Evolution and Tensions in Gaming Communities

Frans Mäyrä, PhD, Professor
Faculty of Communication Sciences, Vice Dean
University of Tampere, Game Research Lab
Centre of Excellence in Game Culture Studies, Director
OUTLINE

- Framework on understanding what ‘community’ is, in general
- What ‘game communities’ are
- What communities do, why they matter
- Bigger picture of game cultures: who plays, what – where dedicated ‘gamer’ practices are situated?
- Range of sociability in gaming, ‘gaming mentalities’
- Future: location-based eSports?
- Hybridity?
- Ambiguity & conflicts?
Community?

- There are many forms and dimensions of sociability
- Many classic social theories view community as fundamental, and essentially good, part of human life
- Debate has focused on how ‘organic’ community is, or should be, in modern societies
- E. Durkheim (1893) criticised romantic notions, and pointed towards freely chosen, voluntary solidarity in modern societies, as contrasted to more ‘mechanical’ belonging in traditional small, location based societies
- But: community based on interest, or choice, lacks the undeniable binding power of community one is born into
True Community?

- Are gaming communities really communities?
- In research, multiple criteria have been set as criteria for ‘true communities’: dense & demanding social ties; involvement & social rituals; small groups; perceptions of group similarity; common beliefs & values (Brint 2001)
- More broadly though, feelings of community can emerge in contexts of interest-based, or activity-based, even imagined & virtual communities
Emergence of Community in/around Gaming

- Since ancient times, games have brought people together, both as game players, as well as audiences.
- In Ancient Greece, more than 40,000 spectators filled the stadium, for the five days of Olympic Games.
- In Rome, Colosseum could hold c. 50,000 – 80,000 spectators for e.g. gladiator games (cf. “Intel Extreme Masters World Championship 2017”, over 173,000 attendees participating live in Katowice, Poland, 46 million unique online viewers).
- Spectacles of physical skill, speed and power dominated the early audience games, as well as conflict, even violence.
- Other kinds of games, e.g. chess, have developed emergent communities – with clubs, rulebooks, increasingly from 18th and 19th centuries onwards (Murray 1913).
Effects of Community?

- Communities seen beneficial for many reasons:
- Permanent social ties are fundamental for our identity and development
- Hobbies, interests, values form complex wholes which contribute to sense of whom we are, and provide sites to develop jointly social agency

- Games and other hobbies are key elements in cultivating social, cultural capital (Bourdieu 1986; 1984)
- Social capital and community seen mostly as positive: reduces risks of harmful behaviours, promotes societal integration, even health and individual wellbeing (Kawachi 1999)
- However, communities also mean boundary creation, exclusion, polarization
Are Games, Play Inclusive?

- **Case Finland:**
  - We have nationally representative, longitudinal data of the Finnish Player Barometer, gathered since 2009.
  - Evidence shows that playing of games is familiar to almost all people in the country: 97% report at least occasional game playing, at least once per month plays 88% of population.
  - Digital games: 75% play sometimes, 60% play at least once per month.

- On other hand, activity and intensity of digital entertainment gaming is much more focused among young people.
  - Among demographic groups over 50 years of age, majority (>50%) do not report at all digital entertainment game playing.
  - Looking at game genres, the most “inclusive” game genre is puzzle games: those ‘casual games’ were most reported game type in all age groups.
### Procentteja

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Kaikista</th>
<th>Naisista</th>
<th>Miehistä</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Pelaaminen ylläpäätään</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Pelaajia</td>
<td>97,4 %</td>
<td>97,2 %</td>
<td>97,4 %</td>
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<tr>
<td>Aktiivisia</td>
<td>87,8 %</td>
<td>84,3 %</td>
<td>91,2 %</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Ei-digitaalinen pelaaminen</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pelaajia</td>
<td>97,0 %</td>
<td>97,2 %</td>
<td>96,8 %</td>
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<tr>
<td>Aktiivisia</td>
<td>81,5 %</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Digitaalinen pelaaminen</strong></td>
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<td></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pelaajia</td>
<td>75,0 %</td>
<td>72,0 %</td>
<td>78,3 %</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Aktiivisia</td>
<td>60,1 %</td>
<td>52,0 %</td>
<td>68,3 %</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Procentteja:  
"Game playing in general"  
"Non-digital game playing"  
"Digital games playing":  

Kaikkia pelaajia vs. Ne, jotka pelaavat vähintään yksi kertaa kuukaudessa ("active players")

Lähetyksen kohdattavuus: 
### Taulukko 9. Viihdepelien pelaamisen aktiivisuus eri ikäryhmissä.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Ikäryhmä</th>
<th>Pelaa päivittäin digitaalista viihdepeliä</th>
<th>Pelaa viikoittain tai useammin digitaalista viihdepeliä</th>
<th>Ei pelaa lainkaan digitaalisia viihdepelejä</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>10–19 v</td>
<td>52,2 %</td>
<td>81,6 %</td>
<td>1,5 %</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20–29 v</td>
<td>31,4 %</td>
<td>56,2 %</td>
<td>8,5 %</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>30–39 v</td>
<td>18,7 %</td>
<td>43,6 %</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>40–49 v</td>
<td>16,1 %</td>
<td>25,8 %</td>
<td>38,7 %</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>50–59 v</td>
<td>8,3 %</td>
<td>17,9 %</td>
<td>56,2 %</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>60–69 v</td>
<td>11,3 %</td>
<td>20,8 %</td>
<td>66,1 %</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>yli 70 v</td>
<td>6,3 %</td>
<td>14,5 %</td>
<td>71,4 %</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age Group</td>
<td>10-19 v</td>
<td>20-29 v</td>
<td>30-39 v</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-----------</td>
<td>---------</td>
<td>---------</td>
<td>---------</td>
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<tr>
<td>1. Pulmapelit</td>
<td>57,0%</td>
<td>42,5%</td>
<td>41,4%</td>
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<tr>
<td>2. Seikkailupelit</td>
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<td>19,9%</td>
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<td>3. Urheilupelit</td>
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<td>30,9%</td>
<td>18,6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Ammuskelupelit</td>
<td>40,8%</td>
<td>30,5%</td>
<td>17,5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Toimintapeli</td>
<td>39,8%</td>
<td>27,4%</td>
<td>16,6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Ajopeli</td>
<td>38,2%</td>
<td>22,4%</td>
<td>15,3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. Simulaatiopeli</td>
<td>37,2%</td>
<td>20,9%</td>
<td>13,8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. Muut moninpelin</td>
<td>27,5%</td>
<td>19,6%</td>
<td>13,3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9. Musiikki- ja seurapeli</td>
<td>24,6%</td>
<td>19,4%</td>
<td>11,9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10. Roolipelit</td>
<td>16,6%</td>
<td>18,0%</td>
<td>9,4%</td>
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<tr>
<td>11. Nettiroolipelit</td>
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<td>14,3%</td>
<td>8,8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12. Opetuspeli</td>
<td>12,4%</td>
<td>11,8%</td>
<td>3,6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13. Opetuspelit</td>
<td>3,7%</td>
<td>3,3%</td>
<td>3,3%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Percentage of those respondents who report playing a game genre, at least once per month, per age group.
- The most popular games, as actually reported as actively played in Finland (Barometer 2015)
- Casual, mobile game, lottery and betting take top places
- *Call of Duty*, FPS shooter series, *NHL* ice hockey simulation games follow closely
- *Counter Strike* and *League of Legends* are also popular as eSports tournament games, so their rise in 2015 data might signal wider impact of eSports to Finnish game cultures

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Rank</th>
<th>Game Description</th>
<th>Rating</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Pasianssipelit (Spider, Vapaakenttä, ym.)</td>
<td>97</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Candy Crush</td>
<td>64</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Veikkauksen pelit (Lotto, Keno, vedonlyönti, ym.)</td>
<td>62</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Mahjong</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Call of Duty</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>NHL</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Hay Day</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>Counter-Strike</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>Grand Theft Auto</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>Clash of Clans</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>Farm Heroes Saga</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td>FIFA</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13</td>
<td>Angry Birds</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14</td>
<td>Sudoku</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15</td>
<td>League of Legends</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16</td>
<td>The Sims</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Social and A-social Games, Play?

- The agency and form of involvement in game cultures is highly diverse
- According to our interviews, for some players, gameplay is primarily solo, and a-social, by character
- While most popular digital games are single-player games, also they are contextualized in social situations, and embedded in socio-cultural circuits of production, consumption, sharing, uses
- eSports is an example of catalysing effects of digital media and networks: “multiplayer” and “massive single player” developing into massive, games-focused, interactive media experiences

eSports & 9 Gaming Mentalities?

- When asked to state whether games are at the focus of their interests, and part of their identity, only minority seems to agree
- E.g. in our older survey study, c. 8% of Finns considered themselves to be ‘gamers’ (‘peliharrastaja’='game hobbyist'; Kallio, Kaipainen & Mäyrä 2007)
- Even when playing a lot, the status of play and game can be conceived as serving other interests, or even trivial, by the person in question
- “Gamer” discourses and boundary-maintenance of game cultures can work to separate ‘casual’ elements from “game culture proper”
- After surveying 804 people, and conducting 106 individual interviews (plus 2 focus groups), we summarised the findings in a model summarizing a wide range of “gaming mentalities”, where intensity, sociability, and orientation towards games combine differently (Kallio, Mäyrä, Kaipainen 2011)
- eSports and streaming services have a catalysing effect that provides vicarious opportunities for game participation, with casual commitment also at high skill & stakes levels, heightening the social significance of games & play events

Sources:
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Social Mentality Profiles: Intensity</th>
<th>Gaming with Kids</th>
<th>Gaming with Mates</th>
<th>Gaming for Company</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Intensity</strong></td>
<td>Varies</td>
<td>Long</td>
<td>Varies</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Sociability</strong></td>
<td>Occasional</td>
<td>Quite occasional</td>
<td>Occasional</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Intensity</strong></td>
<td>Momentary</td>
<td>Quite momentary</td>
<td>Momentary</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Sociability</strong></td>
<td>LIGHT</td>
<td>MODERATE</td>
<td>LIGHT</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>S/P:</strong></td>
<td>Allied, against, alongside</td>
<td>Against</td>
<td>Allied, against, alongside</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>S/V:</strong></td>
<td>-</td>
<td>S/V: -</td>
<td>S/V: -</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>S/O:</strong></td>
<td>-</td>
<td>S/O: Varies</td>
<td>S/O: -</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Sociability</strong></td>
<td>VERY HIGH</td>
<td>VERY HIGH</td>
<td>VERY HIGH</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>S/P:</strong></td>
<td>-</td>
<td>G/D: PC, Consoles</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>S/V:</strong></td>
<td>-</td>
<td>G/G: Action, Party, Sports, Racing</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>S/O:</strong></td>
<td>-</td>
<td>G/A: Familiarity, accessibility, sociability</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Sociability</strong></td>
<td>ACCESS (DEVICE)</td>
<td>ACCESS (DEVICE)</td>
<td>ACCESS (DEVICE)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>S/P:</strong></td>
<td>Allied, against, alongside</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>The games that the companion plays</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>S/V:</strong></td>
<td>-</td>
<td>G/G: -</td>
<td>G/A: The ones that already exist (PC, Basic Consoles)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>S/O:</strong></td>
<td>-</td>
<td>G/A: -</td>
<td>G/G: -</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Sociability</strong></td>
<td>VERY HIGH</td>
<td>VERY HIGH</td>
<td>VERY HIGH</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
# Casual Mentality Profiles

**Intensity** VARIES  
**Sociability** LOW  
**Games** ACCESS + DEVICE

## Killing Time
- **I/S:** Varies  
- **I/R:** Varies  
- **I/C:** Momentary  
  → **VARIES**
- **S/P:** Lone  
- **S/V:** Lone  
- **S/O:** –  
  → **VERY LOW**
- **G/D:** PC, Solitaire(s), The Sims  
- **G/G:** Puzzle, classic  
- **G/A:** Simple, familiar games, free of charge, easily accessed  
  → **DEVICE + ACCESS**

## Filling Gaps
- **I/S:** Short  
- **I/R:** Occasional (not random)  
- **I/C:** Momentary  
  → **VARIES**
- **S/P:** Lone  
- **S/V:** Lone  
- **S/O:** –  
  → **VERY LOW**
- **G/D:** PC  
- **G/G:** Puzzle, classic  
- **G/A:** Easily learned and accessed, free of charge, short  
  → **DEVICE + ACCESS**

## Relaxing
- **I/S:** Quite long  
- **I/R:** Regular  
- **I/C:** Varies  
  → **VARIES**
- **S/P:** Lone  
- **S/V:** Against, lone  
- **S/O:** –  
  → **LOW**
- **G/D:** PC, Consoles  
- **G/G:** Strategy, money games, racing, sports, action  
- **G/A:** Familiarity, flow  
  → **ACCESS + GENRE**
## COMMITTED MENTALITY PROFILES: Intensity HEAVY Sociability HIGH Games GENRE

### HAVING FUN
- **I/S:** Long
- **I/R:** Regular
- **I/C:** Long-term
- \(\Rightarrow\) HEAVY
- **S/P:** Allied, against, lone
- **S/V:** Allied, against, lone
- **S/O:** Shared
- \(\Rightarrow\) QUITE HIGH
- **G/D:** Any
- **G/G:** Any but puzzle, classic and platform
- **G/A:** Speed, action, scores
- \(\Rightarrow\) GENRE + ACCESS

### ENTERTAINING
- **I/S:** Long
- **I/R:** Occasional
- **I/C:** Momentary to Long-term
- \(\Rightarrow\) QUITE HEAVY
- **S/P:** Allied, against, lone
- **S/V:** Allied, against, lone
- **S/O:** Varies
- \(\Rightarrow\) VARIATES
- **G/D:** Any
- **G/G:** Strategy, role-playing, adventure, simulation, action
- **G/A:** New, av-developed, story
- \(\Rightarrow\) GENRE + ACCESS

### IMMERSING
- **I/S:** Long
- **I/R:** Occasional (not random)
- **I/C:** Long-term
- \(\Rightarrow\) HEAVY
- **S/P:** Lone
- **S/V:** Allied, against, lone
- **S/O:** Strongly shared
- \(\Rightarrow\) VERY HIGH
- **G/D:** Any
- **G/G:** Role-playing, adventure, strategy, simulation
- **G/A:** Story, characters, worlds
- \(\Rightarrow\) GENRE
Pokémon GO as “eSports”? 

- Location-based game like Pokémon GO is interesting to consider in eSports context – but not skill-based enough? 
- As an alternative to “couch athletes”, the participants in PGO act out their “game cultural capital” (Consalvo 2007) in streets, city squares and in parks 
- In Youtube, there are over 10 million PGO themed videos 
- For competitive players, both Pokémon World Championships (Trading Card Game) and Pokémon Video Game Championships (Nintendo 3DS games) are organised 
- But: the massive scale element as an “audience sport” is still missing from Pokémon, while it is successful as a transmedial phenomenon 
- Local communities, with face-to-face components: strong tie, collaboration potentials 
- Need for broader conception of “eSports” (in plural)? Cf. Game Educators’ Network in Finland: promoting the ‘game literacy’, pro-social gaming practices and development of positive game cultures, lessening games related harms
Hybridity: Games + Media + RL = ?

- Cultures of play are becoming more pervasive, games literacy is more mainstream
- There is need for ‘ludic mindsets’ in society and culture permeated by need for creativity
- Simultaneously, trends of technology, business and service design push and promote sharing and networking practices
- The active audiences of late modernity come with enhanced expectations of ‘playable media’: ways of interacting with media content, built in
- Engagement and extended interactions shared in circles of the interested, promote community formation

*Halat Hisar*: Palestinian-Finnish political LARP
Ambiguity in Play, in Gaming Community?

- While ‘community’ was a commercial buzzword in early days of Internet, today related perceptions are more mixed.
- ‘Communities of gamers’ regularly engage in coordinated, aggressive harassment of game developers, journalists, scholars.
- Community provides a safeguard for negative and rejection-based forms of identity formation.
- E.g. in male dominated subcultural context, it is easy to normalize sexist behaviour, and harassment practices.
- Recent survey (Non-Toxic, Helsinki 2018) reported that 70% of young players (15-29 yrs) had been target of hate speech of harassment.

User ‘Trainwrecks’ sexist rant in Twitch (Nov. 2017)
Cultural Conflicts, Togetherness

- **Summary, further questions:**
  - ‘Community’ is not one thing – it is acted out, and interpreted differently in different contexts
  - Focus on highly competitive, professional athlete level eSports communities should not turn attention from ‘casual eSports’: augmenting enjoyment, togetherness and sociability among family and friends with gameplay
  - Priorities set on social exclusion, and inclusion, draw gaming communities into opposite directions?

- Mediated communication environments of male-dominated gaming communities can turn toxic – which should be criticized and seriously addressed
  - Evolution of gaming as culture requires recognition of game-cultural diversity
  - We might like similar-looking things – but we are not the same
  - One person’s fun and games might be harassment and anxiety to another
  - Public, societal support should only be provided to ethical, responsible and sustainable cultural practices