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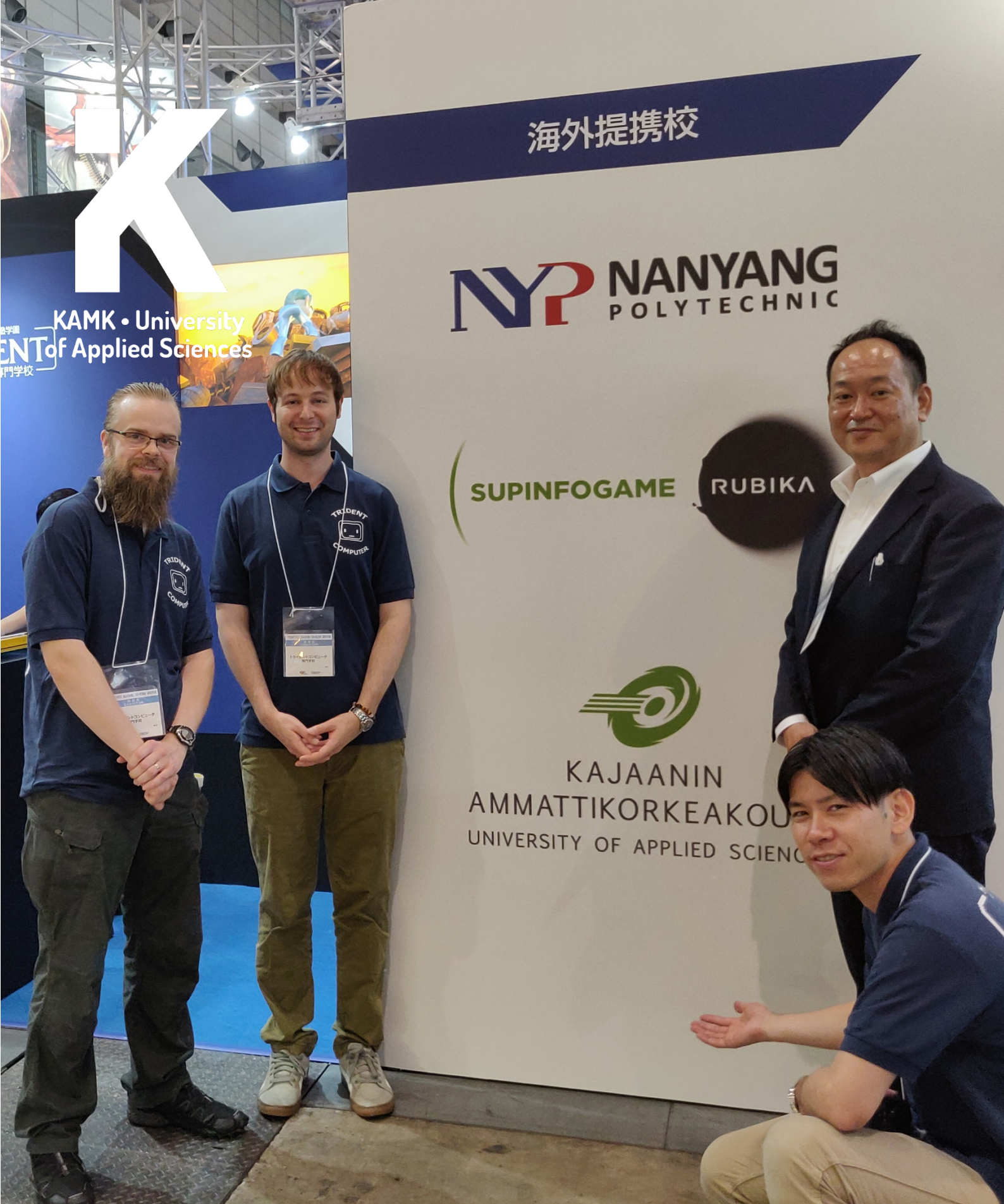
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KAJAANIN
AMMATTIKORKEAKOU
UNIVERSITY OF APPLIED SCIENCES



**International Triple Co-operation
in Information Systems Education**
Tommi Helin

ITriple End Report

Tommi Helin

Kajaanin ammattikorkeakoulun julkaisusarja B

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Sisällys

1	Introduction	1
2	Co-operation in Game Development	2
3	Activities	3
4	Experiences.....	7
5	Implications of COVID-19.....	8
6	Conclusion	9

1 Introduction

International Triple Co-operation in Information Systems Education, shortened to ITriple was a joint project by Kajaani University of Applied Sciences (KUAS), Lapland University of Applied Sciences (Lapland UAS) and Trident College of Information technology.

Information Systems is international, continuously developing discipline with emerging technologies. Education within this field requires updating according to this development. Information Systems covers broadly different aspect from building sensors and applications to networks, cloud services and games. To offer up-to-date education, there is a need to share best practices and experiences and build education together internationally. ITriple aimed to deepen and extend the existing co-operation between Finland and Japan and thus answering this need.

At the beginning of the project, co-operation covered game development studies in KUAS, but one of many aims was to extend this cooperation to cover the whole area of Information Systems education such as information technology engineering and general business IT studies in both KUAS and Lapland UAS and Fine Arts education both in Trident college and Lapland UAS.

2 Co-operation in Game Development

Japan has a strong background in game development and different kind of game technologies, and they also utilize their cultural heritage in narrating the games. Finland is a strong expert in IT industry, but their game industry is relatively young, and it has increased strongly in past years though. The objective of the co-operation was to develop the expertise and knowledge of all parties in game technologies, visualization, narratives, business models and business logics.

Throughout the project period Finnish partners were able to widen their knowledge in Japanese game programming, game graphics, 3D-modelling, and animations and could start building relationships with Japanese game industry through Japanese partners. Likewise, Japanese partners could widen their knowledge in western game development processes and narrating games, and business models and business logics. With the relationships built and deepened during the project all partners can also pilot cases for new game protos in international markets.

All partner schools have work-life based game projects as part of the curriculum. Ideas about joint project courses or unification of project courses were discussed during the project, but the differences in curricula made it more beneficial to maintain the courses as separate entities and focusing on sharing good practices. Further future applications of joint courses were not exclusively ruled out, though academic calendar sets their restriction to such implementations. In a post-COVID era, these implementations could be used to supplement or replace exchange studies, and these have been piloted in other instances.

Collaboration between Trident College of Information Technology and Kajaani University of Applied sciences has been ongoing since 2016 with both parties valuing the co-operation and exchange studies with each other to a high level. ITriple aimed to deepen this co-operation to an even higher level and build upon the already existing good relationship. A new introduction in the project was to start new co-operation between Lapland University of Applied Sciences and Trident College of Information Technology.

3 Activities

Staff mobility was increased during the project, allowing the partners to set in the same table and get to know the practices and opportunities of another school. These included organizational visits during 2019 to help discuss the future cooperation and exchange studies easier. During these visits participating institutes were able to get familiar in the new facilities and get a broader view on the current situation of each institute (Figure 1).



Figure 1 Dean Masato Katsuta and Lecturer Iefan Thompson visiting Kajaani University of Applied Science

Student exchange has been an integral part of ITriple. During the project two exchanges were done from KAMK to Trident College of Information Technology and vice versa. These exchanges have provided a lot of valuable experiences and offered points of improvement to develop the exchanges further, which are to be taken account in the further planning of exchange studies. A student exchange was planned from Lapland University of Applied Sciences to Trident College of Information Technology was planned to be piloted during the project, which had to be cancelled due to COVID-19.

Discussion about the extension of exchange studies to other areas of Information Technology alongside game development have been found as a mutually interesting possibility for both Kajaani University of Applied Sciences and Trident college of Information Technology. Negotiations for said extension have been on hiatus with COVID-19 having an impact on future development but remains in discussions to be opened again after situation has stabilized.

Students from Trident College of Information Technology were able to attend Northern Game Summit during their exchange studies in Kajaani, introducing the possibility to learn about Finnish game development culture and its specialties in greater detail. Northern Game Summit is an annual professional seminar organized by Kajaani University of Applied Sciences with speakers and participants attending both domestic and internationally. The event has a reputation of being an intimate event with the possibility of students and representatives of working life being able to meet and discuss easily, allowing students to meet people working in the industry, and learning about professional game development in further detail.

A member of staff from Kajaani University of Applied Sciences had the chance to visit 2019 Tokyo Game Show learning about Japanese business practices and game development culture of different nations (see Figure 2). Attending the event was a great learning experience about understanding the similarities and differences of Finnish and Japanese gaming cultures, game development and marketing practices. The attendees found interesting the vast number of similarities between the games from different parts of the world, introducing their own cultural elements and nuances not found in corresponding games in other countries.

From an educational point of view, Japanese schools focusing on game development studies were visible and present, as Tokyo Game Show is the biggest consumer marketing event for video-games in Japan with around 100 000 visitors attending each year. This allows schools focusing on game development studies and relating disciplines to market their education for a wide audience, making Tokyo Game Show one of the biggest recruiting event for possible students. This also includes competitions that a lot of said institutes and their students participate in. ITriple's partner Trident College of Information Technology's students have been frequent sight in the finals of this competition, with one of their teams winning their category in 2020.



Figure 2 Kajaani University of Applied science visiting Trident College of Information Technology booth at Tokyo Game Show.

As a part of deepening collaboration with professional game development, piloting a Kajaani University of Applied Sciences student's internship in Japan was planned. This was later cancelled as the required amount of official documentation and requirements for Japanese language in professional life proved to be unfeasible in the timeframe of the project. As a substituting act the lessons learned about the professional environments from ITriple's Japanese partners were decided to be summarized documented for possible later use, should a suitable candidate Kajaani University of Applied Science want to apply for internship in a Japanese game development company.

Designing and implementing joint e-learning courses were in the discussions during the project. The need for such courses varied individually by each of the partner schools, but ideas of courses aimed to smooth out the beginning of exchange studies at a new country were agreed upon. Possibility to offer additional learning material via e-learning was also introduced during the project. The implementation of these courses had to be postponed with the outbreak of COVID-19.

As a final climax for the project, the partner universities organized an online game jam type competition, Triple Game Jam for their students. The event was held simultaneously in all three locations, and students working in chains to develop a game with a team of each partner institute working on a same game in turns. In total eight teams created eight games in three days. Each game was worked on by a minimum of two groups, teams being from different location. The event proved to be a success with a lot learned about working across very different time zones and different languages. After the event, partners agreed upon common interest to organize another event in the following year, with a possibility of expanding the event to include common international partners as well.

4 Experiences

ITriple achieved the high-level goals set in the project description. Existing international co-operation between Kajaani University of Applied Sciences and Trident College of Information Technology was deepened and the relationship between the two institutes kept on improving throughout the project. A new co-operation between Lapland University of Applied Sciences and Trident College of Information technology was started, culminating in the possibility of sending an exchange student which had to be cancelled due to global pandemic

The increased mobility in 2019 helped communicate ideas and deepen the relationships between all the partners. A lot of progress in improving the relations and methods took a leap due to increased mobility of 2019, with communication being frequent and meetings in corresponding educational institutes proved to be fruitful, helping the partners to understand studying environments and culture of each partner in further detail.

During the project Finnish students have participated in student exchange in Japan and vice versa. Students have not only completed professional studies in partner universities but have also had the chance to become familiar with the society and culture of another country. During these exchange studies students were able to visit game companies and get to know the professional game development environment and professional life of another country. Exchanges were seen widely as positive experience, leaving a longing for another country and hopes to return.

Implementing joint e-learning courses were planned during the project to help and supplement exchanges studies in another country with getting started in their studies. As the exchanges were postponed due to breakout of COVID-19 pandemic, these plans have been stored for later use, to be refined and implemented for a post-covid exchange. The interest in remote studies and different kind of new forms of international cooperation has also increased during the pandemic, and will be further discussed among the partners

5 Implications of COVID-19

The spread of COVID-19 into pandemic and subsequent halt in mobility resulted in a lot of activities first postponed and then cancelled. The will to continue and deepen cooperation between the partners was not however diminished, even if the immediate effects of COVID-19 resulted in longer communication periods. This effect was further emphasized with the COVID-19 hitting Finland and Japan at different times, thus elongating the stabilization process in communications, each institute having to prepare for the situation at different times. Even in the middle of a new and uncertain situation the sense of togetherness was not lost; patience and understanding proved to be virtues all participants were good at. Thus, the previously established good relationships were able to be maintained and even further improved among a global crisis.

As a lot of project activities were based upon mobilities, ITriple did have its share of misfortune traveling restrictions in the later part of the project. Even though 2019 increased mobility and allowed for the improvements discussed in the project, a lot of mobilities were planned for Spring 2020 and Summer 2020, having to be cancelled or postponed. These effects were most prominent in mobilities leaving planned additional student exchanges to a later date. These effects also had an impact on the timing of other activities including implementing joint e-learning courses to a later date after the project, as stabilization of normal procedures took priority in all institutes individually, leaving little to no time for these courses

6 Conclusion

ITriple allowed Kajaani University of Applied Sciences Lapland University of Applied Science and Trident College of Information Technology to discuss and build a prospecting foundation for future current and future development. Partner institutes of the project have gained a lot of new information, competences and networks through organizational visits, staff mobility and student mobility. Due to these mobilities, the staff have had the opportunity to seek new ideas for future cooperation from another culture and educational environment to implement in their own study programs and curricula.

The learnings described in this report have also been beneficial in understanding the needs and desires of the participants, allowing better and more efficient implementation of future international co-operation between the partners.