicated that roughly 17% of global game industry working respondents "considered themselves to be immigrants [2]." In the case of Finland, there are roughly 27% of game workers identified as "non-Finnish employees (17% from EU/EEA, and 10% from non-EU) [3]."

Mobility of game creators has become contested terrain as game companies, nations, and educational institutions compete to host game creators. But despite the growth in number, knowledge about game creators and their work is still limited in both academia and game industry. Deuze et al. have once stated in 2007, "(among) professional culture creators in the media world, the ones whose lives are studied the least are game developers [4]." More than a decade later, academic interest in studying game creators is slowly on the rise [5, 6, 7]. Nevertheless, the study of non-natives — expatriates or migrants — in the game industry is even more sparse. Finland also lacks case studies of foreign game creators and their cultural impact despite importing nearly one-fourth of its workforce.

This paper addresses this gap and provides a first in-depth study of foreign game creators who experienced country-to-country transition to Finland, by sampling the South Korean game creators working in Finnish game companies. However, it is crucial to address upfront that this paper is not about investigating immigration at a macro level. Instead, the aim is on the micro-level cultural side of game creation by diving deep into the story of individual game creators. Therefore, the primary research questions of this paper are:

- What are the motivational/demotivational reasons of Korean game creators' work migration to Finland?
- How work migration, a transition between one game production culture to another, affects the game creators and their practice of making games?

This paper takes a qualitative research approach, for which I interviewed and observed five South Korean game creators living and working in Finland. The choice of research participants was made based on my language and cultural background, which allowed engaging with the participants while gathering empirical data and interpreting their viewpoints from the perspective of their native culture and Finland. The similarities in the mobile platform-centric video game industry in Finland and South Korea were also considered a good comparison.

It is also important to mention that this paper is constructed as a preliminary research of my on-going qualitative longitudinal study 2020-2024, tracing the research participants' development throughout four years. This longitudinal research will provide critical insights to enhance our knowledge on the cultural studies of game

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solip.park@aalto.fi (S. Park)
http://www.parksolip.com/ (S. Park)
0000-0001-5581-435X (S. Park)

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production and the potential contributions of expatriates to the host country's social equality and diversity — benefiting both native and non-native game creators.

2. Related work

2.1. Game production culture

Many game creators are part of multi-billion dollar corporate businesses, serving global audiences through a complex transnational production network. Therefore, the cycle of game production is often formulated metaphorically as the "video game pipeline": with concept, production, testing, and post-production phases. However, game production is not always seamless but a messy process that is highly collaborative and distributed, involving a wide range of actors both internally (e.g., in-house studio) and externally (e.g., outsourcing) [8]. The scale, procedures, and complexity of game production varies from platform to platform, team to team, project's need, the number of people involved, and the market [9, 10].

The characteristics of game work is creative, immaterial, multitudinous, and interdisciplinary [11], closer to other professions of cultural businesses such as films. Game developers' professional identity is inseparable from their unique creative contributions to games that they produce [4]. The work of game-making is also closely linked with the global techno-cultural development [12], with a strong emphasis on both individual expertise and social skills — not just being an expert on their own field but also being well integrated with the team to make a better game [13, 14, 15].

However, scholars have noted that production and design process behind games has received marginal attention in the wider context of game research [16, 7]. Fortunately in recent years, academic interest in studying game creators is slowly on the rise with the emphasis on game labor process [17], design and creativity [18, 19], the role of tools and game studios [8, 20], professional identities [21, 22], and diversity [23, 24]. However, the study of migrants and expatriates in the video game industry and their contribution to game productions has not yet been discussed in-depth.

2.2. Talent migration

Globalization has resulted in an increasing demand for talent migration in most developed economies, generating a new flow of immigration of highly skilled professionals and self-initiated expatriates [25, 26]. Evidence has also emerged in recent years that heterogeneous, cohesive, and diverse collaboration tends to contribute to the success of organizations [27, 28, 29]. Teams with cultural diversity, dissimilar stylistic experiences, and higher levels of recurring cohesion tend to outperform homogeneous teams [30, 31]. Positive impacts of talent migration are also reported in the range of industrial sectors for innovation, and the productivity, wages, and tax income to the hosting country [32, 33].

From this notion, diversity in the work environment has been regarded as one of the critical attributes for business success among the actors of the video game industry, despite the industry still being dominantly male and homogeneous [24]. A survey from IGDA, for example, showed a significant majority of (85%) worldwide game creators agree that "diversity in the game industry is important" with growth in number compared to previous surveys (84% in 2017, 80% in 2016, and 66% in 2015) [2]. Finnish game companies also have been asserting cultural diversity as one of the crucial aspects of their recent business growth [34, 35].

3. Background

3.1. Game work environment in Finland and Korea

It is important to acknowledge the overarching work culture in Finland and South Korea in order to understand the background of the research participants.

Finland is a Northern European nation, with Evangelical Lutheran cultural background and social democracy as a leading political ideology, with a population of 5.5 million. The Republic of Korea, commonly known as South Korea (henceforth "Korea"), is an East Asian nation with Confucianism as its primary ethical background and driven by an economy of competitive conglomerate corporations, with a population of 51.6 million.

Video games are one of the biggest entertainment exports in both Korea and Finland. Korean video game industry employs 85,492 people while Finnish game industry employs 3,200 as of year 2018 [3, 36], with a large portion of those employed to companies founded from its home country. Their video game industries are dominantly male, with only 29.2% answered as "female" in the survey from Korea and 20% female employees reported in the survey from Finland [3, 36].

Korea and Finland both have workers' unions representing the game creators. Korean game creators' legal work hours are up to 52 hours per week [37] — which is the nation-wide standard. Their Finnish counterparts enjoy shorter work hours with average of 37.5 to 40 hours per week depending on the associated collective agreement between the industry and the union.

They are both highly concentrated to mobile and PC gaming platforms. Of Finnish game companies, 75% (Android) and 71% (iOS) are developing mobile games, while 50% make PC games (multiple answers allowed) [3]. 35% of Korean game companies have mobile games as the primary source of their revenue, while 46% depend on PC games (single answer only) [36].

3.2. Game expats

In this paper, I will address the research participants as *game expats*. Our intention of this term is to specify the condition of game creators that experienced either assigned or self-initiated migration [38], primarily due to their game profession, with or without concrete long-term future plans for a settlement, directly or indirectly due to precarious job contracts of the video game industry.

The video game industry shares many similar characteristics with other cultural industries (e.g., films). Unfortunately, this includes the erasure of boundaries between work and play, the need for constant re/up-skilling, and high demand for mobility amongst their workers [39, 40, 41]. The career trade-offs of flexibility versus precarity, autonomy versus personal risk, and passionate labor versus self-exploitation are widely normalized in the video game industry up to this date [42]. Game creators worldwide have been raising questions toward income disparity, crunch hours, burnouts, and normalization of these malpractices by justifying game production as a work of passion [43, 44, 37]. Both Finnish and Korean game industries are no exception to these concerns, with frequent crunch hours and passion-driven game work atmosphere reported throughout multiple media outlets.

4. Methods and data

4.1. Research participants

For this paper, five Korean game expats in Finnish game companies were interviewed, and their public activities in the “Finland Developer Group from Korea” (henceforth, “FIN-KO DEV”) were also observed (see Table 1).

First initiated in 2019 by Korean game creators and ICT workers in Finland, FIN-KO DEV is organizing online social media channels and offline gatherings with the primary objective of knowledge sharing and networking among Korean language speaking digital sector workers in Finland and other parts of Europe. Both participants and the researcher were and still are, at the time of writing, active members of FIN-KO DEV. My relation with FIN-KO DEV and the group’s representative position among Korean game industry workers in Finland allowed seamless interaction with the participants.

All participants were male, born and raised in South Korea, and first began their game career in their home country during their 20s of age. Four participants also had experience working with game companies abroad before coming to Finland (for the remaining one participant, coming to Finland was his first country-to-country transition). All participants are working with the agile game production management framework Scrum [45], some also had the experience working with the waterfall model.

4.2. Instruments

A semi-structured interview guide for this paper was designed by referencing the thematic interview method [46], which consists of a well-defined theme to gather objective, personal, and intuitive data from the participants. During the interviews, questions were not detailed, and were open for the interviewee’s expression of opinions and viewpoints associated with the themes [47].

Four themes used in the interview were: (a) motivation and experience of relocation (industrial changes that may have influenced the participant’s work migration), (b) opinions about what is good or missing in working in Finnish game companies (how the participant perceive the host country’s game production culture, and his game design values), (c) cultural encounters and integration (the participant’s response to country-to-country job relocation), and (d) future plans and motivation for socializing (the participant’s relationship with the host country’s game ecosystem).

The participatory observations with FIN-KO DEV began in October 2019. The interviews were conducted between September and October 2020. Each interview took approximately one (1) hour.

4.3. Data analysis

Data were analyzed using thematic analysis [48, 49, 50]. In order to conduct a cohesive thematic analysis, I have followed these steps: (a) familiarization with the data, (b) slicing the full data into initial codes, (c) searching for themes, (d) iteration of themes emerging from the new categories, (e) definition of relevant themes with the purpose of the study, (f) producing of report. Atlas.ti 7 software was used during the process.

All participants also answered a pre-survey prior to their interview (see Table 1). Because all participants choose Korean as their preferred language for an interview, the data analysis process was conducted with its Korean transcript coded in English. Quotations used in the report were then translated by myself from Korean to English. Along the way I have adapted liberal interpretations while cross-referencing the linguistic structure of Korean and English. For example, the word “we/ours” in the Korean transcript was interpreted as “I/mine” in English depending on the context, based on how the native Korean speakers describe the concept of affiliation.

Table 1
Participant List

ID	Role	Years in Finland	Years of Game Work Experience	Immigration status	Preferred language
A	Producer	1-3	16+	work permit	Korean
B	Programmer	1-3	16+	work permit	Korean
C	Artist	1-3	7-9	work permit	Korean
D	Designer	4-6	4-6	work permit	Korean
E	Designer	6-9	16+	permanent	Korean

5. Results

5.1. Value clash

The participants were asked about their motivations and expectations for relocation to Finland. The participants also casually pointed out some of the distinctive cultural interpretations that they felt in Finnish game companies compared to previous countries before coming to Finland. Based on that, I also asked how they tend to response to those cultural interpretations. The data indicate three patterns of value clash among the participants.

5.1.1. Quantitative vs Non-quantitative rewards

The data suggest two primary reasons for Korean game creators' relocation to Finland; career building and communal well-being with their family.

Interestingly, however, these two factors were not always associated with each other but rather conflicting (see Figure 1). While those who came to Finland without a family (C, D) considered Finland as a short-term stepping stone for their career building, those who relocated with their family (A, B, E) thought Finland was a more optimal choice for their family but a sacrifice of their career. To these individuals, Korean and English media outlet coverage of the Nordic social security system was the primary source of their pre-expectations to Finland. The value of the family's well-being continues to maintain as the motivational factor for the participants aiming for a longer stay in Finland.

> "What I know (about Finland) was mostly about the Finnish education system and their social structure, something that is irrelevant to my game career." (E:8)

The participants often used the term "career" or "career building," which appears to be strongly associated with the amount of salary. The participants generally referred the amount of salary (or other means of financial compensations) as a linear quantitative indicator of success in their career; salary increase as a positive achievement, while the decrease as a regression or disrespect of their skills. From that notion, all participants shared a similar "disappointed" or "shocked" moment when they first received their job offer letter from the Finnish game employer — as the salary offered was lower than game industry competitors such as USA, Singapore, etc. Participant C, for example, explained that he later found out that this is due to relatively lower housing prices and other living expenses in Finland — compare to highly industrialized mega-cities — but the explanation from their Finnish employer was insufficient back in the hiring process.

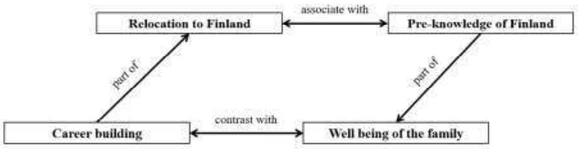

Figure 1: Participant's Reasons of Relocation

> "(When I read the salary written in the job offer email) I was like, 'That's it? Is that how much I'm worth?' And then my Finnish employer was like, 'no no, but you would benefit from other stuff!'" (C:6)

Instead, participants generally agreed that their Finnish game employers tend to promise qualitative intrinsic motivations to their potential recruits. These include emphasizing the feeling of ownership to the games that they develop, and the atmosphere of creative freedom. According to participants, their Finnish employers tend to value facilitating horizontal and autonomous communication within the team. When asked for contexts, B claimed that his primary role as a team leader in Finland is to listen to other team members rather than directing them, describing them as "self-directed" individuals. E backed this notion by describing the value of "trust" defaulted within the Finnish game companies grounded by employees' "proactive" behavior. Other participants also shared similar opinions (see Figure 1).

> "I can self-direct myself. So I feel 'making games is fun after all' back again." (C:24)

> "(I) don't think I have seen such proactive type of game creators, who are so eager to express his/her opinions, than here in Finland." (A:36)

The participants tend to generally interpret these trustful and self-directive behaviors of their colleagues based on their own interpretation of career — the quantitative indicator of financial income. More specifically, participants pointed out "transparency in finances" of their employer as the driving force of the feeling of ownership of the game in development. This includes their Finnish game companies sharing regular updates on daily/monthly user traction, revenue, expenditures, tax, bonuses and payrolls, profit, and realistic business forecasts with their employees.

> "It's very open. So I get to understand more about how the company is doing — being part of the process." (D:9)

This result indicates that work morale and cultural interpretation of game work incentives, which drives the individual game creators, are diverse and may not always align with the company's assumption upon hiring international talents. In this specific case, the Finnish game companies' strategy of communicating with their potential recruits by promising non-quantitative rewards was miss-aligned with Korean game expats' expectations.

5.1.2. Quick execution vs Consensus alignment

Participants identified "consensus alignment" as another unique cultural interpretation of game making in the Finnish game companies.

E explained how his Finnish colleagues focus on making a full alignment of consensus among every team members involved in the project. He claimed that it differs from the concept of collaboration or co-operation, but rather, more of a process of "negotiation" grounded by "individualism." Other participants also described that the Finnish game companies' consensus alignment involves each actor to develop their proposals, then break those proposals into smaller pieces, and then negotiate for the best combination. Upon describing this pattern in their own language, the participants used terms such as "horizontal proposal," "each bringing their idea first," "combining," and "general agreement." (see Figure 2).

> "(My colleagues in Finland) seem to have strong individualistic standards, even compared to other European company that I worked with. It's more obvious here to decide things through a full consensus." (E:15)

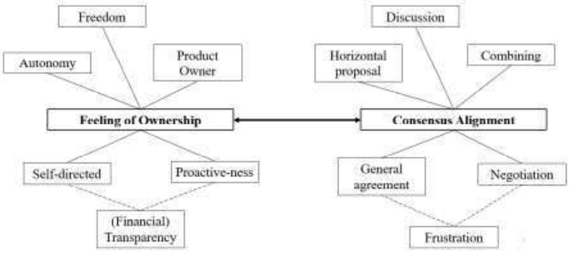

Figure 2: Participants perception about the Finnish game production culture

However, when asked about how they feel about aligning the consensus, most participants commented on "frustration." This feeling was tied with the participants' perception of Finnish game companies "being slow" on decision making, compared to game companies that they experienced before coming to Finland. They were concerned about the risk that the game they make may no longer be competitive in the rapidly changing game market, especially exporting their games to East Asia — where they consider fast in-game content updates as an important factor for the game's business success.

> "(I) can't see top-down decision making here. In a sense, it is actually a very good thing. But, it is also true that this is a very difficult environment to bluntly say 'no.' If a bunch of guys talking some weird ideas and me, as a game designer, already knew the answer to solve the problem, in Korea I can just say, 'hey, I AM the game designer' and push things forward. I just have to prove it in the end. But here, you have to talk, again and again, discussions after discussions." (D:30)

5.1.3. Inclusive vs Exclusive

When asked if they plan to stay in Finland for 1 more year, all participants said, "Yes." But when asked if they are willing to stay longer than 3+ years, most participants expressed uncertain responses.

> "Where ever there is a job. Who knows what is going to happen?" (A: 72)

> "I could stay here for a while but could go somewhere else. Who knows." (B: 34)

However, data also suggest that the pattern is just due to the video game industry's fluctuating labor demand. What hinders the participants was the lack of inclusiveness with the surrounding network of people, more specifically, the barrier to the Finnish referral occupational network.

All participants described how often game job opportunities in Finland are shared and determined within a local referrals network, outside the regular work space. Participant D, for example, described that Finnish game creators tend to "know each other already," and one's reputation can be easily shared with the hiring decision-maker — which impacts the call for hiring/no-hiring. Most participants positioned themselves as "less competitive" and feel less inclusive because of this referral network.

> "Politics. That's important. Building (your) reputation. Otherwise it gets very miserable. (laugh)" (C:20)

> "I think reputation is far more important here (in Finland) than in Korea. It actually impacts your job opportunities." (D:49)

Participants generally perceived this referral-driven network in Finland as a solid cultural custom that they eventually have to adapt, which became a primary reason for initiating their own network — the FIN-KO DEV. When asked their reason for participating in the FIN-KO DEV, the Korean game expats described that they tend to expect "comfortableness," "cultural familiarity," and "belongingness." Furthermore, the social distancing and lockdown measures due to the COVID-19 pandemic, which prevents large offline gatherings, reduced the participant's interest in networking with new people but rather leaning on the existing social connection.

> "I tend to expect something more when I am networking with other Korean game developers here. A tiny expectation that my difficulties will be heard." (A:43)

5.2. Contextualizing the value clash

In this phase, I dove deeper into the data and identified two contextual factors that incur our game expats' value clash.

5.2.1. Balance between the country and corporation

The data suggest that game production culture is affected by both the country's culture (bottom-up, customs, and normative behaviors of people) and corporation (top-down, executive leadership from the headquarter).

Participants generally agreed that each country and company tend to have their own unique game production culture per se, backed by their experience of several job transitions across the world. By connecting their comments, it became evident that there is a confronting balance between the top-down "executive leadership" and bottom-up "local culture" as a context behind the culture of the company's game production. Participant E, who migrated most frequently throughout his career among the participants, identified his preferred game production process are often cultural on a micro-level.

> "I think game production practices are eventually about cultures. We call it 'system,' and we do use 'systems' to manage game production but, if you go deep into it, it is all grounded from the surrounding society." (E:34)

From that notion, all participants expressed a significant distinction between the game production culture they felt between their home country (Korea) and Finland. The participants tend to describe the Korean game production culture as "rapid," "competitive," involving "complex social interaction," driven by a tendency of achieving goals as quickly as possible. In contrast, as described before, participants perceived that Finnish game companies' decision-making process is "slow," as it is oriented more towards the favor of consensus within the team and their creative freedom.

> "Let's say Korean game companies spend 20% of their time to discuss and 80% to make in-game assets. In Finland, it's the opposite." (E:18)

Interestingly, compared to these two, participants' descriptions of their previous work experience within the branch offices of mass-scale multinational video game corporations (commonly known as AAA video game companies) were less distinctive but more uniform. For example, participant A shared his previous experience at a small regional game studio in Europe that was governed by the overseas headquarters' management frameworks from North America.

> "What do you think that affects the game company's production culture?" "Their HQ's mindset. As any branch offices eventually have to follow their HQ's orientation." (A:40)

The well-established domestic cluster of video game companies born-native in Finland and Korea, including their broader impact on the region's game job employment, may be connected with these two nations' distinctive game production cultures resulting in a higher chance of retaining their cultural locality. All participants generally appreciated the unique cultural locality reflected in these two countries' game production, describing it as valuable traditions. Furthermore, two participants (C, E) expressed their concern on cultural toadyism within the game industry by sampling the failed cases they witnessed in Korea, where the game company and their leadership bluntly tried to withdraw their locality by mimicking game production practices from North America.

> "In Korea we have this myth, fantasy about the 'Western working practices.' But now I don't think that's always the reality." (C:15)

5.2.2. Generalization and ignorance

The game production culture is multitudinous on a micro-level, which can be locally distinctive or corporate-specifically uniformed. However, it appears that game creators, including the game expats themselves, tend to have a conflicting assumption that the country-to-country work migration within the game industry should require little to no transitional process — as if the process of game production is universally standardized.

The reason behind this appears to be related to the practicalities of game making (e.g., game engine) and task management tools (e.g., scrum agile) that are indeed quite standardized throughout the industry. But despite those similarities, the participants still spent the first several months or even several years getting familiar with various other aspects of game production – e.g., new sets of work morale, decision making procedures, team dynamics and communication, etc. The participants then re-prioritized and adjusted their practices on game-making.

For example, C, the game artist, mentioned that he became no longer prioritizing the visual aesthetics while working with the current Finnish company — as he came to realize that the team tends to dedicate more time aligning the consensus on the game mechanic than in-game visual assets. For participant A, the game producer, it was about allocating more time discussing with developers and task managers rather than following up with the game release and update schedules. For D, the game designer, it was about prioritizing the discussions with the team rather than the rapid iteration and execution of game design.

> "Back then, when I get a task like 'make something great,' I would sit alone, think hard, and work hard to create something awesome. A bit of feedback here and there, ta-da, done. But these days, I changed more in a way that I talk with people, discuss with people." (D:17)

Some of the game making practices that the participants acquired from previous works were confronted by their new colleagues, even discriminated as something 'abnormal' or 'not right.' Consequently, participants' pattern of re-prioritization were about adapting (and surviving) within the companies' cultural norm, rather than bilateral cultural exchange or compromise. The confusion during the re-prioritization and the feeling of alienation of their previous game making practices were left as the individuals' own risk.

> "At first, my colleagues (here in Finland) confronted my idea (...). They said things like 'what you say is not games' 'that is not how games should be' 'that is nothing to do with gameplay.'" (C:43)

> "Dunno. I think Finland is doing great. It's just me thinking weird sometimes being stressed out." (D:32)

6. Discussion

In this paper I have analyzed the work migration of Korean game expats in Finland by asking about their motivation to relocate and behavioral changes upon migration. The results identified three patterns of value clashes and two contextual factors behind those clashes, which foregrounds the cultural aspects that drive the work of game creators.

6.1. Pluralistic identity of game creators

This research revealed that game creators' primary motivations to relocate to Finland were diverse, and associated with the work morale that drives their professional game career.

Data suggests that the Finnish game companies tend to promise their foreign workers the well-being of work and balance and a feeling of ownership to their game creators. The pattern of Finnish game companies prioritizing the game creator's creative contribution, valuing autonomous and proactive attitudes of their employee, was identified in most interviews during this research. This echoes with the notion that game creators tend to associate themselves with unique creative contributions to the games that they produce [4].

Interestingly, however, the data also revealed complex layers within. In the case of Korean game expats, the financial compensation or the communal well-being with the family were valued most. The desire for one's financial success and self-confidence were also strong. We can see this from the pattern of Korean game expats in this research associating the company's transparent financial report with the proactive behavior of themselves and their colleagues. The pattern indicates that the motivation for game work is not singular nor universal but diverse and complex, that ties with the overarching social and economic discourses — the surrounding reality that drives the game creators to work.

6.2. Multitudes of game production culture

The culture of game production was multitudinous and interdisciplinary, as the characteristic of game work [11]. The practices of game production were indeed different from country to country and company to company [9, 18].

Furthermore, it appears that both country (bottom-up, dominant customs, and normative behaviors of people) and corporate (top-down, executive leadership from the headquarter) affects the establishment of culture of each game company (studio). The relationship between these two factors is confronting balance, as an overseas headquarters' top-down management orientation can overrule the cultural locality. Participants' experience in branch offices and outsourcing agencies under the umbrella of global-scale video game corporations indicate that these type of small studios are more likely to be influenced by the corporate-specific close-knit pipeline. However, game companies in Finland and Korea appear to retain their rather unique and distinctive locality, as the influence of multinational video game corporations is relatively marginal in their game industry.

6.3. Enablers of cultural ignorance in game productions

The alarming obstacle to the long-term settlement and integration of game expats appears to be the assumptive generalization and the ignorance in locality within game production culture blinded by the similarities in game development tools and software. There, the game expats of our research all re-prioritized their game-making practices in a one-sided adaptive manner — which incur the marginalization of ideas and values from the outside: either to adapt or leave. They were generally less optimistic about the cultural exchange between the game studios in their home country (Korea) and host country (Finland), as for their perspective, the cultural gap is too wide while the window of opportunity for pluralistic discourse is marginally small.

The potential to contribute to the host country were also limited. The closed entry to certain domestic occupational referral networks incur a feeling of a lack of inclusiveness among some of the game expats. The referral-driven hiring scheme widely used in the Finnish game companies — where game jobs tend to be shared and determined through the network of referrals — appears to be the center of the concern. This may hinder foreign game professionals who may not be well equipped with this type of socializing practices, and consequently, raise the uncertainty of the long term settlement.

7. Implementation

The conditions of the game expats highlighted in this study highlight a few dimensions for future research and implementation for the recruitment of foreign game creators. First, diverse motivational game work morale and values have to be classified to enhance the strategy of game companies' global talent recruitment and to align it with the various expectations of game expats from across the world. Second, game companies should pay more attention to enhancing cultural awareness within their game production and the cultural transition of incoming game workers. Furthermore, game researchers and educators could also further their knowledge of game production practices and the concept of games outside of their cultural realm to better align future game creators with the reality of the game work in the pluralistic contemporary society that we are living in.

8. Limitations

The main limitation of the present study is the small number of data samples (5). The qualitative approach of this research did allow the in-depth analysis of the phenomenon, and the representative position of these five Korean game expats did offer an overview of the condition of foreign workers in the Finnish video game industry. However, I am also aware that this is just a snapshot and does not account for the entire population of game expats in the region. Therefore, I shall continue to investigate the story of game expats — and their development — longitudinally onwards. This future work could also consider cross-validating with other data sets, such as game expats with other nationalities.

9. Conclusion

In this paper, I reported the motivational (and demotivational) reasons that affect the game creators' relocation to Finland and the impact of work migration on game creators. The data revealed several patterns of value clashes and contextual factors that incur those clashes. This analysis backs the claim that the game production culture is multitudinous, and each game production culture of a game company reflects both the country's culture and the corporation's management orientation. I also argue that cultural awareness and tolerance must be further explored in between game companies. From that notion, I shall continue exploring the pivotal moment of the Finnish game industry and the stories of game expats even beyond this paper.

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