

Adaptability of the Global Game Jam: A Case Study in Japan

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ABSTRACT

We report how the Global Game Jam was introduced in Japan. Introducing events like the Global Game Jam can assist in promoting the benefits of new methods and technologies to the developers, educators, and students throughout the world. In our case, many Japanese jam attendees were not well-acquainted with the practice of the participatory design or prototyping well before the Global Game Jam. To raise awareness at the Global Game Jam about those key elements, local site organizers tried to not only offer backgrounds but also to emphasize some game jam strategies.

Categories and Subject Descriptors

H.5.2 [User Interfaces]: User-Centered Design, Prototyping;
K.8.0 [Computing Milieux]: Personal Computing, General, Games

General Terms

Experimentation, Design, Development, Learning

1. INTRODUCTION

Since the first annual Global Game Jam was held in January 2009[5], the Global Game Jam demonstrated the positive effect that game development can have in helping people learn collaboratively. Bringing the Global Game Jam into different societies sometimes produces different understandings of the event.

This paper first examines why some elements or meanings of the Global Game Jam lose and how the Global Game Jam organizers designed the Global Game Jam based on the local context.

2. THE GAME JAM APPROACH

In the early analysis of game jams, Musil et al. [11] pointed out that the concept of a game jam has not been formally discussed despite the public attention the events have received. They defined [proof]ita game jam as “a mix of

design and development strategies” and broke it down into eight key concepts or strategies: 1) New Product Development, 2) Participatory Design, 3) Lightweight Construction, 4) Product Value-Focused, 5) Rapid Experience Prototyping, 6) Aesthetics and Technology, 7) Concurrent Development, and 8) Multidisciplinarity (Fig. 1).

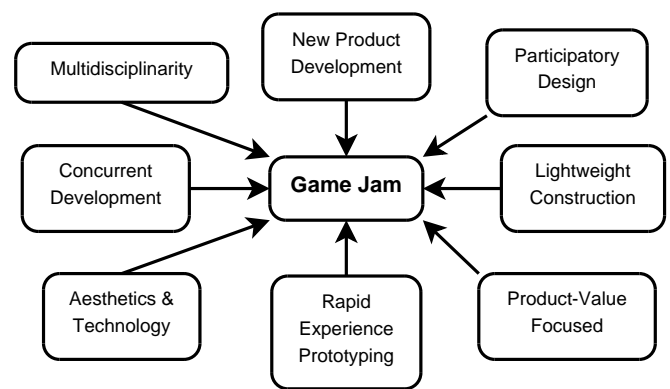


Figure 1: Game Jam elements outlined by Musil et al. [11]

As these key concepts or strategies are also found in other disciplines, Musil et al. [11] explain that these shared strategies make understandable “why game jams gain increasing popularity among the interaction design community and trend to be favored among other design approaches.” This insight also suggests that people might miss the meaning or value of a game jam without the awareness of these key elements.

We at IGDA Japan (the Japanese chapter of the IGDA, the International Game Developers Association) had also recognized the understanding the Global Game Jam event is not easy for people who have less experience with new development methodologies. We tried to communicate an awareness of the constituent elements by organizing local jam sites (Fig. 2). This approach adopted several methods including providing historical information, translating keynotes with background information, emphasizing the particular achievements, and development strategies of the Global Game Jam.

3. LOCALIZATION STRATEGIES

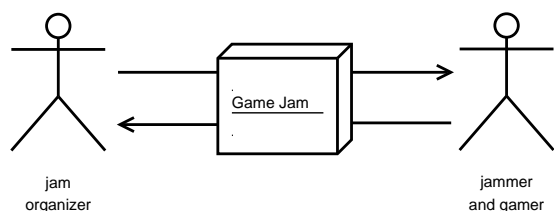


Figure 2: Game jam design: making awareness by local design

Since January 2010, IGDA Japan promoted Global Game Jam to other related organizations in Japan. The impact of Global Game Jam in Japan has taken several forms, detailed below.

3.1 Public awareness of game development as a global event

In the field of game development in Japan, the industry collaboration with universities and graduate schools is still at the beginning stage [10]. In this phase, hosting and promoting the Global Game Jam site at the University drew significant attention from game developers and a wider public audience.

For example, students and professional game developers at the GGJ2011 Tokyo site, the largest jam site in Japan, were featured on a TV program aired nationwide [12]. In addition, the GGJ2011 Fukuoka site, the second largest site in Japan, was publicized through University press release and its promotion occasioned a visit by the city mayor to the game jam site [6].

3.2 Participatory design

As we described in section 2, some researchers have pointed out that Participatory Design is one of the key concept constituent of a game jam. The concept and practice of Participatory Design was developed in Scandinavia and introduced in the United States in the 1990s by a grass roots organization [7].

However, the participatory design movement has not become widespread in some countries including Japan. With regard to introducing Participatory Design (PD) to current development methodology in Asia, Yasuoka et al. [16] reported that some Japanese researchers argue that PD is culturally incompatible, “by showing that Japanese social value systems and understandings of participation are different from countries where PD has been applied.” This observation supports the idea that Japanese game developers may fail to understand some PD elements of the game jam; however, in our view, the key concept of participation was effectively introduced in the Global Game Jam through the emphasis of new design strategies such as rapid prototyping, inclusion of diverse teams including non-professionals, and open user tests. These experiments suggests that the Global Game Jam can provide a successful model of PD worldwide.

3.3 Culture of prototyping

The Japanese game industry has shown less interests in prototyping in commercial game development than has been shown in other countries. For example, rapid prototyping in game development was featured at the SIGGRAPH symposium in 2007 [8], yet it took until 2010 for a major Japanese game developer to “discover” the power of prototyping and take it seriously. In 2010, in the Postmortem of *Final Fantasy XIII*, the flagship game title of the Japanese RPG market, the developers indicated that they had lacked a shared vision until they made first an initial playable demo (a premier products for [proof]thea game show not included in the original development plan) [15]. We believe this demonstrates the power of prototyping in the huge-scale game development. In promoting the Global Game Jam 2011 event, IGDA Japan re-emphasized the power of rapid prototyping in the “real” game development process.

3.4 Providing role models for dealing with design challenge

Unlike other exercises, the game jam provides a valuable role model for learners: — *the game developers*. Though this role model provides motivational force, we promoted a new form of game developer: the *rapid prototyper*.

To promote the new role model, we emphasized it in the keynote talk at the first Global Game Jam in 2009 [2]. Keynote speaker Kyle Gabler, a co-developer of *World of Goo*, which won innovation and technical excellence awards at the 2008 Independent Game Festival (<http://www.igf.com/>), had reported on rapid prototyping experiments in his game development research in graduate school. After Gabler and other project members’ experimental game development projects were published [14] [1], their rapid prototyping experiments became a topic of academic–industry collaboration [8].

Translating the first Global Game Jam keynote speech featuring Gabler and other game developers who explained the rapid short-term prototype development that created their award-winning game, we encouraged challenging game jam topics, and in promoting this educational goal showed how a game jam can be applied to solve a real problem. The next year, we referred to this keynote speech repeatedly.

3.5 Connecting subcultures

Each jam site organizers tries to form teams from the attendee list. We recommended the formation of teams that were as diverse as possible, gathering students, senior professionals, and amateur/non-commercial experts. Not all teams could include a professional game developer, and some team were led by non-commercial game developers (there are large communities of non-commercial games in Japan focusing on genres such as RPGs [3], shooting games, action games, novel games, and others [4]).

Some of the non-professional game designers used HSP (Hot Soup Processor) as a prototyping tool. This is an open source script language and the documentation is written in Japanese. Though educators and professional developers didn’t know about the open source toolkit, the Global Game Jam connected these different subcultures within gaming.

Table 1: Typology of Game Jams[13]

	Global Game Jam (GGJ)	mega-region game jams (localized GGJ)	local game jams
Jam sites	distributed	distributed	standalone
Scale	global	mega-regional, or nationwide	city area, in house, or social event
Purpose	general	regional	local
Examples	GGJ	Apps for Healthy Kids game jams, Fukushima Game Jam	0th Indie Game Jam

3.6 Review and Reflection process

Though the completed games can be download from the website, some additional opportunities for review and reflective learning have taken place.

First, IGDA picked featured games from the Global Game Jam 2011 in its monthly newsletter from March 2011. The first game chosen was developed at the Tokyo site in Japan [9], creating a reflective conversation between jammers. Since the event, we have tried to review some games at local IGDA Japan events.

4. FUTURE ISSUES: GAME JAM DESIGNS INSPIRED BY GLOBAL GAME JAM

Inspired by the Global Game Jam, many smaller game jams are held around the world. IGDA Japan also held our own game jams, taking different approaches to the three types of game jam: the Global Game Jam, mega-region game jams, and local game jams (Table 1).

Mega-region game jams, game jams that take place on a nationwide or international scale with a particular purpose, are expected to create a major social awareness, like the 2010 *Health Games Challenge* game jam in the United States or the 2011 *Fukushima Game Jam* in Japan [13].

These activities also suggests that Global Game Jam is encouraging the invention of additional game jams worldwide and leading people to organize further collaboration and learning opportunities.

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