Norm-critical studies

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- Research interests: Feminist technoscience, ICT4D, design ethnography, future-making, infrastructuring, narrative, social innovation, transmedia, posthumanism.

Norm-critical studies

A not yet established field

Instead of focusing on the other, the research focuses on the norm/s.

A more common term, similar to norm-critical, is:

Intersectionality

The study of intersections between various forms of oppression or discrimination.

Black feminism is an example of this where the experience of being black and being a woman reinforce and traject each other.
Kimberley Crenshaw coined the term

Norm creativity

"If the norm critical perspective reveals norms and its consequences to dismantle structures that limit us, then norm creativity is an approach and methods to pick up the pieces and build new, more inclusive opportunities, organizations and businesses."

Rebecca Vinthagen and Lina Zavalia, Settings

Another term of interest is norm creativity.
Expanding what and who is a norm through practical activities.

A norm-critical game culture

A norm-critical game culture is a pilot study on how norms and power discriminate the innovation process in game development and by extension the game culture .
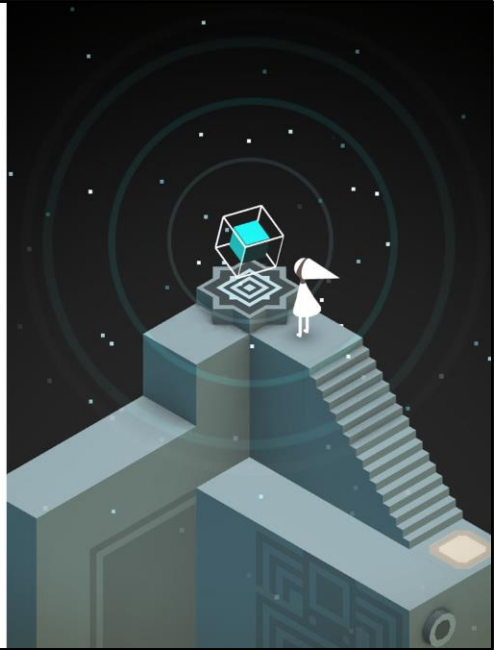
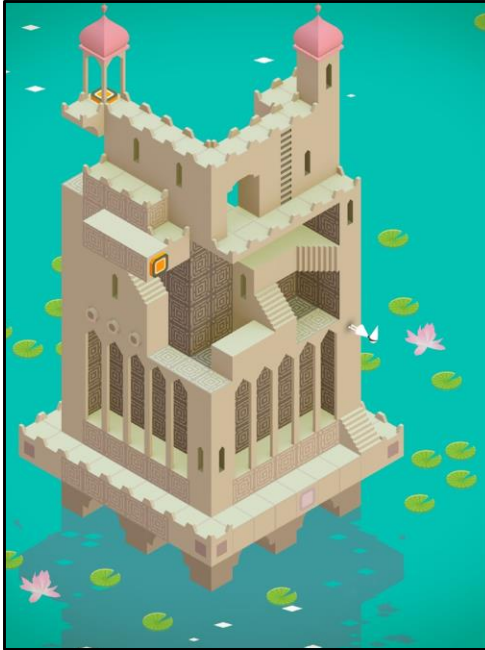In this study, we seek new answers to the questions:

What is a game?

What is gender?

What is innovation?

The study was conducted in the time period August 2014 to February 2015

Aim and objectives

The aim is to identify norms and attitudes among future game developers, increase knowledge of the norm critical perspective in the gaming industry and experiment with the concept of games in partnership with private and public sector.

Objectives:

- develop knowledge of game development and game industry, its needs and possible entry points for innovation.

- develop knowledge and techniques on how gender can be transformed from a theoretical perspective to an action in the gaming industry.

- organize a hackathon focusing on gender and games for change and innovation.

Project team

Linda Paxling, PhD Student, BTH

Elin Hallgren, consultant, gender and technology

Staff at Technoscience Studies, BTH

Financed by Vinnova and BTH

Vinnova, Swedens innovation agency
State agency under the Minstry of Enterprise and Innovation

Why is it important to question norms in games?

Today's game culture is discriminatory and sexist.

"Despite the number of female gamers, video games have traditionally been perceived as a male space, an activity created by men and for men. Indeed, the gaming industry itself is extremely skewed, with female designers, programmers, and producers comprising only a fragment of its workers."

Women are underrepresented in video game content and when they are portrayed, are depicted in stereotypical ways that appeal to men for instance as a weak princess needing rescue or as a highly sexualized dominatrix.

Source: Jesse Fox, Wai Yen Tang, Sexism in Online

"Video game culture has privileged the default gamer, the white male, leading to the maintenance of whiteness and masculinity in this virtual setting" - K.L. Gray

In a field experiment, Kuznekoff and Rose (2013) played a networked violent video game with other anonymous players and interacted with them using male or female pre-recorded voices. The female voice received three times the amount of negative comments than the male voice had received.

Source: Fox, J., & Tang, W. Y. (2014). Sexism in online video games: The role of conformity to masculine norms and social dominance orientation. Computers in Human Behavior, 33, 314-320.

, Deviant bodies, stigmatized identities, and racist acts: Examining the experiences of African-American gamers in Xbox Live.

Game development and gaming industry

There are currently few women studying game development in Sweden, 12% in 2010 despite the fact that there has been a doubling of the number of game programs between 2006-2011.

In the labor market, it is reported that only 16% of those working in the games industry are women.

Who plays games?

Saker man själv gör	någon gång	dagligen
köpa/betala varor/tjänster	84%	0%
köpa/boka resor	71%	0%
betala räkningar	79%	1%
skriva blogg	7%	1%
fildelning	24%	2%
söka jobb	30%	3%
lägga upp foton	65%	4%
statusuppdatera	46%	4%
logga in på bank	84%	6%
se på video	46%	7%
läsa bloggar	41%	9%
telefon över internet	41%	9%
kommentera andra	52%	9%
besöka intressecommunity	46%	17%
ladda ner/lyssna på musik	62%	26%
spel	55%	26%
skriva e-post	92%	42%
besöka socialt nätverk	69%	44%
läsa e-post	96%	73%

Source: Svenskarna och internet 2013

The most common activities on the internet

Svenskarna och internet 2013 (+ 12 år)

SE (The Internet Infrastructure Foundation) is responsible for the internets Swedish top-level domain . .SE Is an independent public organization that acts to promote positive development of the Internet in Sweden.

Sales in Sweden and Nordic in €

Segment	Sverige	Nordic
MMO F2P	49 158 164	119 203 842
MMO P2P	24 285 385	63 510 732
Social	28 988 949	79 121 499
Mobile	69 774 449	187 379 510
PC	46 665 546	118 037 062
Console	12 872 294	35 311 004
Digital total	**231 744 787**	**602 563 649**
Retail	125 292 772	352 940 543
Total:	**357 037 559**	**955 504 192**

Source: Nordic Games Sales 2013

Samtliga siffror i €. Gäller 2013, ur rapporten Nordic Games Sales 2013. Sverige står för ca 37 % av den totala försäljningen i Norden
Uppgifterna baseras delvis på Nordiska

MMO = Massive multiplayer online World of Warcraft
F2P = Free to play
P2P = Pay to play

"... JAG FINNS INTE I SPEL"

EN RAPPORT OM UNGA HBTQ-PERSONERS SYN
PÅ DATOR- OCH TV-SPEL OCH KULTUREN KRING DEM

Voices from the game culture

Issues in game development:
Binary gender, heteronormative love, stereotypes, all players are assumed to be heterosexual men.

Issues among gamers and in the gaming community:
hbtq-fobic language, male norm, silence, hatred, ignorance

Have you experienced anything negative associated with your gender identity and / or your gender expression when playing online games?

"I never tell I am a woman when I play and I always use gender neutral nicks. My whole game experience is destroyed the moment someone believes that I am woman in real life. There is a steady stream of invitations, marriage proposals, sexual invites and when I win over them the aggravations and the detailed descriptions of rape know no limits. "

"I see myself as, and am perceived as a girl, which in the online gaming world very often means that I suffer from sexist comments. If things go well for me in the game I am called whore, bitch, and everything possible. If I goes bad in the game I am accused of not being able to play because of my gender. It's so damn tiring and lame.

Even if I win all the matches in a game you can not win against sexism. The norm is that the ones who play online games are dudes and if I reveal myself as a woman people are surprised (especially if I play well), and the tone is sometimes (often) changed in how others meets me. Everything from being thrown nasty words after me, getting kicked out of the game to guys taking liberties where they ask for pictures of me and so on. "

Friends nätrapport
2015

In the Friends survey it shows that gaming is the place where most guys get offended. Of the guys who have been wronged or bullied by mobile, PC or tablet one in three responds that they had been subjected in the game.

FRIENDS nätrapport 2015
Organization that works against bullying and discrimination

Beyond representation

It is not about evening out the numbers in games and at the work place.

Classification and standardization is a human activity.

Who is allowed to take place?
Whose values and knowledges are allowed to take place?

Many problematize the fact that the concept of gender equality in the Swedish equality policy is usually about evening out the gender distribution. It is a widespread perception that gender equality is about representation (and only that) . The researchers, such as at technoscience studies, discuss the shortcomings of the quantitative dimension of gender equality ("Head count ") and stresses the need to supplement it with qualitative dimensions / indicators on gender equality .

Concepts highlighted in these discussions is power, influence, prevail, values, knowledge and experiences.

The Entertainment Software **Rating** Board (**ESRB**)

Our method

The study was done with a participant-driven model, Participatory Action Research (PAR), where all contribute with their knowledge and discuss possible approaches for a norm-critical game culture.

We, the project managers, chose not to build on existing companies, products or services or fixed definitions of concepts in our meetings. It was the participants' task to explain, develop and define.

For our three meetings with the students we highlighted three themes: Education and research, Business and industry and Future uses.
The students shared many experiences and expectations of how they perceive today's gaming industry, both in education and the business

A safe zone

The group consisted of ten students from the undergraduate programmes here at Campus Karlshamn. We recruited people who where interested in discussing and working with our research questions.

To really dare to talk to each other required a basis for understanding and humility to each other's differences. It was important that we could provide a safe place for saying wrong and unfinished thoughts. In the study we have taken the help of simple tools and exercises for the purpose of creating a community between the participants.

Almost everyone was new to each other, and it was clear that the topic was not uncontroversial.

Challenges

Some of the students found it difficult to think of situations in their education if there was talk about innovation, norms, gender or computer game , others had a problem with themselves that they were active participants in their environment, and explained that the content and analysis should come from someone else than themselves.

It seemed that there were a learned ways to perform certain tasks, which caused problems when this was questioned by us as in Elin and I.

Although we entered the project without any specific success factors other than the opportunity to discuss and work on our research questions we had made assumptions on where the focus of interest would be. We thought we would be discussing how we could change the game culture and what kind of games we would like to play but instead a lot of time was placed on discussing the concepts gender, innovation and game. The concept of innovation proved to be the hardest one and it was difficult for many of the participants on how they should relate to this phenomena
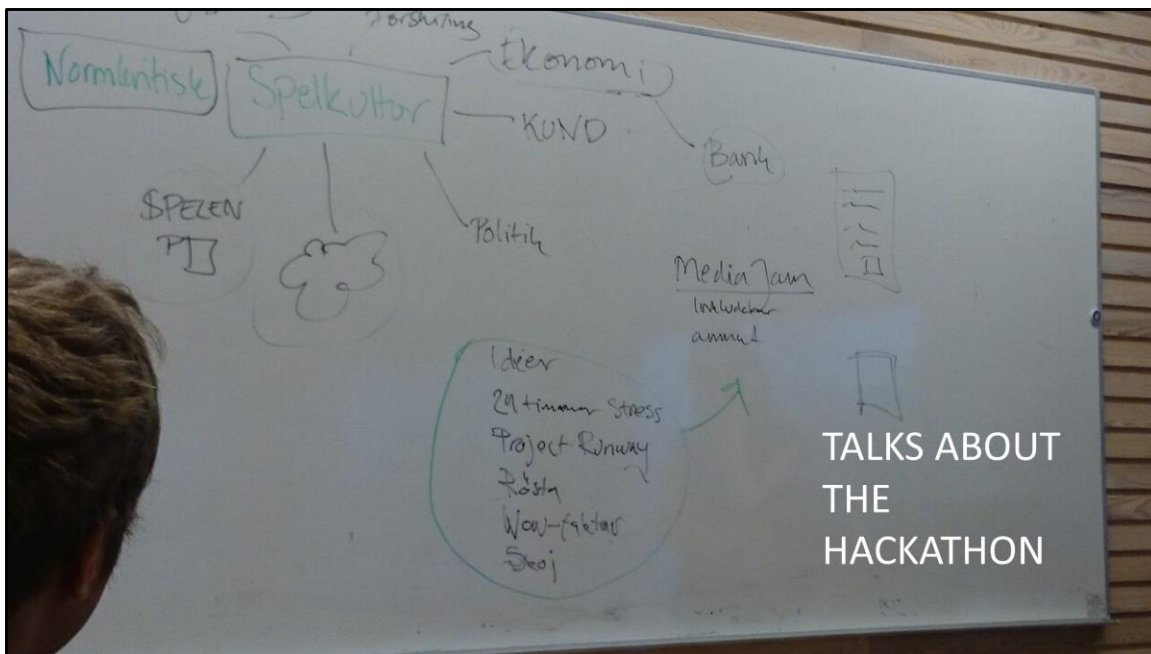
A thought experiment

At one occasion we had a thought experiment where we wanted the participants to create a computer game based on a short passage from the book "The Boys " by Jessica Schiefauer .
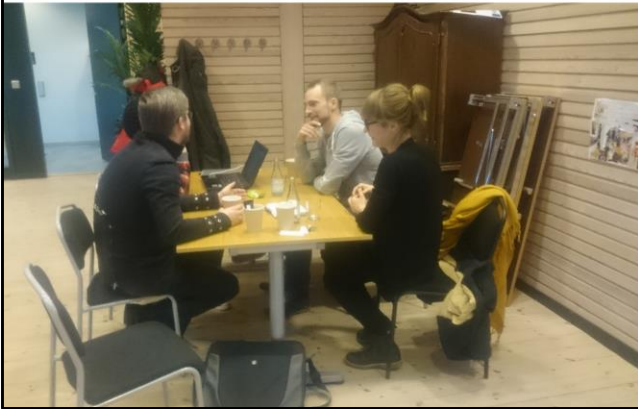
The discussion focused on:

Is this a game? Who is the target audience ? How would it work technically ? Will it become an indie game, or can it reach out to larger masses?

TALKS ABOUT THE HACKATHON

The final phase of the project was a one-day hackathon.
Here everyone was invited.

The participants were librarians, IT manager, cultural administrator from the municipality, teachers from BTH, and a few of the students from the original student group.

We held an introduction explaining the project for the participants and then skyped with Vic Bassey from Diversi and Annika Olofsdotter Bergström about her project Supermarit
The idea of not rushing into to the doing aspect of the day was to give the participants a sense of why we were doing this project and that they should consider a norm-critical perspective when brainstorming their game concepts.

Participants

Participants do not need to study something in the computer games , nor be an avid player or identify with the gamer culture.

Everyone in the "room" is automatically tomorrow's game developers (in our study, there are no experts)

We firmly believe in the meeting with others as crucial and that change takes time.
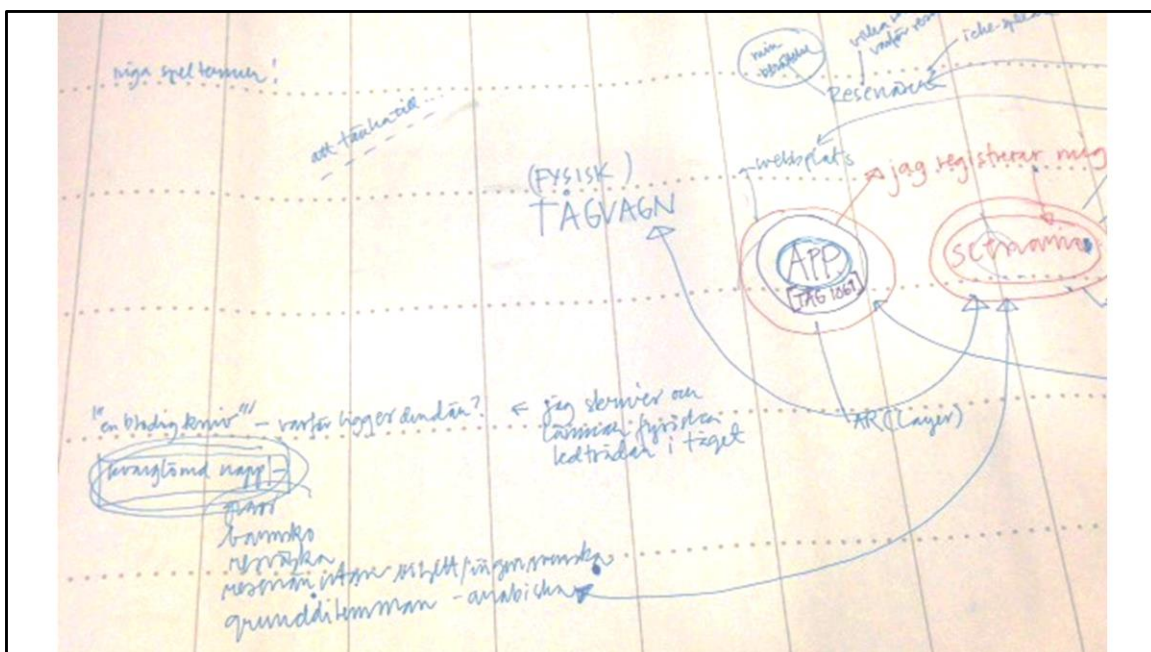
Game concepts

History Cashing

Like geocashing but connected to historical events.

Prejudice profile

Are you really as open-minded as you think?

The backside of war/War hero

A game based on real life experiences from people who have been in wars.

Similar to all game concepts is the story focus and the lack of competition.

As geocashing stuck with historical events ! historic time in place by means of e.g. Google glasses (hologram !), Camera phone or headphones. Nothing pre-recorded with actors to be relived . Experiencing

Ett socialt experiment för att kolla vad nutidmänniskan tänker om sina medmänniskor.
Ett expempel hade kunnat vara ett foto på innehållet av ett kylskåp, där resten får gissa vem personen som äger den är. Ett annat hade varit tre foton på personer tillsammans med fyra påståenden, varav ett inte passar på någon, och vilket det är, och vilket som hör till vem är upp till dig att gissa på osv
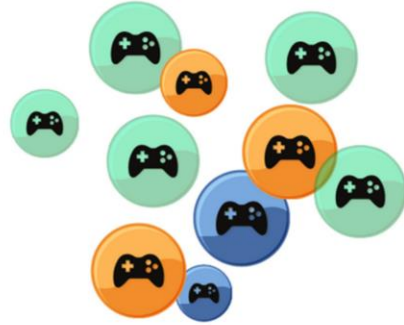
Valuable outcomes

Identify our norms and how we value them

Identify how our lack of knowledge creates stereotypes and prejudice

Participatory action research – a useful and challenging method. Less hierarchy more safe space.

Engage with people from different business areas and academic disciplines to meet common ground

To be innovative we need to be more inclusive.

To be inclusive is to be aware of which norms we abide to and which norms we want and which we don't.

"Why does it matter who makes our games? Innovation comes from fresh voices and new ideas. [...]
It matters to women who feel excluded from a livelihood. It matters to kids who can't grow up to be someone they want to be. It matters to all of us as we expand the role of games from entertainment to platforms on which classroom learning and everyday communication takes place."

- Mary Flanagan, Professor, Dartmouth College