

# Videogames in the Globalization: The Case of Finland

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Good evening everyone! I would like to thank Ritsumeikan University for giving me this opportunity to be here and also give this talk to you.

Today, I am going to talk with the title "Videogames in the globalization, the case of Finland".

My presentation will consist of several parts. First, I will do a personal introduction, and after that, I will form a definition for the game culture and game cultures. Then, I am going to talk to you a little bit about characterization of global and local game cultures: what makes game culture global and what makes it local issue.

The last part of my presentation will be about how, particularly Finnish game companies nowadays, use some sort of Finnish elements in their products. During my presentation, I will use a lot of examples from Finland which mainly are historical cases about game cultures.

First the personal introduction, like Professor Hiroshi Yoshida [Ph. D.] mentioned. I work as a Professor of Digital Culture at the University of Turku in Finland. In my studies, I am focused on the cultural history of information technology and also history of media and technology. Likewise, I have done research on game cultures.

I am working at the multidisciplinary academic community called Pori University Consortium. It's a consortium of four different universities. There are different university units, and we aim to co-operate as much as possible, do collaboration in education, and also in research between these four universities (see <http://www.ucpori.fi/english>).

I will not go into details, but here are some examples of my recent studies about game cultures and also history of information technology. As you can see, my studies consist of research on history of mobile games and also retro gaming which is the main thing I am doing research on here, during my visit in Japan (see e.g. Parikka & Suominen 2006; Suominen 2008). In addition, I have done research, for example, on popular introduction of new information technology in Finland after the World War II and also on science fiction and its role in introducing computer technology in Finland (Suominen & Parikka 2010; Suominen 2011a; Suominen 2011b; Suominen 2011c).

## Definition of game cultures

Now, I will make some sort of definition for the term 'game culture'. Quite many times, I suppose, when game scholars are studying games, they focus on some sort of 'core of play', a

triangle between player, gaming device and game application. In many cases, people do research on, for example, game aesthetics or playability or social interaction between players and gaming applications. That is, one of the main focuses of game studies, typically.

My own research, however, is more related to the issues I call 'contextual framework of game culture', which means, for instance, public debates on gaming and how digital games have been marketed, what kind of regulations society has for gaming, and all other issues which are not directly related to specific gaming experience but social attitude towards digital games and cultural history of those issues (see also Suominen 2003; Mäyrä 2008).

But, I want to underline that there is no one united game culture but more like game cultures, which means varying ways to play different devices, variety of interactions, and also very many diverse contextual frameworks which are intermixed and overlapping. Game cultures consist of many different contexts and also very many varying ways of playing games.

Relationships between these contextual frameworks, which means overlapping between frameworks and between cores of play, I suppose, is the main theme of my presentation today.

### Global and local in games

Now, I will say couple of words about global game culture. We can think, what makes game culture global – or in other words – universal which differs, however, from global. There are, I would argue, some kind of communion in different cultures, in different countries, which could be called as a universal need for play (see e.g. Huizinga 1938; Caillois 1958). Basically, I'd say that every person, every people enjoys to play, and also playing as fun, that is very important, maybe, for everybody in everywhere.

Likewise, a part of the global game culture, or game cultures, is that companies typically, nowadays, make products for global markets. Thus, the gaming devices and games, they are internationally shared.

### Game culture

- Digital game related practices
- **Core of play**
  - game production and playing
- **Contextual framework**
  - public debates on gaming, advertising, marketing, legislation...

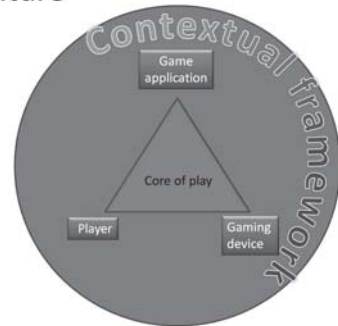


IMAGE 1

### Game cultures

- Related to
  - varying groups
  - localities

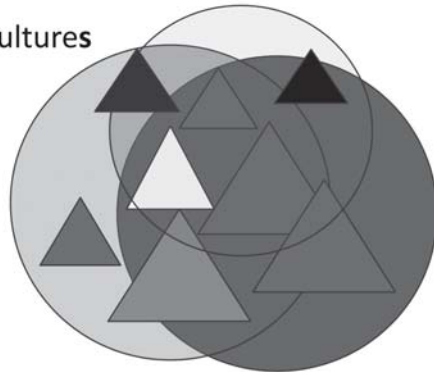


IMAGE 2

But even though the games are shared, the way of play is not the same in everywhere (See also Saarikoski & Suominen 2009). For example, if one imports a game from Japan to Finland, typically, there are different ways how to adapt, how to make it local in Finland. The way to experience the game in Finland is a bit different from in Japan, even though the game can be the same.

But, what happen when game is imported from Japan to Finland? There are many things which affect the way the game is adapted to local conditions (see e.g. theories of cultural appropriation of technology (Hård & Jamison 1998; 2005)) or technology diffusion or transfer (see e.g. Hughes 1987).

I would argue that at the same time, there are both 'material structures' and 'mental structures' which affect the way people design and develop games or play games in different districts of the world.

With those material structures and regulations, I mean, for example, environmental conditions and legislation and also wealth of the people, how much money people are able to invest for entertainment and gaming in different countries (see also the idea of 'technological styles' by the historian of technology Thomas P. Hughes (1987)).

With 'mental or human structures' I refer the ways how different values and norms and, for example, diverse social statuses, affect the gameplay.

I would say that there are both 'primary' and 'secondary consequences' how those structures affect.

Those 'primary consequences' implicate that whether or not particular game or game device is played at all, for example, in Finland. What kind of product has been exported from Japan to Finland?

With 'the secondary consequences' I refer adaptations and localizations of products. For example, if something is imported to Finland, how it should be adapted to be approved in the Finnish context.

### **Specialties in Finnish game cultures**

I will illustrate the previous conceptions with historical cases from Finland. First, I will talk about the situation in the early 1980s when the videogames were introduced in Finland.

The first bigger videogame boom happened in Finland in the mid-1980s with home computer games. We didn't have arcade game centers and we didn't use that much home videogame consoles, which meant lack of digital game experiences before home computer boom.

Why was that? One reason was that we have in Finland very small population, about 5 million people, and a strange language. For the big companies, Finland was and is such minor market area that it wasn't very appealing for them to make local versions of videogames for Finnish market.

Another reason was that in Finland the use of videogame machines, coin-up machines, was

really a regulated business. The Finnish coin-up machine association (Raha-automaattiyhdistys) had a monopoly for different kind of vending machines or coin-up arcade game machines.

The association had no big interest towards video gaming during that time.

In USA and also I think in Japan, for example, when the first videogame home consoles were introduced, it was essential to underline and market them like they would have given less expensive possibility and safer possibility to families to play games at home together, not going to the controversial gaming arcades to put money to games.

In Finland, there was no sense to use that kind of market strategy because we didn't have those game centers (Saarikoski & Suominen 2009).

Moreover, in Finland, we have a very strong social norm to put money, not for leisure and entertainment, but for a serious business. That's why home computers actually were the first machines for playing games also due to the fact that purchase of such machine could be explained with rational matters.

Even though, the kids wanted to play games with home computers, the computers were marketed as tools for future information society and also, for example, for organizing one's household activities. That's why for the parents, it was socially allowed to obtain those expensive computers, because they were serious issues, not only for fun (See also Saarikoski 2004).

### **TV SMS Games**

Another example about local specialty and conditions in Finland deals with mobile games in the late 1990s.

After major economic depression in early 1990s, the Finnish corporation, Nokia, focused on mobile technologies and it became the big international success during the 1990s (Häikiö 2002).

The success of Nokia created in Finland some sort of ecosystem also for small companies to develop softwares and games for mobile phones.

Designers of these games, they had typically started their career with home computers in the early 1980s and they had skills to take everything out from the limited technology. They really could use their skills learnt before when they started to make games for mobile phone platforms.

In Finland, we had very special mobile game genre called TV SMS mobile games (Tuomi 2008). The system was that the player sent an SMS message to the television program. For example, kicking a virtual ball to the goal and then there was a host or hostess typically who communicated with players and try to keep the balls away from the goal.

The reason for this kind of odd game genre was partly because mobile phone culture in Finland, but also the particular situation with the television culture at that time in Finland with new television channels and more hours to use for and a need for cheap programs for television.

## **Cultural appropriation of games**

Then I will introduce couple of examples of cultural appropriation and adaptation of game-related products (on cultural adoption of science and technology, see Hård & Jamison 1998; 2005).

Pac-Man (Namco 1980) game was very popular in the early 1980s. It was designed in Japan, but it gained even more substantial success in the USA, and I believe, for example, in other western countries like in European countries.

The popularity of the game emerged in the situation that there were also other products which were related to the particular game; for example, a song and record called 'Pac-Man Fever' (on popularity and nostalgization of the game, see Suominen & Ala-Luopa 2012).

Jerry Buckner and Gary Garcia published a rock song in 1982 and the whole album with songs about videogames, especially this 'Pac-Man Fever,' it became a hit in the USA in 1982.

The song described the situation where a man spends a lot of time at a game center and put a lot of effort and money for playing the Pac-Man game.

One year later, a Finnish version of this song was made and all the music, the songs, and also the lyrics were changed for being more suitable to Finland.

It didn't sound a rock anymore, but it was more soft and mild version and with the young female singer. This kind of way to transfer a foreign song outside of Finland, was very typical way to do in Finland during that time.

Because of lack of arcade game centers in Finland, in the lyrics, the play was situated at home environment.

There was the single girl who wanted to compete against boys and desired to beat them by playing Pac-Man. The playing of Pac-Man was described more interesting hobby than, for example, watching very popular soap opera in Finland that time called 'Dallas.' (Suominen 1999; Suominen & Ala-Luopa 2012)

Thus, the Pac-Man game was explained to Finnish audience by such media cultural references they recognized: television, videos – and Dallas television series.

But the song didn't get success in Finland. I suppose, this lack of success reveals well that the situation in videogame cultures in Finland was totally different from the USA – there was not such culture!

## **Marketing of Commodore 64**

Then another example; this is about how one of the most popular home computer, Commodore 64, was marketed in Finland during the 1980s.

Commodore was manufactured in the USA since 1982, but it became big success in Finland two to three years later. Like you can see the picture here, sales figures increased heavily or at least that was what the company who marketed the machine wanted to present in the advertisements.

This American computer was represented sort of “Finnish computer” in marketing by using references to Finnish flags. In the picture you can see the flag of Finland with Commodore logo flag. Moreover, they used this slogan ‘Tasavallan tietokone,’ ‘Computer of the Nation’ or ‘Computer of the Republic’ to create the atmosphere that the Commodore computer was actually Finnish or – at least suitable for every Finn.



IMAGE 3

In the same sense they used, for example, a computer graphic illustration of two fighting birds. The original painting in which the illustration referred, ‘Taistelevat metsot’ (by Ferdinand von Wright (1886)), ‘Fighting capercaillies’ (Tetrao urogallus birds) is one of the most famous paintings from the national romantic period from 19th century Finland. Basically, every Finnish people recognize this image, and thus, the digital representation of it, made an interesting nexus between home computer creativity and shared high cultural object, even a phenomenon.

The marketing was not like that initially. When Commodore 64 computer was introduced in Finland, two years before its success, the more international themes were used in marketing, e.g. the Statue of Liberty and also karate theme.



IMAGE 4

Then an example from West Germany a little bit similar situation like in Finland, but in Germany, they marketed the earlier Commodore computer VIC-20 computer with this slogan ‘Volks Computer.’

The slogan referred, of course, to Volkswagen, the car or especially to Volkswagen the Beetle, one of the most popular cars. They wanted to tell with this slogan that the VIC Commodore makes the same thing for computers what Volkswagen Beetle car made for everybody driving cars.

### Use of “Finnishness” in digital games and other forms of popular cultural production

This is the last part of my presentation. I will talk about the current situation. How the game

companies in Finland use elements of Finnishness in their products which are targeted for global markets?

I would argue that typically Finnish game companies nowadays aims to “neutralize” their products. If you see the games, play the games, you don’t notice that much articulated or recognizable ‘Finnish’ in them.

There should be something Finnish in game production because the designers are mostly Finnish and live in Finland. But, like I mentioned, that doesn’t appear that much in the end products.

For example, let’s take examples from very popular games by Remedy Company, *Max Payne* (2001) and *Alan Wake* (2010). They are full of intertextual and intermedial references, mostly to western or Anglo-American popular culture, for example, to Hollywood movies, television series and crime stories (Harvola 2010). And for instance, it is not very Finnish scenery. It’s more like it could be from, maybe, from Canada or from the USA, but not from Finland.

Another example is very popular mobile game called *Angry Birds* (2009) by Rovio Entertainment. At least as a Finn, I really can’t see anything special Finnish in this game, only some vanes resembling Finnish or Swedish flags in certain levels of the game. Perhaps some ‘outsider’, a non-Finnish person, can observe something Finnish in the game, but still, I would argue that also *Angry Birds* has been largely neutralized in terms of national characteristics.

Even though it’s not typical yet, the Finnish game companies, they are able to use some sort of national characteristics as ‘a mild’ or ‘a strong flavor’ in their products. That has been a normal strategy or tactics in other fields of popular culture already.

One example, not from games but from movies, about making some sort of intertextual references to Finland; Finnish movie director called Renny Harlin is very famous, at least in Finland, because in his Hollywood movies, he has typically at least one tiny entity which connects the movie to Finland.

For example, he has included in his movies the Finnish flags somewhere or used a song by famous Finnish composer Jean Sibelius, and, there has been a bottle of Finlandia Vodka in one movie. Thus, these mild flavors are typically recognizable key symbols or objects or even consumer products which are able to be connected or originate in the nation.

These kinds of activities are some sort of signature of the director. Even though Mr. Harlin makes Hollywood movies, with these Finnish ‘Easter eggs’, he articulates that he is little bit different than other directors, that he is from Finland, and it affects the way he makes movies.

### **Use of Finnish folklore and mythology**

Another example, not from games, but from the music business, shows how the Finnish stereotypes can be used as a background for the whole style of music. In these cases, Finnishness is used as a stronger flavor than in the previous case.

For instance, there is a heavy music style genre called 'Finnish folk metal'. In the lyrics and also in the outlook, there are lots of elements from the Finnish stereotypical nature: seasons, forests, lakes and the sea, specific animals such as bear or elk and so forth, and also from the Finnish or the Scandinavian folklore.

Then another example on games; one very famous Finnish animation character is the Moomin character by Tove Jansson. But Moomin games, they are not made in Finland typically, but for instance in Sweden or in Japan.

Here are examples of Moomin games made in Japan and in Sweden. For the international success of Moomin sales, Japan has been very important country.

This is just an anecdote of I just discovered regarding this importance: nowadays the Embassy of Finland in Tokyo has started this 'Moomin diplomacy' (see <http://www.finland.or.jp/public/default.aspx?contentid=229095&nodeid=41206&contentlan=2&culture=en-US>). It means that the embassy use Moomin characters when they are marketing Finland in Japan.

Also some game companies are able to use very strong Finnish elements in their products, but it's not typical at least currently. When I prepared this presentation and gathered information for it, I found a game called 'Heroes of Kalevala' by 10tons (see <http://www.heroesofkalevala.com/>), which is related and based on Finnish national folklore epos Kalevala. This sort of use of Kalevala is not a surprise, because Kalevala has been used often as a reference or source of inspiration in Finnish popular culture (Immonen et al. 2008).

But like I mentioned, this type of using Finnish elements or stereotypes is not yet typical for Finnish game companies.

I would like to end my presentation with this example of intercultural relationship between countries and also gaming cultures. Here you can see the pizza which origin is in Italy, but nowadays everybody in everywhere around the world recognize the food. Here you can observe the game character Pac-Man which is from Japan. This pizza is prepared by me, myself, about a month ago in Finland.



IMAGE 5

Thank you for your attention!

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