

Lithuanian Video Game Developers are Facing a Transformation: Is it about Time to Become Rebellious?

Interview with Arturas R, June 2018

Tendency analysts noticed that the boom of small studios establishment, which has stormed the market, is beginning to subside, thus we will hear about the closure of a few studios in the near future. It should not scare away enthusiasts, since the analysts reassure that this process is just one of the natural stages of this type of industry development, supposedly it is the screening of developers. Kaunas Science and Technology Park is involved in the initiative of the international programme Interreg BSR, which is sponsored by the Baltic Games Industry, and together with the Lithuanian Game Developers Association prepares a review on the game market in the country that helps to understand which Lithuanian characteristics stand out in the European and global context.

The 'project 'Baltic Game Industry' (BGI) aims towards boosting the game industry in the Baltic Sea region. The core element is the installation of durable game incubation structures and schemes that effectively support the emergence and viability of game start-ups.

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Woman in VR glasses outdoor ©iStock.com-bedy

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Kaunas Origins

The sector of video game industry is rapidly growing – the USA company “Newzoo” belongs to the video game industry and predicts that this year the global sales of video games will increase over 138 million USA dollars (over 115 million euros). The video game industry operates at a lot lower amounts in Lithuania; the turnover reached 200 thousand euros in 2015. Taking into account the fact that the video game industry has been developing for 50 years, these figures are significant to the country, as the development of video games has only begun about 20 years ago.

“The development of video games in Lithuania started from the one initiative “Nesnausk” (“Wake Up”) of Kaunas University of Technology Gymnasium, where the first seeds of video game development and networking have sprouted. We still feel a deep connection with Kaunas University of Technology (KTU), even though it does not offer a training programme for video game developers. However, the university has trained an army of industry veterans as well as successfully practicing study managers”, the Board Member of the Lithuanian Game Developers Association, Artūras Rumiancevas, notes.

Talented but Modest

The game market analyst claims that the contribution of the university showed the world various success stories; a KTU “Startup Space” incubator witnessed the emergence of “SneakyBox” and other studios. The university supports student’s ideas to this day and encourages them to take part in the game development as well as participate in a workshop called “Game Jam”. Nonetheless, a smooth start-up does not solve the challenges the current Lithuanian game developers face – they are young and overly modest game developers.

“We, Lithuanians, are a bit introverted, so even if we have something to boast about, at the same time we somehow get embarrassed and do not say anything. Maybe it is a result of an ingrained notion of the past, which implied that Lithuania was of no interest to anyone. Fortunately, this attitude no longer reflects the present-day reality, considering Lithuania is a place where plenty of projects have earned their moment of regional or global glory. Finally, we have something to show for and are not afraid to tell our story, thus all we need to do now is accept the challenges and help each other to overcome them”, says A. Rumiancevas.

Decision: Integration into European Developer Communities

The game industry itself consists of a creative and a business side, hence the developers may find it difficult to attract new people and create a gamers’ circle. The representative of the Lithuanian Game Developers Association highlights the fact that even though they are creative and respected developers, Lithuanians find it substantially more difficult to penetrate businesses; they do not know how to pitch themselves and sell a solution to the market. The interview subject states that the developer communities lend a hand to the teams of game developers by showing initiatives and constant involvement as well as by being more universal and a part of the European or global game industry.

One of such examples is an annual conference “GameOn” (<https://gameon.lt/en>), which has been taking place for four years thanks to the initiative of enthusiasts. During the conference, there are presentations about innovative idea generators; trendy developers or rebels from the international game industry can encourage the game studios to set themselves up for change and make risky but courageous decisions to be on the road to success.



Game controller toned blue © iStock.com-arcoss

Discovery of Mobile Application Niche

The fact that Lithuanians develop most of their games in the form of mobile applications is not a coincidence. These types of games were the last chance for Lithuanians, because developing games on other platforms requires more resources as well as larger teams and initial investments. According to the game market analyst, although mobile applications are relatively cheap to produce, it costs substantially more to be noticed in this kind of environment.

“Lithuania does not have traditions, so we had to independently reinvent the wheel in many fields more than once, especially when it comes to communication, public relations, marketing and business development. In the past, studio managers were searching for programmers, but now they face new sorts of challenges – there is a lack of so-called artists: graphic designers, modellers, animators. Today, we rarely talk about it, but time will come when there will be a shortage of producers, game designers and new-concept game developers”, A. Rumiancevas discusses the ever-changing trends and the search for the most important members of the game developer teams.

Dawn of Rebels

“I was listening to a presentation on how game communities function in each country. I especially enjoyed one vivid example of market development – firstly, the enthusiasts who create something come together. Later, a local hero shows up and inspires others to follow him/her. At a certain stage, there are rebels, who break away from the group of the local hero followers and reach a turning point, which generates new ideas and viewpoints”, A. Rumiancevas talks about the evolution of the game market.

The Board Member of the Lithuanian Game Developers Association declares that the Lithuanian developer community is almost at the threshold of a rebellious separation and this symbolises the desire to develop games not just for mobile applications. Although these developers are not revolutionary rebels, the local market usually learns about their products from influential publication articles of the international game industry.

“The “Nintendo Switch” platform released the game “Human Fall Flat”, which is an excellent example of this phenomenon. In Lithuania, there are 2–3 game development models, which are more or less the basis of all studios that operate here. However, suddenly you open an international magazine and spot developers, who are keen on creating something extraordinary, i.e. a unique marketing strategy, and then they distribute a few million copies of their game, so this is a specific type of rebellious behaviour. Other people will flock round this developer and these individuals are exactly what Lithuania needs”, according to the game market analyst.

Knowledge Exchange: Ace up a Sleeve

While overviewing the requirements of game studios, the interview subject emphasises that the best contribution of interested parties would be to improve the business environment. The Lithuanian studios have mixed teams and a part of the developers is and will be foreign employees, thus in hopes of supporting these people, a flexible tax system and simpler legal regulations are essential.

The Director of the Lithuanian Game Developers Association, Gediminas Tarasevičius, highlights the loopholes in legislation that cause damage to small enterprises; some of these loopholes give way for competitive sectors to employ human resources at a much lower cost. Since the programmer sector focuses on head-hunt, this kind of drain of employees is extremely detrimental to small studios. “Generally, small and micro enterprises or creative studios require high up-front investment in order to get on their feet and propel. It would be particularly effective, if, e.g. a 4–5-year-old start-up game creation accelerator, which has a development programme, was co-financed by the state and private investors”, G. Tarasevičius observes.

Nonetheless, the representatives of the Lithuanian Game Developers Association have concluded that the Lithuanian game market for developers has sowed its seeds and even if nothing is growing yet, there is potential to bear lots of fruit. All they need is to accept and treasure their individuality by stressing their capabilities without fear of fields that pose challenges. The international face of the game industry is constantly changing and the modern industry is not the same as it was three or five years ago. The current dialogue revolves around integrity and open partnership as well as the search for new ideas, communication and knowledge exchange.

Translation from Lithuanian

<http://kaunomtp.lt/lithuanian-video-game-developers-are-facing-a-transformation-is-it-about-time-to-become-rebellious>

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