

Identifying features of political localization in video games

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Degree project 15 HE credits
Computer and Systems Sciences
Degree project at the bachelor level
Spring term 2021
Supervisor: Mirjam Palosaari Eladhari
Swedish title: Identifiering av aspekter av politisk lokalisering



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Abstract

This paper contains a study that was performed to identify the defining characteristics of what political localization is, concerning video games. Games and other forms of media are often changed when localized for different regions, sometimes to another audience than the original one, but sometimes there is a clear political motivation as well. This paper will analyse what characterises political localizations and provide examples of games that have been changed in this way.

To identify the differences between political- and cultural localizations, previous academic sources were reviewed, but the amount of information available was scarce. Therefore, almost all data was gathered through a document survey; searching through articles, forums, and other databases to find games with differing regional versions. In total, 69 video games were found using this method. The analysed data was then divided into 14 categories through the use of a thematic analysis.

Experts within the research domain were contacted for supplemental information. An interview was performed with one of them, Marcus Toftedahl, which yielded useful information.

The result was found to be that political localizations are distinguished by being performed mostly by nations with lower democracy scores, and generally regard political issues relevant to today's society. In the corpus of this paper, they never concern bans/changes based on sexual content, cultural context, blood and gore, drug use, gambling, making something suitable for minors, and violence. Simultaneously, they always concern bans/changes based around state boycotts, the depiction of non-traditional relationships, and undesired depictions of regions.

Keywords: *Video Games, Localization, Censorship, Politics in games.*

Synopsis

Background

The medium of video games is one whose artifacts are often changed when introduced to another audience than it was intended for. These changes come in the form of localizations that are meant to take into account the newer audiences' views and perspectives and in the form of changes that are meant to silence opinions and to change the audiences' views of the world. These two categories are often called solely **localizations** and **censorship**. There is no clear-cut definition that could be found for this study of what is what when it comes to regional changes in video games.

As the paper was being written, domain experts were consulted, and an interview was conducted, to gather expert opinions on the subject.

Research Question

The research question at hand in this paper is: **what are the distinguishing features of political localizations in video games?**

Method

For this paper, a survey of video games that have been localized has been performed. The gathered data from the survey and review has then been analysed through a thematic analysis. The resulting data points were put into categories depending on the reasoning or the stated purpose for the change or banning of the product. In the end, this led to 14 categories which all instances were put into, sometimes into multiple ones if there were multiple reasons present.

Conclusion

Based on an analysis of the localizations of 69 different video games and 84 different reasons for these localizations, this study has garnered two conclusions about political localizations:

1. Defining features of political localization as it pertains to the 14 categories of this paper:
 - i. Political localizations never concern the categories of *Sexual content, Cultural context, Blood/Gore, Drug use, Gambling, Unsuitable for minors, and Violence.*
 - ii. Political localizations make up completely the *categories of State boycott, Non-traditional relationships, and Undesired depiction of region.*
2. Through a meta-analysis of the reasonings behind the localizations, it can be concluded that:

- i. Political localizations are more often than not performed by nations with a lower democracy score.
- ii. Political localizations are mostly based on temporal qualities, they generally regard issues that are only relevant to the current political climate.

Outside of those conclusions, three additional observations have been found during the process of this paper. Firstly, the separation of cultural- from political localization:

A cultural localization aims to cater to local tastes and knowledge. This would then hopefully increase enjoyability or accessibility for that group or consumer base.

A political localization aims to cater to whatever the leading administrative entity is. While this might also increase enjoyability to the group the entity rules over, it is not the primary aim.

Secondly, the 14 categories that can be used to distinguish between different reasons for localizations within video games were created.

Violence	Inciting crime	Undesirable depiction of region
Blood/Gore	Gambling	Non-traditional relationships
Drug use	Unsuitable for minors	State boycott
Sexual content	Cultural context	Religious imagery
Shameful history	Security reasons	

Lastly, a process that can identify the nature of localizations was identified. This process is based on where on the spectrum between politics and culture the localization originated: either as a cultural phenomenon that then informed political decisions or vice versa.

Discussion

The following topics were brought up in the discussion: how culture relates to politics, the categorisation, the results and conclusions of this thesis, implications of this study, data collection limitations, the study's reproducibility, and the future of localization. The main themes and subjects being that politics and culture are hard to separate and that the data collection process could be improved. Therefore, more research is needed in this area to deepen the understanding of this topic.

Acknowledgement

Mirjam Palosaari Eladhari - Supervisor

Markus Toftedahl - Domain expert & Interviewee

Mia Consalvo - Domain expert

Jose P Zagal - Domain expert

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List of Abbreviations

CCP - [the] Chinese Communist Party

ESRB - Entertainment Software Rating Board

MT - Markus Toftedahl

PEGI - Pan European Game Information

WoW - World of Warcraft

1. Background

This chapter aims to introduce the concept of localization and the goals of this thesis.

1.1 Defining localization

The common understanding of “*localization*” is, most likely, just another word for translating something, but in reality, it is a bit more involved than that. While translation into other languages is a part of the localization process, the broader procedure is much more complicated. The Cambridge Dictionary (2021) defines localization as:

“The process of making a product or service more suitable for a particular country, area, etc”.

Another way to describe it, concerning video games, according to Summa Linguae (2021), is as follows:

“Video game localization is all about creating the equivalent experience for players anywhere in the world. Importantly, this is not the same as simply creating the original game in different languages, but about creating versions of the game that feel authentic to the player, wherever they are in the world”.

In practice, this could encompass changing visual assets, re-recording dialogue or cutscenes, removing or changing sections of the game, recontextualising certain events, or removing references that the new audience would simply not understand. Sometimes, however, the aspects that need changing are part of the core of a game and can often lead to a game simply never being brought to certain markets because of it. It can also lead to those core parts being removed to make the game publishable (Mangiron and O'Hagan, 2006).

This paper will attempt to further expand the scope of localization by making different types of localization more defined, specifically political localization. At the time of writing, separating different types of localization is not something that has been done. How politics and other factors can affect translation has been explored, as can be seen in Fatiha's (2019) article *Translation and Censorship*:

“The process of translation always is affected by the cultural, the religious, political and ideologies beliefs.”

The fact that politics plays a part in translation is something that has been discussed and written about, but not how it relates to the process of localization. It has also not been thought of as a type of localization process separate from other forms of localising.

1.1.1 Censorship

Censorship can be seen as a subset of localizations. Merriam-Webster (1, 2021) defines censorship as *the institution, system, or practice of censoring*. Censoring is in turn defined by

Merriam-Webster (2, 2021) to examine in order to suppress or delete anything considered objectionable.

According to these definitions, censorship is when an instance of localization is performed in such a way as to completely ban a piece of media from entering circulation. It can also be done after a piece has been released by removing any active instances from being sold, removing them from their current owners, or changing and removing any offending parts of them (Green and Karolides, 2005, p. xviii).

Censorship is not a form of localization when performed on media that does not enter into a different market than the one it was first intended for. If a piece of media gets censored in the same nation that it is originally from it would not be a localization but only censorship.

1.2 Differentiating cultural and political localization

Seeing the difference between localizations made due to cultural differences and those due to political pressure is not always easy. Only those involved in the localization process know the motivation behind the changes that are made. Therefore, the only way to determine if a localization had been made because of cultural- or political reasons is to look at what has been changed and why. As to date, there has been no research that has created any definitions for these categories. Therefore, to facilitate these observations, two definitions were created for this paper to categorise these two types of localizations:

A **cultural localization** aims to cater to local tastes and knowledge. This would then hopefully increase enjoyability or accessibility for that group or consumer base.

A **political localization** aims to cater to whatever the leading administrative entity is. While this might also increase enjoyability to the group the entity rules over, it is not the primary aim.

Both culture and politics are very broad concepts that are often hard to pin down or define satisfactorily. In this paper, however, the only point of interest is where these two concepts meet and where it is possible to distinguish them.

A prime example as it pertains to the discussion is the ongoing discourse around violent video games. The anti-violence in media movement has been around for a very long time and is not unique to video games but as the industry is much newer than other media types the debate is still just as fresh. Largely concerned with making sure adult content was kept out of the hands of children, it is this movement that was the catalyst behind the creation of the current rating boards for video games, like *PEGI* (Pan European Game Information) and the *ESRB* (Entertainment Software Rating Board). While it could be argued that the movement was rooted in certain political goals, it is undoubtedly a cultural movement in this context. This is because the will for change did not originate within any government or state agencies, but rather within the citizens of those countries (Romano 2019).

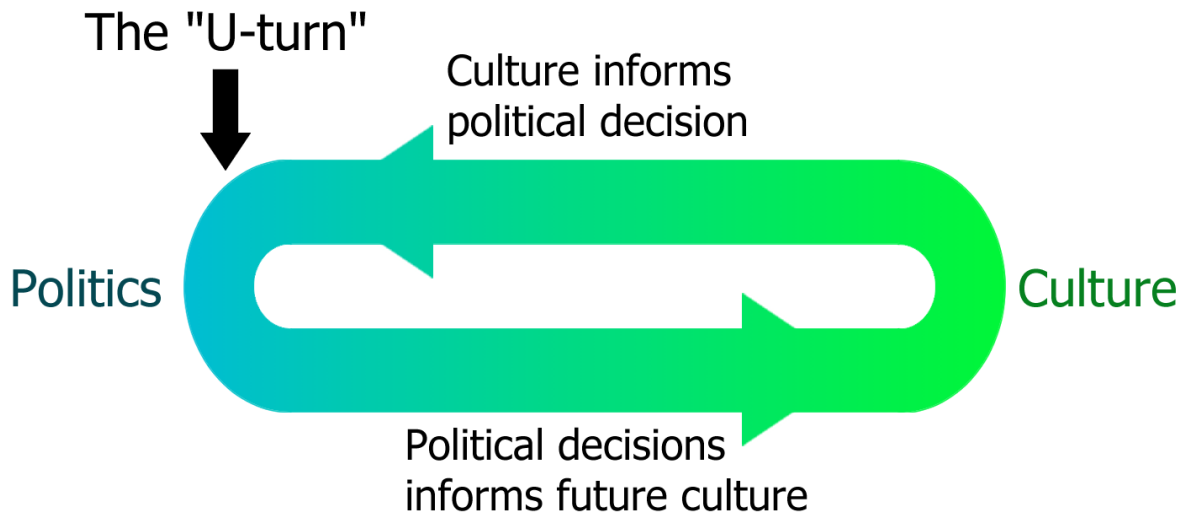


Fig. 1 - Visualisation of how culture and politics influence each other. Created for this paper.

For this study, the point where culture becomes politics, the point in fig.1, labelled "U-turn", was a large part in determining if a change could be classified as political or cultural. It is argued extensively enough any instance of localization could be seen as either cultural or political, so it is more useful to see at which end of the cycle the urge for localization started. Not wanting to see gruesome violence and drugs in the media you consume is a sentiment originating from cultural values. Meanwhile, wanting to change media which shines a bad light on a government is most likely originated in the will of said government and not a large cultural trend. These general opinions will of course blend together since all politicians are part of the larger culture as well, and their decisions then influence the culture of which they are a part.

1.3 Problem

Having localization as a singular monolithic concept does not allow for a deep analysis of this topic. Not being able to distinguish between different types of localization or looking at the different ways it can manifest limits the possibilities of research and thought surrounding it. Without expanding the scope of localization, the subject cannot evolve past what it is seen as of today.

To remedy this problem, political localization will be analysed to define its characteristics. This subcategory of localization can then be viewed concerning other types of localization and thus the entire topic can be understood more deeply.

1.4 Research question

The research question at hand in this paper is: **What are the distinguishing features of political localizations in video games?**

1.5 Delimitations

To fit within the time constraints there had to be boundaries placed on the data collection process. Firstly, if the only changes made were to dialogue and text without any noteworthy deviations from the source material, then that would be considered too mundane to include. Secondly, there had to be pictorial- or video evidence of the changes since that would be easier to verify. Thirdly, only games released after 1980 will be reviewed. This is because the information from that period becomes increasingly hard to find the farther back in time one goes. Lastly, any game that was banned would only be included if it was still restricted at the time this paper was written.

1.6 Previous research

Previous research in the area of political localization is slim to none, but there have been researchers who have explored tangential areas. During this thesis, no comprehensive research about how or even if localizations can be political was found. Instead, research delving deeper into specific instances of political localization could be identified. Some of these instances will be talked about to serve as examples below.

Gagnon (2012) has explored how a political party from the Canadian province of Quebec got its message altered by the Canadian government depending on which language it was conveyed in. In English, the party was called *separatist* and in French, they were called *sovereignists*, a very important linguistic difference. The word “*separatist*” does not carry the same meaning as the word “*sovereignists*” and is usually associated more negatively. This, in the context of the political situation of Canada at the time, can be seen as the Canadian government taking a political stand against the Quebecois party.

In the Japanese cartoon series *Sailor Moon*, two characters were originally in a homosexual relationship but when the series was translated into English, the characters had become cousins and heterosexual. At the time of the series creation in 1992, Japan had a higher tolerance to seeing homosexual people in media than the western world and so, the company in charge of the translation process changed the characters’ sexualities (Hoskin, 2016).



Fig. 2 - The difference between what is shown to the people of Morocco and what is shown to the people of Western Sahara.

Google Maps, a mapping software available and used the world over, shows borders differently depending on which nation is used in. For example, in the nation of Morocco, there is no border shown between the nation's northern- and southern parts as well as only one name shown for the entire region. In the semi self-governing southern region of Western Sahara, a border is shown and the title for the region is different from that of the northern part, see fig. 2 for an image of the described example. This shows that political situations can dictate whether people are shown different versions of the same thing, even on the internet (Bensinger, 2020).

1.7 Personal communication with domain experts

To acquire deeper knowledge into the field of localization, email communication was exchanged with domain experts, Mia Consalvo, Jose P Zagal, and Marcus Toftedahl, on the 30:th of March, 2021. Following this contact, an interview with Marcus Toftedahl (MT) was arranged to get more in-depth answers. MT is a researcher, developer, and lecturer with his focus being on games and game localization, employed at the University of Skövde. MT consented that both his name and his views could come to be included in this study, both before the interview as well after it.

The interview was semi-structured with pre-written main points that made up the core of the discussion that then branched out from there. MT was asked a series of questions about his experience with localization in general as well as the topics which concern this paper.

One of his claims is that western studios tend to favour making games and then localizing them afterwards, meanwhile, game developers in China build their games from the ground up to cater to western markets. MT also brought up the point that smaller game studios are less focused on potential localization processes than larger ones.

He also said that from his experience and research, big sections of the game developing sphere still considers localization to be simply about literal translation instead of thinking in broader terms like thematics. Many studios also outsource the translation process so they do not usually take part in said process. This claim is corroborated by Mangiron and O'Hagan in their article from 2006 published in the *Journal of Specialised Translation*. This plays into the “*localize later*”-mentality; localization is something that occurs after the product is done so it can be physically sold in another region. Often, this can make the localization process more difficult because if changes are made after a product is “finished” it can have unforeseen consequences. For example, see *World of Warcraft* (WoW) that had to be severely reworked to be allowed in the Chinese market¹ (Mangiron and O'Hagan, 2006).

After the interview was concluded it was decided that while useful, these sorts of interviews would most likely not lead to a firmer definition of the characteristics of political localizations. This made the qualitative strategy for research to be discarded in favour of another one.

¹ More on this in chapter 3.1.4 - *People's Republic of China*.

2. Method

This chapter explores the chosen research methods and strategies that have been used to acquire the result of this study.

2.1 Research strategy

To answer the research strategy it was deemed most fitting to use exploratory research, also called grounded theory approach or interpretive research, because of the lack of previous research. This sort of strategy is defined by its focus on finding out more about a problem that has not already been well defined in the scientific community (Stebbins, 2001).

Exploratory research does not usually provide fully conclusive results but instead a start-off point into a subject. Researchers using this strategy should also be ready to change the direction their studies are going depending on what findings can be discerned in the early stages of their projects. Exploratory research is usually done only in these early stages but it does not necessarily need to be restricted to them (Stebbins, 2001).

2.1.1 Alternative research strategies

If there would have been more information on this field of study, an analytical approach could have been utilized. It focuses on finding the cause and effect of the problem. For this thesis, it could have defined the characteristics of localization by finding out why they are created and for what purposes.

A qualitative strategy could have been used as well, again, if there had been more research at the start of this study. This sort of strategy focuses on finding out the “*why*” of phenomena instead of the “*what*”. This sort of strategy could have garnered important information as to why political localizations are created and for what goals.

2.2 Data collection methods

At the beginning of this study, it was discerned that data would be collected through second-hand sources because of time constraints; no self-report study, interview, or other first-hand data collection method would come to be utilized.

That the collected data, no matter how it would have come to be collected, would be used qualitatively was realized early on. For this study, it is not the number of times a nation has censored video games but rather the underlying reasons as to why the games were censored. To choose the best fit for this sort of data, it was decided that a literature review was to be performed.

After some time, it was realized that the literature review had to be abandoned: there were not enough published articles on the subject to draw any sorts of conclusions from. In light of that, a new method had to be chosen. After learning of the scarcity of data, the only way forward seemed to be a document survey to collect a corpus from which to analyse.

2.2.1 Literature Review

Literature reviews consist of three main steps:

1. Search for literature involving relevant data.
2. Evaluating the quality of said data to ascertain its potential.
3. Identifying underlying themes, gaps in the knowledge of the subject, and debates concerning the data.

(Denscombe, 2007, pp. 135-144).

These three steps need to be followed in the order mentioned above for each point of data. Not all data points need to be processed at the same time, i.e. one point can have its themes analysed at the same time as another one is evaluated. The first step is meant to gather broad data, the second and third are meant to reduce it to solely useful data (Denscombe, 2007, pp. 135-144).

2.2.2 Document Survey

Differentiated from most other forms of surveys, document surveys focus on getting information from documents rather than people. The main problem with a document survey is the access issue. A lot of relevant information that researchers might want to gather can be locked behind walls, either physical or metaphorical, such as libraries in other nations, internal documents for organisations, or classified military minutiae (Denscombe, 2007, pp. 18-19).

There also exist issues with ensuring the quality of sources and the content within them. Denscombe (2007, pp. 221 - 224) has created four categories that can be used to determine how trustworthy a source is:

Authenticity: is this document the genuine one and not a forgery?

Representativeness: is the document complete and typical of its type?

Meaning: is the meaning of the words clear and unambiguous and are there hidden meanings?

Credibility: is the document accurate and free from bias and errors?

For websites, there is one additional category:

Authoritativeness: is the website serious and up-to-date?

Gathering data points from websites and other forms of documents must take these four categories, five if the source is from the internet, into consideration when determining the accuracy of the gathered information.

2.2.3 Alternative research strategies

Instead of searching for data, which can be a time-consuming and arduous process, asking people that are knowledgeable about the topic can be both quicker and give deeper answers.

This can be done by the use of interviews or by sending out surveys with questions. These same strategies could be applied to non-field experts as well but that might give heavily biased and false results.

This would most likely have been the primary research strategy for this study if there had been more to gain from them and more time to conduct the study. After the first interview with MT and performing the initial literature review it was realised that there was little potential data to be gained from additional interviews or questionnaires. A different study in the future might be able to make use of this strategy after more research has been done in this field.

2.3 Data analysis - Thematic analysis

To be able to analyse the gathered data in a meaningful way, a thematic analysis was performed. This form of analysis is well suited to the type of qualitative data that has been gathered due to its focus on finding and identifying the presence, meaning, and relationships between concepts through the categorisation of themes.

Thematic analyses can either be performed with an inductive- or deductive approach, or a mix of both, according to Braun and Clarke (2006). These are defined as follows:

Inductive: the data determines the themes.

Deductive: data is collected with preconceived themes in mind.

For this study, a mixture of both approaches was chosen. Reducing the amount of data to a set containing only relevant data was prudent because of time constraints and the preconceived nature of the problem and research question. Data was collected with the themes of political- and cultural localization in mind but were also analysed to find the reasoning behind them.

In addition to the previous definitions of inductive and deductive, thematic analyses can analyse data in two ways:

Semantic: analyses the explicit content of the data.

Latent: analyses the underlying meaning of the data.

For this study, the thematic analysis was chosen to be used with a latent approach to find the underlying reasoning, the subtext, behind localisations (Braun and Clarke, 2006).

2.3.1 Alternative data analyses

If a series of interviews would have been performed, transcribing them would have been important. This could have been performed by either doing it by hand, using interview transcription software, or a mixture of the two. If a thematic analysis would not have been performed on the transcripts, a discourse analysis could also be a viable alternative. Instead of looking for relationships and underlying meanings, it analyses how language is used, the discourse around it, and how it relates to social and political contexts.

2.4 Data gathering challenges

Due to the nature of the topic being researched, credible and verifiable data was difficult to find. The first problem that became apparent was the language barrier. There may exist research on this topic somewhere, but the only languages which could be included during the research process were Swedish, English, and German because these being the languages the researchers spoke. There likely exist game localizations that would have been included in the data set if they were made available in one of those three languages.

Alongside the language barrier there quickly developed a second problem; the varying quality of the sources. Since there does not exist any central hub of video game localizations, data had to be collected from differing sources. Some articles or forums had plenty of visual evidence and citations to verify their information, but the majority were poorly researched or written. To counteract this, only instances with visual evidence were utilised, or articles from reputable publishers reporting on primary sources.

In addition to the previous points, information about why a game had been banned could have sources claiming different and sometimes even opposing reasons. There were also times when governments banned games without giving out information as to why which led to speculative, and therefore untrustworthy, claims. Other times it was simply outdated information spread around as if it was current.

2.5 Ethical concerns

To ensure an adequately high consideration for ethics, Denscombe's (2007, pp. 206-325) four principles were followed to their fullest extent. These are:

1. Participants' interests should be protected.
2. Participation should be voluntary and based on informed consent.
3. Researchers should operate in an open and honest manner with respect to the investigation.
4. Research should comply with the laws of the land.

Before and after the interview with MT, his consent to be referenced in this survey and to have his views shared was asked for and received. If he had either declined to share his name or views, one or both of them would not have been used in this paper. In the interest of safety, the interview was held digitally over the internet to avoid any concerns about the COVID-19 pandemic.

Due to none of the creators of the video games of this paper being referenced by name, no consent on their part is needed. The same goes for those that have issued the bans and/or changes. This is because all information that might be used to find individuals was gathered from public statements, articles, or anonymously administered databases. Because of this, it is highly improbable that the publishing of this paper would cause any ethical concerns to those working on, or have previously worked on, the titles mentioned or referred to, within this paper (Denscombe, 2007, pp. 306-325).

All research was performed within the borders of the law of the land and in a manner that had the thesis checked several times by other, volunteering researchers. If the thesis would have been conducted in an unscientific manner, which it was not, these other researchers would have noticed it.

3. Application

Using the methodology described in chapter 2, the survey began by searching for instances of localized games online using broad search terms, such as “banned games”, “games local changes”, etc. This was then narrowed down to specific games or countries as the process went on. Each time a game was found, the source was scrutinised to ascertain its veracity. The cause for the changes was also gathered, for example; if the change was mandated by a government, done to localize to a specific market, etc.

In the end, a lot of games were found that have had changes made to them, been ordered to be changed, or been banned. To not exceed the scope of this study, not all potentially relevant games were included, but rather those with the most concrete evidence of their changes. It should also be noted that the overwhelming majority of localizations are in the form of textual- or audial translation. While that translation can have cultural or political leanings, the vast majority is too innocuous to be included in this paper.

After the finished data collection process was concluded 69 had been gathered for the thematic analysis. To illustrate the thought process of gathering data points during the survey and how games were categorised in the dataset, some examples have been chosen and can be read in chapter 3.1.

3.1 Examples of localizations within video games

To give concrete examples of localizations of both sorts and some that are hard to define, a few nations and how games have been localized for them are displayed below. These serve as case studies within the larger scope of the full list of localizations.

3.1.1 Saudi Arabia

The second instalment of the *The Last of Us* series was banned in Saudi Arabia allegedly due to containing homosexuality. However, no official reason has been stated as of yet. Media containing mentions of homosexuality are almost without exception banned in Saudi Arabia due to conflicting with Sharia law. This makes this ban political and not cultural, according to the definitions in this paper (Purslow, 2020; Green and Karolides, 2005, p. 494).

The *Pokémon* franchise was banned in the nation based on a decree issued by the nation’s religious authority. According to a BBC news article, the series was banned due to including religious symbols, specifically: “*the star of David, which everyone knows is connected to international Zionism and is Israel’s national emblem*”. Much like the previous example, this banning would also be considered political since it was designed to target and censor a political symbol. This banning was later reviewed in 2016, but it was decided to maintain the decree (BBC News, 2001; The Guardian 2016).

3.1.2 Germany

Germany stands out as one of the European nations strict laws of what video games are allowed to show, relating to graphic content and certain symbols. This has led to many

games removing symbols pertaining to the Nazis and a lot of violent content in general (Lober, 2020).

A prime example of this is the game *Wolfenstein*, which is a game about a character that fights Nazis in an alternate history universe. In Germany, the game had to be changed to remove its depictions of the swastika symbol. The stated reasoning behind the ban was explicitly due to the use of Nazi imagery, which is and was taboo in Germany at the time and also against the law. This change can be seen as political since it specifically targets a political symbol. It could potentially be cultural instead, as part of a greater trend to distance themselves from that chapter in history. For this paper, this specific change is labeled as cultural for that very reason, but it could equally be regarded as the other (Kushner, 2003).

Another change requested by the German government pertained to the video game *Command & Conquer: Generals*. The German board of game localization perceived the game as too violent and requested that the developers reduce the intensity. To adhere to this request, most of the characters in the game were changed to be depicted as robots instead of humans: the voices of characters were modulated to sound robotic and all depictions of human characters were changed to have greyer skin and robotic features, as can be seen in fig. 3. This can be seen as a cultural localization since it did not pertain to any specific political goal, but simply to reduce the depicted violence to mirror German sensibilities at the time (da ola, 2007).



Fig.3 - Comparison between american and german release of Command & Conquer: Generals. In the german version characters have been altered to resemble non-human robots.

3.1.3 Japan

Japan was the second-largest producer of video games in 2019 according to Workman (2020). In contrast to this, only a small number of games have been banned in Japan as of 2021 but several games exported from it to different markets have been banned. Several games have had features and explicit material removed and their stories rewritten. As a general rule, the Japanese markets tolerate the display of sexual or adult content to a far greater degree than most other markets. Other concepts that are taboo in many western nations are not taboo in Japan. Examples include the *Pokémon* character *Jynx* having the

colour of her face changed from black to purple when the games², and the franchise as a whole, was localised for western markets. This was to avoid the franchise being accused of promoting blackface and therefore offend western audiences, which would have considered it highly taboo (Pulliam-Moore, 2016).

In the popular card game *Yu-Gi-Oh*, many cards had to be changed before being released outside of Japan. The artwork on many cards was seen as too sexualized by western sensibilities and was made less risque before being released. For example, the card *Allure Queen LV7* was changed to make the character's clothes less revealing, see the character's outfit in fig. 4. These changes made to accommodate the western audience are examples of cultural localizations since they are meant to cater to the tastes of the audience in western markets. There are also examples where the skin tones of characters have been altered to either make them seem non-human or less nude, usually done by darkening their skin, see the character's skin in fig. 5. Examples like those are harder to define as either fully cultural or political, unrelated to the stated reasonings, and are much more anchored in the worldviews of those that experience them because of how they can be conceived as having connotations of racism.



Fig. 4 - The card *Allure Queen LV7* being localised for the western market. The original artwork is on the left. Pictures courtesy of https://yugioh.fandom.com/wiki/Card_Artworks:Allure_Queen_LV7.

² Because of the early games's limited colour palette it was not actually changed in the games until the release of *Pokémon gold, silver and crystal*, but the official art was changed beforehand.



Fig. 5 - The card *Rise of the Snake Deity* being localised for the western market. The original artwork is on the left. Pictures courtesy of https://yugioh.fandom.com/wiki/Card_Artworks:Rise_of_the_Snake_Deity

3.1.4 People's Republic of China

The game *Hearts of Iron 4* was banned in China due to showing Tibet, Xinjiang, and Manchuria as sovereign nations, and Taiwan as being under Japanese rule, during the events leading up to world war 2. The reason given by the Chinese Ministry of Culture was that “*all these [facts] severely distort historical facts and violate China’s gaming and internet service regulations*”. This reason can be interpreted as the historical view shown in-game not coinciding with China’s and can therefore be seen as cultural at first hand. In the context of China’s recent history, however, it seems more likely to be political. This is because the Chinese government has been very adamant on their specific stance on the autonomy of Tibet, something that the average consumer would not consider important (Chinadaily.com.cn, 2004; Human Rights Watch, n.d).

In one of the trailers for the 2020 game *Call of Duty: Black Ops Cold War* there was footage showing clips of many geopolitical events relevant to the cold war era. Examples include footage of the Vietnam war, atomic bomb testing, and many protests. One such event shown was the Tiananmen Square protests, the clip depicting protesters assaulting an armored vehicle. The original trailer was taken down and a recut version with that footage excluded was uploaded afterwards. All other footage was left in. Even though no statement has been released as to why the change was made this can be seen as a political localization on behalf of the Chinese government (Kent, 2020).

An example of a more recent ban being imposed by China is in the case of the games *Plague Inc & Plague Inc: Evolved*. Both games focus on simulating the spreading of disease and had been released to the Chinese audience back in 2012 and 2015 respectively. Both games were later banned during the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic. The reason stated by the Cyberspace Administration of China was that the games contained “illegal content”. No further explanation has been given as of yet. The fact that this decision was made so suddenly after years of no concern makes it seem like the decision was politically motivated (BBC News 1, 2020).

Possibly the most well-known game with a China-specific version is the game, *World of Warcraft* (WoW). WoW is a massively multiplayer online role-playing game originally released

in 2004. In WoW, anywhere from thousands to millions of players from all over the world, though normally constrained to regional servers, work together to accomplish shared goals, such as fighting dragons and necromancers. In Chinese culture, the depiction of skeletons and gore is usually seen as offensive and grotesque. Therefore, WoW's publisher chose to change a lot of the content to better fit the local culture, for example, chunks of meat were turned into bread and large skulls into stones. See fig. 6 and *Appendix 1 - Differences in WoW* for more examples. The game was released in mainland China in 2009, four years after its first release (Andrews, 2014).

Several of the expansion packs for WoW, *the Burning Crusade* and *the Wrath of the Lich King*, the former featuring demons and the later zombies and skeletons in very prominent roles, were delayed in mainland China. The reasons given by the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) representatives were due to having too much content that could have harmed the Chinese player base (Andrews, 2014).



Fig. 6 - Examples of how WoW differs from the western client and the Chinese one. The western client is at the bottom of each pair and the Chinese at the top. Screenshots courtesy of Reddit user Vahldis. See appendix A for more examples.

How WoW is played in mainland China is also different from its western counterparts. The company in charge of WoW had to ensure that the game fulfilled the rules of “cultural harmony” imposed by the CCP. To guarantee this, the Chinese company The9 was hired to

change the game in several ways. For example, there are time limits imposed on players to make certain that no one gets harmed from the effects of addiction (BBC News 1, 2019).

These aforementioned changes are cultural ones since they are mainly focused on visual changes and promoting the well-being of the player base, without any apparent specific political goals.

There is, however, one part of the game where political influence seeps in: the specific chat filters that only exist in the Chinese version. The international release hinders profanities or insults from being sent to other players in-game, but the Chinese version censors a larger variety of words. Some of the phrases include “*freeHongKong*”, “*Carrie Lam*”³, and other phrases relating to Hong Kong. Phrases relating to the Kuomintang⁴, the COVID-19 outbreak, and other controversial topics are banned as well. Being unable to discuss topics that are politically charged in one region but not in another can be seen as political localizations. For more examples, see appendix B - *Terms banned in the Chinese version of WoW*.

These examples serve to illustrate how the larger analysis was carried out through specific examples. Each entry into the dataset went through a similar process to determine whether it should be indexed as either a cultural- or political change/ban. See Appendix C - *Dataset of localized video games* for the complete list of video games.

3.2 Localization Categories

After the games had been gathered, a thematic analysis was performed. For each game, the reason/s for their localization or ban was written down. These reasons were then refined and combined into categories that were deemed to be granular enough to only fit one theme each. See Appendix C - *Dataset of localized video games* for the complete dataset with all reasons for each game.

For the 69 games studied for this paper 84 reasons were found⁵. These reasons were then codified into 14 different categories, which can be read in table 1 - *Localization Categories*.

Violence	Inhumane treatment of other humans, torture, sadism, or other acts of excessive violence.
Blood/Gore	Excessive amounts of blood, gore, corpses, or severed limbs.
Drug use	Drugs, the use thereof, or the support of them and their use.
Sexual content	Content that is overtly titillating which is shown in a way that is deemed inappropriate or indecent.
Cultural context	Cultural ideas, iconography, subtext, and context that needs to be translated to make sense to other cultures.
Shameful history	Depictions of symbols or people from a region’s past that are deemed shameful, inappropriate, or uncomfortable.
Inciting crime	Perceived encouragement of illegal activity.

³ Hong Kong’s chief executive.

⁴ The original government of the Republic of China.

⁵ Some video games had more than one reason for being localized.

Gambling	Depictions, encouragement, or discussion of wagering anything of value on uncertain events.
Unsuitable for minors	Depictions of concepts that are deemed unsuitable for minors.
Religious imagery	Depictions of symbols and themes related to faiths or belief systems.
Security reasons	Content that is deemed to be a threat to national security, political stability, or cultural harmony.
Undesirable depiction of region	Depiction of a region in a perceived negative light or allegedly misrepresenting a region's sovereignty or geopolitical situation. It also includes depictions that reinforce stereotypes.
Non-traditional relationships	Depiction of or the endorsement of relationships that are deemed non-traditional, undesirable, or obscene.
State boycott	An official state-mandated ban of products.

Table 1 - Localization Categories.

3.3 Explication of categories

The 14 categories are derived from the dataset of this paper. There are many types of localizations that might exist but which never appeared during the data collection process and the thematic analysis for this paper. A different dataset might have resulted in slightly different categories but the overall themes would have, most likely, been similar.

The chosen categories could be further subdivided into smaller granularities but to get a comprehensive result for this paper this was not done. For a paper with a narrower scope, this might have been more useful. However, for this study, it would have created such narrow categories to be effectively useless. In contrast to this, further clustering could also be performed but this would have created too broad categories instead.

Here follow the categories with an explication of their meaning as well as an illustrative example for each.

Violence & Blood/Gore

While the categories of Violence and Blood/Gore are quite similar it seemed pertinent to separate them. When analysing the data and the different changes that were made to games certain patterns pertaining to violent content emerged. Some games that were required to make changes based on violent content did so by removing distinct acts of violence from the game, while others changed the contents of the game without cutting any segments. In many instances, blood and gore were accepted but the most violent content had to be cut, and in others, the opposite was the case.

In the game *Left 4 Dead 2*, the violent content was never forced to be reduced, just the amount of blood and gore. Meanwhile, in *Grand Theft Auto V* a torture scene was cut because of its inherent violence and cruelty, but the amount of blood and corpses in the rest of the game remained the same. From these differences, it was decided that two categories

were needed to represent both mindsets: removing violence from a game, or removing blood and gore (FreshDudel, 2013; FreshDudel, 2014).

Religious Imagery

This category pertains to the specific instances where the depiction of religious symbols or iconography directly informed the banning or changing of a game. For example, the use of the Christian cross got the game *Fight Of Gods* banned in Malaysia. This category can pertain to any religion or religious organisation which is recognised by the country involved or international organisations (Alexandra, 2017).

Cultural Context

Cultural context refers to specific instances of references which one culture would instantly recognise as a reference, but needs to be localized in order to be comprehensible to an individual or another. Often this is necessary for humour or wordplay to function. However, it can in the case of this paper also pertain to character design or other visual changes.

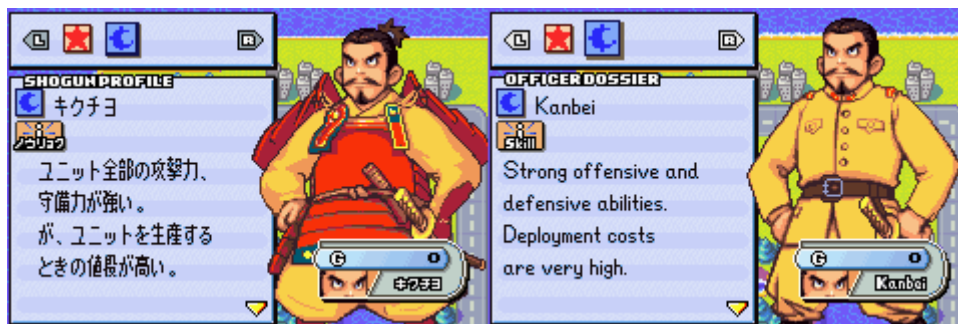


Fig. 7 - Character changes between the Japanese- & international release of Advance Wars. The Japanese version is on the left.

In the example of fig. 7, the design of the character in the original Japanese version was to evoke the aesthetics of a traditional Japanese general, however, in the international release, it was changed to be more reminiscent of a modern military outfit. The sprite was changed so that it still evokes the same underlying theme as the original but to a different audience (Tcrf.net 1, n.d.).

Inciting Crime

This category stems from the tendency of countries to cite this as their reasons when banning games. Such reasoning is based on the assertion that the playing of the game in question would lead to or encourage illegal activities. Which exact activities that are allegedly being encouraged can differ from game to game or depending on the country, but the core assertion remains the same. E.g, the *Grand Theft Auto*-series was banned in Thailand because of this assertion (Reed, 2008).

Depiction of Non-traditional Relationships

What exactly is seen as a non-traditional relationship can vary greatly from region to region, this category encompasses whatever that may be in the context of the change or ban. In the cases that were included in this study, it pertained mainly to homosexual relationships, but this category could also include those between humans and non-humans or adults and minors. This category does not pass judgment on whether such relationships are valid or not, but rather that the country or organisation involved perceived such a relationship to be non-traditional and should therefore be censored. For example, *Mass Effect* was banned in

Singapore for containing a “*sex scene between a human woman and a female alien*” (Elliot, 2007).

Shameful History

Many countries, regions, or cultures have a history that they might not want to be displayed in pieces of media. The prime example of this is the German government's almost universal banning of the swastika because of its association with the nationalist socialist party. However, this category could include any cultural event, person, or period which is seen as shameful and should not be displayed.

Wolfenstein is a model example. In the original release, the game has many instances of the symbol being displayed. While in the German version, all such instances were replaced with another similar symbol, that is not as provocative to the German people (Kushner, 2003).

State Boycott

While a state boycott could be issued by any nation, the data of this paper pertains entirely to the Indian government's ban of certain Chinese goods, including some of the games included in this paper's corpus e.g *AFK Arena*. This act is not predicated on any other cultural influences but instead the will of one government to disallow the selling of a product within its borders (BBC News 2, 2020).

Undesirable depiction of Region

This category pertains to any instances where a geographic area is presented in an unfavourable or unwanted way by an authority. The nature of the depiction might range from showing a region as independent, belonging to another authority, or simply depicting the people living there in a bad light. For example, *Counter-Strike* was banned in Brazil for its depiction of favelas (Gibson, 2008).

Unsuitable for Minors

While many countries and regions have dedicated age ratings that disallow mature media from being sold to children, sometimes there is content in a game that gets past those ratings. The basis of this category stemmed from the Danish government's banning of *EA Sports MMA* because it included advertisements within the game that allegedly targeted children (McElroy, 2010).

Gambling

The Gambling category refers to any instances of unsanctioned or sanctioned gambling being depicted or alluded to. It also includes mechanics in gameplay or surrounding it that can be seen as gambling. Gambling can either be with or about real-life currency or solely in-game currency. The only example of this within the data set is the Belgian government's ban on *FIFA 17* since its loot box mechanic was decided to fall under the legal definition of gambling (BBC News 2, 2019).

Drug Use

Any reference or depiction to the use of drugs, legal or illegal, other narcotics, or substances that can be addictive but are not commonly referred to as drugs fall under the category of Drug Use. These substances can either be based on real ones or only exist in the game's world; the importance is on their effects and drawbacks. Even if they do not come with any in-game mechanical consequences, akin to real-life narcotics, they can still be treated as

such due to their in-game description, narrative importance, depiction of either use and/or users, or the intended target audience.

For example, the game *Super Mario Kart*, aimed at children, was changed in its international release because of some characters engaging in alcohol consumption (Tcrf.net 8. n.d).

Sexual Content

Any content that can be seen as sexual in its depiction or discussion is included in this category. Surrounding factors are also important: are involved characters over the age of consent or considered adult and/or depicted as such, can the sexual content be seen as involuntary or forced on characters, is the content depicted as deviant from the norms or unpleasant, beastly, etc. What is considered sexual, either overtly or implicitly, changes from culture to culture. Games containing content that can be seen as relatively innocent or funny in one culture can be seen as grotesquely sexual in another: the game *Gal Gun: Double Peace* contains acts that can be seen to be of a sexual nature towards characters under the age of 18. In its homeland of Japan, this was seen as offensive at most but in New Zealand, it was seen as extremely taboo (Ricedigital.co.uk, 2017).

Security Reasons

What each country considers a breach of national security can vary greatly. Therefore, which pieces of media are put into this category is entirely based on the issued statements of the government in question. One example of security being referenced as a reason for localization is Iran's banning of *Pokémon GO*. Since no other reason or further explanation was given it cannot be put into any other category without significant speculation (Kamali Dehghan, 2016).

4. Results

After the category identification, the data that the 14 categories were based on was analysed and made into graphs to analyse the characteristics of political localizations. The amount for each type of category, divided into political and cultural, was visualised, as can be seen in fig. 8, and the split between the total amount of political- and cultural ones can be seen in fig. 9. The percentage of political localizations was 33,3%, i.e. $\frac{1}{3}$ of all localizations.

Types of localisations

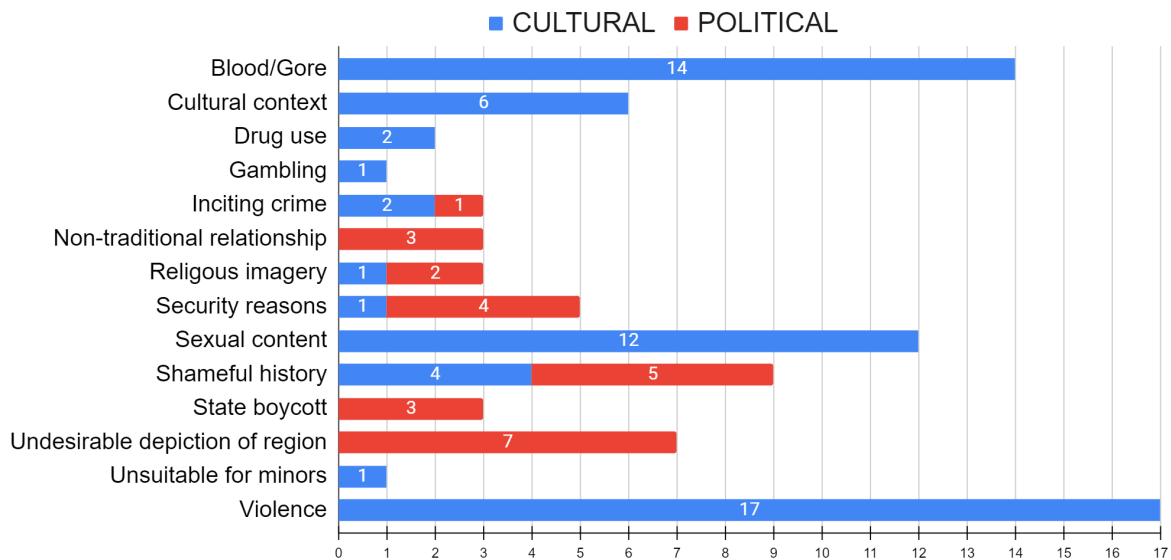


Fig. 8 - The types of localization, further divided if they are political or cultural, found through thematic analysis. The number on the bars indicates the number of video games in that category.

Localization split

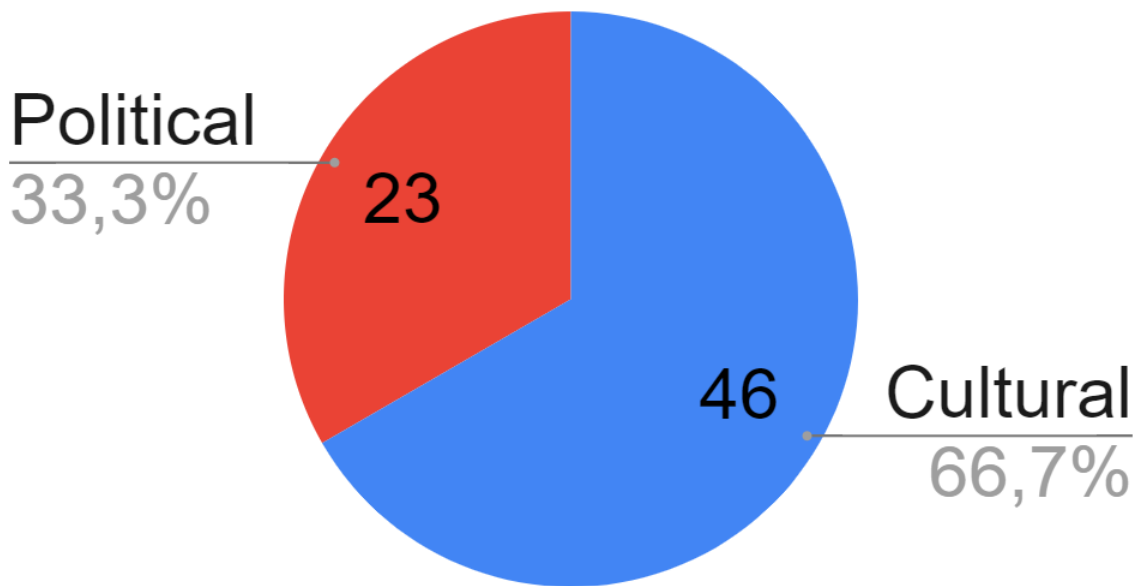


Fig. 9 - Breakdown of the amount of Political- versus Cultural localization that was found in the data. The number on the slices indicates the number of video games in that category.

The dataset is dominated by three categories: *Blood/Gore*, *Sexual content*, & *Violence*. The three of them make up 43 out of the 86 instances of localizations and neither of them contain any instances of political localizations. It was also noticed that many games that were localized to remove violence also often were localized for blood/gore and sexual content, therefore inflating the number of times they showed up in the data. It was therefore prudent to remove these three outlying categories to get a clearer representation of the data⁶. The resulting graph with outliers removed is shown in fig. 10. The resulting split between cultural and political localizations can be seen in fig. 11.

⁶ More on this in chapter 5 - Discussion.

Types of localization after outliers have been removed

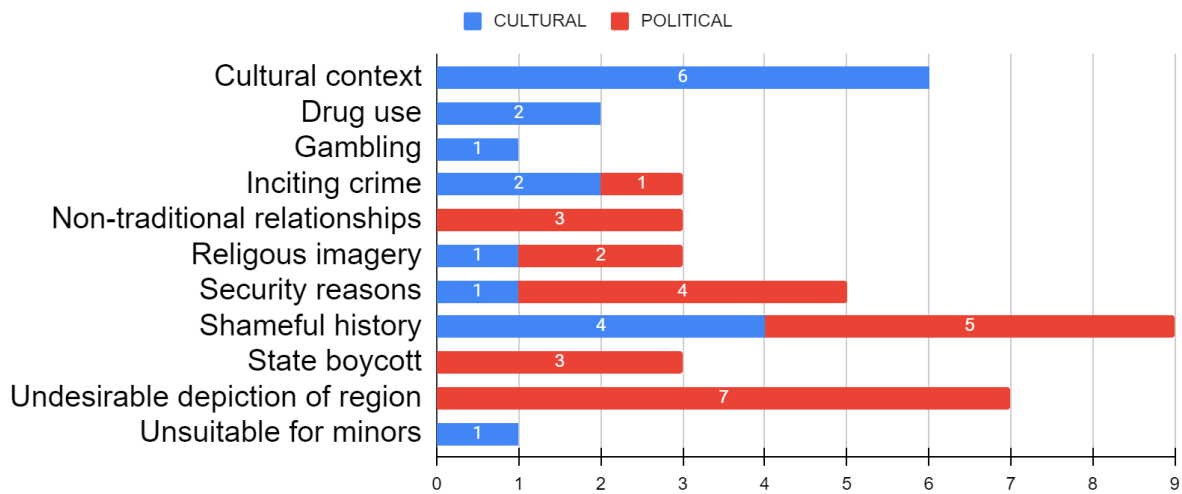


Fig. 10 - The types of localization, further divided if they are political or cultural, after outliers have been removed. The number on the bars indicates the number of video games in that category.

Localization split, outliers removed

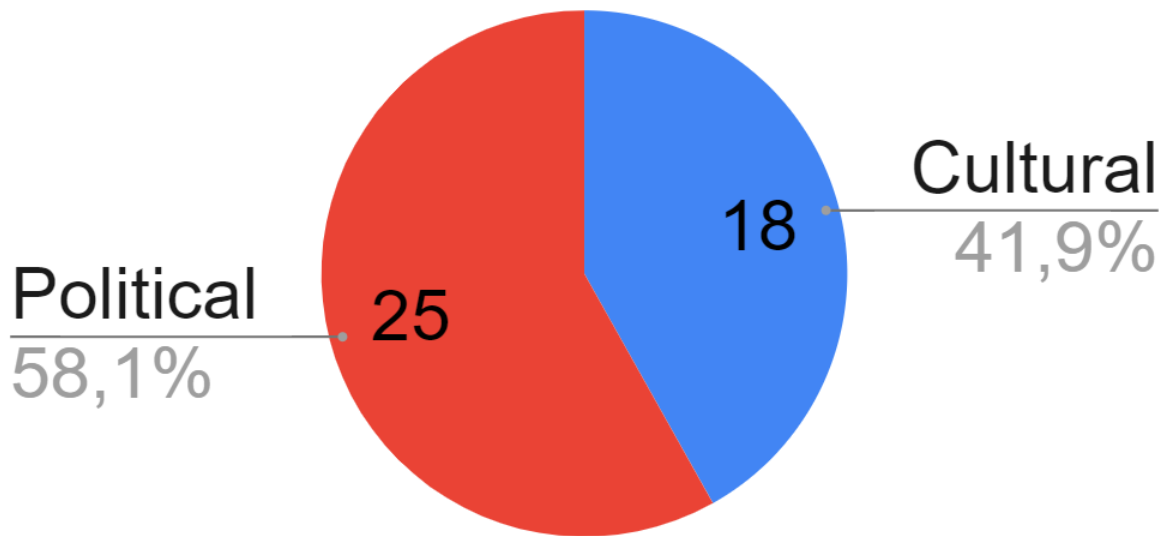


Fig. 11 - Breakdown of the amount of Political- versus Cultural localization that was found in the data after outliers were removed. The number on the slices indicates the number of video games in that category.

These graphs show that political localizations increased to 58,1% of the total amount of the remaining instances when outliers were removed.

4.1 Democracy score analyzation

After the dataset was completed, a trend was noticed. It appeared as though countries who were seen as more authoritarian tended to give out more politically motivated bans of products and demands of localizations. To get an overview of this, the 2020 democracy score created by the *Economist Intelligence Unit* at eiu.com was used to help visualise this trend.

Democracy score is a measurement of how democratic a nation is. It is created by asking several experts and the general public questions, either directly or in the form of surveys, and aggregating the resulting answers. For nations where this process is fully or partly impossible, assessments from experts are used to address the knowledge gaps (Economist Intelligence Unit, 2021).

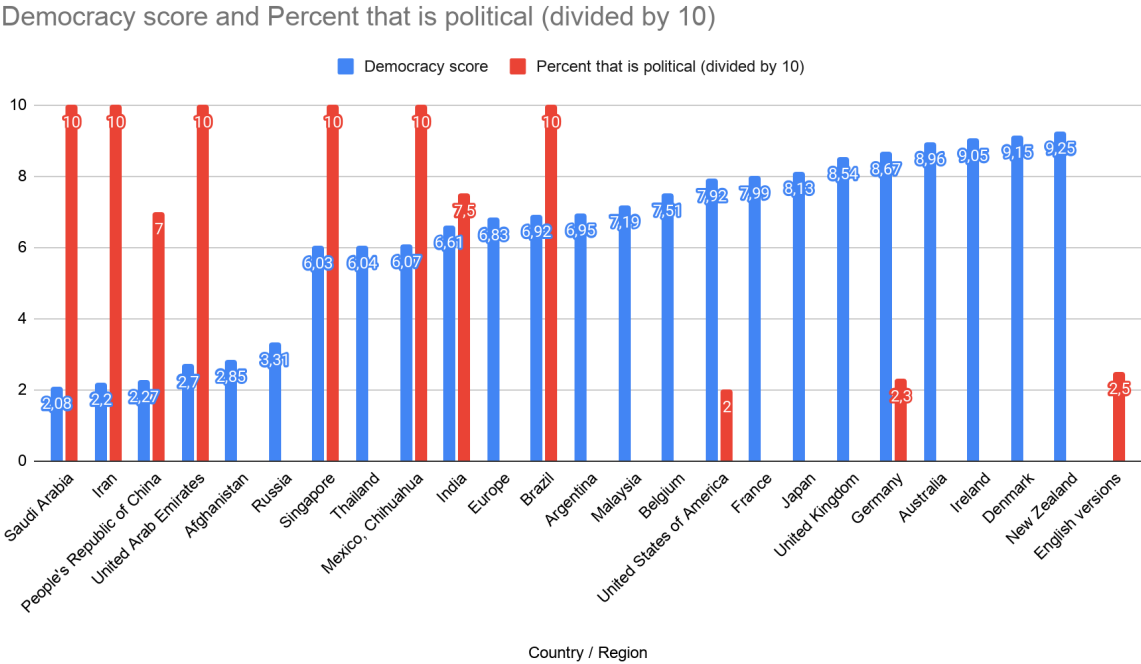


Fig. 12 - Democracy score and percentage of political localizations of the nations in the dataset.

In fig. 12, “English versions” is not a region but refers to any game that has had localizations done to “all English versions” and has, therefore, no democracy score.

The label of “Europe” in fig. 12 is set apart from the European nations due to some localizations concerning all of Europe whilst others only concern individual nations. The democracy score for Europe as of 2020 was calculated by taking the scores of western Europe (8.29) and central and eastern Europe (5.36) and calculating the average of those groups (6.83).

To make the graph more clear, nations that had a small sample size, i.e. Denmark, which had only 1 localization, were removed. Categories without a democracy score were removed as well. The result can be seen in fig. 13.

Democracy score and Percent that is political (divided by 10), outliers removed

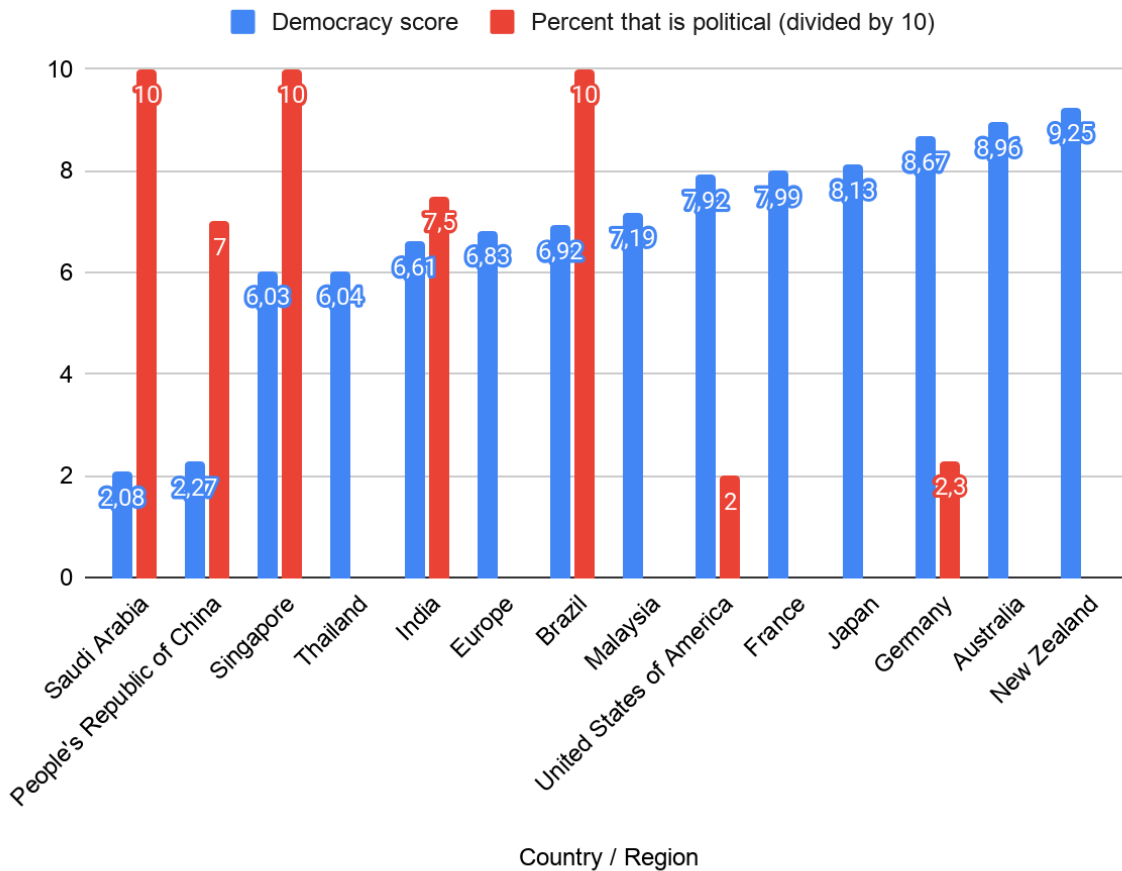


Fig. 13 - Democracy score and percentage of political localizations of the nations in the dataset, outliers removed.

Fig. 13 shows that, in general, the lower a nation's democracy score is, the higher the percentage of localizations concerning that nation is political.

Connections behind these representations were made and analysed in turn. Distinguishing features of political localization were drawn from these analyses. These features can be read in chapter 5 - Conclusion.

4.2 Further analysis

Political localizations were also noticed to correlate more to temporal qualities as opposed to cultural changes. Almost all instances of political localization and bannings have been because of reasons relating to the current political climate. The questions of Tibetan, Taiwanese, and other nation-states' sovereignty are relatively recent concepts. They are only relevant due to earlier events that created/ are creating the specific contexts under which they can exist.

5. Conclusion

This study aimed to identify distinguishing features of political localizations. This was performed by differentiating cultural- from political ones. Based on the analysis of the localizations of 69 different video games that were issued from around the world and 84 different reasons for these localizations, this study has garnered two conclusions about political localizations:

Defining features of political localization as it pertains to the 14 categories of this paper:

- Political localizations never concern the categories of *Sexual content*, *Cultural context*, *Blood/Gore*, *Drug use*, *Gambling*, *Unsuitable for minors*, and *Violence*.
- Political localizations make up completely the *categories of State boycott*, *Non-traditional relationships*, and *Undesired depiction of region*.

Through a meta-analysis of the reasoning behind the localizations, it can be concluded that:

- Political localizations are more often than not performed by nations with a lower democracy score.
- Political localizations are mostly based on temporal qualities, they generally regard issues that are only relevant to the current political climate.

Outside of those conclusions, three additional observations have been found during the process of this paper. Firstly, the separation of cultural- from political localization:

- A cultural localization aims to cater to local tastes and knowledge. This would then hopefully increase enjoyability or accessibility for that group or consumer base.
- A political localization aims to cater to whatever the leading administrative entity is. While this might also increase enjoyability to the group the entity rules over, it is not the primary aim.

Secondly, the 14 categories that can be used to distinguish between different reasons for localizations within video games were created. These categories can aid in seeing general trends of localization as well as aiding in differentiating political- from cultural localization. They are as follows:

Violence
Blood/Gore
Drug use
Sexual content
Shameful history

Inciting crime
Gambling
Unsuitable for minors
Cultural context
Security reasons

Undesirable depiction of region
Non-traditional relationships
State boycott
Religious imagery

Lastly, a process that can identify the nature of localizations was identified. This process is based on where on the spectrum between politics and culture the localization originated: either as a cultural phenomenon that then informed political decisions or vice versa.

6. Discussion

The aim of this study was to identify distinguishing features of political localizations. There are a lot of topics to discuss about the subjects of this question; cultural- and political localizations, the used definitions of this paper, how these definitions were created and applied, the results and conclusions of the study, etc. This chapter will shed a light on some of these points and divulge deeper into the discussion around them.

Seeing as the previous amount of related research on this topic is so small that none could be found for this study, the discussion is not anchored or seen in relation to any other study.

6.1 Culture relating to politics

It should be noted that culture informing politics does not always mean that it informs it in a way that is positive for most people. For most governments, it is often the case that the ruling politicians try to shape the culture in ways so that it becomes more supportive of the rulers, by whatever means. In return, the general cultural response will either be positive or negative which then informs future attempts at the same goals. It is also possible that the political mechanisms only respond to a subset of the larger culture, or to different cultures and subcultures differently.

It can also be that the subculture that the ruling class can be a part of informs political decisions concerning game legislation. Even if the rest of the population that the legislation concerns are against the decisions, the ruling class is blind to these complaints or sees them as smaller than they might be due to the echo chamber of ideas that they can be a part of.

When the corpus for this paper was being created each instance of localization had to be categorized as either cultural or political. To determine this, the idea behind fig. 1 in chapter 1.2 - *Differentiating cultural- and political localization* was used as a framework. Each instance was analysed and using the context of the banning or change it was determined at which end of the cycle it started. For example: removing blood and gore originates mostly from a cultural aversion to displaying or glorifying such things according to the majority of sources in this paper, see those for Blood/Gore in Appendix C - *Dataset of localized video games*. Meanwhile, removing references to great atrocities likely originated as a political move to reduce accountability instead of a cultural push to not acknowledge it, which then turned into a culture of denial. This is of course controversial: other researchers might interpret this cycle or its implementation differently.

6.2 Categorisation

Dividing data into categories is always going to be an inherently arbitrary process, informed by biases and individual perspectives. All categories are also not created equal. Some are broader than others and some are inherently more or less political.

The 14 categories are derived from the dataset of this paper. There are many types of localizations that might exist but never appeared during the thematic analysis for this paper.

A different dataset might have resulted in slightly different categories but the overall themes would have, most likely, been similar.

The chosen categories could have been further subdivided into smaller granularities but to get a comprehensive result for this paper this was not done. For a paper with a narrower scope, this might have been more useful. However, for this study, it would have created such narrow categories to be effectively useless. In contrast to this, further clustering could also be performed but this might have created too broad categories instead.

The culture, gender, and age group of the researcher are also important in the determination of the categorisation classes. If the researchers would not be of the same culture, what might have been determined could have become different. Researchers from an Asian nation, instead of a European one, might have viewed the issue at hand from a different angle or might have interpreted the reasons in the sources differently.

While the categories used in this paper differ greatly from that of an organisation like PEGI, the roots of the division are similar: the meaning is to inform about content that might be seen as offensive or obscene and if they contain underlying political currents. To get such a division the categories must at a base level be distinguishable from each other so there is no significant overlap.

The differentiation of pure violence from *Blood/Gore* is the most tenuous of the distinctions. It would be equally valid to combine these instances into one category. The reason why the *Violence- & Blood/Gore* categories are distinguished in this paper is because of how regulating bodies have chosen to differentiate between them. Other researchers might have chosen to lump these two categories together (or to divide them even smaller) and might do so in future research.

6.3 Results and conclusions

This study found that some categories either never contain political localizations, or are made up fully of them. This is a finding that can vary a lot depending on the dataset and should not be seen as absolute truth. It can still be a good indicator for future researchers though because it can be seen as a representative statistic of a larger whole.

It was also made apparent that, of the 69 video games, before outlying cultural categories had been removed the number of political changes was 33,3 % but afterward it was 58,1 %. These numbers could change depending on the number of video games analysed, how other researchers decide to divide them, and also on the very definition of what a political localization is.

Some might find the inclusion of democracy index scores to be a bit bizarre. Why it was included was simply because of its contextual visibility in the dataset and propensity in the data gathering process. There are very likely a lot more factors of interest that can be discerned from the data and be used to come to more comprehensive results but, due to the timeframe and scope of this study, they could not be identified. Democracy score was a readily available variable to identify, partly because of the reasons stated above and partly due to discussions arising during the study. How democracy scores relate further to localizations and censorship is something that would be fitting for a future study to fully explore.

6.4 Implications of this study

The results concluded by this study and the process to gather information can come to be used to further ways of silencing people. Governing bodies in charge of bans and/or changes can find this study and use it to improve their processes concerning censorship and use them to discipline what people can and cannot see. This, however, can be seen as a worst-case scenario and is not likely to occur.

The study can also be used to identify when issues relating to political localizations occur and enable people to deal with them in such a way to ensure a positive outcome for most people. People previously unaware of the fact that localizations can be done to further political agendas might be able to oppose them in ways they previously were unable to or unaware of. Prevention of political localizations, if so desired, can also be further explored and expanded upon with the help of this study.

Game companies can also use the results and the process in this study to more easily create games that will not be banned in other countries.

6.5 Data collection limitations

If the same topic were to be researched in a much more in-depth study with greater access to primary sources in the future it could greatly improve on the foundations laid out in this paper. Some of the flaws in the data collection that could be improved in future research are limited access to sources in other languages, limited or no access to direct government- and/or regulatory body sources, more time to divulge in the reasoning behind bans/changes and the culture and/or politics surrounding them, etc.

Australia, Germany, and China are very overrepresented in relation to most other countries in the data gathered for this paper, each for varying reasons. Australia's appearance is largely accounted for by its comprehensive and accessible database of restricted goods. Germany's law against the display of nazi-imagery made it appear in several places because of such changes. Lastly, China simply draws large media attention when they ban products or demand changes because of the importance of the Chinese markets in the current industry.

Western media's propensity to report when some regions made executive decisions to outlaw media properties more than other regions might have played a large role in creating the dataset. It could very well be that the region of Morocco has banned a lot of games containing portrayals of the region of Western Sahara as independent but this could not have garnered as much attention as China banning games portraying Tibet. In the end, this is a known unknown; a fact that might be real but, due to the scope of this study, there is no way to confirm or deny it.

It is also very possible that countries such as Saudi Arabia, Brazil, and Russia have some sort of official list of all banned media products or localized media properties, but those could not be found during this study. It could also be that nations have lists but that they are not open on the internet, needing researchers to either go over them in person at the place where they are stored, to sign a paper to get the lists sent to them, or to lend them as one would do at a library.

Concerning Denscombe's five categories for source control when performing a document survey online (*authenticity, representativeness, meaning, credibility, and authoritativeness*) it

is the belief that this thesis has taken them well into account. This is due to the analysis of every source's quality.

With the almost complete lack of first-hand sources, the data collection process often became tedious. News articles often cited other statements which could not be corroborated or lead to dead web pages. The facts that they cited could very well have been true but due to there not being any way to confirm it, at least in the timeframe of this study, they could not be trusted. Some sources were also dubious which made their statement less reliable. If they would have carried their message in a more official-seeming way it would have been easier to trust them. For example, an article claiming that a game was changed due to its portrayal of drugs that is littered with expletives, poor grammar, and attacks on the issuing region would not be seen as an acceptable source. If that same article contained reference pictures showing what had been changed would have been considered tolerable, despite its faults.

It should be noted that the number of data points gathered could have been increased. There was no specific minimum goal set at the start of the gathering process, but there was a time limit. There may be localizations that could have made it into the paper but which did not because of this. There was also a severe diminishing return in the gathering process: the final ten data points took an equivalent time to acquire as the first fifty. Many outlets that archive or list the relevant information overlapped and because of this made data increasingly harder to collect.

6.6 Reproducibility of study

This study's validity can be tested by it being able to be reproduced by other researchers. This is due to all of the sources being made available in an easy-to-read list, the process of gathering and categorizing these sources can be found in this study, and how the results were concluded can also be found further up and in this chapter. It is possible that future reproductions of this study, either with the same dataset or with another one, might come to slightly different results. However, the overall process and the same general conclusions will most likely be reproduced. This gives this study high validity, reliability, and generalizability.

6.7 Future of localization

The study of localization is relatively new and as such, there is still much ground to cover and explore. Future research will likely be able to collect further data and construct a more holistic view of the subject. The definitions established in this paper will hopefully be useful to some degree in the larger field and discussions on the topic.

Future researchers might come to refine, restructure, or reassemble the definitions of this paper, both what a political localization is as well as the 14 categories by the use of, for example, larger or more focused datasets or data gathered from primary sources that were not accessible during this study. Future researchers with different backgrounds could also delve into the psychological- and societal reasons behind political localizations.

Hopefully, this study will lead more people to question and research more into the nature of localizations, both cultural and political.

6.8 In conclusion

Current usage of the term 'localization' usually only refers to the process of translating text and nothing beyond it. Likewise, the term 'censorship' in this context is used for anything beyond that. Hopefully, the distinguishment between cultural- and political localization will give more tools in the discussion around these topics.

We hereby propose not only that cultural- and political localizations should be regarded as different and distinguished in the future, but also that which term is used should be thoughtfully regarded. Conflating the two can only lead to further issues and confusion. Being able to separate these phenomena will aid in further discussion and create new avenues for research and understanding. In addition, the content categories for different localization types and the process by which to categories them will be useful for other researchers.

Lastly, we hope that this study will shine a light on the extent of localization within the world of video games.

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Appendix A – Changes in WoW

All pictures are courtesy of the Reddit user Vahldis. Taken from the gallery at <https://imgur.com/a/VF3eq>. These pictures represent some of the changes done to WoW in the Chinese version of the game.



Picture A1 - Meat in the original lower version has been replaced with bread.



Picture A2 - Meat in the original lower version has been replaced with bread.



Picture A3 - The skeletal parts of these weapons have been replaced with stone. Original version on the left.



Picture A4 - The skeleton in the original lower version has been replaced with a zombie.

Appendix B – Terms Banned in the Chinese Version of WoW

[Link to list of terms banned in the different versions of WoW.](#) The Chinese version is coded as the number 4 in the language-column. All terms have been translated by the use of a translation software and may therefore not be fully correct. Only those terms with a clear message have been chosen for this list. Terms with multiple variations of the same concept have only had one of those instances put into the list.

Number	Chinese	English	Notes
9599	西藏独立	Tibet independence	
9679	专政	Dictatorship	
20204	卧底定位软件	Undercover positioning software	
28506	红十字会	Red Cross	
28514	解放军接管武汉	The People's Liberation Army takes over Wuhan	
28524	钟南山	Zhong Nanshan	President of the Chinese Medical Association from 2005 to 2009.
28527	常凯	Chiang Kai	Leader of the Kuomintang and prime minister of Taiwan from 1930 - 1931.
28528	世卫组织	WHO	Abbreviation of World Health Organisation
28533		SARS	Abbreviation of Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome.
28586	时代革命	Revolution of the Times	Slogan used in the "Liberate Hong Kong"-protests.
28596		COVID-19	Disease originating in Wuhan, China.
28688	圣城拉萨的哭泣	The cry of the holy city of Lhasa	Lhasa is the capital of Tibet.
28702	中国禁闻	Chinese banned news	
28723	毛折东	Mao Zhedong	Chairman of the Communist Party of China from 1943 - 1976.
27559	丹增嘉措	Tenzin Gyatso	The name of the current Dalai lama.
28318	安倍晋三	Shinzo Abe	Former prime minister of Japan.
28448	蒙独旗帜	Mongolian independence flag.	

12507	中华民国	Zhōnghuá mínguó	Chinese for the Republic of China.
12573	新闻出版总署	General Administration of Press and Publication	was the administrative agency responsible for regulating and distributing news, print and internet publications in China

Appendix C – Dataset of localized video games

Game title	Banned or changed	Reason	The issuing region	Localization type	Source
Advance wars	Changed	Cultural context	English versions	Cultural	https://tcrf.net/Advance_Wars
AFK Arena	Banned	State Boycott	India	Political	https://www.bbc.com/news/technology-53998205
America's 10 most wanted	Changed	Shameful history	United States of America	Political	https://tcrf.net/Fugitive_Hunter:_War_on_Terror#Regional_Differences
Ape Escape	Changed	Cultural context	English versions	Cultural	https://tcrf.net/Ape_Escape_(PlayStation)
Battlefield 4	Banned	Security reasons	People's Republic of China	Political	https://www.tomshardware.com/news/battlefield-china-banned-illegal-shooter,25542.html
Bionic commando	Changed	Shameful history	English versions	Political	https://tcrf.net/Bionic_Commando_(NES)#Regional_Differences
Bioshock	Changed	Violence	Germany	Cultural	https://www.schnittberichte.com/schnittbericht.php?ID=4315#C
Call of duty 2	Changed	Shameful history	Germany	Political	https://www.schnittberichte.com/schnittbericht.php?ID=3936
Call of duty: Black ops	Changed	Violence	Australia	Cultural	https://web.archive.org/web/20140804075525/https://www.movie-censorship.com/report.php?ID=875064
Call of Duty: Black Ops Cold War	Changed	Undesirable depiction of region	People's Republic of China	Political	https://www.eurogamer.net/articles/2020-08-25-activision-removes-tiananmen-square-footage-in-call-of-duty-black-ops-cold-war-trailer-after-china-ban

Call of Duty: Modern Warfare 2	Changed	Violence	Japan, Germany & Russia	Cultural	https://tcrf.net/Call_of_Duty:_Modern_Warfare_2_(Windows)#Region_Differences
Command & Conquer: Generals	Changed	Violence	Germany	Cultural	https://www.schnittberichte.com/schnittbericht.php?ID=3688
Command & Conquer: Red Alert	Changed	Shameful history	Germany	Political	https://www.schnittberichte.com/schnittbericht.php?ID=3406
Counter-Strike	Banned	Undesirable depiction of region	Brazil	Political	https://www.gamesindustry.biz/articles/counter-strike-everquest-banned-in-brazil
Crusader: No remorse	Changed	Violence	Germany	Cultural	https://www.schnittberichte.com/schnittbericht.php?ID=5975623
Dank Tanks	Banned	State Boycott	India	Political	https://www.bbc.com/news/technology-53998205
DayZ	Banned	Violence, Blood/Gore	Australia	Cultural	https://www.classification.gov.au/titles/dayz
Disco Elysium - The final cut	Banned	Violence, Drug use	Australia	Cultural	https://www.classification.gov.au/titles/disco-elysium-final-cut
Doom II: Hell on Earth	Changed	Shameful history	Germany	Political	https://doomwiki.org/wiki/Doom_II#Legal_issues_in_Germany
Dragon Age: Inquisition	Banned	Sexual Content, Non-traditional relationships	India	Cultural	https://kotaku.com/ea-says-india-wont-get-dragon-age-inquisition-due-to-o-1659754229
Duke Nukem 3D	Changed	Blood/Gore, Violence, Sexual content	Australia	Cultural	https://web.archive.org/web/20140804081442/https://www.movie-censorship.com/report.php?ID=3427
EA Sports MMA	Banned	Unsuitable for minors	Denmark	Cultural	https://www.engadget.com/2010-08-27-ea-sports-mma-wont-be-sold-in-denmark-because-of-energy-drink-l.html
Everquest	Banned	Inciting crime	Brazil	Political	https://www.gamesindustry.biz/articles/counter-strike-everquest-banned-in-brazil
Fallout 3	Changed	Shameful history,	Japan, Australia	Cultural	https://www.gamespot.com/articles/fallout-3-de-nuked-in-japan/1100-6200975/

		Violence, Blood/Gore			
FIFA 17	Banned	Gambling	Belgium	Cultural	https://www.bbc.com/news/newsbeat-49674333
Fight Of Gods	Banned	Religious imagery	Malaysia	Cultural	https://kotaku.com/publisher-of-god-fighting-game-says-malaysian-governmen-1802729743
Football Manager 2005	Banned	Undesirable depiction of region	People's Republic of China	Political	https://www.chinadaily.com.cn/english/doc/2004-12/08/content_398445.htm
Gal Gun: Double Peace	Banned	Sexual Content	New Zealand	Cultural	https://www.ricedigital.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/2017/01/GalGun-Decision.pdf
Genshin Impact	Changed	Undesirable depiction of region	People's Republic of China	Political	https://www.theguardian.com/world/2020/oct/08/genshin-in-impact-players-say-chinese-game-censors-taiwan-and-hong-kong-chat
Grand Theft Auto	Changed	Sexual content	Japan	Cultural	https://tcrf.net/Grand_Theft_Auto_V_(Xbox_360_Play_Station_3)#Regional_Differences
Grand Theft Auto - series	Banned	Inciting crime	Thailand	Cultural	http://news.bbc.co.uk/news/beat/hi/technology/newsid_7540000/7540623.stm
Grand Theft Auto III	Banned, then changed	Violence, Blood/Gore	Germany, France, Australia	Cultural	https://www.schnittberichte.com/schnittbericht.php?ID=3239
Grand Theft Auto V	Changed	Violence, Sexual content	Japan	Cultural	https://www.movie-censorsnip.com/report.php?ID=282051
Half-Life	Changed	Violence, Blood/Gore	Germany	Cultural	https://tcrf.net/Half-Life_(Windows)#Regional_Differences
Harvester	Changed	Blood/Gore	United Kingdom	Cultural	https://web.archive.org/web/20140804080945/https://www.movie-censorship.com/report.php?ID=363639
Hearts of Iron 4	Banned	Undesirable depiction of region	People's Republic of China	Political	http://www.chinadaily.com.cn/english/doc/2004-05/29/content_334845.htm
I Have No Mouth and I Must Scream	Changed	Shameful history	France, Germany	Cultural	https://www.pcgamer.com/saturday-crapshoot-i-have-

					no-mouth-and-i-must-scream/
Left 4 Dead 2	Changed	Blood/Gore	Australia	Cultural	https://web.archive.org/web/20140804074228/https://www.movie-censorship.com/report.php?ID=5984068
Mace Griffin: Bounty Hunter	Changed	Blood/Gore	Europe	Cultural	https://www.movie-censorsnip.com/report.php?ID=3759
Manhunt 2	Banned	Inciting crime, Violence	Ireland, United Kingdom, New Zealand	Cultural	http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/uk_news/england/leicestershire/6767623.stm
Mass Effect	Banned	Non-traditional relationships	Singapore	Political	https://www.gamesindustry.biz/articles/mass-effect-banned-in-singapore
Metal Gear Solid 2: Sons of Liberty	Changed	Blood/Gore	Worldwide, outside USA	Cultural	https://www.movie-censorsnip.com/report.php?ID=4113
Mortal Kombat 9	Changed	Violence, Blood/Gore	Australia	Cultural	https://www.classification.gov.au/titles/mortal-kombat-komplete-edition-0
NecroVision	Changed	Blood/Gore	Germany, Australia	Cultural	https://web.archive.org/web/20140804074712/https://www.movie-censorship.com/report.php?ID=5982801
Omega Labyrinth	Banned	Sexual content	Australia	Cultural	https://www.classification.gov.au/titles/omega-labyrinth-h-z
Plague Inc	Banned	Security reasons	People's Republic of China	Political	https://www.bbc.com/news/technology-51673293
Plague Inc: Evolved	Banned	Security reasons	People's Republic of China	Political	https://www.bbc.com/news/technology-51673293
Player Unknown's Battlegrounds	Banned	Security reasons	Afghanistan	Cultural	https://dotesports.com/news/afghanistan-bans-pubg-calls-for-regulation-of-video-games
Pokemon card game	Banned	Religious imagery	Suadi Arabia	Political	https://abcnews.go.com/International/story?id=81345
Pokemon GO	Banned	Security reasons	Iran	Political	https://www.theguardian.com/world/2016/aug/08/iran-bans-pokemon-go
Postal	Banned	Violence, Sexual content	Australia, New Zealand	Cultural	https://register.classificationoffice.govt.nz/Pages/Screen

					ens/DDA/WarningPage.aspx
PUBG MOBILE LITE	Banned	State Boycott	India	Political	https://www.bbc.com/news/technology-53998205
Quantum Theory	Changed	Blood/Gore	Germany	Cultural	https://web.archive.org/web/20140804100027/https://www.movie-censorship.com/report.php?ID=988234
RapeLay	Banned	Sexual content	Argentina, China, New Zealand, Malaysia, Thailand	Cultural	https://economictimes.indiatimes.com/magazines/panache/rapelay-banned-for-sexual-content-manhunt-for-gore-pokmon-go-could-be-next/articleshow/53516123.cms
Silent hill	Changed	Blood/Gore	Europe	Cultural	https://www.movie-censors.com/report.php?ID=5975597
Song of Memories	Banned	Sexual content	Australia	Cultural	https://www.classification.gov.au/titles/song-memories
South Park: The Stick of Truth	Changed	Violence, Sexual content, Shameful history	Australia, Europe	Cultural	https://www.eurogamer.net/articles/2014-03-07-matt-stone-south-park-the-stick-of-truth-censorship-not-that-big-a-deal
Spec Ops: The Line	Banned	Undesirable depiction of region	United Arab Emirates	Political	https://spong.com/feature/10110607/Interview-Reviving-the-Spec-Ops-Franchise
Splatterhouse	Changed	Religious imagery	United States of America	Cultural	https://web.archive.org/web/20140602073637/http://www.movie-censorship.com/report.php?ID=5982816
Street Fighter 2: Champion Edition	Changed	Cultural context	United States of America	Cultural	https://youtu.be/X_E8LVdt7Y?list=PLJ4fBNrYelimYVJ3gapdUtBrf0-p19xv&t=60
Super Mario Kart	Changed	Drug use	Europe, United States of America	Cultural	https://tcrf.net/Super_Mario_Kart#Regional_Differences
The Last of Us	Banned	Non-traditional relationships	Saudi Arabia	Political	https://nordic.ign.com/news/36724/the-last-of-us-part-2-seemingly-blocked-in-middle-eastern-countries
The Legend of Zelda: A	Changed	Cultural context	English versions	Cultural	https://legendsoflocalization.com/fat-beauty-and-a-lin

Link Between Worlds					k-between-worlds-localization/
Tom Clancy's Ghost Recon Advanced Warfighter 2	Banned	Undesirable depiction of region	Chihuahua, Mexico	Political	https://www.gamespot.com/articles/mexican-governor-orders-seizure-of-graw2/1100-6168009/
Tom Clancy's Rainbow Six Siege	Changed	Violence, Sexual content, Cultural context	People's Republic of China	Cultural	https://gadgets.ndtv.com/games/news/rainbow-six-siege-censorship-china-sex-gambling-ubisoft-1942952
Valkyrie Drive: Bhikkhuni	Banned	Sexual content	Australia	Cultural	https://www.classification.gov.au/titles/valkyrie-drive-bhikkhuni
Wasteland 3	Banned	Violence, Blood/Gore	Australia	Cultural	https://www.classification.gov.au/titles/wasteland-3-1
Wolfenstein	Changed	Shameful history	Germany	Cultural	Kushner, D., 2003. Masters of Doom. Random House Publishing Group, pp.113 - 117
World of Warcraft	Banned, then changed	Cultural context	People's Republic of China	Cultural	https://www.engadget.com/2014-01-17-wow-archivist-wow-in-china-an-uncensored-history.html

Appendix D – Reflection Documents

Olle Frid

Goal Correspondence

Our study corresponds well to the goals of the thesis course seeing as there has been constant correspondence and meetings with our supervisor during the course of the study.

The goals as laid out in the **Thesis Instructions** were not the main goal during the beginning, frankly, they were almost forgotten by me at this stage, but their underlying sentiments were always my goal. If someone were to ask me what the goals are I would not be able to say the wording of the actual list but would instead say “*to make a good scientific report*”, or something to that extent. Comparing my inner thoughts with the list of goals they correspond quite well, at least according to me.

The goal that we had the most trouble with was the one concerning **Relevant Method Selection** seeing as we had trouble identifying the most optimal scientific method for our paper. The ones that I am the proudest over and think are the ones most worthy of mention are the ones concerning critical discussion, e.g. **Self Reflection** and **Knowledge Development Discussion**.

Study Plan

The planning of our study progressed quite well. We formulated a plan around our first thesis idea and it was of our belief that we could follow it until the end of the study. When we found out that we had to change the thesis we laid out another plan that was quite similar to the first one but with a few changes based on the new format.

We could have changed our plan to be more efficient, as it always is with any project. When one phase was officially done we could have used the excess time from it and dispersed it to other phases that might have needed it more.

Education Relation

Our thesis's work relates to our education quite well, seeing as it is about an area relevant to game design. In our education, there have been several courses that have not brought up the area of localization directly but have tangentially touched upon the area. There have also been courses about scientific research which are directly applicable to any thesis.

Evaluability for future work/studies

We believe that this thesis is very valuable in the field of localization analysis due to the field being almost barren before our study was created. If either of us or only one goes forward

and explores this area further, this thesis, and/or its inherent themes and ideas, will be imperative in making other people understand the subject.

I am very curious about how I, or other people, can explore this topic further.

Satisfaction

I am very satisfied with our work. I have not felt more interested in a thesis's topic before as I have for the one that has been created by us. I found the workflow, the gathering of sources and data, and the analysis of these, as well as the actual writing of the paper to be very satisfactory.

As the field of localization analysis is, as previously stated, sparse at best, it felt *good* to be one of the first to explore it. I do believe that if we had written about a topic or a field that had been previously established, I would not have felt the same kind of inner satisfaction as I have done with this thesis.

What has been said about the process of creating the thesis can be said about the results; very satisfactory. The only part of the entire thesis that I find to be not satisfying is the fact that there is so much more that could be explored concerning political localizations but, seeing as there was a time limit on this project, could not be explored by us right now.

Henrik Hökby

Goal Correspondence

Despite not having the exact course goals in mind while writing the paper I still think the goals were reached for all the criteria. This is because the goal was always to create a professional thesis of the highest quality, which naturally leads one to achieve the goals listed if that is successful. We made sure to have constant and clear communications with our supervisor which helped to avoid any major mistakes while writing.

While writing there was a heavy focus on the language and readability of the text itself. Most academic texts are primarily concerned with the contents of the text to the detriment of how the reader experiences that content. For this paper, I wanted to make sure that even someone not knowledgeable about the specifics could understand the point of the text. Even though there are parts that are slightly technical, the overall text, I believe, would be comprehensible by most people.

Study Plan

At first, the planning process had been quite smooth and straightforward. We laid out a plan for what work should be done each week to correspond to the dates where we had meetings with our supervisor and other deadlines.

The initial plan for the direction of the paper had to be shifted after the first rough draft was sent to the reviewer. At that time the paper did not fall within the purview of computer science and was thus rejected. To remedy this, the focus was broadened to cover all of video game localization instead of a single case study like before. This shift required a major rewrite at the early stages of the course, which was a difficult task, but ultimately resulted in a better paper overall.

Rewriting the text also took some time away from other parts of the decided schedule. The time we had to gather data had to be slightly cut short to be able to analyse it within a reasonable timeframe. However not having as much time as one wanted is always going to be an issue when writing a paper and it is unsure how much extra data would truly have been garnered if given another week.

Education Relation

This paper was written as part of a computer science degree with a focus on game development. While the study veers slightly into the humanities because of the mentions of culture and politics it is still grounded in a foundation of video games. If part of a more standard computer science degree it could have been argued that it is not focused enough on the technology of computers or the theory of any digital system.

The courses on scientific writing and methodology were naturally helpful when writing since they primed me on how to structure a scientific text and writing academically. Outside of

those, there were parts of the larger education that formed my understanding of this topic without ever being about video game localization specifically. That knowledge base allowed me to later write this paper, whereas I would not have been able to without it.

Evaluability for future work/studies

It is hard to say how relevant the study will be to my future endeavours, working on it did increase my knowledge of the specific topic and the field of video games as a whole. That knowledge will most likely aid in any future work that I partake in.

Satisfaction

When writing the initial draft I was moderately confident in the work, but not entirely since I had not written a paper at this level before. When we received feedback that major rewrites were needed to get the rough draft accepted I became more unsure of how the final paper would turn out. After the rewriting process was complete, and the second draft accepted, the nervousness had entirely subsided. As it stands now I am very confident in the work that I and my partner performed as well as in the quality of the paper.