Polish Video Games? Gaming Cultures and Game Industry in National Context

The phrase „Polish video games" is ever-present. Polish gamers use it to stress the pride they take in international recognition, mass media profess the bright future ahead of Polish games, and politicians from all sides readily stress games importance for Polish economy. A video game produced in Poland was considered a worthy gift for President of the United States, and Polish prime minister announced tax reduction for game developers and readily use their success as example during economic summits. World-wide success of Polish games brigs joy and pride to all of us, Poles.

But on the other hands, video games as such are creatures of the globalized world. Video game genres are created within international, English-speaking popular culture, they are sold and consumed globally. The very success of those games considered Polish is based on the fact they fare well internationally, and hundreds of best game titles *The Witcher 3* was showered with serve as a token of international recognition. Even the controversy over racial representation in said game is a testament to global condition of the gaming culture. It was also the fact this excellent game is recognized as a part of the global popular culture that started the controversy regarding racial representation within the gameworld. It was widely considered the game should follow international standards and sensibilities, regardless of racial composition of the Polish society and Polish take on the matter.

This is why we are about to ask: what does it mean for the game to be considered "Polish"? Even is certain game was produced in Poland, it is safe to assume a it was created a team of developers hailing from various nations and backgrounds. And the game itself can contain foreign parts – for example, the first part of *The Witcher* series was build upon the engine created by Canadian company, BioWare. It is also misleading to follow traditional criteria of publication place and language used by an artwork as basis for nationality. Contemporary games are published worldwide, through Internet platforms available from any place on the globe, and offer several languages to be chosen within the game menu. It is also hard to rely on aesthetics. Even though some games are heavily connected with the culture of a place the studio operates in (as was the case of *The Witcher 3*), there are also games heavily referencing real cultures, and not considered to be a part of those cultures. For example, *This War of Mine* is regarded a successful Polish game, even though it is inspired by the tragic history of Balkan War.

To establish what "Polish video games" actually are, we will conduct a comprehensive research of Polish gaming culture. We'll check what elements of games produced by Poland-based companies can be related to tropes from national tradition, on narrative, visual aesthetics and gameplay level. We'll find out what games are considered Polish by Polish gamers, and which of them are labeled as such by international, English-language community. We'll scrutinize game production in Poland, analyze developer teams, and marketing and distribution schemes. Finally, we will consider the Polish gaming culture in broader cultural context and research it's history, to establish what conditions led to Polish game industry's success and what cultural changes allowed for games to become Polish national specialty. This way we aim not only to better understand what Polish games are. We will create theoretical and methodical tools to research national gaming cultures in general. In doing so, we will contribute to better understanding of video game phenomenon and contemporary national cultures.