

# To Become a Cultural Fit, or To Leave? Game Industry Expatriates and the Issue of Migration and Inclusivity

**Solip Park**

Aalto University, Finland

[solip.park@aalto.fi](mailto:solip.park@aalto.fi)

## ABSTRACT

This paper explores the experience of immigrant/expatriate game developers (“game expats”), focusing on how the game developers’ community influences migration. Inspired by Weststar (2015)’s study identifying the game developers’ social group of occupational community (OC), I have conducted semi-structured interviews (n=29) with game expats in Finland in 2020-2021 and used grounded theory to identify cohesive patterns from their relocation experiences. The result showed community as a motivational driver for game expats’ migration to Finland, acting as a direct channel of recruitment and ease of relocation stress. Meanwhile, favor towards a certain type of personality, attitudes, and familiarity with the collective norms shared within the community (so-called “cultural fit”) was identified as a determining factor that affects game expats’ hiring and settlement. However, the closed hiring with a tendency to find already culturally fitting colleagues within the immediate community network due to concerns for productivity, raises difficulties for game expats with a junior level of expertise, less cultural proximity, or of a different gender. This paper highlights the challenges faced by game expats, calling for communal efforts between the industry, society, and institutions as an ecosystem to enhance inclusivity and cultural competence in game work environments.

## Keywords

Game Developers, Game Work, Game Expats, Migration, Occupational Community, Game Development Culture

## INTRODUCTION

The global video game industry has become one of the most influential cultural industries in the 21st century, followed by the rise of regional hotspots worldwide (Kerr 2017; Lehtonen, Ainamo, and Harviainen 2020; Šisler, Švelch, and Šlerka 2017; Zeiler and Mukherjee 2021). It functions on the complex global value chain of production boosted by rapidly advancing digital technologies that institute how to create and monetize games (Dyer-Witthof and De Peuter 2009; 2021; Nieborg, Poell, and Deuze 2019; Sotamaa and Švelch 2021). But it is also important to acknowledge the precariousness labor condition of the game industry with the normalization of self-exploitative labor, income and gender inequality, and stratification within the worker’s group (Perks et al. 2019; Ozimek 2019; Švelch 2021; Ruffino and Woodcock 2021;

Proceedings of DiGRA 2023

© 2023 Authors & Digital Games Research Association DiGRA. Personal and educational classroom use of this paper is allowed, commercial use requires specific permission from the author.

Park et al. 2022). To broaden these critical inquiries, in this paper, I look at one of the lesser-studied worker groups in the game industry: *migrant and expatriate game developers*.

The number of migrant/expatriate game developers has steadily increased in the past decades. In Finland, where this research was conducted, almost one-third of game workers have a migrant background (30%, with 15% from outside the EU/EEA area) (Neogames 2023). Similar trends were reported in the UK (Taylor 2022), Czech Republic (GDACZ, 2022), and other parts of the world (Kumar et al. 2022; Weststar, Kwan, and Kumar 2020), indicating the significance of work-based migration within the game industry. Coming from this context, in this paper, I will use the term *game expatriates* (henceforth, “game expats”), which refers to game developers that experienced migration primarily due to their game profession but “without concrete long-term settlement plans due to precarious job contracts and unpredictability of the game work” (retrieve from Park 2021; Park et al. 2022; inspired by Andresen, Bergdolt, and Margenfeld 2013; Tharenou and Caulfield 2010).

This paper focuses on the relationship between game work migration in the context of a social group called an *occupational community* (henceforth “OC”) (Van Maanen and Barley 1982; Salaman 1971; see also Weststar 2015). OC refers to a social group of a certain type of occupational workers that functions as a common ground of shared belongingness and identity, competency building, and career development to those in boundaryless careers such as in the game industry (see also Weststar and Dubois 2022; Creus, Clares-Gavilán, and Sánchez-Navarro 2020; Kücklich 2005; Srnicek and Williams 2016). By using the concept of OC as a starting point, the paper explores the microscopic hands-on factors surrounding game work migration by asking:

***RQ:*** *How does the occupational community of game developers enable (or constrain) the migration experience of game expats?*

The paper takes a qualitative research approach by analyzing semi-structured interviews of 29 game expats from 2020-2021 using grounded theory (Salisbury and Cole 2016). The participants were from a range of nationalities and were gathered on a voluntary basis. Many of these participants had multiple relocation experiences throughout their game industry career (i.e., have worked in a country other than their country of origin or the current host country) (75.8%), indicating the commonness of work-based migration among game workers. Insights from this research will not only report the concurrent condition of global game production work and migration, but also contribute to the ground of *game design praxiology* (Kultima 2018) and ethnographical studies on game making practitioners (see also Pelletier 2022; Whitson 2018). From there, it will provide insights to the topic of how game companies and society can collaborate to create more inclusive game development environments.

## CONTEXT

### Game Development and Work

The cycle of developing games, including game development, service, business and marketing, and publishing, is commonly known as “game development” or “game production” (Kerr 2017; Sotamaa and Švelch 2021). Game development/production work, which I refer to as “game work” in this paper, requires specialized expertise such as software engineering, arts and graphic design, game design, and business acumen. Game developers are required to execute work tasks that are technical, creative, immaterial, multitudinous, and interdisciplinary (Harvey 2019; De Peuter and Young

2019; Wimmer and Sitnikova 2011) while also being aware of industrial tendencies that orient the creative process (Chia 2022; Foxman 2019; Nicoll and Keogh 2019; Young 2021). Game making is also a teamwork effort, from two to tens of thousands of people working on a single game as a team (Kerr 2011; Bergstrom 2022). Various individual and social factors also influence the creative outputs of individual game developers (Kultima 2018; Whitson 2018), alongside both global and region-specific factors that simultaneously influence the practicalities within game work (Šisler, Švelch, and Šlerka 2017; Lehtonen, Ainamo, and Harviainen 2020).

But self-exploitative work culture and project-based precarious contracts normalized within the game industry have also raised concerns among scholars (Deuze, Martin, and Allen 2007; Creus, Clares-Gavilán, and Sánchez-Navarro 2020; Peticca-Harris, Weststar, and McKenna 2015; Consalvo and Paul 2018). There is normalized extensive working hours and burnout (Lee 2018; Weststar and Dubois 2022), and mounting issues with income and gender inequality (Lopez-Fernandez et al. 2019; Kerr 2020). Furthermore, strategies for flexibility of employment systems have worsened the class stratification and individualization of game work that burdens the risk of production on developers (Ruffino 2022; Ruffino and Woodcock 2021; Whitson 2019). It is also causing the division of workers between the ‘insiders’ (i.e., those with access to decision-making) and ‘outsiders’ (i.e., those without access to decision-making or without formal employment relations) (Ozimek 2019; Park et al. 2022). There are also behind-the-scenes game workers (e.g., voice actors, game event organizers, game critics) often without formal task-related firm affiliations, situated somewhere between the personal and the professional game work life (Švelch and Švelch 2020; Perks et al. 2019).

### **Occupational Community of Game Developers**

The occupational community (OC) is a collectively established group of workers who “consider themselves to be engaged in the same sort of work (Van Maanen and Barley 1982),” share a common set of values based on their social identity through the occupation (Salaman 1971; Van Maanen 2010; Salaman 1974). OC was selected for this study as it is a suitable framework for understanding the condition of game developers with their boundaryless, precarious, and immaterial nature of work (Törhönen et al. 2019; Weststar, 2015).

OC consists of four main dimensions: *boundaries*, *social identity*, *reference group*, and *social relations*. First, the ‘*boundaries*’ are a “metaphorical wall” (Weststar, 2015), which members seek to distinguish those inside the group from those outside by finding a common social dimension to recognize each other. This is because specialized occupations are often invisible from the public view and may not be identifiable with conventional occupation labels (e.g., digitally mediated work such as modding and streaming, see also Hamilton, Garretson, and Kerne 2014; Hilvert-Bruce et al. 2018). Geography is not a definitional matter in the case of OC, as the members could be dispersed or clustered, such as game developers distributed across the internet with blogs and forums providing moral support and potential collaboration (Parker and Jenson 2017) (see also Terranova 2000; Consalvo and Paul 2018).

‘*Social identity*’ means a shared identity among the members that “derive valued identities or self-images directly from their occupational roles (Van Maanen and Barley 1982)” regarding how the members are seen by the ones outside the group. It is fostered by the high involvement of the work itself, on how the members of the group seek to have (or believed to have) certain attitudes and skill sets. We can see this by OC members wearing or possessing conventional references (e.g., costumes, t-shirts), using

codes that can be understood by themselves and production-related texts (e.g., post-mortems) with esoteric knowledge and specialized abbreviations requiring a certain level of knowledge to understand (Weststar 2015).

*'Reference group'* refers to how OC members justify their level of expertise by self-reflecting on each other within the group. They also construct a view of the world that could be used to “justify and vindicate itself as a defense against outsiders (Van Maanen and Barley 1982),” with collective sets of values, beliefs, norms, and interpretations of the occupation. This behavior is for the members to acquire a richer understanding of the product and the problems they face (Bechky 2003). They may constitute what is proper or improper behavior and codes at work, and what are deemed compelling ways to live even outside the work (Schwartz 2018). In the OC of game developers, such collective self-reflection can be intrinsically hierarchical, with the larger firms constantly attempting to position their product and services as part of the work norms (Cohendet and Simon 2007; Chia 2022; De Peuter and Young 2019; Nieborg, Poell, and Deuze 2019). There’s also the so-called “cultural fit (Guzman and Stanton 2009; Hora 2020),” in which corporations use the OC’s referencing grouping to evaluate the candidate’s occupational commitment based on their familiarity with the collective norms due to concerns about immediate productivity (Rivera 2012).

Lastly, *'social relations'* refers to the “blurring of the distinction between work and leisure activities” within the OC (Van Maanen and Barley 1982). This includes specific leisure activities that members pursue linked to the occupation, for example, social engagement with other members for occupational enhancement (Consalvo and Paul 2018; Coulson 2012; Kultima and Alha 2017) while keeping close involvement in work and non-working leisure activities (Salaman 1974). The workers might also be confined to socializing, for example, sailors on-board the ship (Lee-Ross 2008). For game developers, engaging with in-company or external social events is often encouraged, in addition to long work hours and rigid deadlines that tend to situate individuals to spend more hours with co-workers (Dyer-Witthof and De Peuter 2006; Cote and Harris 2021; Edholm et al. 2017).

## **METHOD, DATA, AND ANALYSIS**

I have conducted semi-structured interviews (n=29) from January 2020 until December 2021, with participants joining on a voluntary basis through an online pre-survey form posted at web forums in Finland<sup>1</sup>. Participants first answered the pre-survey that asks their years of game work, years of living in Finland, role at the company, immigration status, and previous experience of game work in other countries. Then, the interview guideline inquired participants’ migration experience, work and social life, and cultural encounters at work. The semi-structured interview format was chosen as it allows the participants to freely express their views comfortably, using familiar metaphors and industry-specific abbreviations to describe their experiences. Most of the participants joined the interview via Zoom<sup>2</sup> sitting on their remote work desk at home due to the Covid-19 global pandemic. Consent was collected both through the pre-survey and verbally at the beginning of the interview. Each interview took roughly 60 minutes and was later fully transcribed by the author. With 29 interviews in total, roughly 30 hours of transcripts were collected.

The participants (n=29) mostly identified as male (n=25, 86.2%), with a significant portion being senior game developers with more than seven years of game work experience (n=22, 75.8%) at the time of the interview – including six (20.6%) with more than 16 years of game work experience. 26 (89.6%) were based in Finland at the time, including three running their own indie game studio. The remaining two had

recently exited Finland. The participants were of various nationalities (i.e., countries in North America, Latin America, Western and Eastern Europe, East Asia, Southeast Asia, and the Middle East). All identifiable information, such as the participant's company and project name, has been anonymized during the transcript process. The anonymized list of the participants (summarized in Table 1) and interview guidelines can be found on the project's Open Science Framework.<sup>3</sup>

ID	Role	Home country	Current immigration status at the time of the interview	Years of game work experience at the time of the interview	Gender	Worked in games other than home country and Finland
AA	Artist	West Europe	Recently re-expatriated to home country	10-12 years	M	Yes
AB	Manager	North America	Permanent residence	13-15 years	M	Yes
AC	Sound	West Europe	Work permit	13-15 years	M	Yes
AD	Marketing	Asia-Pacific	Work permit	4-6 years	F	No
AE	Manager	Asia-Pacific	Permanent residence	7-9 years	M	No
AF	Manager	East Europe	Work permit	13-15 years	M	Yes
AG	Manager	Middle-East	Permanent residence	13-15 years	M	Yes
AH	Programmer	West Europe	Permanent residence	7-9 years	M	No
AI	Programmer	Latin America	Work permit	7-9 years	M	Yes
AJ	Communication	Asia-Pacific	Work permit	13-15 years	M	Yes
AK	Designer	West Europe	Permanent residence	16+ years	M	Yes
AL	Designer	Middle-East	Permanent residence	10-12 years	M	Yes
AM	Designer	North America	Permanent residence	10-12 years	M	Yes
AN	Designer	North America	Work permit	16+ years	M	Yes
AO	Designer	Asia-Pacific	Work permit	13-15 years	M	Yes
AP	Human Resource	North America	Work permit	4-6 years	M	Yes
AQ	Programmer	West Europe	Recently migrated to another host country	4-6 years	F	Yes
AR	Artist	East Europe	Permanent residence	Less than 1 year	M	No
AS	Artist	North America	Work permit	14-16 years	F	No
AT	Designer	Latin America	Permanent residence	10-12 years	M	No
AU	Manager	Middle-East	Work permit	7-9 years	M	No
AV	Manager	Asia-Pacific	Work permit	16+ years	M	Yes
AW	Programmer	Asia-Pacific	Work permit	16+ years	M	Yes
AX	Artist	Asia-Pacific	Work permit	7-9 years	M	Yes
AY	Designer	Asia-Pacific	Work permit	4-6 years	M	No
AZ	Manager	Asia-Pacific	Permanent residence	16+ years	M	Yes
BA	Communication	Asia-Pacific	Permanent residence	1-3 years	F	No
BB	Programmer	Asia-Pacific	Work permit	16+ years	M	No
BC	Manager	Asia-Pacific	Work permit	4-6 years	M	No

**Table 1:** A summarized list of research participants.

The grounded theory method (Salisbury and Cole 2016) was used with an interpretative approach with manual open coding, focusing on coherent patterns that naturally emerged from the data (see also Carmin and Balser 2002; Grigoreanu et al. 2009). Further attention was taken to the microscopic experience of the game developers (see

also Kultima 2018; O'Donnell 2020; Whitson 2018), the societal context surrounding the respondents beyond their work affiliation (e.g., immigration and health status), and the individuals' game inspirations and design values (Kultima 2009; Kultima and Sandovar 2016). The focus was to explore how game expats experience work migration within the broader context of societal and industrial influences and to articulate personal experiences of mobility in their everyday lives. In total, 121 initial codes were identified, which were then further abstracted in four main dimensions of OC (Van Maanen and Barley 1982; Van Maanen 2010): (a) boundaries, (b) social identity, (c) reference group, (d) social relations. Furthermore, codes were categorized by referencing *push-pull-shock* model to identify which patterns from the data correspond with game expats' migration and settlement intentions: (i) *Push* – the perceived desirability of leaving the country, (ii) *Pull* – the perceived ease of leaving to another country, (iii) *Shock* – unexpected encounters such as cultural encounters that cause workers to re-evaluate their desire to expatriate or re-expatriate (Tharenou and Caulfield 2010; Toren 1976; Shaffer et al. 2012). The coding and categorization were conducted in English through Atlas.ti 22 software. In case the interview was conducted in a language other than English, the original transcripts were coded in English and then translated into English the author for direct quotations.

## FINDINGS

The findings suggest that the OC globally acts as a social group that bonds game expats beyond geographical borders, helping game developers to migrate and to feel comfort and secured about moving abroad. The motivation for career enhancement also attracts game developers to migrate. However, the hiring principles of game companies seem to not always align with game expats' needs thus resulted in re-evaluation of settlement intentions. Furthermore, there were a lot of cultural and human-to-human interaction aspects of game work shared within in the local community. There were also the indicators of the game industry's dependency on a closed hiring with the fear of lack of "cultural fit."

### Migration through the global community

Most of the research participants claimed that they were not aware of the Finnish game industry prior to the migration attempt due to the relatively small scale of the country's game industry compared to counterparts in established hotspots (e.g., USA and Japan), thus lesser visibility in the job market. Instead, game expats were more likely to be introduced to Finnish game jobs through other game developers. Indicating that the social network between the game developers acts as a primary migration route that brings talents to Finland. There were also cases of migration inspired by other game expats. For example, one of the participants (AZ) was pointed out by several other participants, including AK, as the person who introduced them to Finland. Game expats also seek mental comfort and ease migration stress by staying connected with other game developers. This includes participant BB, who confirmed his decision to move abroad after discovering that he could work with his former co-worker.

*"At one point, my friend [participant AZ, anonymized] called me up. He said, 'Hey, how about you move to Helsinki? We are hiring!' And I was like, 'What? Helsinki? Are you drunk?' And he said, 'No, no, it's cool. I work for [Finnish game company, anonymized]. Want to join?' (...) He got me over for an interview. He got us from the airport and brought us to the studio." (AK)*

*“I had a Finnish colleague back in [a country, anonymized]. (...) Then I realized that him and I were offered a job at [the same Finnish game company, anonymized]. I thought, ‘well that’s good, at least I know somebody in that country.’ So when the company asked if I would like to visit the office and see if I could settle down, I bluntly said, ‘no, it’s fine’ and immediately took the offer.”*  
(BB)

Game expats in this study also share a tendency for career enhancement and emotional engagement with the game they develop. Here, the participants described work migration as a chance to accomplish such achievements, favoring less hierarchical small to medium size game companies as it is easier to talk with decision-makers than in larger multinational game corporations. This includes the cases of two participants (AI and AZ), who both expressed high interest in starting their own game business in the future and were thus motivated to acquire a broad understanding of the overall game production process by directly interacting with the design and business decision makers. This pattern shows that while the local game industry with a relatively small scale may gain lesser visibility in the global game job market; on the other hand, it can also attract game expats with higher expectations in career and emotional engagement with their production. But there was also the attitude of self-exploitation, with some participants expressing the necessity of investing in their leisure time to upskill their game-making techniques and to network with other members within the company to access or learn game production process beyond their assigned role and responsibilities.

*“I want to understand from several perspectives. Design, code, technology, user experience, business, scheduling, and the market itself. And least here in Finland, at least in [this Finnish game company, anonymized], I can now understand things better. I can see how all these parts connect to each other in it.”* (AI)

*“For a long time, I thought (game) career is about getting a good (game) job. Now it’s more like, ‘how can I contribute to this project,’ about how far I can go, what I can do, and what I want to achieve myself. Of course, it has pros and cons. There’s no right or wrong on this. It’s just different.”* (AZ)

The finding also suggests that game companies’ hiring principles do not always cater to the reality of work migration and neglect to clarify the missing knowledge that game expats may have prior to migration to the country. In the case of AX, a significantly lower salary offered by the Finnish employer – compared to his former host countries – without a valid explanation, that living costs near work are lower than AX’s previous host city, was interpreted as less appreciation of his workability and thus being pushed away from the country. Game expats with such doubtful relocation experience tend to rely on other members of the community for moral support and comfort while having less emotional engagement with the host country and are more willing to leave when necessary. For participant AS, a misalignment between the reality versus the obscured media-portrayed image of Finland led to a fear of falling into poverty upon migration. AS was later relieved from the stress after talking with other game expats in neighboring countries and obtaining clarification on the living condition comparison. It was surprising to see that both AX and AS, as well as other participants who went through a doubtful relocation experience, were affiliated with some of the biggest – in terms of number of company employees, and well-resourced game studios in Finland, with a dedicated HR department and relocation packages that support their workers’ initial trip to the country. Yet they failed to cater and customize their communication with their potential recruits. This indicates the firm’s growth in size and financial stability do not always guarantee the game expats’ ease of migration stress.

*“(When) I got the salary offer, I was like, ‘that’s it? Is this how much I’m worth?’ Then the manager at [Finnish company, anonymized] said I would be benefited from other things. Sure? Maybe?” (AX)*

*“(Living cost) was something that I was worried about when I came to Finland. Because everything you read about the Nordics is, ‘everything is expensive.’ (...) I was thinking, ‘How am I going to survive? Can I make a decent living there?’” (AS)*

### **Local community norms and the term “cultural fit”**

The participants generally agreed that digitalized game production techniques are somewhat similar around the world (e.g., game engines, graphics software), besides some major differences set by the operating system (e.g., Windows, Android), development (e.g., Unity, Unreal) and publishing platforms (e.g., Google Play, Valve Steam). While larger game corporations tend to use their own internal software and peripherals customized for their own needs, participants said that those still share a familiar user interface with the mainstream tools in the public market. Thus, they tend to perceive such technicalities of game production as a minimum requirement for game jobs. Participant AW claimed that experienced game developers like him could easily re/upskill technicalities whenever necessary, while those with less work experience tend to pay more attention to the choice of tools.

*“Each (game) company can have its own uniqueness. Like, some may be more rigid than others, while some can be more flexible than others. (...) (Tool-wise,) I think they are eventually the same around the world. When I do interviews (to hire someone), game developers with short work experience tend ask about what tools and skillsets are needed for the job. While seniors tend to ask about the decision process and what the company expects (from the candidate), etc.” (AW)*

Instead, game expats said it is often the non-technical aspects that decide the game expat’s hiring and continuation of work contracts. According to the participants, such aspects were described as “culture” that vaguely covers all sorts of human-to-human interactions involved at work: personality, work attitudes, way of communication, interpretations of what sort of game development practices are deemed appropriate in the production, etc. Being able to blend into the organization’s existing cultural norms was called “cultural fit,” which contextual and often different in every country, company, or team. They generally deemed it necessary to secure the project’s productivity and business efficiency, successful social dynamics, and increasing the chance of delivering game products within the time and budget. According to game expats, in Finland, the term “cultural fit” is commonly referred being able to “know what to do without being told (or asking),” “communicate horizontally,” “work as a team,” “work autonomously,” “like/love games,” “to have similar likes (of games),” “being passionate about game (work),” “keeping work-life-balance,” and “fun to work with,” as also shown in following excerpts:

*“Let’s say I have three people that are applying for a job. They’ve all been in the industry for years, and probably all going to be good at what they do with that length of time in the game industry. Then it’s a case of ‘who’s a cultural fit?’” (AC)*

*“I want to make sure that the team is full of people who can work together, having fun and can enjoy the time together. Every person will be awesome skill-wise. But there’s bad persons that cause hassle to the team. (...) I believe that soft skills are more important.” (AF)*



Many game expats said that being able to “fit” into the team’s “culture” leads to successful hiring, promotion, and extension of the work contract, thus the likelihood of legal residency in any country. They also said it is quite normal to be monitored by their (new) co-workers in all sorts of human-to-human interactions involved at work during their initial migration phase, on whether they have the basis to adapt seamlessly. Then the game expats would also carefully observe the behaviors of its leadership and the dominant social group to predict whether the place is a good place to work. However, such double-way validation seemed challenging to game expats with junior level of expertise or with distanced cultural background as they have less knowledge to predict a good workplace in the local context.

Game expats generally advocated the industry’s principle of “cultural fit” — and are eager to become fit themselves quickly – claiming that game teams without “cultural fit” could escalate into a discomforting, unpleasant, or even toxic work environment. However, their views on the game company’s hiring principles to find culturally fitting individuals were rather divided. In Finland, it was important to be well-connected to former colleagues as hiring actors tend to find potential culturally fitting candidates through *closed hiring*: sharing job openings internally within the organization or requiring a personal referral from game devs within a close-range network. Participants who benefited (e.g., relocated through personal referral) were more likely to maintain their positive tone about the closed hiring in the game industry. Conversely, game expats with a lack of such network (e.g., short work experience, relocated from far without referrals) tend to share mixed views: on the one hand, admiring those who already blend into the teams’ culture but later also expressing their dissatisfaction. For instance, participant AY favored the work culture of his Finnish game employer and justified his “cultural fit” with the team as a reason for being a demanded migrant worker in the country. But he also admitted that his current Finnish supervisor’s hiring principles – hiring primarily through his or teammate’s former colleagues or friends – would be deemed unfair at his previous country of work. Similarly, BC first supported his current employer’s devotion to comforting and pleasant work culture in the first part of the interview. But later, he revealed a bitter relocation experience when he was puzzled by the (now) employer taking an abnormal amount of time double-checking his work and life views as he had little to no personal connections prior to migration.

*“After multiple rounds of online interviews and (series) of tests, I thought, ‘I got this (job),’ Especially when they flew me over to Finland for a visit. (...) So I took some days off from [BC’s former game company, anonymized] to visit Helsinki. But when I arrived, they asked for another round of interviews. I spoke with the group of people there again. Talked with team leads and directors, asking me this and that again. Some even asked me the same things that they had asked before. (...) And then, when I was about to head (back) to the airport, they asked for another round of tests. I was like, ‘what the hell?’” (BC)*

Female participants also shared mixed views on the industry’s emphasis on closed hiring and promotions justified with a “cultural fit.” Participant BA claimed that she feels less appreciated by her current employer, with a lower salary and a short-term temporary residence permit, as the company refused to offer her a permanent job position compared to her male colleagues who know how to speak in a “certain tone” of language. AM was concerned about the closed hiring normalized within the Finnish game industry while talking on behalf of his female colleague. Even in a case of female-dominant company, participant AQ still felt frustrated by the closed and homogenous attitudes of the company’s leadership despite the firm’s public advocacy on diversity.

*“I think 80% of the (game) jobs here (in Finland) are being filled before anything gets listed. (...) Virtually all hires were previous co-workers. Everyone*

*had worked with them before and already knew how to communicate. Great. Now, the disadvantage is that you get a complete sausage-fest of only guys.”*  
(AM)

*“I’m happy to have this chance to talk to you about it. Because I feel like some of these things should be brought to the surface. (...) Their selling point was ‘diversity.’ The founders were constantly going to conferences to promote how they build companies with diverse cultures. (...) Is that the way to make a diverse workplace? Sure, the company is ‘different’ because they’re all biological women – including myself – but they’re not ‘diverse’ if they’re all the same. I don’t get it.”* (AQ)

## **DISCUSSION AND IMPLICATIONS**

The findings reported an intimate relationship between game developers’ occupational community and game work migration, of how game expats naturally associate themselves with the social group of game development professionals beyond geographical borders. It was also clear that the “soft” aspects of game work (i.e., human-to-human interactions) affect the game expats’ work contract and thus their legal residency and settlement in the host country. The findings also confirmed the pattern of a *reference group* – sharing of collective norms of work and life views within the OC of game developers, the so-called “cultural fit.” While the use of reference grouping within the OC validating candidates’ compatibility is not an isolated case to the game industry, it also holds the risk of over-dependency on closed hiring. Therefore, further actions for awareness and critical inquiries with collaborative industrial and pedagogical implications should be acknowledged.

### **Boundaries and social identities: opened (geographical) borders**

Supporting the previous studies on OC (Schwartz 2018; Van Maanen 2010), the result shows game developers’ social group stretches beyond geographical borders. It also offers a cohesive career identity and moral support to game developers (Weststar 2015; Parker and Jenson 2017; Deuze, Martin, and Allen 2007; Wimmer and Sitnikova 2011). It was further revealed that game developers’ OC also has an impact on work migration by acting as a primary recruitment channel for smaller game industry hotspots — in this case, Finland. This indicates the importance of OC, not only for the social identity and comfort of game developers but also directly impacting the game industry’s recruitment of talents.

However, industry actors’ current practices in talent recruitment had mixed responses. Recruiting game developers from abroad without the careful assessment of work conditions in both regions (the previous and current country) has a risk of increasing game expats’ relocation stress. The findings showed that game company’s hiring actors negotiating the terms and salary with the candidate without clarifying the difference in living and work conditions in the host country compared to the previous country, only leads to game expats’ uncertainty over migration intention. Thus, more clarified communication is necessary. Finnish game studios could try appealing to their international talents with their smaller and lesser hierarchical managerial structure (Lehtonen, Ainamo, and Harviainen 2020) as game expats share higher expectations in career enhancement through migration (Shaffer et al. 2012; Andresen, Bergdolt, and Margenfeld 2013; Tharenou and Caulfield 2010). This resonates the cases of self-initiated expatriates (Bjerregaard 2014; Tharenou and Caulfield 2010) and highly specialized expatriates such as academic researchers (Richardson and McKenna 2003).

Game expats' high passion – but could be also self-exploitative – towards game work with willingness to acquire a broad sense of game production also supports the patterns found in previous case studies on non-migrants (native) game developers (Kultima 2018; Sotamaa and Švelch 2021; Kerr 2011; Švelch 2021).

Overall, the finding indicates the significance of game developers' community and a need for maturity of the game companies' handling of international hiring. Perhaps the game industry's human resource practitioners and hiring managers may further check their candidates' home or previous host countries' culture and use that knowledge to communicate closely.

### **Reference group and social relations: closed within its own borders**

Game jobs are commonly portrayed as highly digitized technical work requiring competence in digital technologies (De Peuter and Young 2019; Harvey 2019; Kerr 2017). But interestingly, the findings suggest that human-to-human factors (e.g., attitudes, personalities, communication style) and being able to culturally fit into the team are important for game expats' work and settlement. This somewhat aligns with ethnographic case studies of “soft” skills in day-to-day hands-on game work experience (Kultima 2018; Pelletier 2022; Whitson 2018). However, the finding also suggests game companies and their hiring decision makers' over-dependency on closed hiring, justified as a “cultural fit” could solidify into its own toxic and homogeneous environment. It also raises concerns about potentially discriminatory work culture, with conflicts between privileged game workers and public voices urging for changes to support marginalized groups in the industry, which already showed in the excerpt below:

*“I'm all for diversity and inclusiveness, and like I would never do anything bad on that side. But then I occasionally feel like it's taken a little bit too far. (...) Unfortunately, there are certain laws in Finland that if you run a bigger company then you need to report the reasons why you didn't hire women. We have all men working as senior (game developers) while a woman is an intern. But still, we needed to explain. It was insane.” (AF)*

I acknowledge the game industry's closed hiring is driven by the vulnerability and unpredictable-ness of the game market, like other highly specialized and competitive industries that are concerned about the potential loss of its high productivity (Guzman and Stanton 2009; Rivera 2012; Schwartz 2018; Koveshnikov, Wechtler, and Dejoux 2014). Most game companies, especially small to medium-scale businesses, need every bit of their resources to deliver their game products (Consalvo and Paul 2018) to compete in this highly competitive global game market (Creus, Clares-Gavilán, and Sánchez-Navarro 2020); failing to quickly form a “cultural fit” team can escalate into a situation that would devastate the game's business. Therefore, could be that the term “cultural fit” is more coming from the industry's fear towards failed social dynamics in a highly collaborative and risky processes of making cultural commodity of games.

Closed hiring justified as “cultural fit” narrows the room for individuals' process of cultural adjustment upon migration, forcing game expats to fit promptly into the pipeline regardless of their cultural background or experiences from previous countries. What is also concerning is the bilateral condition of this pattern. Game expats were generally eager to be become fit themselves quickly, as if game development work adaptation *should* happen seamlessly and promptly. This was because prompt adaptation leads to more secured employment and immigration status. Adapting quickly also meant the ease of cumbersome process to relocate again, or to quickly

leave again before committing too much in the host country that could hinder their game career. However, comparative studies have already reported the significant differences in the culture of game development between the regions and firms (Sotamaa 2021; Šisler, Švelch, and Šlerka 2017). Thus, game work migration requires a lengthy process of cultural adjustments just like any other specialized professions out there in the world (Shaffer et al. 2012; Caligiuri and Lazarova 2002; Koveshnikov, Wechtler, and Dejoux 2014). Nonetheless, game expats seek to fulfill this unachievable expectation: *to be already fit or leave*. The conflict between misleading expectations versus the reality of game work migration increases the risk of game developers failing to adequately prepare against unexpected cultural encounters and stress. The action of closed hiring, therefore, could further lead to game expats' individualization or internalization of the cultural encounters that they face.

Diversity that is lost for the overweighing closed hiring and short cut of resources is also a threat to the companies in the long run. Game companies and hiring actors struggle to find adequate talents because there are, realistically, never enough *already* cultural-fit game workers in the world. Therefore, there should be a balanced ways to recruit internationals in the game industry. I further call for individuals, industry, and institutions to act together to facilitate on-boarding training programs and learning channels that could *build* culturally fitting teams. Perhaps a trans-local network of regional communities and exchange of culture (e.g., social gatherings, exchange events, hackathon, and game jams) may also help potential game expats to be exposed, prepared, and become familiar with the game work practices and culture of a potential host country before relocation. Moreover, from a pedagogical standpoint, game education curricula may further emphasize soft skills and cultural awareness. For example, exploring various game production and local work cultures across the world through institutional collaborations (e.g., student camps, study exchange, cross-cultural jams). Such efforts will help future game developers to become aware and be competent in this ever-diversifying workspace.

## LIMITATIONS AND FUTURE WORK

At the beginning of the research design, I did not consider including questions about the participant's family or relationship status in the interview guideline as it was deemed irrelevant at the time. However, participants were actively describing their family's livelihood throughout the interview without being asked. From there I realized how the well-being of expatriates is closely associated with the well-being of their family members (Dyer-Witthford and De Peuter 2006; Koveshnikov, Wechtler, and Dejoux 2014), which should be further studied by future research. Another limitation is the over-represented aspects of the data sample, with a significantly higher ratio of male participants (n=25) than female participants (n=4), despite the interviewees being all recruited voluntarily. The amount of representation of a gender in this study is thus not enough to expose the potential multitude of expatriate experiences tied to gender. It could be that male-dominant industrial narratives might have discouraged people who identify with other genders from participating in this study. Thus, I am incredibly grateful for all female participants who decided to act by joining this study and hope my future research can ensure everyone feels safe in having their voice heard. I also acknowledge that the research relies on self-reported cases that only offer a snapshot of the condition of game expats, and thus cannot be regarded as representing the entire game expats group. Perhaps a longitudinal research approach will enlighten us with further findings and more in-depth views on the long-term effect of game work migration.

## CONCLUSION

As the game industry expands globally, so has the significance of the international workforce in game production. But the condition of game work is divided with rising cases of boundaryless game work. Coming from this notion, as Weststar (2015) pointed out, the game developer's OC is where the game workers find mental and career support, channel of shared identity and values.

This research explored the patterns of migration experience of game expats based on four main dimensions of OC: *boundaries*, *social identity*, *reference group*, and *social relations*. The findings showed that the game developers' community connects individuals beyond the geographical border while acting as the main recruitment channel for game work recruitment in the emerging game industrial hotspot. In a nutshell, game expats are frequently introduced to jobs while connected through other members of the community. Game expats also share a tendency for career enhancement that regards migration as an opportunity to gain a broader knowledge of the game production process. The participants' relocation experience revealed that the members of the game developer community offer comfort and thus correspond positively to the game expats' migration intention, even more so than the game companies' hiring actors and their current practices. Furthermore, the findings also showed that game production work heavily involves various human-to-human interactions (e.g., attitudes, communication, interpretations of work practices). Here, game developers tend to prefer to work with people familiar with their collective values, beliefs, norms, and interpretations of game practices – calling the ones that fit within the norm a “cultural fit.”

For game expats, becoming a “cultural fit” could lead to satisfying work conditions and more stable legal residency in the host country. However, it appears that game industry actors tend to dependent on closed hiring as the way to find candidates that are *already* culturally fitting (e.g., hiring through personal network of former co-workers, friends). This limits the company's talent pool, with game expats without cultural proximity, lack of experience of the organization's culture (i.e., junior game developers), or those representing a gender minority in the male-dominant game workspace facing greater challenges upon migration. Such implicit expectations of quick and seamless integration have a higher chance of game expats' stress of migration being internalized and neglected – forcing either to be *already* culturally fitting, or to leave.

Therefore, I would like to highlight the importance of industrial and societal collaborations as an ecosystem that could benefit the actors of the game industry in the long run. A trans-local network of game developer communities may help game developers exchange diverse cultural norms and values of game development practices worldwide, which will help future game expats prepare for their migration. Game education institutions and teachers may also further emphasize soft skills and cultural understanding within game work to help future game developers to become not just digitally but also culturally competent for diverse workspaces. As such, studying the cases of game expats and the effort to improve the experiences of migrant workers in the game industry will enhance our knowledge to improve possibilities for the local game industry to grow and compete in the globally demanding job markets.

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I would like to thank all research participants who supported this research, and Dr. Annakaisa Kultima for the supervision of this research work.

## BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Andresen, Maike, Franziska Bergdolt, and Jil Margenfeld. 2013. "What Distinguishes Self-Initiated Expatriates from Assigned Expatriates and Migrants? A Literature-Based Definition and Differentiation of Terms." In *Self-Initiated Expatriation: Individual, Organizational, and National Perspectives*, edited by Maike Andresen, Akram Al Ariss, and Matthias Walther, 1st ed., 11–41. New York: Routledge.
- Bechky, Beth A. 2003. "Sharing Meaning across Occupational Communities: The Transformation of Understanding on a Production Floor." *Organization Science* 14 (3): 312–30. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/4135139>.
- Bergstrom, Kelly. 2022. "When a Door Becomes a Window: Using Glassdoor to Examine Game Industry Work Cultures." *Information, Communication & Society*, March, 1–16. <https://doi.org/10.1080/1369118X.2022.2048048>.
- Bjerregaard, Toke. 2014. "Engaging Institutions in Global Careers: Highly Skilled Self-Initiated Expatriates' Journeys through a Nordic Welfare State." *European Management Journal* 32 (6): 903–15. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.emj.2014.04.003>.
- Caligiuri, Paula, and Mila Lazarova. 2002. "A Model for the Influence of Social Interaction and Social Support on Female Expatriates' Cross-Cultural Adjustment." *The International Journal of Human Resource Management* 13 (5): 761–72. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09585190210125903>.
- Carmin, Joann, and Deborah B. Balsler. 2002. "Selecting Repertoires of Action in Environmental Movement Organizations: An Interpretive Approach." *Organization & Environment* 15 (4): 365–88. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1086026602238167>.
- Chia, Aleena. 2022. "The Artist and the Automaton in Digital Game Production." *Convergence* 28 (2): 389–412. <https://doi.org/10.1177/13548565221076434>.
- Cohendet, Patrick, and Laurent Simon. 2007. "Playing across the Playground: Paradoxes of Knowledge Creation in the Videogame Firm." *Journal of Organizational Behavior* 28 (5): 587–605. <https://doi.org/10.1002/job.460>.
- Consalvo, Mia, and Christopher A. Paul. 2018. "If You Are Feeling Bold, Ask for \$3': Value Crafting and Indie Game Developers." *Transactions of the Digital Games Research Association* 4 (2). <https://doi.org/10.26503/todigra.v4i2.89>.
- Cote, Amanda C., and Brandon C. Harris. 2021. "The Cruel Optimism of 'Good Crunch': How Game Industry Discourses Perpetuate Unsustainable Labor Practices." *New Media & Society*, May, 14614448211014212. <https://doi.org/10.1177/14614448211014213>.
- Coulson, Susan. 2012. "Collaborating in a Competitive World: Musicians' Working Lives and Understandings of Entrepreneurship." *Work, Employment and Society* 26 (2): 246–61. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0950017011432919>.
- Creus, Amalia, Judith Clares-Gavilán, and Jordi Sánchez-Navarro. 2020. "What's Your Game? Passion and Precariousness in the Digital Game Industry from a Gameworker's Perspective." *Creative Industries Journal* 13 (3): 196–213. <https://doi.org/10.1080/17510694.2019.1685302>.
- De Peuter, Greig, and Chris J. Young. 2019. "Contested Formations of Digital Game Labor." *Television & New Media* 20 (8): 747–55. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1527476419851089>.

- Deuze, Mark, Chase Martin, and Christian Allen. 2007. "The Professional Identity of Gameworkers." *Convergence: The International Journal of Research Into New Media Technologies* 13: 335–53. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1354856507081947>.
- Dyer-Witthford, Nick, and Greig De Peuter. 2009. *Games of Empire: Global Capitalism and Video Games*. University of Minnesota Press.
- . 2021. "Postscript: Gaming While Empire Burns." *Games and Culture* 16 (3): 371–80. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1555412020954998>.
- Dyer-Witthford, Nick, and Greig De Peuter. 2006. "'EA Spouse' and the Crisis of Video Game Labour: Enjoyment, Exclusion, Exploitation, Exodus." *Canadian Journal of Communication* 31 (3): 599–617. <https://doi.org/10.22230/cjc.2006v31n3a1771>.
- Edholm, Henrik, Mikaela Lidström, Jan-Philipp Steghöfer, and Håkan Burden. 2017. "Crunch Time: The Reasons and Effects of Unpaid Overtime in the Games Industry." In *2017 IEEE/ACM 39th International Conference on Software Engineering: Software Engineering in Practice Track (ICSE-SEIP)*, 43–52. <https://doi.org/10.1109/ICSE-SEIP.2017.18>.
- Foxman, Maxwell. 2019. "United We Stand: Platforms, Tools and Innovation With the Unity Game Engine." *Social Media + Society* 5 (4): 2056305119880177. <https://doi.org/10.1177/2056305119880177>.
- GDACZ. 2022. "Czech Games Industry Study: Study Findings Infographics." CR2022. Czech Republic: Czech Game Developers Association (GDACZ).
- Grigoreanu, Valentina, Roland Fernandez, Kori Inkpen, and George Robertson. 2009. "What Designers Want: Needs of Interactive Application Designers." In *2009 IEEE Symposium on Visual Languages and Human-Centric Computing (VL/HCC)*, 139–46. <https://doi.org/10.1109/VLHCC.2009.5295277>.
- Guzman, Indira R., and Jeffrey M. Stanton. 2009. "IT Occupational Culture: The Cultural Fit and Commitment of New Information Technologists." *Information Technology & People* 22 (2): 157–87. <https://doi.org/10.1108/09593840910962212>.
- Hamilton, William A., Oliver Garretson, and Andruid Kerne. 2014. "Streaming on Twitch: Fostering Participatory Communities of Play within Live Mixed Media." In *Proceedings of the SIGCHI Conference on Human Factors in Computing Systems*, 1315–24. CHI '14. New York, NY, USA: Association for Computing Machinery. <https://doi.org/10.1145/2556288.2557048>.
- Harvey, Alison. 2019. "Becoming Gamesworkers: Diversity, Higher Education, and the Future of the Game Industry." *Television & New Media* 20 (8): 756–66. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1527476419851080>.
- Hilvert-Bruce, Zorah, James T. Neill, Max Sjöblom, and Juho Hamari. 2018. "Social Motivations of Live-Streaming Viewer Engagement on Twitch." *Computers in Human Behavior* 84: 58–67. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.chb.2018.02.013>.
- Hora, Matthew T. 2020. "Hiring as Cultural Gatekeeping into Occupational Communities: Implications for Higher Education and Student Employability." *Higher Education* 79 (2): 307–24. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10734-019-00411-6>.
- Kerr, Aphra. 2011. "The Culture of Gamework." In *Managing Media Work*, edited by Mark Deuze, 225–36. London: Sage.

- . 2017. *Global Games: Production, Circulation and Policy in the Networked Era*. Taylor & Francis.
- . 2020. “Decoding and Recoding Game Jams and Independent Game-Making Spaces for Diversity and Inclusion.” In *Independent Videogames: Cultures, Networks, Techniques and Politics*, edited by Paolo Ruffino, 29–42. London: Routledge.
- Koveshnikov, Alexei, Heidi Wechtler, and Cecile Dejoux. 2014. “Cross-Cultural Adjustment of Expatriates: The Role of Emotional Intelligence and Gender.” *Journal of World Business* 49 (3): 362–71. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jwb.2013.07.001>.
- Kücklich, Julian. 2005. “Precarious Playbour: Modders and the Digital Games Industry.” *The Fibreculture Journal*, The Fibreculture Journal, , no. 5. <http://five.fibreculturejournal.org/fcj-025-precarius-playbour-modders-and-the-digital-games-industry/>.
- Kultima, Annakaisa. 2009. “Casual Game Design Values.” In *Proceedings of the 13th International MindTrek Conference: Everyday Life in the Ubiquitous Era*, 58–65. MindTrek '09. New York, NY, USA: Association for Computing Machinery. <https://doi.org/10.1145/1621841.1621854>.
- . 2018. “Game Design Praxiology.” Doctoral dissertation, Tampere University. <https://trepo.tuni.fi/handle/10024/103315>.
- Kultima, Annakaisa, and Kati Alha. 2017. “The Intertwined Role of Play at Game Studios: An Examination of Office Play Strategies.” In *Proceedings of the 21st International Academic Mindtrek Conference*, 45–53. AcademicMindtrek '17. New York, NY, USA: Association for Computing Machinery. <https://doi.org/10.1145/3131085.3131115>.
- Kultima, Annakaisa, and Alyea Sandovar. 2016. “Game Design Values.” In *Proceedings of the 20th International Academic Mindtrek Conference*, 350–57. AcademicMindtrek '16. Tampere, Finland: Association for Computing Machinery. <https://doi.org/10.1145/2994310.2994362>.
- Kumar, Shruti, Eva Kwan, Johanna Weststar, and Trevor Coppins. 2022. “IGDA Developers Satisfaction Survey 2021 - Diversity in the Game Industry Report.” IGDA International Gaem Developers Association. <https://igda.org/dss/>.
- Lee, Sangkyu. 2018. “How do Digital Creative Workers Cope with Precarity - A Research on Korean Game Developers.” Seoul, South Korea: Seoul National University, Department of Communication. <https://s-space.snu.ac.kr/handle/10371/143378>.
- Lee-Ross, Darren. 2008. “Occupational Communities and Cruise Tourism: Testing a Theory.” *Journal of Management Development* 27 (5): 467–79. <https://doi.org/10.1108/02621710810871790>.
- Lehtonen, Miikka J., Antti Ainamo, and J. Tuomas Harviainen. 2020. “The Four Faces of Creative Industries: Visualising the Game Industry Ecosystem in Helsinki and Tokyo.” *Industry and Innovation* 27 (9): 1062–87. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13662716.2019.1676704>.
- Lopez-Fernandez, Olatz, A. Jess Williams, Mark D. Griffiths, and Daria J. Kuss. 2019. “Female Gaming, Gaming Addiction, and the Role of Women Within Gaming Culture: A Narrative Literature Review.” *Frontiers in Psychiatry* 10. <https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsy.2019.00454>.



- Neogames. 2020. “Pelialan Koulutuksesta Vuosina 2016-2019 Valmistuneiden Tai Opintonsa Eskeyttäneiden Työllistyminen.” Finland: Neogames. <https://neogames.fi/wp-content/uploads/2020/09/TyollistyminenPelialalla.pdf>.
- . 2023. “The Game Industry of Finland Report 2022.” Finland: Neogames. <https://toolbox.finland.fi/life-society/the-game-industry-of-finland-report-2022/>.
- Nicoll, Benjamin, and Brendan Keogh. 2019. “Workflow: Unity’s Coordination of Individualized Labour Processes.” In *The Unity Game Engine and the Circuits of Cultural Software*, edited by Benjamin Nicoll and Brendan Keogh, 47–61. Cham: Springer International Publishing.
- Nieborg, David, Thomas Poell, and Mark Deuze. 2019. “The Platformization of Making Media.” In *Making Media*, 85–96. Amsterdam University Press. <https://doi.org/10.1515/9789048540150-006>.
- O’Donnell, Casey. 2020. “Studio Studies Theory, Method, and Practice.” In *Independent Videogames: Cultures, Networks, Techniques and Politics*. Routledge. [10.4324/9780367336219-12](https://doi.org/10.4324/9780367336219-12).
- Ozimek, Anna M. 2019. “Outsourcing Digital Game Production: The Case of Polish Testers.” *Television & New Media* 20 (8): 824–35. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1527476419851088>.
- Park, Solip. 2021. “Migrated/Ing Game Work: A Case Study of Korean Game Expats in Finland.” In *Proceedings of the 5th International GamiFIN Conference*, 170–79. Levi, Finland. <http://ceur-ws.org/Vol-2883/>.
- Park, Solip, Annakaisa Kultima, Miikka J. Lehtonen, and Jeanine Krath. 2022. “Everywhere but Nowhere: Development Experiences of the International Game Developers in Finland during the Covid-19 Pandemic and Remote Work.” *Proceedings of the ACM on Human-Computer Interaction* 6 (CHI PLAY): 233:1-233:14. <https://doi.org/10.1145/3549496>.
- Parker, Felan, and Jennifer Jenson. 2017. “Canadian Indie Games Between the Global and the Local.” *Canadian Journal of Communication* 42 (5). <https://doi.org/10.22230/cjc.2017v4n5a3229>.
- Pelletier, Caroline. 2022. “Charming Work: An Ethnography of an Indie Game Studio.” *Convergence* 28 (2): 561–78. <https://doi.org/10.1177/13548565211072636>.
- Perks, Matthew E, Felan Parker, Jennifer R. Whitson, Bart Simon, Gabrielle Lavenir, Ceyda Yolgörmez, Pierson Browne, and Brian Schram. 2019. “Autonomy, Integration, and the Work of Cultural Intermediation in Indie Games.” *Media Industries Journal* 6 (2). <https://doi.org/10.3998/mij.15031809.0006.202>.
- Peticca-Harris, Amanda, Johanna Weststar, and Steve McKenna. 2015. “The Perils of Project-Based Work: Attempting Resistance to Extreme Work Practices in Video Game Development.” *Organization* 22 (4): 570–87. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1350508415572509>.
- Richardson, Julia, and Steve McKenna. 2003. “International Experience and Academic Careers: What Do Academics Have to Say?” *Personnel Review* 32 (6): 774–95. <https://doi.org/10.1108/00483480310498710>.
- Rivera, Lauren A. 2012. “Hiring as Cultural Matching: The Case of Elite Professional Service Firms.” *American Sociological Review* 77 (6): 999–1022. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0003122412463213>.

- Ruffino, Paolo. 2022. "Workers' Visibility and Union Organizing in the UK Videogames Industry." *Critical Studies in Media Communication* 39 (1): 15–28. <https://doi.org/10.1080/15295036.2021.1985157>.
- Ruffino, Paolo, and Jamie Woodcock. 2021. "Game Workers and the Empire: Unionisation in the UK Video Game Industry." *Games and Culture* 16 (3): 317–28. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1555412020947096>.
- Salaman, Graeme. 1971. "Some Sociological Determinants of Occupational Communities." *The Sociological Review* 19 (1): 53–77. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-954X.1971.tb00619.x>.
- . 1974. *Community and Occupation: An Exploration of Work/Leisure Relationships*. 1st ed. 4. Cambridge University Press.
- Salisbury, John H, and Tom Cole. 2016. "Grounded Theory in Games Research: Making the Case and Exploring the Options." In *In Proceedings of 1st International Joint Conference of DiGRA and FDG*. Dundee, Scotland: Digital Games Research Association and Society for the Advancement of the Science of Digital Games.
- Schwartz, David. 2018. "Embedded in the Crowd: Creative Freelancers, Crowdsourced Work, and Occupational Community." *Work and Occupations* 45 (3): 247–82. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0730888418762263>.
- Shaffer, Margaret A., Maria L. Kraimer, Yu-Ping Chen, and Mark C. Bolino. 2012. "Choices, Challenges, and Career Consequences of Global Work Experiences: A Review and Future Agenda." *Journal of Management* 38 (4): 1282–1327. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0149206312441834>.
- Šisler, Vít, Jaroslav Švelch, and Josef Šlerka. 2017. "Video Games and the Asymmetry of Global Cultural Flows: The Game Industry and Game Culture in Iran and the Czech Republic." *International Journal of Communication* 11 (0): 23.
- Sotamaa, Olli. 2021. "Studying Game Development Cultures." *Games and Culture*, March. <https://doi.org/10.1177/15554120211005242>.
- Sotamaa, Olli, and Jan Švelch, eds. 2021. *Game Production Studies*. 1st ed. Amsterdam University Press.
- Srnicek, Nick, and Alex Williams. 2016. *Inventing the Future: Postcapitalism and a World Without Work*. Verso Books.
- Švelch, Jan. 2021. "Developer Credit: Para-Industrial Hierarchies of In-Game Credit Attribution in the Video Game Industry." *Games and Culture*, July, 15554120211034408. <https://doi.org/10.1177/15554120211034408>.
- Švelch, Jan, and Jaroslav Švelch. 2020. "'Definitive Playthrough': Behind-the-Scenes Narratives in Let's Plays and Streaming Content by Video Game Voice Actors." *New Media & Society*, November, 1461444820971778. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1461444820971778>.
- Taylor, Mark. 2022. "UK Games Industry Census 2022." The UK Interactive Entertainment Association (Ukie). <https://ukie.org.uk/resources/uk-games-industry-census-2022>.
- Terranova, Tiziana. 2000. "Free Labor: Producing Culture for the Digital Economy." *Social Text* 18 (2): 33–58.
- Tharenou, Phyllis, and Natasha Caulfield. 2010. "Will I Stay or Will I Go? Explaining Repatriation by Self-Initiated Expatriates." *Academy of*

- Toren, Nina. 1976. "Return to Zion: Characteristics and Motivations of Returning Emigrants." *Social Forces* 54 (3): 546–58. <https://doi.org/10.2307/2576281>.
- Törhönen, Maria, Lobna Hassan, Max Sjöblom, and Juho Hamari. 2019. "Play, Playbour or Labour? The Relationships between Perception of Occupational Activity and Outcomes among Streamers and YouTubers." *Hawaii International Conference on System Sciences 2019 (HICSS-52)*, January. [https://aisel.aisnet.org/hicss-52/dsm/live\\_streaming\\_services/4](https://aisel.aisnet.org/hicss-52/dsm/live_streaming_services/4).
- Van Maanen, John. 2010. "Identity Work and Control in Occupational Communities." In *Van Maanen*. Cambridge University Press. <https://dspace.mit.edu/handle/1721.1/69852>.
- Van Maanen, John, and Stephen R. Barley. 1982. "Occupational Communities: Culture and Control in Organizations." ADA122826. Cambridge, MA: Alfred P Sloan School of Management.
- Weststar, Johanna. 2015. "Understanding Video Game Developers as an Occupational Community." *Information, Communication & Society* 18 (10): 1238–52. <https://doi.org/10.1080/1369118X.2015.1036094>.
- Weststar, Johanna, and Louis-Étienne Dubois. 2022. "From Crunch to Grind: Adopting Servitization in Project-Based Creative Work." *Work, Employment and Society*, February, 09500170211061228. <https://doi.org/10.1177/09500170211061228>.
- Weststar, Johanna, Eva Kwan, and Shruti Kumar. 2020. "IGDA Developer Satisfaction Survey 2019." International Game Developers Association (IGDA). <https://igda.org/resources-archive/developer-satisfaction-survey-summary-report-2019/>.
- Whitson, Jennifer R. 2018. "What Can We Learn From Studio Studies Ethnographies?: A 'Messy' Account of Game Development Materiality, Learning, and Expertise." *Games and Culture* 15 (3): 266–88. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1555412018783320>.
- . 2019. "The New Spirit of Capitalism in the Game Industry." *Television & New Media* 20 (8): 789–801. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1527476419851086>.
- Wimmer, Jeffrey, and Tatiana Sitnikova. 2011. "The Professional Identity of Gameworkers Revisited. A Qualitative Inquiry on the Case Study of German Professionals." In *DiGRA '11 - Proceedings of the 2011 DiGRA International Conference: Think Design Play*. Vol. 6. DiGRA 2011. Utrecht, The Netherlands: Digital Games Research Association 2019.
- Young, Chris. 2021. "Unity Production: Capturing the Everyday Game Maker Market." In *Game Production Studies*, 141–58. Amsterdam University Press. <https://doi.org/10.1515/9789048551736-009>.
- Zeiler, Xenia, and Souvik Mukherjee. 2021. "Video Game Development in India: A Cultural and Creative Industry Embracing Regional Cultural Heritage(s)." *Games and Culture*, September, 15554120211045144. <https://doi.org/10.1177/15554120211045143>.

## ENDNOTES

<sup>1</sup> Play Finland (<https://www.facebook.com/groups/23186771856>), We in Games Finland (<https://www.facebook.com/groups/136739879781246>), and International Working Women of Finland (<https://www.facebook.com/groups/348015526109949>).

<sup>2</sup> <https://zoom.us/>

<sup>3</sup> Open Science Framework link of the project:

[https://osf.io/e7rg2/?view\\_only=0425dca05bca49a5a144b0a66309194e](https://osf.io/e7rg2/?view_only=0425dca05bca49a5a144b0a66309194e)