Methodological Framework for an Enhanced Incubation Roadmap

Output 4.1 of the BSGI Project

BALTIC SEA GAMES

The output of GoA 4.1 is a methodological framework which best describes the conceptual approach and methodology for upgrading the BGI output 3.6 "Implementation Roadmap for Effective Game Incubation in BSR" to provide for an enhanced roadmap as a durable tool for the discovery of pertaining knowledge on game incubation and for the retrieval of valuable information for the game incubation community.
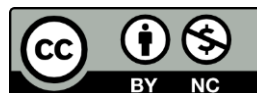
Pictures

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Berlin, May 2021

Content

1. Executive Summary

The project Baltic Game Industry (BGI) has introduced a roadmap (www.balticseagames.eu) for establishing and running a game incubator. This tool is a living body of knowledge that we are further developing, expanding and adapting in the extension stage project Baltic Sea Game Incubation (BSGI) with the help of a whole range of experts contributing in part very different, in part very similar experiences. In the roadmap we combine several components, such as text, articles, videos, files, news, etc. pertaining to a specific topic. The roadmap allows for easy access to a wide variety of knowledge and a comprehensive approach to knowledge transfer regarding game incubation.

This setup of the roadmap benefits both the users as well as the people responsible for the input itself. To a user, the roadmap presents itself as a one-stop-shop for all things game incubation without having to navigate scattered and unedited material from all over the internet, as well as opportunities for easy participation in a network. For the input side this means that any kind of material can be easily added to the roadmap since the industry is ever changing and new knowledge is constantly created. In the future, this will allow for even further additions to the roadmap and lower maintenance requirements.

The potential of the roadmap is immense and it can evolve beyond its initial layout, which is already happening during BSGI based on the work done during BGI. While the roadmap compiles a body of knowledge from game incubation experts for prospective or emerging incubators, the fact that game incubation itself is a fairly recent practice with little documented knowledge or endorsed standards calls for a broader approach to embrace all key stakeholders engaged in supporting game start-ups or studios with little entrepreneurial experience (e.g. splinters).

Creating a platform for exchange as a means for competence building in a peer-to-peer environment, acting at the same time as a complementary source of growth for the body of knowledge on incubation and game business development, has evolved into a very compelling route to venture on.

2. Benchmarking a Knowledge Base and Community Platform for the Game Industry

The Baltic Game Industry (BGI) roadmap (www.balticseagames.eu) that we are further developing, expanding, and adapting in the extension stage project Baltic Sea Game Incubation (BSGI) combines several components that are usually kept separate. These components are for example text, articles, videos, files, news, etc. pertaining to a specific topic. The roadmap allows for the combination of these and more components for easy access to a wide variety of knowledge and a comprehensive approach to knowledge transfer.

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To our knowledge, based on intensive research, such a game incubation platform-knowledge base does not yet exist. However, we need to ensure that such an endeavour would provide an added value for the incubation ecosystem. On top of that, such a knowledge base and platform needs some maintenance and user traffic to gain traction and be a valuable tool.

Therefore, we are looking into two aspects that we combine in our approach:
- Compiled body of knowledge or curated information source for the game industry
- Platform used for peer exchange, community or ecosystem building, collaborating and networking

In the following, we will explore a range of similar approaches to knowledge transfer and network platforms in the Baltic Sea region (BSR) and beyond, both within the game industry and outside the game industry.

Comparable Bodies of Knowledge for the Game Industry

A key finding of the BGI project was the lack of comprehensive and manifested knowledge on game incubation. This was identified as a serious obstacle to further game incubation efforts in the BSR to support start-ups, entrepreneurship, and business in the game industry. Information on game incubation is definitely available but it is mostly scattered all over the internet or located with select individuals. This means that comprehensive knowledge is hard to come by and individuals are constantly required to share their knowledge with the risk of losing that knowledge when e.g., exiting the industry. The BSGI roadmap aims to address these issues with a comprehensive knowledge sharing platform within the context of a network. Several organisations, institutions, initiatives, and projects within the game industry are comparable to the BSGI roadmap and already some are aiming to provide knowledge on game incubation and networking aspects.

One European example is Dutch Game Garden, the second oldest incubator in the European digital game industry, with operations started in 2008. As an experienced game incubator, especially for the comparatively young game industry, and having undergone several changes to its approach and programme, Dutch Game Garden has amassed a wealth of knowledge on game incubation to be shared with the rest of the industry. The YouTube channel of Dutch Game Garden (https://www.youtube.com/user/dutchgamegarden) is used to share information in the form of videos on game incubation. There are interviews, panels, Q&As, trailers, and more available. Through the channel, Dutch Game Garden is able to share their knowledge on game incubation issues with incubation managers and game developers. When comparing Dutch Game Garden's efforts of knowledge sharing via their YouTube channel to the BSGI roadmap, several differences become apparent. The YouTube channel is by design not very user friendly i.e., all videos are in one place with no real structure or user guidance for accessing specific content. The focus of the videos is also very much on individuals presenting their knowledge. As aforementioned, this reality of having to rely on a limited group of individuals sharing their knowledge is very common for the game industry but has its problems. A third issue is the effort needed to maintain such a YouTube channel. Producing high-quality and effective videos like Dutch Game Garden does, is time-consuming and expensive. Additionally, a YouTube channel provides next to no network functionality.

GamesCapitalBerlin (https://gamescapital.berlin/) is a website for all things game industry in Berlin. It is maintained and operated by the city of Berlin in an effort to support the local game industry. Somewhat similar to the BSGI roadmap, GamesCapitalBerlin aims to be a one-stop-shop for Berlin's local game industry. The website hosts a blog with interviews with local game industry representatives, a news section, an events section, as well as an info section with information on e.g., funding opportunities, jobs, working conditions in Berlin, etc. While the website provides a wide range of information, it is not necessarily very organised or rather the information is not organised by e.g., topics. GamesCapitalBerlin has no search option to easily access specific material that a user wants to find. As the focus is very much on up-to-date content, any lack of such up-to-date content, e.g. in the events or news section, becomes apparent very quickly. In contrast to the BSGI roadmap, GamesCapitalBerlin is maintained by a single entity, curating input. This is good for validating content for the website but also excludes input access for multiple and diverse organisations and people. GamesCapitalBerlin is an informational medium with no interactive functionality and therefore not really suitable for network purposes.

Games:net berlinbrandenburg (https://www.medianet-bb.de/de/games-net-berlinbrandenburg/) is another more locally focused initiative. While GamesCapitalBerlin provides a website for up-to-date information on Berlin's local game industry, games:net berlinbrandenburg aims to connect Berlin's game industry companies with other contacts in business, politics, and science. Key activities are networking

events with other actors within the ecosystem to further dialogue and cooperation. Games:net berlinbrandenburg is very "typical" in the sense that it provides networking opportunities for game industry actors and experts like many other organisations throughout the game industry. As the focus is on events, knowledge sharing is again mostly conducted informally and without documentation or a focus on comprehensive and structured knowledge transfer as part of a knowledge base.

Games Germany (https://www.games-germany.de/) is a cooperation of several funding and network institutions from different parts of Germany. The goal is to present a united national appearance against the backdrop of Germany's federal political system and its fragmented funding landscape for the game industry. Games Germany as an initiative is working around the events and information of its member organisations but also hosts some joint events and more. The initiative is not aiming to provide a comprehensive knowledge base or anything similar. The website of Games Germany is therefore not particularly informative or hosting comprehensive information but rather links and information on events, etc. For the initiative as a whole, networking aspects as part of events take precedence.

A fourth German example for similar platforms / knowledge bases is game e.V. (https://www.game.de/en/). Game e.V. is the German games industry association. As the name suggests, the focus is on all of Germany in contrast to GamesCapitalBerlin and games:net berlinbrandenburg. Key activities are centered around networking and lobbying efforts towards the political spectrum. Game e.V. is involved in a range of different activities for the game industry as they are co-organiser of gamescom, one of the world's biggest events for computer and video games, but they are also concerned with e.g. esports. This wide variety of activities is definitely a selling point for game e.V. and its activities but it also limits the focus of networking and knowledge sharing efforts. The broad approach to the German games industry as a whole also impedes a focus on a specific topic like game incubation and the networking aspects are too varied to efficiently leverage the benefits of exchange and cooperation.

As the name suggests, Game Hub Denmark (https://gamehubdenmark.com/), as an example of another initiative in the BSR, has a more limited focus on Denmark. As an incubation organisation itself, like Dutch Game Garden, Game Hub Denmark has a wealth of knowledge on game incubation, especially about the development of their game incubation approach and programme. Currently, efforts like maintaining and updating a YouTube channel for knowledge sharing are not the focus. Increasingly, Game Hub Denmark has been expanding their activities to strengthen networking opportunities but is mostly embedded within the local ecosystem in a part of Denmark, expanding their efforts to different cities.

Another local initiative is sTARTUp Tartu (https://startuptartu.ee/). Focused on one city, sTARTUp Tartu is dealing with the start-up ecosystem in Tartu, Estonia. Its efforts very much revolve around its main yearly event, the sTARTUp Day in Tartu. In addition to the main start-up event, the initiative hosts lectures and webinars and more networking efforts. It can be seen as a gateway to enter the start-up ecosystem in Tartu, to connect with local support organisations and to learn more about local support services. STARTUp Tartu hosts an ecosystem database for all tech companies in Tartu, which can be seen as an example of a knowledge base. Start-ups can enter their information into a form on the website (to be approved by sTARTUp Tartu) to add their information to the database. This is by no means a comprehensive approach to a knowledge base for start-ups but a good example of a clear and informative database.

Digital Dragons (https://digitaldragons.pl/) is a household name in the BSR for its annual conference in Krakow. In addition, Digital Dragons hosts a game incubator as well as an academy for game developers with a very active social media presence and a YouTube channel for knowledge sharing. As the focus of

Digital Dragons is the annual event and its surrounding activities, networking is definitely a cornerstone of Digital Dragons' efforts. So far, knowledge sharing efforts have been in Polish only for the most part.

The goal of the Baltic Explorers project (https://balticexplorers.eu/) is to support and boost the success of game companies in the South-East Asian and North American game markets. As an EU-funded project, Baltic Explorers is by design limited in scope, both in terms of duration and coverage. Set up as a network of organisations from the Central Baltic Region with a common goal of supporting game industry teams and including a mentor network, Baltic Explorers relies on meetups, an acceleration programme, mentoring and more to facilitate its goal of building a strong international cluster of game developers. Baltic Explorers is very much focused on hands-on assistance to game companies. Comprehensive and structured knowledge-sharing efforts, similar to what BSGI is focusing on, are not necessarily part of the project. Rather, Baltic Explorers relies on online meetings, meet-ups and e.g. YouTube lectures to share information and knowledge.

In this chapter, we have been exploring a wide range of game industry approaches to knowledge transfer and also to network platforms that are located in the Baltic Sea region and beyond. The examples above from the game industry illustrate the vast array of different initiatives, organisations, websites and more that are involved in knowledge sharing efforts or networking activities. Naturally, we have only been able to include a fraction as examples with many more out there and in development. As the BSGI roadmap aims to effectively combine knowledge sharing efforts within a knowledge base and networking aspects as part of a community platform, the above-mentioned examples serve as benchmarks for the roadmap development. Clearly, there is no perfect setup for such an endeavour, but within BSGI, we strive to learn from the wide range of already existing platforms to create a valuable and sustainable good practice.

The examples above, that have been elaborated on, show the possibilities and limitations that are relevant for BSGI's efforts. When it comes to knowledge sharing, most often, there are no structured, systematic, and accessible efforts to do so. This might be due to the different focus of the initiative or due to a lack of funding or time. It is apparent that effective knowledge sharing efforts that are embedded within a user-friendly setup, require curated and valuable input that has to be organised appropriately. Many of the above-mentioned examples have access to valuable input but are severely lacking when it comes to the user experience of accessing and navigating that content. For that reason, the newly created roadmap during BGI, that BSGI is further developing, is tailored to be user-friendly with a range of options for easy access to content and navigation options. Additionally, comprehensive knowledge sharing for a specific topic is lacking for the examples above, as information and knowledge sharing efforts are almost always fragmented and incomplete.

When it comes to networking aspects, the above-mentioned examples illustrate the "typical" approach to such efforts: networking events and activities organised by the responsible initiative. While these events are certainly very valuable and greatly appreciated by the game industry community, most initiatives do not feature a network platform for integrated networking. As the COVID-19 pandemic has shown, it is problematic to rely on physical events only or too heavily for networking. Online events can certainly fill that gap, as we are showing during BSGI as well, but to make networking efforts sustainable and less reliant on individual events, networking platform features are key. Such functions can not only provide network members with an exchange platform for different information (e.g. forum, mentor database, investor contacts, etc.) but in combination with a knowledge base, network members can expand and use the knowledge base as well. Integrated networking features can therefore solve some of the issues mentioned above that are relevant for a valuable and sustainable knowledge base.

Ultimately, BSGI strives to combine the already existing knowledge base with a highly useful networking platform that can benefit the other within an integrated approach. Key findings and learning from existing platforms and approaches in the game industry, as mentioned above, will be considered to improve our endeavour. Furthermore, BSGI is working with a truly transnational approach within the BSR, combining input from all over the region.

Comparable Network / Community Platforms (Game / Non-Game)

Plenty of network / community platforms exist in comparison to BSGI's efforts. Somewhat similar to the issues mentioned above, a lot of these efforts are either focused on specific regions or are only available in a specific language. More often than not, commercial incentives (e.g. articles and features behind paywalls) play a bigger role than in the game industry, see e.g. Gründerszene (https://www.businessinsider.de/gruenderszene/), focusing on the German start-up scene as a commercial extension of Business Insider. The challenge of providing comprehensive information as well as including networking aspects remains present. As part of our research, we have looked into how other networks in the realm of incubation or start-up ecosystems or within the game industry work.

One of the most prominent networks within the game industry is the International Game Developers Association (https://igda.org). It is a non-profit organisation for game developers worldwide with over 12,000 members. The goal is to support game developers. The International Game Developers Association hosts meetings at industry conferences, runs local chapters all over the world and is extensively connected within the game industry. As for the membership, a wide range of different options are available. Since every type of game developer, large or small is encouraged to join, 1-year individual memberships start at just $60 USD. Such a membership includes access to an internal expert resource library, the opportunity to network with other game industry professionals, the option to take part in the Global Mentorship Program, conference discounts and more. There are other membership levels e.g., a 2-year individual membership, a lifetime membership, a student membership, an emerging market membership and a hardship membership. The International Game Developers Association is a household name with an established and strong network structure spanning the whole world. As for the comparison to BSGI's efforts, a network on that scale has been realised only through many years of existence, input, as well as its uniqueness. Therefore, for our efforts of establishing a network, focusing on the uniqueness of our purpose and setup is key. Additionally, the value of curated resources for members is noteworthy.

On a European level, the Interactive Software Federation of Europe (https://www.isfe.eu/) represents the interest of the video game industry in Europe. In contrast to the International Game Developers Association, there is no access for individuals. Rather, the federation is made up of major video game publishers, as well as national trade associations in 18 countries in Europe. The Interactive Software Federation of Europe is very much so focused on policy work towards the European level and not necessarily on supporting individual game developers. It can be understood as a representative lobbying network towards the political realm. BSGI's network is focused on the BSR and its game industry, directly connecting and supporting incubators, mentors, investors and ultimately game developers. Therefore, our network will offer more concrete support options for these groups instead of e.g. working on lobbying towards politics.

GDBAY (https://gdbay.com/) presents itself as an online community platform for the game industry, targeting indie developers, publishers, and industry experts. A membership usually costs $199 USD (free memberships for the first 2000 members), featuring access to online events, matchmaking tools, developer profiles, recordings, a blog, private chats, and topic discussions. In contrast to the above-

mentioned International Game Developers Association, GDBAY is quite small. It is also not a lobbying organisation like the Interactive Software Federation of Europe. GDBAY provides some of the functionality that BSGI's network wants to realise such as a blog, private chats, and topic discussions. All these options are immensely valuable within a network to provide a safe and worthwhile environment for expert exchange.

The European Business and Innovation Centre Network (https://ebn.eu/) is a not-for-profit association of business support organisations with the goal of using innovative business as a driver for regional (economic) development. While there are no membership fees, full network access is limited to organisations like innovation centres, incubators, accelerators, chambers of commerce / industry, or other types of business support organisations. There are options for more limited memberships as associates. As a full member of the European Business and Innovation Centre Network, one can use the network's certification and label, access training offers, matchmaking opportunities, participate in projects, reports and more. Curation and certification are a focus of BSGI's network to provide members with the opportunity to connect to other vetted experts, as well as to access approved valuable resources.

Media:net berlinbrandenburg e.V. (https://www.medianet-bb.de/en/home/) is a networking association for the media, creative and digital industries of the federated states Berlin and Brandenburg of Germany. Media:net berlinbrandenburg works together with the network's members, politicians, business leaders and academics in the Berlin-Brandenburg region and beyond. The association is very much focused on connecting contacts within the media industry by e.g. hosting events. This is a key benefit of the network membership, i.e. contacts to other businesses, cooperation partners, professionals, as well as to politics and funding institutions. Other benefits include a job market, HR support and discounts for conferences and more. Media:net berlinbrandenburg has a range of membership offers in terms of pricing for different types of companies. Media companies and service providers have to pay 1,500 € while e.g., banks, insurances, VCs, and lawyer offices have to pay 2,500 € per year. Start-ups can join for reduced costs. Interestingly, there are no different benefit levels for the different types of memberships in terms of pricing for companies. Individuals can join too as supporting members and have to pay 100 € yearly. As for the comparison to BSGI's network efforts, media:net berlinbrandenburg is first of all focused on a rather small part of Germany. BSGI's network approach is truly transnational, with the explicit goal of connecting game industry incubators, mentors, investors, and game developers across countries in the BSR. With its knowledge base, BSGI is also able to offer a more sustainable approach to knowledge exchange, instead of heavily relying on events that can be affected by e.g. a global pandemic, as well as a natural lack of firmly established knowledge (therefore avoiding the issue of having to rely on specific individuals to access and share knowledge and associated problems, as mentioned above).

Female Founders (https://www.female-founders.org/) is a community for female entrepreneurs in Europe. It provides various network and acceleration services for start-ups, female entrepreneurs, and leaders. The network of Female Founders is structured around different levels of engagement for their different target groups and their needs. The most basic access to the network is free of charge for access to information and the opportunity for exchange. The next level of membership targets start-ups / ventures with an accelerator programme. There are no direct costs for that level but rather a 5 % success fee. Finally, the last level of membership targets female individual entrepreneurs and company representatives with a leadership accelerator with fixed pricing. BSGI's network structure aims to have different membership levels and different levels of access as well to enhance the quality of exchange and knowledge sharing without any costs.

An example of a network that is active worldwide, the Global Entrepreneurship Network (https://www.genglobal.org/) provides a platform of projects and programmes in 170 countries with the goal of facilitating starting and scaling businesses. Key to the Global Entrepreneurship Network are its national operations with a focus on appropriate knowledge, contacts, and programmes for the respective national environments. There are no membership costs or different levels of membership. In addition, there is a member directory open to the public. BSGI's focus goes beyond national boundaries with a strong emphasis on transnational cooperation to facilitate exchange and knowledge building.

The above-mentioned examples show the various network / community platforms that are active worldwide, on a European level or in a specific country. We have included examples both from the game industry as well as examples from outside the game industry to illustrate the diversity of approaches and structures that such platforms can have. Naturally, we have only been able to include a small number of these platforms as there are many more out there. The examples that we have examined provide valuable learnings when it comes to the setup of a network / community platform and the further development of the BSGI roadmap as a good practice and a sustainable and useful network in combination with a knowledge base.

Firstly, just as BGI, BSGI's efforts are truly transnational and go beyond any country boundary to work across the BSR. BSGI's network will be made up of organisation representatives as well as individual members - incubators, mentors, investors, and game developers. Any restrictions regarding organisational or individual memberships will not apply. The focus of BSGI's network, especially in combination with the knowledge base, is very much on hands-on support options for aforementioned groups and will not operate on a political lobbying level. Therefore, the setup of the network will be centred around those concrete support offers for members to benefit from each other.

One of the key tenets of BSGI's network efforts is free-of-charge access to the network. Many of the above-mentioned examples work around different pricing models for membership in their networks. Sometimes different membership levels are linked to different benefits within the network. BSGI's network will be free-of-charge but work with such different membership levels to facilitate the provision of curated and vetted input, exchange, and access to resources for its members. Some of the functionality that has been mentioned above will be part of BSGI's network. These are the already frequently running online events, the knowledge base itself, an internal forum, topic discussions and more.

Further developing and combining the already existing knowledge base with an interactive and easy-to-use network platform will be central to BSGI's efforts. The findings from the above-mentioned examples inform our decision-making process to build a sustainable network.

3. Scope of Target Groups

The initial idea was to provide guidance for prospective or emerging game incubation operators, an approach based on the fact that the BGI project group ran several pilots to establish the grounds for regional game start-up support both through the industry and respective public authorities.

As the knowledge about good practices has not yet been documented or standardised, we came to understand that in order to create a reliable body of knowledge on game incubation, veteran and experienced incubators needed to endorse such a source of information as we endeavoured to establish with the roadmap. In an effort to bring them to the table, it soon became clear that knowledge pertaining to game business support is still evolving and needs to be continuously adapted, in particular with a fast-changing market such as the game sector. Hence, 3-5-year-old incubators could still learn from 6-10-year-old incubators, most of whom went through several stages of transition. To pass on the relay baton and share the experience and reflections to avoid reinventing the wheel, we widened our approach to accommodate more relevant incubation ecosystem stakeholders for implementing an incubation or acceleration programme: incubators / business developers + mentors + investors / publishers.

Own graphic: Scope of target groups

To constitute a powerful instrument, incubators need to work closely with mentors and investors, who in turn need to have a competent understanding of the game industry, of mentoring game developers and investing into game companies. Therefore, in order to strengthen the incubation impact, it was essential to also look into liaising in particular with mentors and investors and include the ensuing knowledge into the roadmap. This way, the roadmap would become a tool for both experienced and prospective game incubators.

Clearly, the ultimate beneficiary of an efficient incubation would be on the individual level the (start-up) teams and on the community level the regional industry and economy.

4. Chosen Approach

Navigation

The range of choices to be made when establishing and operating an incubator is extensive and not all elements are equally important or valid for each incubation environment and incubation model. In order to offer guidance through the maze of information, we established a flow chart as an underlying navigation logic. This was used as a basis for commissioning a company to develop an intuitive map for the user based on the key decisive factors that would determine the best avenue through the plethora of details exploring all aspects of the incubation enterprise.

Own graphic: Roadmap flow chart – part 1

Game Community
Build up knowledge about your regional game community and create alliances with ties with its diverse stakeholders to receive support and to introduce your incubates to.
https://balticseagames.eu/game-incubation-roadmap/ecosystem/game-community/

Topics
Determine your programme focus! Are you a business focused incubator, or do you focus on design and creativity?
https://balticseagames.eu/game-incubation-roadmap/programme/topics/

Coaching
Involving the right type of experts for the knowledge transfer is paramount.
https://balticseagames.eu/game-incubation-roadmap/coaching/

Ecosystem
Understand the larger eco-system in which you operate in order to assure the best support possible for yourself and your incubatees.
https://balticseagames.eu/game-incubation-roadmap/ecosystem/

Marketing
Plan and execute marketing activities for your incubator and for your business goals.
https://balticseagames.eu/game-incubation-roadmap/operation/marketing/

Evaluation
Follow the advice you'll give your incubates: assess your success and failure, exploit your lessons learnt.
https://balticseagames.eu/game-incubation-roadmap/operation/evaluation/

Destination
Use the lean canvas to design your business model
https://balticseagames.eu/game-incubation-roadmap/introduction/XXXXX

Own graphic: Roadmap flow chart – part 2

The roadmap introducing a prospective incubation operator to the realm of game incubation lies at the heart of the incubation knowledge base. It is this endeavour that led to understanding the importance of capturing and documenting invaluable existing knowledge and to widening the scope of target groups to include already operative incubation operators and other business development support organisations and initiatives.

Knowledge Compilation

To cater for the first target group i.e., prospective game incubators, we used the knowledge gained from the pilots carried out during the BGI project. During the first months of the extension stage project BSGI, we revisited the structure and content with the aim to streamline the information. The information gathered has been structured in this way as a baseline.

The 4 pillars of game incubation:
- Ecosystem
- Operation
- Programme

- Coaching
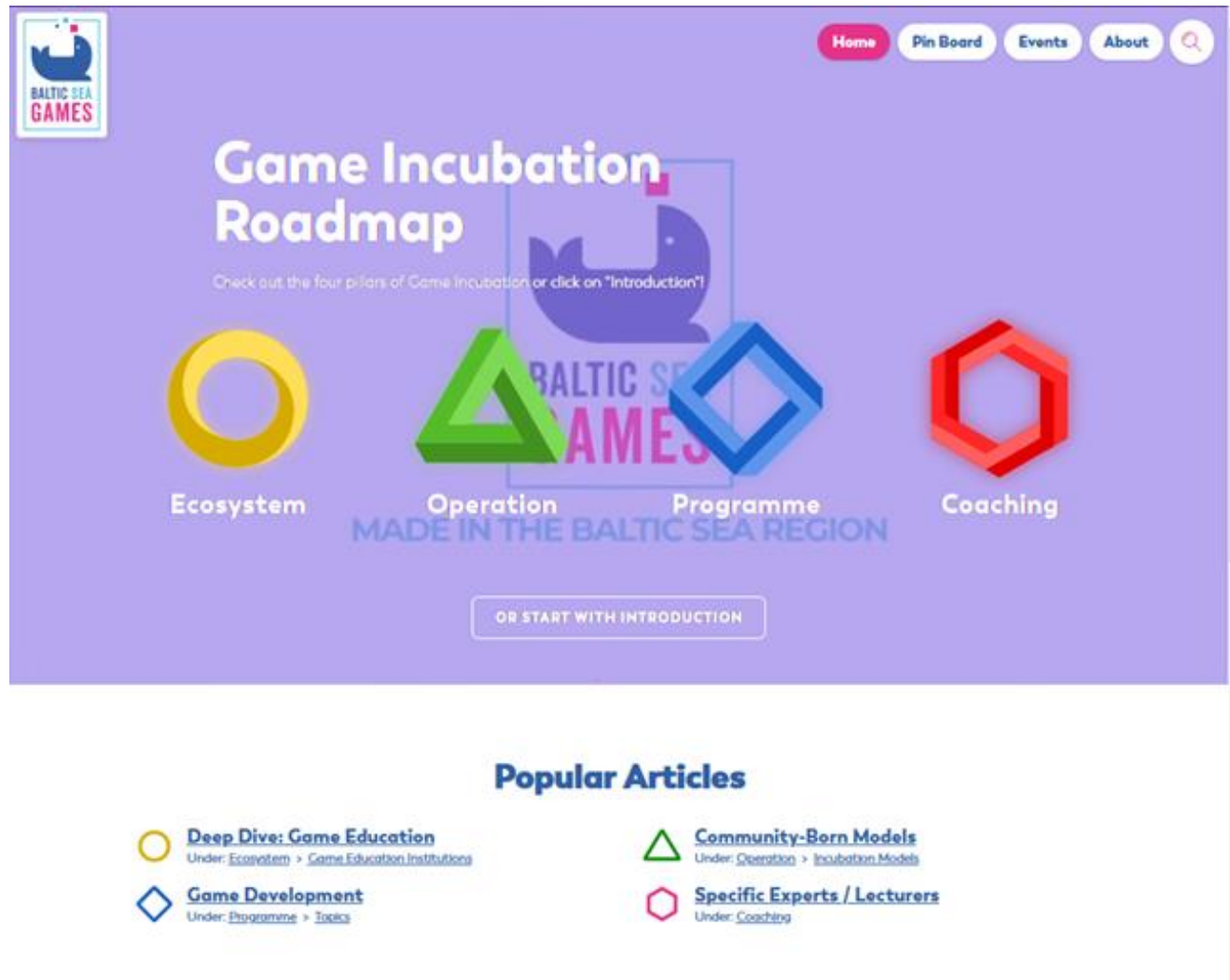
Own Screenshot: 4 pillars

Each of these 4 pillars is broken down into topic areas, which, if need be, are further broken down into subtopics. Each topic is featured with a specific page with the respective information (frequently with additional guidance by a table of contents) in paragraphs, lists, bullet points or other. Relevant links can be included as well as footnotes to enhance the reading experience. Topics that go further down into one of the pillars are directly linked on that topic page. This is indicated at the bottom of the page with the heading "Subpages".
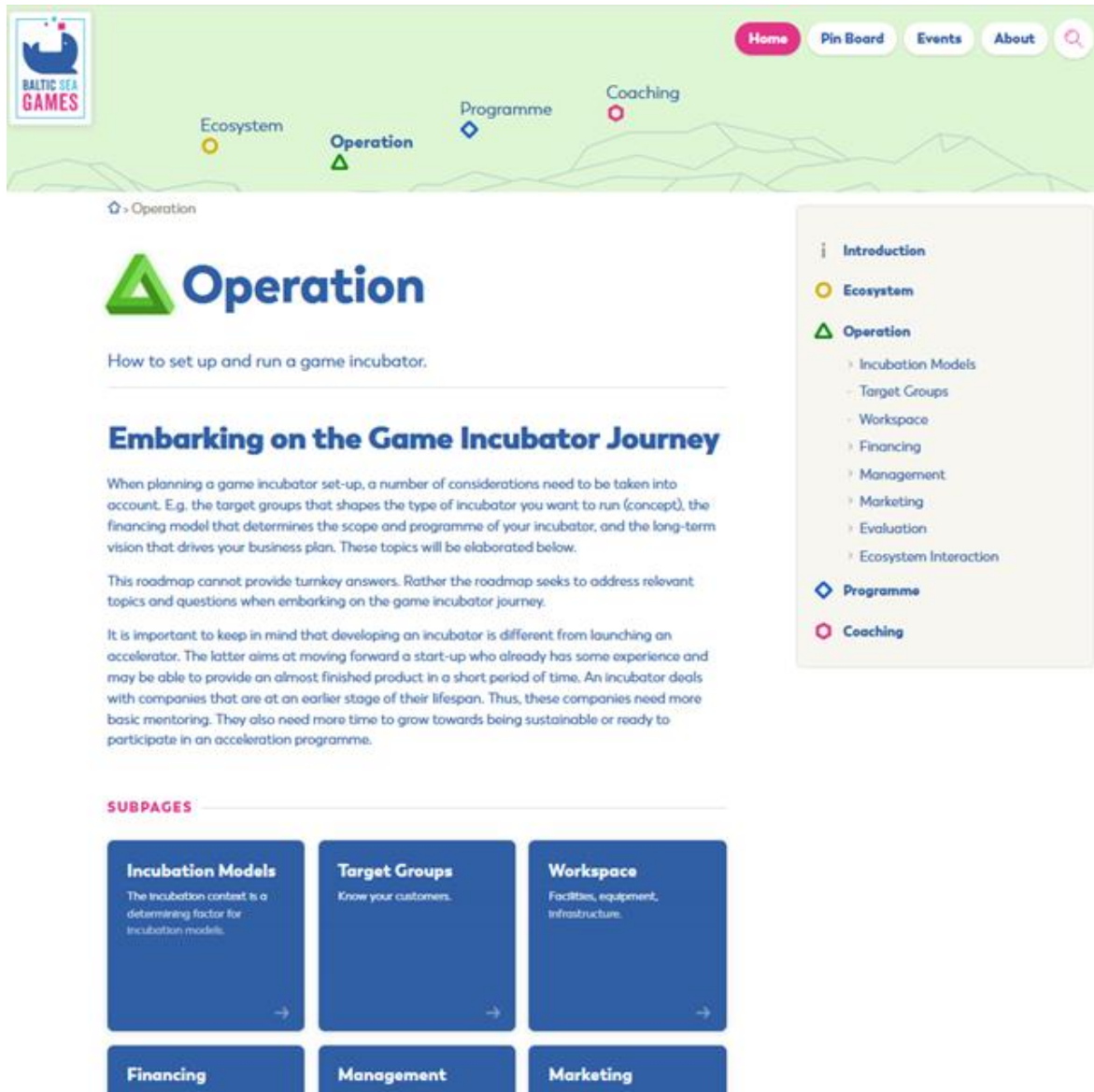
Own Screenshot: Topic page & subpages

Subpages marked with the title "Deep Dive" indicate a subpage that is providing an in-depth look at a specific topic where necessary.
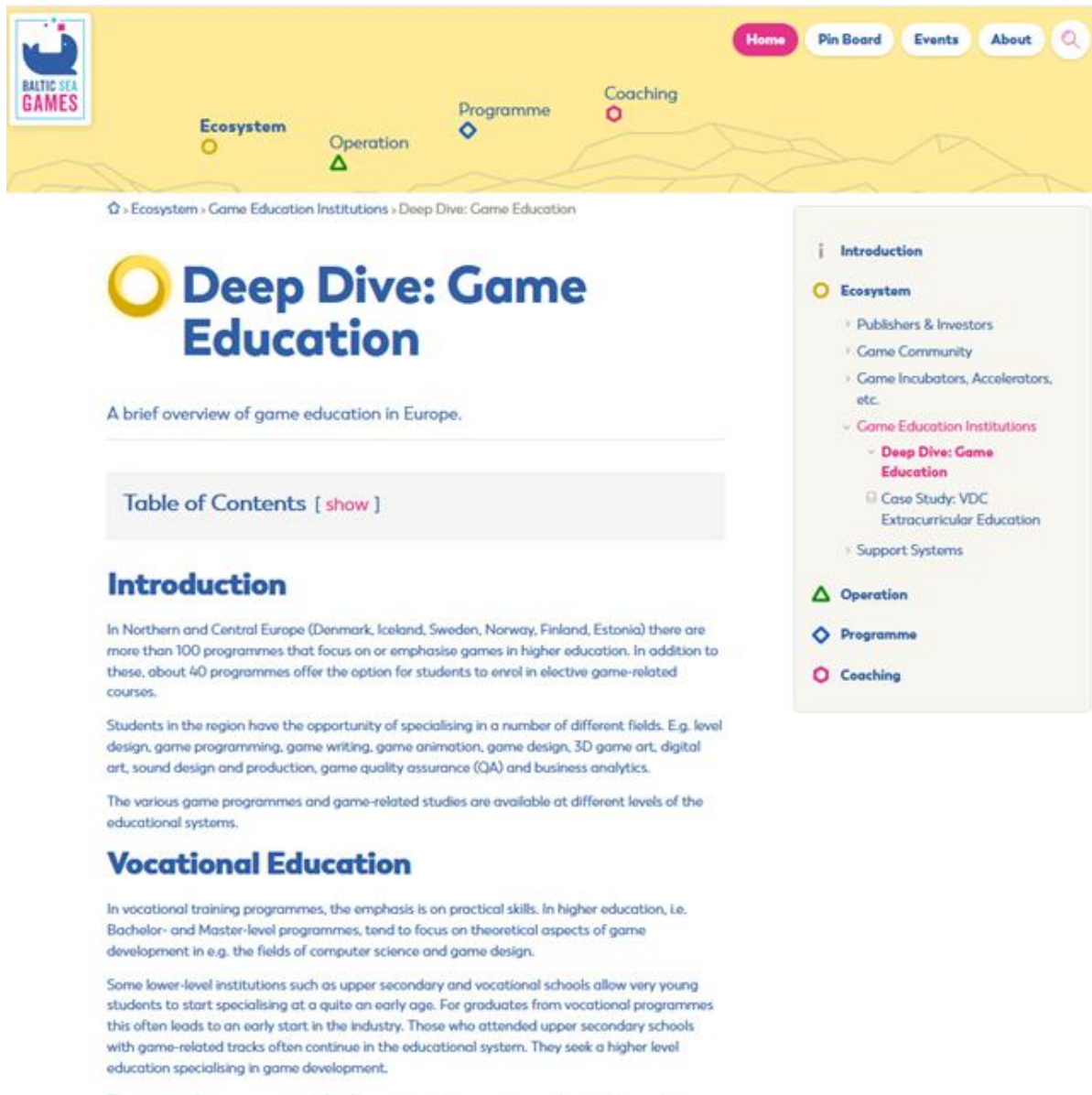
Own Screenshot: Deep Dive page

Some topics relate to other topics within the roadmap or complement them. This is indicated as part of a box on a topic page called "Related Content". Depending on the relevance, a range of other topic pages within the roadmap are cross-linked. This is to enable the user to quickly navigate between pages of the 4 pillars of the roadmap that are related in terms of content across the 4 pillars, curated by incubation experts.

Highlights

Also relevant for a game studio's company profile can be notable achievements and accomplishments such as:

- Awards
- Testimonials
- Reviews (from media as well as consumers)
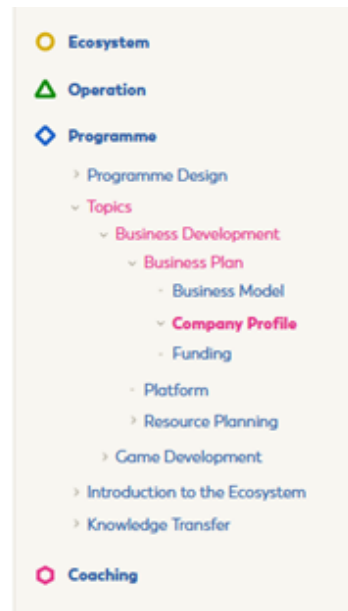- News or media recognition

Optional Items

The following items sometimes feature in company profiles but might not be relevant for early-stage start-ups that haven't yet converted their first product into sales. But, for more mature game development companies that have something to show, it can be a good idea to include them.

- Annual sales
- Financial targets
- Number of employees
- Partners (e.g. publishers, investors)
- Grants received
- Art / in-game photos or video clips.

RESOURCES

- ⬇ Press kit template
- ⬇ One-pager template used by Tartu Science Park, Estonia
- ⬇ Press kit of Bedtime Digital Games from Denmark (using above press kit template)
- ⬇ Press kit of Placeholder Gameworks from Estonia

○ **Ecosystem**

△ **Operation**

◇ **Programme**

 › Programme Design
 ⌄ Topics
  ⌄ Business Development
   ⌄ Business Plan
    · Business Model
    · **Company Profile**
    · Funding
   · Platform
   › Resource Planning
  › Game Development
 › Introduction to the Ecosystem
 › Knowledge Transfer

○ **Coaching**

Own Screenshot: Topic page with resources

Some topic pages feature special subpages called "Case Studies". These are topic pages with relevant examples (e.g. from the Baltic Sea region) for a topic, provided by incubation experts.

Own Screenshot: Case Study page

The obvious method to capture existing knowledge in an emerging environment is to engage with those who own the as yet either undocumented knowledge or to compile the widely dispersed information. The first often requires time and for people to actually verbalise and structure their knowledge. To this end, xperts in the field of game business support from all over Europe, in particular from the different parts of the BSR, met to discuss their different approaches, methods and practices with regards to individual aspects of their incubation activities, from target group selection to programme design, to marketing and knowledge transfer and to quality assurance and evaluation. This captured knowledge constitutes a singular body of knowledge within the game industry as it is rapidly evolving and still an active learning curve. The key is to establish a continued

exchange and keep stakeholders interested in adding to the knowledge base and engaging with other experts in the field.

At the same time, this expert involvement needs to be enticed through tools that would provide an added value to sharing information. Therefore, the knowledge capture is extended to include tools with valuable information as a reward for their active contribution.

Organising the Information

The building blocks identified as requirements for an efficient and useful knowledge base are:

- Guide for prospective game incubation operators, establishing the core of experience from current operative incubators
- Exchange platform for continued additions and discussion of pertinent issues
- Different databases
  - Game incubation / acceleration programmes in the BSR and Europe
  - Game mentors, coaches, and consultants worldwide
  - Game investors and publishers worldwide
  - Pertinent documentations and publications
  - Industry representatives and experts in the BSR and worldwide
- Tools to convey, analyse or support knowledge formation or compilation
  - Template to produce "investor / publisher" brief on outstanding teams recommended by the incubators
  - Template to match mentors and teams
- Pinboard for activities, events, or announcements by the game incubation community

To safeguard the integrity of the body of knowledge, the access to and management of the information needs to be placed under trusteeship. The foundation of the trusteeship would be an alliance or network formed by a membership body of game incubation and industry experts with different access rights.

Those parts that contain confidential information such as those falling into the GDPR domain, e.g. person databases, need to be restricted and only visible to trusted members, with specific access rights and answerable to the membership. Then there are parts that a wider circle of editors can gain access to as their contribution would form an important asset. The third part would allow the public user to manoeuvre through the roadmap and discover valuable information on game incubation activities in the BSR and Europe and to get in touch with the incubation operators or apply for mentorship.

Own graphic: Organisational set-up

We are currently investigating if it might not be leaner in terms of operation and maintenance to have different "containers" for different types of information sources and access levels and tie them together through simple linking. The alternative, i.e. finding and programming plug-ins into the existing WordPress container might prove more vulnerable to future disruption due to incompatible updates and might entail higher maintenance efforts.

5. Knowledge Capture

As mentioned above, to capture intangible knowledge that resides in individuals' minds, you need to reach out to them and find ways to extract that knowledge of which often they are not consciously aware of or could not provide in a structured and comprehensive way.

In the case of a young practice such as game incubation and to a lesser extent game acceleration (which has been practiced earlier than incubation), business developers had to be self-reliant, inventing the "game incubation" wheel as they embarked on their trial-and-error journey.

Although the game industry is exemplary for their openness to knowledge-sharing, this exchange mostly focuses on the market evolution, new technologies and business models, etc., discussed in the panels and the conference grapevines. However, attitude, methods, conjectures and assumptions, strategies of the actual work with start-ups, splinters or scale-ups lacking the business skills required to grow and stabilise a company are rarely touched upon on these occasions.

Therefore, it did not come as such a surprise when an invite to a game incubation expert exchange was met with a highly positive response. The general tenor was that such an exchange was long overdue.

Piloting an Expert Workshop

From the work on the roadmap for establishing a game incubator, we already had a complete list of topics relevant to this field of work. With game incubators being a relatively recent occurrence, we were able to discover all currently operative dedicated game incubators and accelerators in Europe. In parallel to inviting them to a first test run, we carried out a survey on how important and interesting the different topics seemed to them.
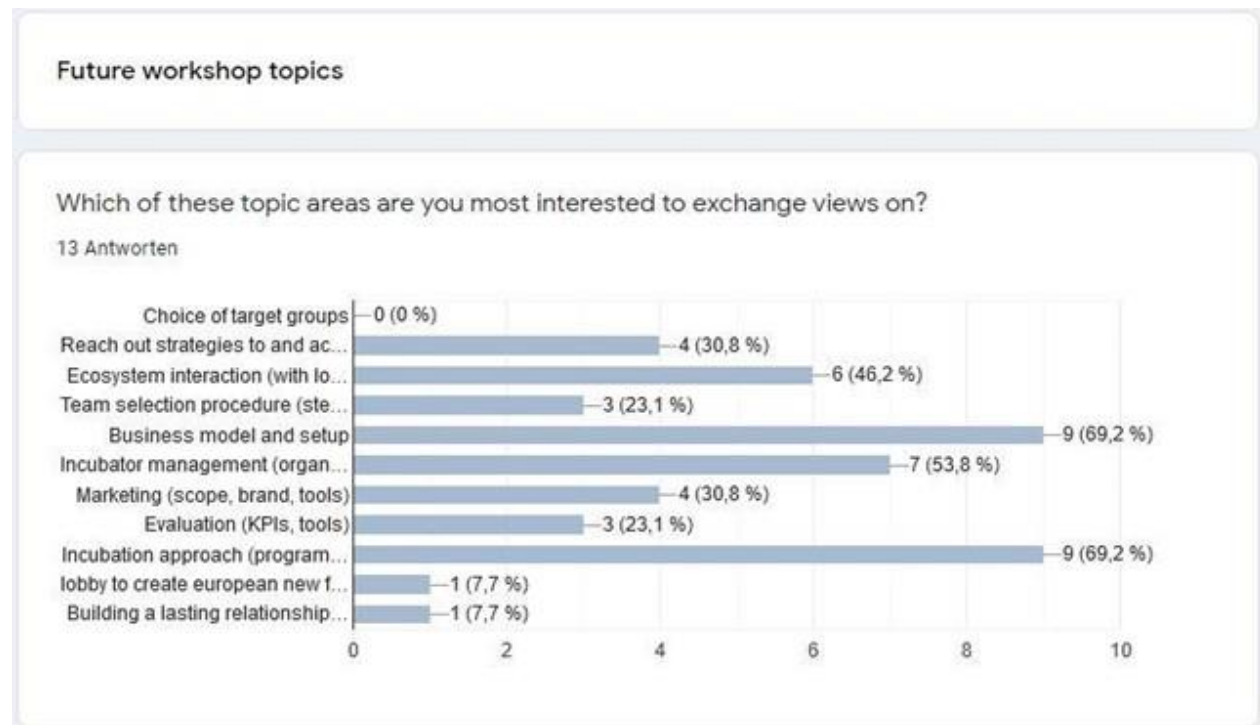
Here are the results of the survey:

High-interest topics
- Business model and setup
- Incubation approach (programme design, topics)
- Incubator management (organisation, staff, etc.)

Medium-interest topics
- Ecosystem interaction (with local authorities, education institutions, the community, etc.)
- Reach out strategies to and activities for target groups
- Team selection procedure (steps, forms, etc.)
- Marketing (scope, brand, tools)

Future workshop topics

Which of these topic areas are you most interested to exchange views on?

13 Antworten

Topic	Count (%)
Choice of target groups	0 (0 %)
Reach out strategies to and ac...	4 (30,8 %)
Ecosystem interaction (with lo...	6 (46,2 %)
Team selection procedure (ste...	3 (23,1 %)
Business model and setup	9 (69,2 %)
Incubator management (organ...	7 (53,8 %)
Marketing (scope, brand, tools)	4 (30,8 %)
Evaluation (KPIs, tools)	3 (23,1 %)
Incubation approach (program...	9 (69,2 %)
lobby to create european new f...	1 (7,7 %)
Building a lasting relationship...	1 (7,7 %)

Own screenshot: Survey results on "Future workshop topics"

Though this was indicative of the areas where there might as yet be insecurity - mostly due to the rapidly changing situation in the industry and market - we decided to start with the basic questions. The idea was to deep dive into what seemed (according to the survey responses) unambiguous topics and thus make the game incubation experts revisit their assumptions and pre-conceptions within these areas. We started at the beginning: wished for and actual target groups. To facilitate the discussion, we split the attendees into three groups.

To stimulate a lively exchange, we engaged facilitators to encourage active participation, while note-takers ensured that the group could fully concentrate on their conversation and that the knowledge discussed was documented. The facilitators received a detailed script to ensure that there was no digressing from the topic, however, the key objective was to dig into a topic and let the experts talk to each other without too severe time constraints. The notes from the three groups were then collated and analysed. Several congruent aspects came to light. The synopsis was circulated not only amongst the attendees but within the whole European expert community, as all expressed their interest in the pilot activity, even though not all could make it at the chosen date for the first round. All attendees agreed to exchange their email addresses.

As a means to establish a network that will take over responsibility for the knowledge base beyond the project, we will continue the workshops using the understanding from the previous workshop to determine the next topic area. The planned next topic will be "methods in and motivation of business development".

Documenting the First Test Run

Participating Organisations

- Aalborg University Incubator
- Abragames
- Baltic Explorers
- Carbon Incubator
- Cnam-Enjmin
- Dutch Game Garden
- Execution Labs
- Game Acceleration South Sweden
- Game Habitat
- Ideas Lab - Filmby Aarhus
- Playa Game Industry Hub
- SpielFabrique
- Tartu Creative Incubator / Center for Creative Industries
- Swedish Games Industry - Association of Swedish Game Developers
- Xamk

and other incubation project partners:

- DE:HIVE
- Game Hub Denmark
- LGIN - Living Game Intelligence Network
- Turku Game Hub

Agenda

- Housekeeping rules
- BSGI & rationale behind the workshop series
- Overview and presentation of BSGI incubation partners
- Presentation of external experts - focus on the organisations
- Breakout room discussions
    - Round 1: Target groups
    - Round 2: Reach out strategies to target groups
    - Round 3: Selection methods to accommodate the intended target group concept?
    - Round 4: Change of target groups and strategies and / or selection method over the years?
    - Round 5: Ideas / approach / experiences regarding alumni programme
- Looking forward
    - Feedback and next topics
    - Idea of alliance (joint activities, knowledge exchange, platform, lobbying, projects)
    - Presentation of support opportunities by IGDA

International Expert Round on Development Support for Young Game Businesses
Online event on 28 April 2021

A synopsis of the discussions amongst 25 experts

Background:

The project "Baltic Sea Game Incubation" is a follow-up of the "BGI Baltic Game Industry" project (funded by the Interreg-BSR programme). Our endeavour is to provide a sustainable expert environment and knowledge base on game developer incubation, acceleration and business support. Lively exchange amongst experts in this field will provide a fertile ground to further empower the "incubation / business support" ecosystem.

The expert rounds are designed to dive deeper into topics that are often not really questioned, even though there are many different approaches applied in the industry / community. The discussions should challenge the different underlying assumptions and enable the experts to critically re-think their own strategies and practices. To a certain extent, the series of discussions might lead to reshaping the current notion of "game incubation", perhaps eventually arriving at a different design than the current one which seems heavily based on the model of IT and film incubation.

General line of enquiry for this first expert round: "Revisiting your target groups - are we targeting the right group?"
- Who are your target groups?
- Have they changed over the years?
- Do you attract the groups you seek to attract?
- What influenced your choice of target groups and / or you changing tack?

Target Group 1: Students - Incubation

It seems that this is where a lot of incubation starts: in the context of universities. And at first glance, it seems a logical choice with educators wishing to accompany their students into the market after graduation. Or to help them keep the IP of the game they developed during their studies.

However, the more experienced incubators have come to realise that it is not necessarily a successful and reasonable avenue. Many amongst them have turned away from taking on students.

Students more often than not have created games in a cocoon. They usually resemble the "hobby type" of game developer, interested in making the game, but not so much in setting up a business. In addition, teams that have been built during studies are often based on friendship or it is difficult dismissing one or the other. Hence, while the team composition is paramount for a business set-up, it is often the student teams that are tied down and inflexible in developing a sound team structure.

Also, with the game industry growing and the related increase in employment, students now turn more frequently to the job market than to the incubator or drop out as soon as there is a good job offer.

On the other hand, Finland who is often the pioneer of the "next thing to look out for", is intensely reaching out to the "hobby-developer" stratum of the ecosystem to ensure a balanced supply of young talent to keep the industry flourishing.

The issue seems only to be in part with the "students". It strongly depends on the university and their game education approach. For example, those that offer a master's degree often include business competence building courses. An interesting example is CNAM-ENJIM in Angoulême offering a "game producer" course, signalling that game development is a business, in addition training for a highly important, yet too rare job profile. Others are offering pre-incubation courses as a bridge to incubation. So, it seems that it depends on the "business" orientation of the university regardless of whether they operate in a media-design-art or IT & computer-engineering context.

Game Habitat with their GASS (Game Acceleration South Sweden) project offer 5 weeks start-up academy course (2 hours per week) and 2 months bootcamp for teams without a published game. Though open to all, it attracts a lot of graduates and the investment on both sides is limited – hence, teams would quickly find out whether "doing business" is where they want to go.

The common experience is that the majority of students are not interested in learning the "business side" of game development and thus the "failure score" is high (to the detriment of the incubator's renown). Therefore, an approach that would help sound out the aptitude and mind-set for turning into an entrepreneur should be in place for incubators running mainly with students.

Quoted statement:
"An incubator as a follow-on for students is the biggest mistake. Financial viability is not part of their mind-set. During their studies they made a game, not a marketable product. We had incubatees that at 20 were not interested in the entrepreneurial part – they wanted to make games, not necessarily at a profit. Now at 30 they're coming back for the entrepreneurial skill building to attract VC."

Question to the Experts (for next time perhaps?):
Those of you who focus on incubation as a means of paving the way for teams that lack entrepreneurial savvy to becoming successful businesses or growing scale-ups: you are doing this as a driver to boost the game industry by increasing the stratum of young talented and business-oriented professionals, right? But why are you focusing on incubating only teams on their journey to becoming an enterprise? Isn't the industry lacking business-oriented middle to senior managers? Wouldn't it make sense to coach promising creative game developers to move up in larger companies and be part of the decision-making levels quicker by making them understand the business and market of the industry in parallel to enhancing their design and programming skills? I.e., learning these skills without requiring them to form a studio, become a business or entrepreneurs? Becoming like a mix between a VET and incubator – if targeting inexperienced hobby game devs or graduates? We were told that the students' interest in incubation has

decreased with the increase in job offers on the market. So why not choose a model that would allow for professionalisation of business skills for both higher-level jobs and entrepreneurs?

Target Group 2: Splinters – Incubation & Acceleration

Some of those who have been in the incubation business for a while, have turned from students and "just-started" companies to splinters, expecting them to be more accepting of having to learn the business (splinters are forming one's own business after having worked in a company for some time, hence having experience but not necessarily business savvy).

As this approach is a bit more recent than the student target group approach, the experiences with this target group differs in a positive sense, because they understand the need to make money to survive and because there is a strong desire to remain in the industry (as opposed to moving to e.g., the automobile sector where game developers find well-paid jobs) and in a negative sense, because many think all it needs to succeed is their existing experience plus the freedom to follow their own ideas (as opposed to their former bosses' ideas). Some teams gave up as they found it hard and unattractive to run the business side of things. In this aspect, the mind-set was not necessarily more open towards learning these skills than it was with graduates or young start-ups. But the urgency of making money (quickly) was higher, and thus the expectations from the incubator or accelerator, too. They know the game they want to make and might be very selective in the services they will use. In most cases, "incubation" has to adapt individually to their agendas, and they have less time for "workshops" and other time-intensive learning components.

Another issue is – a bit like with the fellow student teams – that splinters often are built from a group of two or more former colleagues and then you see the lead programmer or designer become the CEO -though not necessarily as proficient in this task as in the other.

Quoted statement:

"We found working with splinters a big mistake. They have the wrong mind-set. There is still too much of this attitude 'creative power thrives in poverty' going which explains a lot the lack of business ambition in young and indie teams. The movie 'Indie Game' has done nothing to contradict this. While Don Daglow's statement that being an entrepreneur (and earning money) enables him to be more artistic, seems to mostly fall on deaf ears. 'We are artists, not start-ups'."

Question to the Experts (for next time perhaps?):

Isn't it a general issue, the lack of a business-minded team member, one who enjoys business management and understands games, but knows that their talent is not good enough to be doing well as a developer? But doesn't exactly that work somehow in other creative sectors? Someone with a bachelor's in economics or so, willing to earn less but working for a sector that brings joy or fulfilment? Would it not make sense to include e.g. courses paving the way for "failed developers" to instead follow the path of "game producer" "game marketing manager" etc. Where and how could this be installed at both university and VET institutions (e.g., game academies)? Just as the graduate and start-up incubation has grown from a motivation of industry support from community members, would not these same people need to promote this idea, help shape a programme and find supporting infrastructure for it?

And what about Indies – strangely, they were hardly mentioned. Are they mostly splinters?

Target Group 3: Green Start-Ups – Incubation

The difference between this target group and the students is mainly in the setting and funding. If the incubator is part of the university environment, the transition is smooth, which as described above might exactly be the problem: still in the cocoon.

If the game incubator is either part of a larger (independent or tech park) incubator, then the difference is more about whether the teams have already formally established a company or not. Many incubators require this formal foundation for their programmes as it signals the earnest desire to become a business and they will think twice about dropping out.

These teams are more willing to spend time on "learning" than splinters, they are also often more prepared to do some iteration in identifying the right niche for them. Another advantage of working with start-up teams is that there usually is public funding in place for start-up support.

A broad and lively game community is an invaluable asset for start-up support. The peer-to-peer exchange is a very important complementary boost for the start-ups, and the sense of "belonging" will encourage them to see their project through to the end.

Some incubators e.g. in North Sweden or with the GASS project or in Tartu, operate as part of not IT incubators but of CCI (mostly film) incubators. Here it pays to create an understanding for the game industry, its potential, and its range of its facets (not just video games but roleplay, cards, cosplay, etc.) and to build a community around the creativity, unlocking the potential that's available in the region.

Question to the Experts (for next time perhaps?):

Someone came up with the idea that with an active network of start-up incubators (and other forms of supporting organisations e.g., hubs), if there was a web platform where teams sharing same issues because doing same genres or being VR or serious games etc., brought together through their coaches, incubators, or mentors, would this not create the kind of impact that a large and tight community could provide?

Target Group 4: Early Scale-Ups – Incubation & Acceleration

Incubators disconnected from the university context tend to take on (early) scale-ups, taking the fact that they have already published 1-3 games as a sign of them seriously wanting to go into business and thus not wasting mentor time (which is often volunteered by senior developers) or (public / private) funding. Accelerators take on teams that do not need support in the development of the game itself, but in placing their game on the market and raising capital.

Target Group 4: Mixed Groups

While some incubators have mixed groups because they have long programmes so that every new batch runs parallel to earlier batches, or because their funding/financing doesn't give them a choice, they need to fulfil a quota regardless of the maturity level of the teams, others have by design opted for mixed levels to create an environment encouraging peer-to-peer to exchange and helping teams see beyond the limits of their "own box".

Target Group 5: Special Focus

It seems that some game incubators employ people with knowledge in business or law or programming or design but have themselves only second-hand knowledge of the intricacies or idiosyncrasies of the game industry nor have they ever produced a game themselves. Some argue that the game industry is too complex for an incubator to be able to cover all genres and market sectors and thus should focus on parts of the market and offer real first-hand expertise.

Target Group 6: Regional or International

Most incubators are regional, mostly because of their public funding conditions. But it also was difficult for those who could take on international teams to accommodate them. Though the community seems open and welcoming, it is often in fact a closed circle and language can be a barrier to enter this circle. Online coaching is feasible but definitely needs more exploration to find effective ways to assess for whom this type of incubation might work.

The questions to be tackled in the second half of the project are:
- How to create an online environment within our platform as an extension and complement to the expert discussion round?
- How to ingest the information and ensure discovery for others?
- What access level should we grant for this type of information?

6. Evaluation and Deployment

Evaluation Methodology

<u>We will evaluate the knowledge base threefold:</u>

- Feedback from incubator target group (e.g. a survey)
- Focus group with incubation managers, incubation staff, mentors, prospective incubation operators
- User statistics from the website

We plan to finalise the platform structurally (clearly it is meant to be a living tool, evolving further over time which might require some adaptations and streamlining in the future) by the beginning of November.

Together with the invite for the planned final conference (see below), we will ask the incubation experts to respond to a survey regarding the platform.

During the conference, we will ask a focus group, i.e. selected members of different target groups, to assess the usefulness and user-friendliness of the platform for their own needs. We will hand out tasks to be fulfilled with the help of the website and following the focus group methodology, have them discuss amongst themselves their experience and suggestions for improvement. Only a note-taker and facilitator will be present, but not interfere other than to initiate the discussion and do housekeeping.

We will then debug the website accordingly and launch an extensive and dedicated dissemination of the platform (promoting all the new components added to the BGI roadmap) within the target group community. The launch will be the baseline for statistically assessing the impact of the dissemination.

Deployment

Though the roadmap and its evolving structure remained visible and thus discoverable at all times, we held back on intensive public promotion of the platform to avoid disappointment based on premature conclusion, gaps and not yet fine-tuned or tested functionalities and offers. Also, we felt that the roadmap lacked an intuitional navigation interface which we will commission during the second half of the project.

Most important, however, is to ensure its long-term operational framework. Many websites are orphaned because their set-up had been too ambitious and required too much day-to-day or regular care to remain updated. The knowledge ingested into the roadmap itself will not become obsolete within months or even years, hence it does not require continuous updating, while a website appears orphaned if the news or events sections show inactivity for more than several weeks. Also, a regular newsletter requires a routine workflow and a central management. A database or a blog can be operated decentralised with a group having specific access and authoring rights and without the dictate and pressure of a specific schedule.

Therefore, we will carefully look into creating a sound and viable solution for sharing the responsibility of management and care amongst a core group of experts which we engage with in the expert workshops and the conference to demonstrate with our pilots the value this online platform has to offer for them and their ecosystem. Dania Academy with its Game Hub Denmark managers will be the facilitators for the network involvement and shared responsibility, and guardians of the website itself.

The current conceptual approach will be tested and implemented during the pilot phase in period 2:
- Website holder: Game Hub Denmark (transfer of ownership from Tartu TP for URL registration)
- Regular membership: Organisations signing up the alliance agreement as regular members forming the core group with full access rights.
- Associated membership: Organisations and experts registering as associate members, gaining thus limited access rights

Draft of rights and responsibility structure:
- The core group has the right to access the databases and all its personal data contents
- The core group has the exclusive right to add information to the database
- The core group manages the permission rules in keeping with GDPR and the data owners' permissions
- The core group has the exclusive right to add information to the roadmap
- The core group approves the publication of the investor / publisher letter
- The associates have the right to access only the selective fields of the database (excluding restricted data)
- The associates have the right to add to the blog / exchange forum
- The associates have the right to add to the literature / documentation resource list
- The associates can publish event announcement links.

To be assessed and validated:
- How to exclude registered persons who violate the rules or are pirating the access for other content or purpose than game incubation?
- How to include matchmaking tools, e.g. between mentors and teams?

7. Conclusion

As the game industry is getting more mature with more successful game developers and experienced veterans around willing to share their knowledge and experience with younger and more inexperienced teams, the need to fill the gaps these (prospective) mentors and business developers will naturally have, it seems all to logical to support their commitment through a central platform providing invaluable information regarding game incubation and current trends in the market and industry. The survey done in connection with the mentor workshop had an open question regarding what they would wish for, and several mentors were mentioning a source of information, a database or list for them to peruse, when they feel that they need specific knowledge to be able to help a team. Connected to the body of knowledge gathered and ingested in the online roadmap, is a salient need for exchange amongst the mentors and incubation staff, but also a matchmaking support option. Part of the knowledge base would then need to be several tools, such as a literature / video database, a matchmaking tool for teams and mentors, an overview of existing incubation organisations and ways to get in touch with them. For the original roadmap for game incubation to become a compelling asset for the community and their one-stop shop, we have come to understand that these components that will foster exchange, make it easy to discover important information and facilitate ingestion of new knowledge, are paramount for its usefulness and sustainable success.

THE PROJECT

The extension project "Baltic Sea Game Incubation – Piloting Network Activities to Foster Game Incubation in the BSR" (BSGI) builds upon the BGI-project and continues to work on boosting the game industry in the Baltic Sea Region – giving special attention to capacity building. Its main objective is to enhance business support of game incubators through strategic transnational collaboration with other game incubators in the Baltic Sea region (BSR). Joining forces in transnational cooperation will significantly raise the impact on industry development as opposed to acting alone. A viable international incubation network, a standardised incubation approach with powerful support tools and the expansion of the talent pool will enable young game studios and game developers to compete successfully in the game market and turn it into a growth market.

Read more at https://baltic-games.eu/171/project-extension-bsgi/

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- Finland: Metropolia University of Applied Sciences, Turku Game Hub
- Germany: HTW Berlin University of Applied Sciences
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- Sweden: Creative Crowd AB, Invest Stockholm

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