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'CORNERSTONES FOR CREATIVITY AND SUCCESS':

FINNISH GAME CULTURAL ORGANISATIONS' PUBLIC DEI DEFINITIONS AND PRACTICES

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Abstract:

Diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) are value-based principles that are widely utilised in building more socially and culturally sustainable environments that are experienced as welcoming and fair for all – also in diverse game cultural contexts. In this study, we investigate how different types of game cultural organisations in Finland understand DEI in the context of their own activities, and what kind of guidelines and practices they have for promoting DEI. The results are based on a reflexive content analysis on 18 public DEI documents from 11 Finnish game cultural organisations focusing on digital games and gaming. Based on our analysis, it seems that Finnish game cultural organisations view DEI as a pathway for their continuous success as well as for building better game culture for everyone. The examined organisations were actively expressing their commitment to promoting DEI both by working to prevent discrimination and harassment and by utilising practices to build safer and more inclusive environments. However, it was not always clear if these organisations had set specific goals for their DEI work and if they were following their progress in this area. Importantly, our investigation illustrates that a wide range of different types of organisations can contribute to the cultural ecosystem in which digital games are created, consumed, and utilised in various ways, and that inspecting this variety of organisations operating on different sectors of game culture may reveal more widely shared cultural values and practices within this environment.

Keywords: game cultural organisations, game industry, DEI, diversity, equity, inclusion

Introduction

Diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) are widely recognised as central principles in creating more socially and culturally sustainable environments that are experienced as welcoming and fair for all. They are popular concepts in public discourses about different types of social environments, communities, organisations, and institutions, and also studied in similar contexts. Like in most other areas of our culture and society, there are many challenges to DEI in digital game culture, such as cultural structures and practices that enable and normalise discrimination, harassment, and hostile behaviour. While these issues affect everyone engaging with digital games to some extent, they specifically target those in marginalised positions in this cultural field. At the same time, studies on specific DEI strategies and practices in game cultural contexts are still rare. Furthermore, they mostly hail from North America, often excluding nationally and culturally specific contexts from other regions. This study contributes to filling this gap by providing an overview of DEI definitions and practices in game cultural organisations (e.g. companies, public agencies, associations, and nonprofits whose operations focus on digital games) in a Nordic country, Finland.

Finland provides a highly relevant context for studying DEI in game culture for several reasons. While Finland is a fairly small node in the global circuits of game production, Finnish game cultural organisations have been active in developing initiatives to build safety, improve diversity, support marginal groups, and fight harassment. Finland is also regularly mentioned to be the 'promised land' of associations. Freedom of association is guaranteed in the Finnish Constitution, and various associations have played an important role in the development of Finnish civil society (Byrkjeflot, 2024). When compared to the number of citizens (5.6 million), the number of associations (over 100,000) is considered to be very high (PRH, 2024). This is also visible in the sphere of gaming, as we can identify many kinds of associations and nonprofits actively working towards more open-minded and less toxic game cultures – alongside private companies. Indeed, many actors participating in shaping Finnish game culture, and their shared interest in DEI initiatives strengthens DEI efforts as a cultural force on a national level. In this study, we will illustrate this wide range of game cultural operators in Finland and how they all contribute to the construction of the cultural ecosystem in which digital games are created, consumed, and utilised in various ways. Our focus is on how these game cultural operators express their values related to DEI and what that communicates about Finland as a game cultural environment.

The specific aim of this study is to describe, based on their public DEI documents, how different types of Finnish game cultural organisations understand DEI in the context of their own activities, and what kind of guidelines and practices they have for promoting DEI. We will respond to three research questions:

RQ1: What types of public DEI documents do Finnish game cultural organisations have?
RQ2: How is DEI defined in these documents?
RQ3: What kind of DEI practices and processes are described in these documents?

While DEI has become a progressively popular yet contested topic globally within recent years, there does not seem to be a universally shared understanding of what DEI really means, especially on a practical level. Because of this, it is becoming increasingly important to explore how DEI is understood and practiced in different national and cultural settings in various sectors. This study contributes to this effort by showing how DEI is understood in Finnish game cultural organisations and by providing examples of what kinds of actions these organisations are taking in their DEI work. We will also critically assess the range and effectiveness of these DEI definitions and measures in relation to the research conducted in this area. Through this investigation, we will depict how independent organisations operating in different sectors of game culture can contribute to a wider cultural value environment through their public communication and how DEI can be seen as a driving force for creating socially sustainable and successful game cultural environments.

Background
Game Cultural Organisations in Finland

Cultural organisations are often conceptualised through a sector-listing approach, including, for example, performing arts, cultural heritage, and industry organisations. Instead of a sectoral listing, one can also argue for a more content-focused definition. Along these lines, Castañer (2014, p. 263) suggests that 'cultural organisation' refers to 'formal organisations (with a legal entity) that preserve and/or provide goods that use, develop, and/or nourish a community's culture and sense of identity, as well as goods that carry emotional content and/or attempt to generate emotions in those who are exposed to them.' Our understanding of game cultural organisations follows this line of thinking. If organisations are generally understood as groups of people gathering around a shared objective, for us, game cultural organisations include companies, public agencies, and associations whose operations focus on games, and their ability to support the building of experiences, identities, and communities. Furthermore, we focus specifically on organisations operating with digital games.

A relatively loose definition is useful for the purposes of this research, as it allows for inclusion of numerous organisations of varying sizes affecting the landscape of game culture. While such international conglomerates like Tencent, Microsoft Gaming, Nintendo, or Epic Games cannot be bypassed when trying to understand how gaming is globally organised, research shows how game cultures are often made up of diverse regional ecosystems and organisations, which are affected by their local contexts (e.g. Chen, 2014; Farmer, 2021; Friman et al., 2023; Grandadam et al., 2012; Keogh, 2019; Kerr, 2021; Sotamaa, 2021).

The Finnish game development industry consists of over 200 game studios (Neogames, 2023), including globally recognised companies such as Supercell, Rovio, Remedy, and Housemarque. The industry is supported and promoted by Neogames, a membership based, non-profit association that promises 'to coordinate and support the growth and development of the Finnish Game Industry and its ecosystem' (Neogames, 2024). Game studios are also supported by Suomen Pelinkehittäjät (The Finnish Game Developers' Association), and individual developers can join IGDA Finland, a local

chapter of International Game Developers' Association. In addition to this, Game Makers of Finland works to support the unionisation and employment conditions of Finnish game industry employees, and We in Games Finland promotes diversity, inclusion, and equity within the industry. Finnish Game Jam is another nonprofit organisation connected to the industry, organising regular game jam events (including the annual Finnish Game Jam in connection to the Global Game Jam) and bringing game jam enthusiasts together.

Esports in Finland is coordinated by the Finnish Esports Federation SEUL, a membership-based non-profit association supervising and supporting the growth of the Finnish esports ecosystem through advocacy and best practices development (SEUL, 2020). SEUL has around 60 member organisations, categorised as event organisations, associations, educational institutions, and game and player organisations. Finnish esports organisations are mainly funded by sponsorships and youth culture subsidies. Local esports tournaments are usually organised by non-profit hobby organisations (e.g. Smash Finland ry, Helsinki FGC ry, Finnish Sim Racing Association ry), either as stand-alone events or as part of larger game festivals such as Assembly, Vectorama, Lantrek, and Stage142 that are organised annually in different parts of Finland. These festivals have historically formed around the demo scene or LAN parties (Jørgensen et al., 2017; Tyni & Sotamaa, 2014), from where some of them have slowly expanded and diversified their content to include esports, cosplay, music shows, game jams, seminars, and exhibition booths (Tyni & Sotamaa, 2014).

Game culture is also visible in other areas of Finnish mainstream society, such as educational institutions, libraries, youth work, and cultural heritage institutions (Friman et al., 2022), as well as many (often publicly funded) projects that deal with specific game cultural topics. As described here, the game cultural ecosystem in Finland contains a great variety of different types of operators, each contributing to the wider national game cultural environment.

DEI Challenges and Solutions in Digital Game Culture

Games are obviously neither the only, nor the first, field that has recognised the importance of DEI measures. In workplaces, diversity has been defined as heterogeneity among employees (Chaudry, 2023). In the broadest sense, diversity includes various dimensions of human identity ranging from race, ethnicity, colour, nationality, religion, and geographic origin to age, gender, sexual orientation, socio-economic status, and various other factors (Harrison-Bernard et al., 2020). Compared to diversity, equity and inclusion are more based on perceptions, feelings, and perceived fairness (Chaudry, 2023). Bowe et al. (2023) suggest that if diversity focuses on how the population within an organisation compares to the regional demographics, equity concerns the predictability of outcomes of different DEI programmes, and inclusion deals with the experience of being comfortable, respected, and empowered within an organisation. Following this line of thinking, the key components of DEI can also be defined in hierarchical terms, so that diversity is a requirement for equity and inclusion to occur.

Issues of discrimination and harassment in digital game culture are well documented in research literature. There is still a strong cultural stereotype of an 'ideal' participant in this cultural sphere, imagined as a White, young, heterosexual, cisgender, able-bodied man. Those who do not reflect this stereotype are marginalised in different ways. Numerous studies report on discrimination, harassment, and violence based on gender, sexual orientation, and racial or ethnic background in digital gaming environments (e.g. Crothers et al., 2024; Richard, 2021; Tomlinson, 2024). Players with disabilities encounter significant obstacles in terms of accessibility and representation alike (Ochsner & Spöhrer, 2023). Older gamers are faced with ageist, ableist, and sexist expectations related to 'gamers' and culturally acceptable game preferences and playstyles (Lavenir, 2022). This cultural stereotype of a digital game culture participant is also reflected in the game industry. As Cole and Zammit (2020, p. ix) point out, in 'Western countries, the games industry is homogenous: predominantly white, cisgender, male, heterosexual, able-bodied, and neuro-typical,' and that 'people from marginalised groups are not being adequately represented in game content or the game studios producing that content,' leading to an overall lack of diversity in the industry as well as in the cultural products that this industry creates, i.e. games.

To truly create systematic change, we need to change the system. This transformation begins in companies, organisations, and communities that are willing to start new initiatives to promote DEI in their operations. Chee et al. (2022) argue that although the value of DEI in game culture and game development has been demonstrated from multiple perspectives in the past two decades, there have not yet been significant, lasting structural changes. They also point out that early DEI initiatives have been known to fail due to disbelief in their functionality by participants or for being of low priority within the organisations. Studies that document existing good practices aiming to promote DEI in game cultural environments as well as research-based recommendations written for this purpose are thus important.

Cole and Zammit (2020) note that while game companies need to put effort into increasing diversity and being more inclusive, concrete strategies for making this happen are rare and often unclear. However, they list some well-known public examples, such as Blizzard's 'global diversity and inclusion initiative' launched in 2017, Microsoft's 'Gaming for Everyone' initiative, and EA Games' 'diversity and inclusion framework.' In their study on designing external communication measures to increase women's participation in the game industry, analysing practices of one German game company, Ahmadi et al. (2020) found that addressing struggles and stereotypes – in terms of both game culture and gender – and communicating in a gender-sensitive manner, making role models visible, focusing recruitment on women in particular, and selecting the right communication channels carefully, while also focusing on working towards the long-term goals, are key elements in successful industry communication inclusive to women. It is worth noting, however, that diverse hiring alone is not sufficient, but companies need to be willing to adjust their culture to accommodate diverse employees – and to also make their promotion practices inclusive and practice pay equity. Other previously documented measures for increasing DEI in game companies include non-discrimination policies, sexual harassment

policies, and equal opportunity hiring policies, as well as internal training initiatives (Cole & Zammit, 2020).

Cole and Zammit (2020, p. 51) recommend that 'Every organisation should have a mission statement, code of conduct, and accessibility action plan that align with the diverse and inclusive values of the company.' They also suggest that companies should offer diversity training and mentoring, facilitate informal communities for marginalised employees, offer opportunities for compensated consultant positions on topics related to making the company and its products more inclusive, and practice inclusive communication – both internally and externally. It is also important for game companies to regularly assess and reflect, also with measurable metrics, where they currently stand in terms of their DEI goals.

Several studies have focused on promoting DEI in esports and gaming communities in the context of higher education in North America where esports teams and gaming clubs have been adopted in collegial institutions in a similar way than traditional sports teams and clubs. In their report on diversity measures implemented and planned in the University of California, Irvine's (UCI) esports programme, Amazan-Hall et al. (2018) describe their strategy for being a leader in diversity and inclusion in collegiate esports. For this purpose, they have founded a Diversity and Inclusion in Esports Task Force on campus, initiating many practices for increasing inclusion and diversity within the programme. These include an actively communicated and systematically enforced code of conduct, diverse staff and player recruitment, diversity and inclusion trainings for staff and players, events aiming to invite and include people previously unfamiliar with esports, panel

discussions on diversity and inclusion topics in esports, outreach programmes for marginalised participant groups, shared housing for students who enjoy gaming, and equipment donations to underserved schools and communities in the region.

There are also research-based recommendations for DEI measures in game and esports organisations. These emphasise the importance of creating explicit, clearly communicated policies and standards for expected behaviour alongside clear processes for reporting and real repercussions for toxic behaviour as well as having active practices for putting these policies and standards into practice in their everyday activities, for example through active moderation of all media channels (Crothers et al., 2024; Friman et al., 2023; Pauketat, 2022). Another important aspect of promoting DEI in all organisations and companies is inclusive communication and recruitment strategies that focus on inclusion and diversity (Friman et al., 2023; Pauketat, 2022).

Methodology

Our research material includes 18 public DEI documents from 11 Finnish game cultural organisations focusing on digital gaming, written in Finnish or English (see Table 1 in Findings). The documents are publicly available on the organisations' websites and consist of any content (i.e. a webpage or an attached file) including material related to DEI. The organisations include game companies (4 companies, 7 documents), industry organisations (3 organisations, 5 documents), gaming event organisations (2 organisations, 3 documents), an esports organisation (1 organisation, 2 documents), and a public organisation with gaming-related activities (1

organisation, 1 document). After producing an initial list of documents, we also shared the list with our research project collaborators, i.e. representatives of certain Finnish game cultural organisations, to identify potential gaps in the data, and supplemented the list based on this feedback. Our material includes the biggest, most well-known organisations from different sectors of Finnish game culture, many of whom are specifically known for their impactful DEI work. Due to its content and selection method, we believe that this material represents well the different types of organisations working in different sectors of Finnish game culture.

We analysed document versions that were online on 6 November 2024 using reflexive qualitative content analysis (RCA), utilising Atlas.ti software. RCA is a method focused on categorising the meanings explicitly communicated in the data, guided by pre-set research questions (Nicmanis, 2024). In RCA, the analysis process is systematic and iterative, following pre-defined stages. Importantly, RCA utilises reflexivity as an analytical resource, requiring the researchers to acknowledge the impact of their subjective choices throughout the analysis process. This reflexivity was particularly important here as several of the authors had previously collaborated with the organisations represented in the data. In addition, author 2 had participated in producing D2, and author 4 had participated in producing D4, D5, D17, and D18 (see table 1 in Findings). In practice, this reflexivity was practiced both on an individual level during the coding process, as individual coders considered their personal positionality and perspectives in relation to the material, as well as in the discussions within the research team during the iterative analysis process.

After producing the material and familiarising ourselves with it, we began the iterative coding process following the researcher-driven coding method of RCA, with authors 2 and 3 first coding all materials independently, guided by the method guide and our research questions. In RCA, codes 'act as containers for recurring or singular pieces of text that are relevant to a research question' and are marked with labels derived from the material analysed (Nicmanis, 2024, p. 4). On this first coding round, the authors created 196 and 434 codes respectively, also creating initial subcategories, i.e. collections of codes with several distinctive features, focusing on different types of document categories, term definitions, roles, practices, and processes. Next, author 4 conducted an integrative coding round, merging these into 327 individual codes and creating the initial main level categories which in RCA act as overarching containers for subcategories and their codes that are grouped together based on the research questions (Nicmanis, 2024). After this, the whole team gathered to discuss and further develop this categorisation in relation to our research questions. Finally, the first author tested and further refined this analysis structure against the original material, after which the full team agreed on this final categorisation and interpretation of the material. In the following section, we will present the results of this iterative analysis process, describing the DEI document types, DEI definitions, and DEI practices and processes we identified in our material.

Findings
DEI Document Types

We analysed a total of 18 documents from 11 different organisations, placing them in four categories (figure 1), one per

Codes of Conduct	Guides	Statements	Strategies

Figure 1 DEI document categories.

document: codes of conduct (7), guides (5), DEI statements (5), and DEI strategies (1). This categorisation and the documents in our material are presented in table 1.

In a previous study focusing on DEI contents on websites of Finnish esports organisations, Friman et al. (2023) identified five types of DEI contents: DEI documents; statements and practices; values and goals; rules and guidelines (e.g. codes of conduct); and activity descriptions. While our categorisation differs from theirs, and our study includes a wider range of different types of organisations, the DEI material types found in these studies were similar, including statements regarding the organisations' values, strategies for improving DEI in the organisations' operations, as well as practical DEI measures and rules. In the following, we will describe the different document categories we identified within our material in more detail.

Codes of conduct are documents that reflect an organisation's principles and values, setting boundaries and expectations for expected and prohibited behaviour accordingly (Calvao, 2016). Six out of seven documents in this category focused on setting guidelines for interactions between humans in certain contexts, i.e. in gaming, game production, industry events, and esports activities. The most extensive document, the Finnish Esports Federation's code of conduct (D12), is adapted from the *Svensk E-sports Code of Conduct*

that is originally produced for esports activities in Sweden. The document aims to provide guidelines for making esports inclusive and safe for everyone. It includes codes of conduct for players and competition organisers, as well as guidelines for event organisers and esports athletes' parents. Assembly's code of conduct (D1) on the other hand is the narrowest of these, consisting of a short section entitled 'Etiquette' within the event's Party guide. The section does not include a detailed code of conduct but rather a general description of desired behaviour, summarised in the end in one bolded sentence: 'Treat others like you'd like them to treat you.'

In general, these codes of conduct forbid certain types of actions and behaviours (e.g. discrimination, harassment, and violence) while encouraging others (e.g. being inclusive and empathetic, and playing fairly) and instructing what to do in case something happens. As such, they speak to – and place responsibility on – participants. For example, gaming event Vectorama's guide for safer space practices (D15) instructs event participants on making their event safe for everyone, highlighting how the event has a zero-tolerance policy against all identity-based harassment and discrimination and describing what to do in case someone encounters harassment or other inappropriate behaviour. Some documents (D3, D5, D18) also communicate clearly what is considered harassment or other type of unwanted behaviour.

Codes of conduct are commonly used in various game cultural environments and recommended as a central tool for preventing discrimination and harassment within these contexts (Friman et al., 2023; Pauketat, 2022). Based on our material, these are commonly in use in the Finnish game

Codes of conduct	Guides	DEI statements	DEI strategies
			Vectorama: Yhdenver-taisuus- ja tasa-arvosu-unnitelma [Equity and Equality Plan] (D16)
Assembly: Etiquette (D1)	City of Helsinki / Non-Toxic Project: The Beginner's Guide to Inclusive Gaming Activities (D2)	Next Games: Company Responsibility (D6)	
Finnish Game Jam: Code of Conduct (D3)	Neogames: Guidelines for Dealing with Harassment Cases at Gaming Events (D4)	Next Games: Culture and Values (D7)	
Neogames: The Finnish Game Industry Code of Conduct (D5)	Rovio: Playbook for Inclusive Game Development and Marketing (D11)	Remedy: Sustainability (D8)	
SEUL: Eettinen ohjeisto [Code of Conduct] (D12)	SEUL & Suomen paralympiakomitea: Elektronisen urheilun esteettömän tapahtuman järjestäjän opas [Guide for Organising an Accessible Esports Event] (D13)	Remedy: Sustainability Topics (D9)	
Supercell: Sustainability Code of Conduct (D14)	We in Games Finland: Best Practices for Creating Diverse Characters (D17)	Rovio: Diversity, Equity and Inclusion (D10)	
Vectorama: Opas – Turvallisempi tila [Guide – Safer Space] (D15)			
We in Games Finland: Code of Conduct (D18)			

Table 1 DEI documents in our research material.

industry, game development, and other game cultural events. Importantly, there were several umbrella organisations that had created and published codes of conduct for their wider community, i.e. the Finnish game industry (D5), Finnish esports (D12), and the Finnish game jam community (D3), to be used widely in their respective frameworks.

Guides were documents that presented clear guidelines for working towards a specific goal. Most of these focused on events and activities. The most extensive and wide-ranging guide document (40 pages long) was the City of Helsinki's Youth Services' Non-Toxic project's *The Beginner's Guide to Inclusive Gaming Activities* (D2). The document focuses on promoting equality in gaming activities from the perspectives of game education, safer space, and communication. It also

includes definitions of central concepts, a glossary of relevant terms, links for additional resources, and templates for documents such as a code of conduct, an equality plan, and a safer space agreement. Another guide document focused on organising activities was the Finnish Esports Federation's and Finnish Paralympic Committee's guide for organising an accessible esports event (D13), focusing on organising events that are physically accessible, including tangible guidelines for different aspects of event organisation.

In the industry context, our material included Neogames Finland's *Guidelines for Dealing with Harassment Cases at Gaming Events* (D4) that includes definitions of sexual harassment in the workplace, presents the idea of a code of conduct (with several industry-related examples), and introduces guidelines for dealing with different types of harassment cases at game events, including a proposal for a procedure for handling them. The importance of having clear procedures for reporting and handling harassment cases has been emphasised in previous studies (Friman et al., 2023; Pauketat, 2022), so it is positive to see a Finnish game industry representative taking an initiative on this. Notably, the creation of this document has been a joint effort of the Finnish game industry harassment task force, including representatives of several organisations: Neogames Finland, IGDA Finland, Finnish Game Jam, Suomen Pelinkehittäjät, and We in Games Finland. There were also two guides focusing on more inclusive game development and marketing, i.e. game company Rovio's *Playbook for Inclusive Game Development and Marketing* (D11), and industry organisation We in Games Finland's *Best Practices for Creating Diverse Characters* (D17). Narrow, stereotypical, and otherwise problematic character representations – also reflected in development

teams with limited diversity – are a known DEI issue within the game industry, and these documents reflect some of the research-based recommendations for improving the situation (Ahmadi et al., 2020; Cole & Zammit, 2020).

While other types of DEI documents have been addressed in earlier research, we did not find previous studies on DEI guides within game cultural contexts. However, there are examples of organisations sharing their own good practices through research, i.e. the report on diversity measures planned and implemented by the University of California, Irvine's (UCI) esports programme (Amazan-Hall et al., 2018). Previous studies have also described how Finnish game industry organisations have been happy to openly share their good practices with one another (Harviainen et al., 2025; Komulainen & Sotamaa, 2020).

DEI statements were documents containing some kind of a statement of the organisation's DEI values or goals – without any specified plan for related action. In practice, these described the company's values, goals, and related achievements through short textual descriptions. For example, regarding diversity and inclusion, Remedy writes that 'We are a safe and welcoming place to work for people with diverse backgrounds' (D8), and Rovio that 'we are committed to weaving diversity, equity and inclusion into how we work and what we make, together with the industry' (D10). While DEI statements are important in terms of communicating an organisation's commitment to promoting DEI, it is also important that these value statements are connected to planned strategies and practical measures (Cole & Zammit, 2020; Friman et al., 2023).

Finally, *DEI strategies* were documents that outlined a specific strategy for promoting DEI, including actions for achieving DEI goals. Only the gaming event Vectorama had an up-to-date document like this on their website, their equity and equality plan (D16). It is worth noting, however, that the Finnish law requires all authorities, education and early childhood education providers, and employers employing more than 30 people to draw an equality plan. As such, the bigger game companies in our study should also have these documents, although not publicly available and thus not included in our material. Majority of the game industry's DEI issues require long-term solutions (Ahmadi et al., 2020). This, in turn, requires long-term goals, organisational strategies, and actions that contribute to carrying out those strategies and achieving goals.

Defining DEI

Searching for DEI definitions, we first coded direct definitions for the terms individually and then together. We noted that while these terms were mentioned quite often, they were rarely defined. Likewise, Friman et al. (2023) found that while Finnish esports organisations had a positive attitude towards DEI and were applying different types of DEI actions, they had not considered what DEI actually means, especially in the context of their own operations. In this study, we did find some definitions for diversity, equity, inclusion, and other related terms, but most of them were from a single document: City of Helsinki's Youth Services' Non-Toxic project's *The Beginner's Guide to Inclusive Gaming Activities* (D2). In other documents, these definitions were mostly indirect, such as Remedy communicating DEI to mean that they are 'a safe and welcoming

Figure 2 DEI definition categories.

place to work for people with diverse backgrounds' (D8). In addition to DEI term definitions, the documents also included descriptions of things preventing it, i.e. DEI challenges. Finally, the materials included DEI framings, i.e. descriptions of how DEI is framed in these operators' activities. We further divided each of these three main categories into two subcategories (figure 2).

DEI terms included definitions for diversity, equity, and inclusion, and these three together. As mentioned before, these were not usually directly defined but rather described indirectly. Regarding diversity, some documents referred to a variety of identity categories: 'We celebrate the diversity of our employees, recognizing that age, color, disability, ethnicity, family or marital status, gender identity or expression, language, national origin, physical and mental ability, political affiliation, race, religion, sexual orientation, and other unique characteristics are what make us stronger as a team' (D11). Equity as an individual term was not defined in the documents, but equality was defined to mean that 'all people are of equal value regardless of their sex, gender, age, skin colour, origin, nationality, language, religion or conviction, opinion, political or trade union activity,

family relationship, disability, health, sexual orientation or other personal characteristic' (D2). This definition follows the Finnish Non-Discrimination Act from 2014 (1325/2014), and two documents (D2 and D15) directly referred to this. Inclusion was defined referring 'to the extent to which e.g. an activity or organisation includes people who might otherwise be excluded or become marginalised' (D2). The documents also used other *related terms* to define and communicate DEI. These included accessibility, antiracism, gender sensitivity, and representation. Overall, the ideas attached to DEI within our materials align with the general idea of diversity, including various dimensions of humanity as well as the experiences of fair, equal, and empowering treatment (Bowe et al., 2023; Chaudry, 2023; Harrison-Bernard et al., 2020).

DEI challenges defined DEI by describing what prevents it. We divided these into ideologies and actions. *Ideologies* included discriminatory ideologies such as cisnormativity, racism, and transphobia. *Actions* included discriminatory and hostile actions such as different forms of discriminatory behaviour and harassment, everyday racism, hate speech, microaggression, tokenism, and toxic behaviour. These challenges were generally addressed at the level of mentioning them, not delving any deeper. Discriminatory attitudes and behaviours within game cultural contexts are well documented in earlier research (Crothers et al., 2024; Lavenir, 2022; Ochsner & Spöhrer, 2023; Richard, 2021; Tomlinson, 2024), and these organisations seemed well aware of them.

DEI framings defined DEI by describing what it means in the context of the organisation's activities. These focused on two perspectives: societal impact and success. In terms of *societal impact*, DEI signified change for the better through political and cultural change. For example, Rovio describes their vision for the societal impact of inclusive game design: 'As developers, players, and enthusiasts, let us embrace this vision of gaming as a space where everyone is welcome and represented, as it is not only important for the industry but for the betterment of society as a whole' (D11). In the same vein, We in Games Finland describes how 'Being the most profitable entertainment industry in the world, 3,5 times more valuable than movies, games have a huge possibility to affect worldviews and either build or break stereotypes' (D17). This significant impact of games was also described potentially leading to validation and empowerment on an individual level: 'Video games and popular culture influence the way we perceive the world in an immense way. Games offers a platform to tell diverse stories and portray characters from all walks of life. When players encounter characters and narratives that reflect their own experiences, it fosters a sense of validation and empowerment' (D11).

At the same time, DEI also meant *success* on various levels, translating to being considered achieved and culturally relevant, but also – and mostly – economic success through improved recruitment due to attracting talent, developing better products, boosting marketing, and attracting a wider audience. As Remedy summarised this perspective, 'diversity, equality, inclusion and wellbeing are the cornerstones for [a game company's] creativity and success' (D8). It is also recognised in research that more diverse organisations tend to enjoy from higher performance levels and financial gains (Cole & Zammit, 2020).

DEI Practices and Processes

Finally, we explored what kind of tangible DEI practices and processes were described in the documents. We divided these into three main categories: administrative practices and procedures; inclusive game design and marketing; and building safe and inclusive environments. We further divided each main category into two subcategories (figure 3).

Figure 3 DEI practice and process categories.

The first category, focusing on administrative practices and procedures, included organisational strategy work and resources as well as good governance practices. *Organisational strategy work and resources* focused on setting organisational DEI goals, creating strategies and guidelines for achieving them, and describing resources that are beneficial in this process. There were some explicit DEI goals in the documents, such as Next Games stating that 'We've made an important and very concrete commitment that no single gender identity make up for more than 49% of the company's employees by 2030' (D6), but these mostly remained at the level of a bit more abstract intentions, such as being 'open to everybody' (D1) or 'committed to keeping our community safe and inclusive' (D3).

The documents included descriptions of collecting data to make informed decisions and having practices to ensure the longevity of DEI information and improvement. For example, Vectorama described that when creating their equity and equality plan, they collected feedback from their event participants and members of their organisation, which allowed them to notice that not everyone knew what to do in case they witness or encounter discrimination in the event, leading
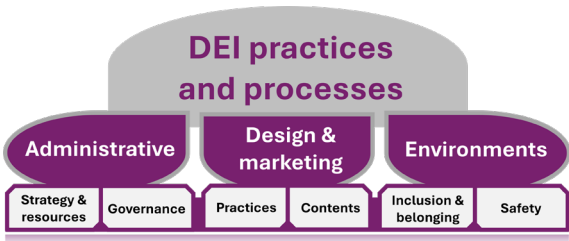
them to create guidelines for these situations (D16). The documents also described utilising internal resources such as recruiting a DEI development team and organising DEI trainings for staff members. For example, Next Games described having 'an active, employee-led and management-sponsored group focusing on diversity, inclusion, and belonging that welcomes employees to participate across the whole company, along with several Employee Resource Groups (ERGs)' (D6). Cole and Zammit (2020, p. 51) describe training initiatives – alongside policy documents – as 'effective methods of encouraging company-wide change that can foster an inclusive culture, and both attract and retain diverse employees.' The importance of allocating sufficient resources for such DEI activities was highlighted in the documents. Non-toxic guide (D2) pointed out how, for example, 'high-quality, inclusive communication requires skill, effort and resources. It is very difficult to carry out quality communication alongside other time-consuming work tasks. An employee carrying out communication should be provided with training and support for the implementation of easy language and accessible communication, visual expression and the consideration of assistive technologies, for example.' In terms of external resources, organisations also described networking and collaboration with

other organisations promoting DEI. For example, the Finnish Esports Federation SEUL notes that collaborating with organisations focused on different aspects of diversity is an effective way of developing events that are inclusive to as wide range of people as possible (D12).

Good governance practices were based in a company environment and focused on legal and fair employment practices, such as supporting wellbeing at work and work-life-balance. For example, Remedy describes how they 'want to ensure mental and physical wellbeing of our employees. We value a healthy work-life balance and ongoing development of good leadership practices' (D8). In this category, the documents also referred to equal pay and recruitment practices, as well as supporting employee rights through not intervening with unionisation. In addition, they described good leadership and governance practices in terms of being transparent, following laws and regulations, and providing whistle-blowing channels. Most of these descriptions originated from Supercell's *Sustainability Code of Conduct* (D14), describing in detail what is expected from themselves and their partners in terms of organisational conduct, e.g. 'Partners are urged to foster inclusive teams and purposefully shape an employee-friendly corporate culture with a sense of belonging to the workforce and community. Learning experiences and tools to enable leaders, managers, and individual contributors to model inclusive leadership are encouraged.'

DEI practices and procedures focused on inclusive game design and marketing included contents related to game design and marketing practices as well as product and marketing contents. Material related to *design and marketing practices*

focused on utilising specific types of development practices, such as user-centric design practices. The documents emphasised the importance of doing thorough research to identify different barriers to diversity and inclusion as well as including experts and representatives of the communities depicted in the game in various ways, from ideation to testing and collecting feedback. For example, Rovio encourages game developers to 'invest time in thorough research to accurately represent diverse characters, cultures, and experiences', to 'seek input from diverse team members, consultants, focus groups, or community members,' and 'prioritize user feedback and involve players with diverse abilities in the playtesting process to identify and address potential accessibility issues' (D11).

In terms of *product and marketing contents*, the documents focused on creating accessible games with diverse contents, e.g. including varied accessibility features but also varied characters and cultural representations while avoiding harmful stereotypes, cultural appropriation, and other forms of discriminatory contents. Here, Rovio encourages game developers to 'strive to present nuanced and multi-dimensional representations that break free from preconceived notions' and 'craft storylines that reflect the experiences and challenges faced by underrepresented communities' (D11). In terms of inclusive marketing, the documents suggested creating campaigns that resonate with different communities through e.g. diverse representation, multi-language materials, using inclusive imagery and language, collaborating with diverse content-creators, and expanding the idea of 'gamers,' for example through showcasing diverse stories and perspectives. It was also emphasised that organisations' products as well

as their public communication (such as marketing) should communicate its DEI values and include participation in e.g. annual theme days and weeks focusing on DEI topics: 'Another good way to promote diversity is to participate in events, campaigns and themed days. For example, participating in a local Pride event may lower the threshold for LGBTQIA+ youth to try out gaming activities by allowing them to learn about the activities in a familiar environment first' (D2). At the same time, they warned about the danger of tokenism instead of truly inclusive and diverse representation.

Contents in the category of building safe and inclusive environments focused on different aspects of building communal inclusion and belonging as well as fostering safety. Practices focused on *building communal inclusion and belonging* emphasised the significance of experienced inclusion. Many documents included statements regarding building inclusive, welcoming, and safe environments. For example, Finnish Game Jam described itself being 'committed to keeping our community safe and inclusive; our events are a celebration of our different backgrounds and experiences making games' (D3). The documents instructed on supporting this goal through practices such as inclusive communication (written, verbal, graphical, and symbolic), introducing low-threshold ways to participate in varied activities, and respecting participants' diverse identities. The Non-Toxic guide summarised practices focused on communication in a checklist aimed at gaming activity organisers (figure 4).

Representation was also highlighted as important: the documents suggested making conscious decisions regarding the diversity of speakers and other performers when producing e.g. game-related events and other contents. For example, the Finnish Esports Federation SEUL encouraged to consider representatives of underrepresented participant groups when choosing experts and hosts for esports competitions to promote diversity (D12). Indeed, role models are seen to be important for encouraging marginalised participant groups' participation in various game cultural environments, including esports and the game industry (Ahmadi et al., 2020; Crothers et al., 2024).

Accessibility was a topic that was present in the materials from different perspectives, including accessible game design. In terms of creating accessible physical spaces, the contents focused on making decisions and arrangements taking into consideration people with different needs by e.g. ensuring accessible pathways for moving in different ways in the space, making sure that the space has accessible toilets and parking, avoiding bright lights and strong fragrances, accommodating people with hearing loss, and allowing accessibility assistants to participate for free. They also included suggestions for including additional accessibility spaces such as quiet rooms and prayer rooms to accommodate various needs. In research, most work on the accessibility of gaming has, so far, focused on gaming devices and game contents rather than physical environments (Ochsner & Spöhrer, 2023).

Contents in this category also focused on *fostering safety*. These mostly included practices and procedures for preventing and processing negative behaviours such as discrimination and harassment. In other words, they focused on fostering safety by preventing unsafe behaviours. The documents

often included a statement of the organisation having a zero-tolerance policy against such behaviour, sometimes listing different forms of unwanted actions. For example, We in Games Finland's *Code of Conduct* includes a long description of unacceptable behaviours, such as different forms of harassment, abuse and intimidation, and inappropriate language (D20).
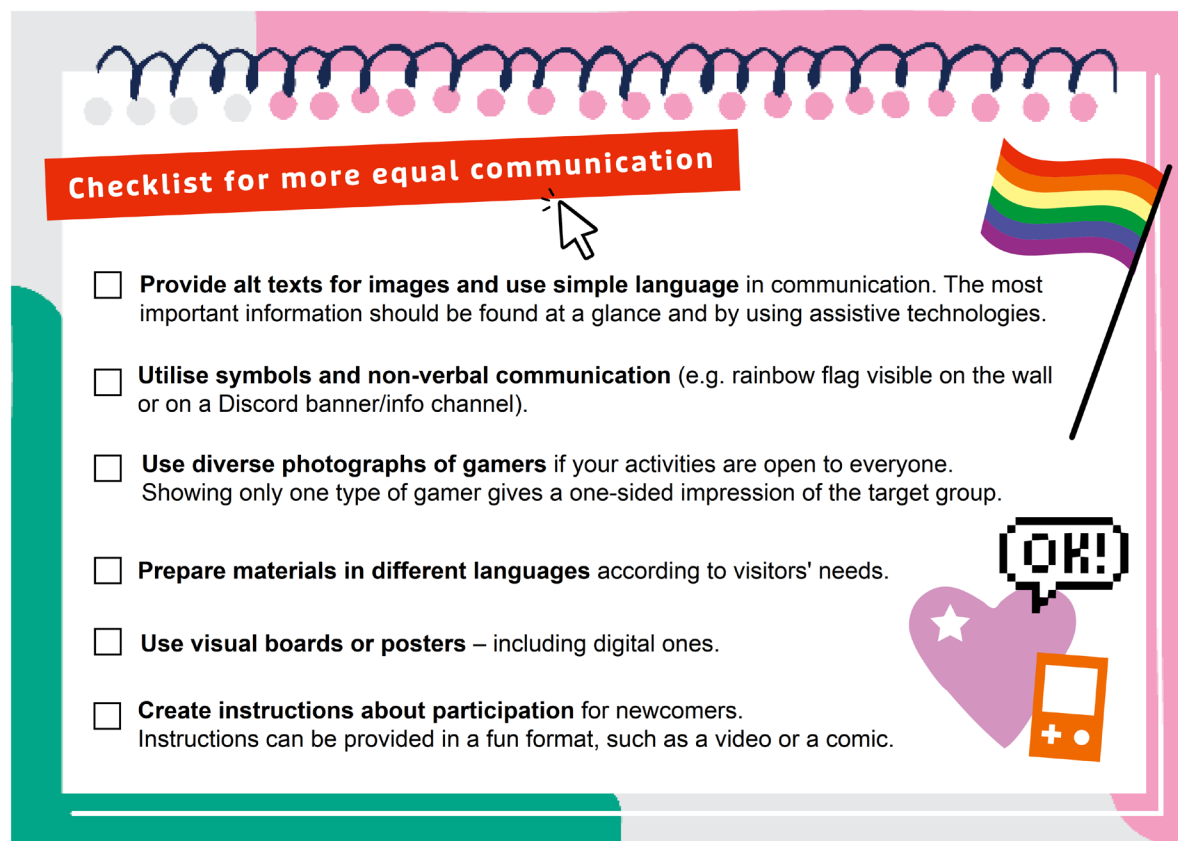

Checklist for more equal communication

☐ **Provide alt texts for images and use simple language** in communication. The most important information should be found at a glance and by using assistive technologies.

☐ **Utilise symbols and non-verbal communication** (e.g. rainbow flag visible on the wall or on a Discord banner/info channel).

☐ **Use diverse photographs of gamers** if your activities are open to everyone. Showing only one type of gamer gives a one-sided impression of the target group.

☐ **Prepare materials in different languages** according to visitors' needs.

☐ **Use visual boards or posters** – including digital ones.

☐ **Create instructions about participation** for newcomers. Instructions can be provided in a fun format, such as a video or a comic.

Figure 4 Checklist for more inclusive communication from the city of Helsinki's Youth Services' Non-Toxic project's *The beginner's guide to inclusive gaming activities* (D2).

Primarily, these DEI practices took forms of implementing guidelines such as codes of conduct and safer space principles, and practices such as allowing people to state their own pronouns. The documents also emphasised the importance of monitoring that the agreed guidelines are being followed and having clear procedures and consequences in place if they are breached. Throughout the documents, it was emphasised that both the rules and the consequences for breaking them need to be clear and communicated actively and efficiently to everyone involved. However, it was also brought up that these rules, guidelines, and punishments should not be seen as a goal in and of itself but rather means to an end: 'When you work systematically to improve the communication between participants and the breaches of your code of conduct have systematic consequences, this will eventually lead to self-regulation. Participants themselves will monitor that the rules are followed without needing interference from organisers. Constructive interaction will become a habit' (D12). A couple of documents also suggested that in addition to laying out punishments for breaking rules, it is a good practice to actively award participants who are engaging in supportive and constructive behaviours.

Overall, practices for building safe and inclusive environments identified in our material align well with recommended inclusion practices presented in earlier studies (Crothers et al., 2024; Friman et al., 2023; Pauketat, 2022). While the DEI definitions communicate about what DEI means to these organisations, the practices and procedures communicate how they are working to promote DEI in their operations in practice. These focused on internal aspects, such as employer practices, organisation of operations, as well as design practices, but also on external aspects, such as communication and marketing. Building safe and inclusive environments was relevant from both perspectives, including practices and processes that aimed for creating a welcoming atmosphere for current and potential future members and participants.

Discussion and Conclusion

In this study, we have described how different types of Finnish game cultural organisations contribute to the national game cultural environment through their public DEI communications. In our analysis, we categorised these organisations' public DEI documents into four different types: codes of conduct, DEI guides, DEI statements, and DEI strategies. In these documents, the organisations defined DEI in three different ways: through DEI (and related) terms; DEI challenges, i.e. ideologies and actions preventing DEI; and DEI framings, i.e. how DEI translates to the organisation's societal impact and success. They also described a variety of DEI practices and processes, focusing on three areas: administrative practices and procedures (strategy work and resources and good governance practices), inclusive design and marketing (design and marketing practices and contents), and building safe and inclusive environments (building communal inclusion and belonging and fostering safety). Our full categorisation is summarised in figure 5.

Reflecting our findings against previous research on promoting DEI in various game cultural contexts, Finnish game cultural organisations were familiar with potential DEI struggles in game cultural environments such as discrimination and harassment targeted at marginalised participant groups
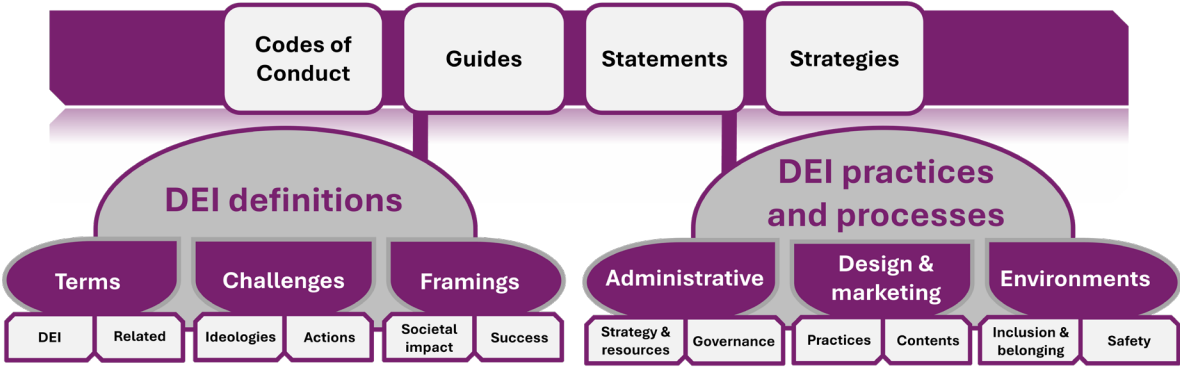
Figure 5 Analysis categories.

(Crothers et al., 2024; Lavenir, 2022; Ochsner & Spöhrer, 2023; Richard, 2021; Tomlinson, 2024). The examined organisations were actively expressing their commitment to promoting DEI both by working to prevent discrimination and harassment and by utilising practices to build safer and more inclusive environments. Having clear, documented practices and processes for these purposes, engaging in inclusive communication, and utilising tools such as codes of conduct have been presented in earlier research as effective tools for promoting DEI in game cultural settings (Cole & Zammit, 2020; Crothers et al., 2024; Friman et al., 2023; Pauketat, 2022). However, based on our material, it was not clear if these organisations had set specific goals for their DEI work and if they were monitoring their progress in this area, which would be important for impact measurement (Chee et al., 2022). It was significant to find several guide type documents within this material, as these kinds of documents are not usually mentioned in research literature addressing DEI measures in use in game cultural organisations. This finding

could be interpreted as a demonstration of the collaborative nature of the Finnish game cultural ecosystem that is used to sharing good practices in various areas (Harviainen et al., 2025; Komulainen & Sotamaa, 2020).

While our material and perspective is limited to organisations who had DEI documents publicly available on their websites, these organisations represent some of the biggest and most impactful operators in various sectors of the Finnish game culture and can be seen as significant trailblazers in this field. Based on this exploration, we believe that Finnish game cultural organisations view DEI as a pathway for their continuous success as well as for building better game culture for everyone. Furthermore, these individual DEI initiatives from different game cultural sectors all contribute to a wider game cultural ecosystem on a national level, communicating about an overall inclusive and welcoming environment. At the same time, in addition to documenting good intentions and initiatives, it is also important to investigate the effectiveness of

the selected DEI approaches and measures, and more re-search is needed from this perspective. It would also be valuable to gain further insights on how DEI is perceived and practiced in other national contexts to enable comparative analyses and to gain deeper understanding of the local aspects of global DEI issues in game culture.

Finally, this study illustrates that a national game cultural environment may consist of a great variety of different types of operators – in this case game companies, industry organisations, gaming event organisations, esports organisations, and public organisations with gaming-related activities. While organisations operating in different sectors may work separately, they all affect the wider cultural environment in which games are created and consumed. As such, to understand the cultural and value environment surrounding games, their production, and related activities, it is fruitful to explore this wider ecosystem consisting of various operators and their intersections.

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