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THE ROLE OF URBAN SPACES IN COSPLAY CULTURE

A case study of Tracon-Tampere

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ABSTRACT

Yuran Im: The Role of Urban Spaces in Cosplay Culture: A case study of Tracon in Tampere
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Cosplay as a subculture has been gaining traction among teenagers and young adults in Finland, particularly those interested in costuming and role-playing from various media such as manga, cartoons, video games, and films. This research explores how cosplay conventions, specifically Tracon, contribute to a sense of belonging and community bond among cosplayers, and how the use of urban spaces enhances participants' experiences. Utilising a case study approach and an online survey, the study investigates the dynamic interaction between cosplay conventions and urban spaces, highlighting the significance of appropriating these spaces to meet cosplayers' needs and desires.

Findings indicate that Tracon, as a physical space for community activities, significantly fosters a sense of belonging and social inclusivity, transforming urban environments into creative and supportive spaces for cosplayers. The research underscores the importance of urban spaces in enhancing the convention experience and suggests that cities can better support these events by offering adaptable spaces and wider range of harassment prevention. While the study focuses on a single event, it provides valuable insights of the utilisation of urban spaces for subcultural events.

Keywords: Youth-subculture, cosplay, fandom, social inclusion, the use of urban space, identity

The originality of this thesis has been checked using the Turnitin OriginalityCheck service.

PREFACE

This thesis is fruition of research and academic exploration, and it is with great pleasure that I present it to the reader. The journey towards the thesis has been constant challenging and rewarding, and I am grateful that I learnt from a series of constant learning experiences towards the topic.

The motivation behind this research begins from one of my passions about comics for a long time. As I embarked this journey, I realised the complexity and depth of the topic, and I tried to explore them thoroughly.

Throughout the process, I have been fortunate to receive guidance, endless support, and encouragement from people from my degree program, family, and friends. First and foremost, I express my appreciation to my thesis supervisor, Dr. Salla Jokela and Dr. Markus Laine, for their expertise, mentorship and support, and the feedback and constructive criticism have been the nourishment of my thesis.

Furthermore, I express the appreciation, especially to my mother and brother for believing the potential in me and their support throughout the long academic journey and this thesis as well as my other family members and friends for the endless support and encouragement which have been a strong source of strength and motivation.

I hope this thesis has a meaningful contribution to the future research in youth subculture studies and urban studies and inspire further inquiry and exploration.

Yuran Im

27 May 2024

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1 INTRODUCTION

Cosplay as a subculture has been gaining attention from teenagers and young adults in Finland, particularly among those interested in costuming and role-playing from various media such as manga, cartoons, video games, and films. Enthusiasts, known as cosplayers, not only focus on creating costumes but also actively socialize, forming communities through online forums, offline meetings, and cosplay conventions. Cosplay conventions, integral to this subculture, provide opportunities for cosplayers to gather, showcase their creativity, and engage with urban spaces like parks, shopping malls, and restaurants. Despite a lot of attention to cosplay convention, there is limited research on how urban spaces are utilised by cosplayers and how cities can better support these events. Additionally, cosplayers often face negative experiences from those outside their culture, underscoring the need for inclusive and supportive convention environments.

In Finland, there are many cosplay conventions happening throughout the country. Cosplay convention becomes one of the popular events for teenagers and young adults. Although the importance of event space has been clarified in many fields, more knowledge is needed about how urban spaces are appropriated by cosplayers and how the city can offer the space for such purpose. From this point of view, cosplay convention contributes to understand cosplay culture as a minor community in society, establish new form of identity, and gather support and its industry. Moreover, as Jenkins (2018) elucidates that community provides a safe space where cosplayers can experiment with new passion or activities, cosplay convention plays the role of gathering people and make them feel included in the community. In addition to that, Zubernis and Larsen (2018) highlighted that face-to-face interaction in physical spaces will establish a stronger community bond.

Cosplay conventions have become global phenomena and are essential parts of cosplay culture, allowing participants to gather and showcase their creativity. These conventions help cosplayers form communities, communicate through various means, and spend time in both the convention venue and surrounding spaces. The engagement between cosplayers and urban spaces such as parks, shopping malls, and restaurants is crucial for their experience. Crawford and Hancock (2018) highlighted that cosplayers reimagine urban environments as part of an inspired narrative, transforming spaces into virtual settings like dungeons. This activity fosters a sense of belonging and community.

According to the previous work done by Lucas (2018), there are a number of debates about social stigma and sexual harassment which limits the sense of freedom within the cosplay culture. Furthermore, Ellsworth's research (2018) pointed out that there is little research on the study of sexual assault or harassment in cosplay convention. To enhance the experience in conventions, I decided to tackle the issue of harassment and social stigma which cosplayers tend to face with in my thesis.

Thus, I attempt to answer these following research questions throughout the research:

1. How do utilised urban spaces during Tracon contribute to a sense of belonging and community bond within cosplay community?
2. How can allocated urban spaces reduce harassment from the public and promote social inclusiveness?

To answer the research questions, Tracon, a prominent cosplay convention in Finland, will be studied as a case for this research. Tracon utilises its venue and the adjacent public park (Sorsapuisto) for the convention, allowing cosplayers to transform these spaces creatively. The online survey was conducted to explore cosplayers' experiences and perceptions of the convention and surrounding urban spaces. This research aims to study how cosplay conventions can be inclusive and foster a sense of belonging, identifying factors

that enhance the quality of conventions and providing a model for future event planning.

The research investigated how urban spaces utilised during Tracon contribute to fostering a sense of belonging and community bond among cosplayers, particularly focusing on the convention's role in addressing challenges related to harassment and introversion within cosplay culture. It would be of specific importance to employ the urban spaces into cosplay culture, as there is little study on improving the experience and impression of cosplay conventions using the urban spaces and their utilisation. The key contribution of this research is the advantages of the utilisation of urban spaces done by Tracon, and cosplayers are offered the space where they can transform by their needs and desires.

Although this study offers insightful information on how cosplayers use urban spaces and how the conventions help to strengthen ties within the community, it is crucial to recognise some limitations. Because this research focuses on one case (Tracon), which might not be typical of all cosplay conventions. Also, self-selection may introduce by online survey due to the different experience from all respondents. Lastly, because cosplay culture is ever-evolving, conclusions may vary over time as new habits and trends take hold. However, this research provides a basic grasp of the interaction between the use of urban spaces and cosplay conventions.

2 LITERATURE REVIEW

Through this scope of literature review, this literature review will enhance the deeper understanding of the relationship between urban space and cosplay culture and shows the importance and meaning of appropriating of urban spaces for cosplayers.

In this literature review, I will first focus on youth subculture paying particular attention to identity formation and the formation of a unique sense of community. Within this framework, I will then focus on a specific subculture, namely the 'cosplay culture'. After that I will move to explore the appropriation of urban space and delve into relationships between cosplay culture and the appropriation of urban space from the perspective of cosplayers.

2.1 Youth Subculture and Community

Youth subculture has been studied in many fields such as sociology, psychology, criminology etc. In the early studies, subculture tends to connect to criminology studies as the scholars focused on deviant aspect of youth subculture by explaining subculture as distinct social subsystem within a larger social system and culture (Williams, 2007). Hebdige (1979) described subculture as 'noise' because of its anti-social behaviour, distinctive identity, and characteristic of rebellion.

The community plays important role in subculture. According to Cohen's subcultural theory (1956), subculture is formed when a number of actors with similar problems of social adjustment interact with one another and innovate new frames of reference, which leads to explaining social fragmentation. Community plays the role as a space for consumption of subculture. People

who have common interests start making their own community and it shapes their identity as a part of the community.

2.2 *Cosplay Culture*

The word “cosplay” comes from combining costuming and play. Cosplay was first coined by Nobuyuki Takahashi, a Japanese reporter, as a first serial title in the anime magazine article (Nobuyuki, n.d.). Enthusiasts in cosplay culture are called cosplayers. Cosplayers are interested in specially fabricating clothes and putting appropriate makeup based on anime (Japanese animation), manga, and video games (Hill, 2017; HDFS, 2012). Additionally, Hill (2017) adds that cosplay culture consists of different history, gender, and socio-economic status in society and diversity can be found within its community. It has become popular among the youth and young adults and manifests itself in different ways around the world.

Although it is difficult to specify the beginning of history of cosplay, the masquerades in Europe can be considered as its early predecessors (Hill, 2017). They were costume parties that were held during the 17th and 18th centuries among nobles. In masquerades, people were expected to wear masks to conceal themselves and follow a strict dress code. This tradition has evolved in different ways and cosplay can be seen as derived form of masquerades.

Cosplay enables young people to re-create their interests and socialize with other members of communities within the common recreational activity (Abramova, Smirnova, Tataurova, 2021). In the same way as in the masquerades of the 17th and 18th centuries, costuming might be seen as hyper-realistic activity because cosplay is used to escaping reality and cosplayers immerse themselves into the characters that they are recreating and re-enacting, which is seen as new form of identity formation and social role transformation (Abramova, Smirnova, Tataurova, 2021). This is evident in the survey conducted by Abramova et al. (2021), stating that the dominant motivation for participating in cosplay was the desire for self-expression, self-development, and a desire to play the roles of favourite characters (51% to 56% of respondents).

However, the survey also highlighted that respondents choose the second important motives as communication with similar lifestyle participants or finding their own lifestyle, or a desire to learn more about cosplay. This result shows that community plays the significant role of communication with one another.

2.2.1 Community within the Fandom and Cosplay Culture

Fandom studies highlight how fandom affects subcultures and what role fandom plays in the formation of a sense of community. According to Jenkins (2018), fandom is an expansive and participatory subculture, and its members share traditions and practices. Additionally, Jenkins (2018) added that members are able to acquire skills and knowledge for their interests by engaging within this participatory culture and reproduce the core ideology.

Specifically, cosplay fandom includes people who are interested in science fiction, fantasy, video games, manga, and Japanese animation (Hill, 2017). As cosplay requires social activity (Calinao, Dulay, Llamas, 2023), fandom and community culture are closely connected to cosplay culture. For example, cosplayers form their own community where they socialise with each other, exchange necessary information about cosplay activities, support and celebrate each other's creativity and performance. This entails the survey conducted by Abramova et al. (2021) that cosplayers are motivated to communicate with each other and share a desire to learn more about by sharing knowledge and cooperating with others.

According to the survey conducted by Rosenberg and Letamendi (2018), 67.3% of the participants fall under the age range of 18 to 30 years old where young adults are a part of. Thus, the participation of these young adults in fandom culture contribute to their identity development. Adolescence is an important period for developing identity and integrating experiences into one's sense of identity (Madjar& Cohen-Malayev, 2013; Selby, 2021). Additionally, Yamato (2016) claimed that cosplay community not only inculcate the sense of autonomy and community, but the repeated affirmation over many years of

consistent attending of convention have positive effects on mental health. In a study conducted by Laninga-Wijinen and Veenstra (2021), a factor that influences the growth among adolescents are its peers and the environment that they grow in. Fandom culture such as cosplaying are one of the communities where adolescents are able to grow and discover themselves.

Fandom culture is especially prominent among adolescence because it promotes the self-reflexivity, identity building, and social functioning of youth, for those who struggle with belonging and connectedness in their primary socialization contexts, supporting basic psychological needs from the community of fandom (Madjar & Cohen-Malayev, 2013). Moreover, Fandom and community helps in identity forming and categorization of self (Abramova, Smirnova, Tataurova, 2021; Lamerichs & Nicolle, 2018), based on the level of involvement (Jenkins, 2018), and the perception of closeness, similar values, and communicative practices (Abramova, Smirnova, Tataurova, 2021). For cosplayer in adolescence, Friendship formed in community affects their identity formation and emotional connection sharing the culture strengthens the sense of belonging. Friendship can not only provide common interest but also play crucial role in shaping one's interests, likes or dislikes, and even the fundamental values they live by. These connections can also be a reference of an adolescent, influencing their aspirations and guiding their choices regarding to who they want to emulate or not become. When adolescents spend time with friends who share common passions, discussions lead to shifts in perspectives or preference, which affects shaping the sense of self and belonging.

Since fandom plays an important role in cosplay communities, it enables cosplayers to enact their self and affects self-awareness by supporting and socialising within the community. Lacasa et al. (2017) demonstrate that teenagers receive support from their community, which leads to the construction of the self, relying on actions and goals. Moreover, cosplay fandom as a space plays a role for cosplayers performing and experimenting passions and activities (Jenkins, 2018; Crawford & Hancock, 2018). It leads out the feeling of "brotherhood" (Abramova, Smirnova, Tataurova, 2021) with highly active and supportive characteristics. Since cosplayers get an opportunity to realise what

they are interested in, pursue, and desire throughout the activities in the community, they get to know themselves and develop their self through supporting and celebration from fellow cosplayers.

2.3 The Use of Urban Spaces in Cosplay Culture

2.3.1 The Appropriation of urban space

Regarding to relationship between marginal group and the space, Kurniawati (2012) explained that marginal groups of people have potential to reproduce a space. Reappropriating of spaces make the marginal groups more resilient by allowing them to strengthen their social ties, as well as to build long-term relationships and social capital, which leads to fostering social cohesion and the sense of togetherness and builds more solid tradition within the culture (Kurniawati, 2012).

Cosplayers constantly engage with the space. They appropriate and transform everyday architecture to create an ideal place depending on the purpose of use. Rioux et al. (2017) defined “appropriation” as the mechanism of transforming space into place. For example, cosplayers choose and arrange decorations and furnishings for their performance of costuming to the space where is considered abstract, and then the abstract space becomes the place with the certain meaning as a background for the performance, for instance. Through appropriation, space gathers people and activities, meaning, hobbies, and desire at the same place. Crawford and Hancock (2018) quoted the idea of cosplayers’ urban poaching defined by de Certeau as the way they re-imagine and transform social spaces, which enables them to be active and capable of new understanding, interpretations and outcomes.

From the perspective of cosplay culture, appropriation of urban space is not new concept. Among traditions in cosplay culture, cosplay convention is a conspicuously big part. Cosplayers and visitors get inspired and support each other’s performance within the space. Again, cosplay convention plays a role of

background. Cosplayers transform convention spaces into the scene for their characters and they emulate by interacting with imaginary spaces. Crawford and Hancock (2018) describes that cosplayers look for environments that are suitable for their character and enable them to immerse into the role and this process is transforming an area into a play space. As a marginal group of people (Badshah, 1996), they have ability to reimagine and reproduce into place where they can play their role and they simultaneously look for the possibilities and limitations within the existing built environment (Crawford & Hancock, 2018; Badshah, 1996). Since cosplay convention offers the space for cosplayers for the activities, they are allowed to appropriate the space and freely reimagine of what they want. Finally, cosplay convention becomes a symbol of big part of cosplay culture and the place encourages and celebrates the culture, as well.

2.3.2 Inclusive and diverse space

Inclusiveness and diversity are crucial to the vitality and sustainability of cosplay conventions. Cosplay conventions as a social space create embracing environments and respect the participants regardless of gender, race, ethnicity, age or socio-economic level (Kurniawati, 2012). In this context, inclusiveness defines that participants can have a fair opportunity to enjoy the cosplay convention without any discriminations. Cosplay convention as inclusive space ensures that people with various backgrounds can share the common interests and perspectives (Ramirez, 2023). In the inclusive environment, cosplayers can freely express themselves and pride on their community by meeting other cosplayers or sharing thoughts about favourite characters, for instance. As cosplay convention embraces people with various backgrounds, it becomes diverse and inclusive, strengthening community bond through shared perspectives and interest. Cosplayers use such urban spaces to socialise with one another and celebrate their culture together.

Moreover, cosplay convention fosters global connection, as cosplay convention and event become global phenomena by forming global community based on shared interests in cosplay culture. Such global connections are

developed by visitors, artists (e.g. cosplayers), and merchant sellers, and these contributions add meaning to cosplay convention throughout the linkage between people and the space (Kurniawati, 2012).

Diversity in cosplay community manifests in various forms, reflecting the differences in ethnicity, age, and education level, according to the survey conducted by Rosenberg and Letamendi (2018). This diversity comes in a lot of different forms in cosplay convention. Through their own narratives and ideas, cosplayers interpret a variety of characters and perform creative expression from existing media (Lamerichs, 2015).

However, despite the inclusive and diverse nature of cosplay conventions, there are instances where people in cosplay community may feel the sense of alienation, when cosplay convention cannot accommodate the rights of marginalised group. When cosplay convention failed to offer welcoming and embracing environment, cosplayers become forgotten, silent, and undesirable people (Kurniawati, 2012).

Since cosplay is closely tied to conventions, inclusiveness and diversity helps to respect various cultural narratives and perspectives, and it fosters the sense of belonging to all participants (Tylor, 2009). When convention put efforts to include marginalised group of people, doing so realises social justice and equality (Hutabarat-Nelson, 2017).

2.3.3 Harassment and Safety

However, despite inclusiveness and diversity within cosplay convention, it is important to acknowledge the challenges face by introverted individuals and the issues of harassment and safety within these spaces.

Introversion often finds a comfortable refuge for the displays and performances. Cosplay as a performance has the audiences who should be receptive, non-challenging, and non-threatening and they mostly refer to other cosplayers (Crawford & Hancock, 2018). Napier (2007) claimed that convention

venue is considered as safe spaces to express themselves. As Ellsworth (2018) cited previous work by Peterson and Ray in 2016, cosplay convention is seen as safe spaces where cosplayers can freely express their passions without fear of repercussions from the “normal” everyday world. Because cosplayers prefer activities that label them as geeks, nerds, or intellectuals, they frequently feel excluded or mistreated in the mainstream society (Ellsworth, 2018). This indicates that cosplayers tend to feel more comfortable expressing introversion within the convention venue.

Lopes (2006) and Peirson-Smith (2013) claimed that cosplayers tend to face with social stigma outside of their cultural space (as cited in Ramirez, 2023, p.64). In mainstream society, cosplayers tend to be mistreated or excluded which results in them having introverted behaviours. Lucas (2018) cited the definition of stigma by Goffman and he defines stigma as a social process by which people with undesirable traits are actively shunned and rejected by people in mainstream society. For example, cosplay culture with minority status in the society, could face with stigmatisation and marginalisation in convention spaces (Orme, 2016).

Additionally, cosplay convention offers the space where cosplayers can re-envision or change the way they view aspects of their identity in terms of sexuality or gender (Tylor, 2009). For example, cosplayers are likely to use cosplay as a mean of exploring and expressing aspects of their identity that tend to be undesirable and uncomfortable in other social contexts. Especially, cosplayers who does not share the same values in terms of gender binary, can change into the identities that they want to become as well as they are not judged by others.

In cosplay conventions, there are people who have certain fetishises towards the decisions in clothing and they portray certain characters in a sexual way. By the definition of harassment by Powell in this context, it defines the act as staring, flirting, suggestive gestures, and sexual remarks (as cited in Lucas, 2018, p.16). Rodriguez (2015) claimed that this kinds of sexual assault and harassment makes mostly female cosplayers to feel dehumanised, which leads to severe trauma as same as outside of conventions. As a results, these issues affect people who attend and staff or volunteers (Ellsworth, 2018). This suggests

that cosplayers are likely to prefer to avoid or withdraw from such negative experiences, and such experiences results in introverted behaviour.

Overall, making positive changes in cosplay convention contributes to embracing marginalised communities (Ramirez, 2023). For example, safe and public as well as inclusive and embracing environment for casual meeting with a fellow fan from online, plays the crucial role for cosplayers to perform and feel welcomed by such spaces. Moreover, clear, concise, and effective policies and trained staff regarding to safety issues mentioned above, are essential to helping cosplayers feel safer and bringing positive atmosphere to the conventions (Ellsworth, 2018).

3 DATA AND METHODS

This chapter discusses in detail the methodological choice, the research design processes, and the procedure of analysis. The overall methodological approach used case study and survey. Tracon (Cosplay convention held in Tampere) is selected for the case study and the survey is presented in order to support the case study as the secondary method.

3.1 *Research Design*

3.1.1 Qualitative Research Approach

To quote Corbin and Strauss (2014), qualitative research allows to understand the inner experiences of participants as well as the way of meaning formed through and in culture.

The main idea of this research is that cosplayers develop the meaning of the space through appropriation of urban spaces according to their needs and desires, and they seek for the spaces where they can express themselves and feel sense of belonging within cosplay communities. The aim of the research is to promote social inclusiveness of marginal group within society through appropriation of urban spaces, especially focused on cosplay culture. Therefore, this research will focus on how cosplayers engage with the space and foster sense of belonging and community bond by facilitating the space. Following sections will elucidate the case study and the survey conducted for the research, in detail.

3.1.2 Case Study

The case methodology used in this research was a single case study. Based on the study by Punch (2005) and Merriam (1998), the case study is the specific research with single or small number of cases considered appropriate. They define a case study as an intensive and in-depth explanation and analysis of single or small number or cases at extent of societal level.

I decided to conduct a case study in order to offer a multi-faceted description about the use of urban environment of cosplay convention and its utilisation of surrounding urban spaces to develop new understanding and experience of how urban spaces are appropriated by cosplayers attending cosplay events. This research is a case study of Tracon, which is a cosplay convention held in Tampere, Finland. According to Tracon official website, Tracon recorded 5,500 daily visitors during 3 days of convention. Additionally, the main venue of Tracon, Tampere-Talo, actively utilises surrounding urban spaces, for example, Sorsapuisto. Since Tracon contains the number of visitors and its active utilisation of urban spaces, I decided to study Tracon as a case for this thesis.

This research aimed to how Tracon entails the appropriation of urban spaces and utilises them as Tracon is a fruitful case for studying the role of urban space in fostering a sense of community among cosplayers.

3.1.3 Survey

I decided to conduct an online survey, aiming to understand the experience and perception towards the use of space contributes to the sense of belonging among cosplayers. The survey examines the appropriation of urban spaces in the context of cosplay culture and its importance for cosplayers. The advantage of conducting a survey was that it was an efficient, cost effective and contains flexible data collection method, for example, it can be done by either online or offline.

The survey instrument was developed with a comprehensive review of relevant literature and designed to bring out responses consistent with research

objectives. Through this survey, I attempt to study how cosplay convention can contribute to the sense of belonging and enhance social inclusivity and how they feel about being in cosplay convention as a cosplayer. The questionnaires are mostly inspired by the previous work done by Crawford and Hancock (2018), which explores how cosplayers act in urban spaces and how cosplay convention means to them.

I paid attention to questionnaire wording and structure to avoid the bias as much as possible and increase clarity for participants by preventing from a double meaning and deliberate questions. Additionally, anonymity and confidentiality were ensured to elicit honest responses. Moreover, the survey was provided to participants who were 15 years old or older according to Finnish National Board on Research Integrity (2021).

The image shows two side-by-side screenshots of a survey questionnaire. The left screenshot is in English and the right is in Finnish. Both are enclosed in a light green border. The English version (left) has three sections: 1. A question about the role of the event in communication among cosplayers and people who share interests, with four radio button options: 'Provides networking opportunities through events and activities', 'Provides a platform for cosplayers to showcase their work and attract people who share the same aspirations', 'Promotes inclusion and diversity within the cosplay community and create an environment that contributes to open communication', and 'Muu: _____'. 2. A question about how attending the event has influenced the sense of togetherness within the cosplay community, with a text input field labeled 'Oma vastauksesi'. 3. A question about sharing specific instances of a strong sense of belonging, with a text input field. The Finnish version (right) has three sections: 1. A question about the role of the event in communication among cosplayers and people who share interests, with four radio button options: 'Tapahtuma tarjoaa verkostoitumismahdollisuuksia tapahtumien ja aktiviteettien kautta', 'Tapahtuma tarjoaa alustan cosplay-harrastajille työnsä esittelemiseen sekä houkuttelee ihmisiä, jotka jakavat samoja tavoitteita', 'Tapahtuma tukee yhteenkuuluvuutta ja moninaisuutta cosplay-yhteisössä ja luo ympäristön, joka edistää avointa viestintää', and 'Muu: _____'. 2. A question about how attending the event has influenced the sense of togetherness within the cosplay community, with a text input field labeled 'Oma vastauksesi'. 3. A question about sharing specific instances of a strong sense of belonging, with a text input field.

Photo 1 & 2: The online survey in English (left) and in Finnish (right)

The survey was conducted via Google form with English and Finnish versions, as shown above, because some people who may feel more comfortable answering the survey in their mother tongue. To consider such possible

differences, the survey was created in two languages to ensure it reflects the feelings of the respondents regarding to language barrier.

Finally, the survey was distributed to Tracon community forum which I can access through communication responsible member of board of Tracon, and cosplayers, and personal social media. In addition, a snowball sampling technique was used to extend the initial participants. In other words, the initial participants were encouraged to invite new participants to the research. To test the clarity of the survey, necessary adjustments were made before it was published.

3.2 Data Analysis

The case study included investigating Tracon through official website, social media, relevant literature, and photography. Additionally, to understand the complexity of phenomenon, I conducted the online survey via google form regarding to exploring the experience and perception of cosplayers towards cosplay conventions in Finland. The online survey consists of 7 of multiple choices and 5 of open answer responses. The online links were sent to the cosplay community forum, community discord, cosplayers who are active on social media, and posted on social media. I extracted the excel file from google form and proceeded with the data. And then, I combined both English and Finnish surveys and produced pie charts with quantified results. Additionally, I categorised open answer responses with tags and some responses that has repeated viewpoint selected and quoted for the reasoning.

4 CASE STUDY: TRACON IN TAMPERE

4.1 Case Description: Background Information and Context

Despite the growing interest in cosplay and popularity of cosplay conventions, there remains a lack of comprehensive understanding regarding the cosplayers' experiences of availability of urban spaces. For example, cosplayers use the urban spaces in order to socialise, hang out, even for their performance stage. Cosplay convention allows them to facilitate all of activities listed above and its potential is worthy to research. Thus, the use of space of Tracon is important factor to research in order to enhance the experience of participants and perception of the cosplay conventions.

4.2 Tracon

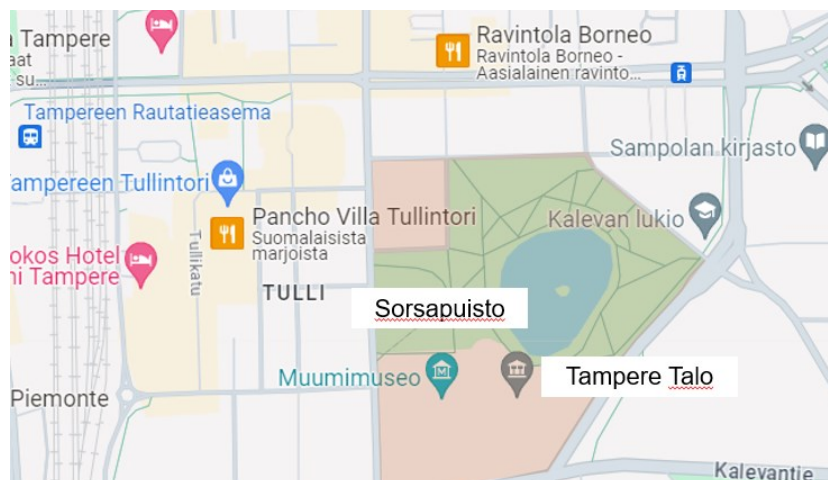


Photo 3: The map of Tampere Talo and Sorsapuisto

Tracon is one of the biggest cosplay conventions held in Tampere, Finland. It is a non-profit convention with 5,500 daily visitors and over 500 volunteers. It is organised in the Tampere Hall, Tampere-Talo (The location is

shown above). This venue is located 900 meters from the central railway station of Tampere with pleasant proximity for walking.

4.2.1 The Utilisation of Urban Spaces

Tracon organises its main events both in the Tampere Hall and Sorsapuisto and the evening party held at Pakkahuone located in the centre of the city. Tracon actively utilises not only its own venue, but also surrounding urban spaces.



Photo 4: Inside the venue (Tracon, 2023; credit: Juce)



Photo 5: Main event in Sorsapuisto. Cosplayers and visitors are watching cosplay competition. (Tracon, 2023; credit: Juce)



Photo 6: Evening party in Pakkahuone (Tracon, 2023; credit: Fapio)

Tracon connects cosplayers and visitors to their needs and desires. Subsequently, it will explore how Tracon connects participants through the utilisation of urban spaces.

The perspective of cosplayers

Cosplayers costumes themselves like the characters from the media they are enthusiastic about. By doing so, these characters out to the real life and perform them. Tracon not only becomes the place for the characters and various identities, but it also transforms regular urban spaces into fantasy worlds where cosplayers play their role. Sorsapuisto offers the wide scale of spaces where they can appropriate and transform by their needs and inspirations.



Photo 7: Cosplayers in front of Tampere Hall

Cosplayers fill the space with fantasy characters by their presence and create Tracon as safe space for play by constantly engaging with the environment and others (Crawford & Hancock, 2018). In this manner, Tracon is successfully used as a tool of achieving their own fantasy of cosplayers. On the other hand, Tampere-Talo and Tampere Hall offers the indoor space where cosplayers, especially avoiding the public attention, can secure their privacy and feel more comfortable.

The perspective of visitors

Tracon is offered not only for cosplayers, but also for residents and visitors. Especially for residents and visitors, the concept of cosplay is unique and curious due to its subcultural characteristics. However, Tracon offers the opportunity to get to know about new culture and world. For example, as Tracon organises part of main events in Sorsapuisto, this enables residents and visitors to easily access than the Tampere Hall. Events held in Sorsapuisto let them curious and lead to more exploration of the convention.



Photo 8: People are participating outdoor event in Sorsapuisto (Tracon, 2023; Credit: Juce)

4.2.2 The Sense of belonging and inclusiveness

Tracon utilises the venue and public spaces nearby in a way that gathers people who share interests and hobbies and even people who are interested but difficult to approach to this culture.



Photo 9: cosplay competition in Tampere Hall (Tracon, 2023; credit: Kuura Kuu)

Within the cosplay community, performing their creation and supporting each other are a big part of the culture. Tracon organises various types of competition events that allow cosplayers to showcase and feature them in noticeable places such as the stage. In Tracon, anime and cosplay competitions are arranged international scale, and smaller local competitions in Tampere Hall as well as an exhibition for costume design and performances. People can participate in competition events both in Tampere Hall and Sorsapuisto. Competition held in Sorsapuisto allows easy access for visitors.

This kind of event spotlights cosplayers throughout the urban space, honours their performance, and develops a sense of belonging and pride within the community. Especially, in Sorsapuisto attracts attention from passersby and allows them to engage with the new culture. Therefore, this strengthens the sense of inclusiveness within the local community. In addition to that, these spaces become “interactive zones: among cosplayers, which allows them to interact and collaborate. Moreover, by offering security and safety around the

venue, designated spaces demonstrate a welcoming and supportive environment for the event and activities.

5 SURVEY RESULTS

5.1 Description of Data

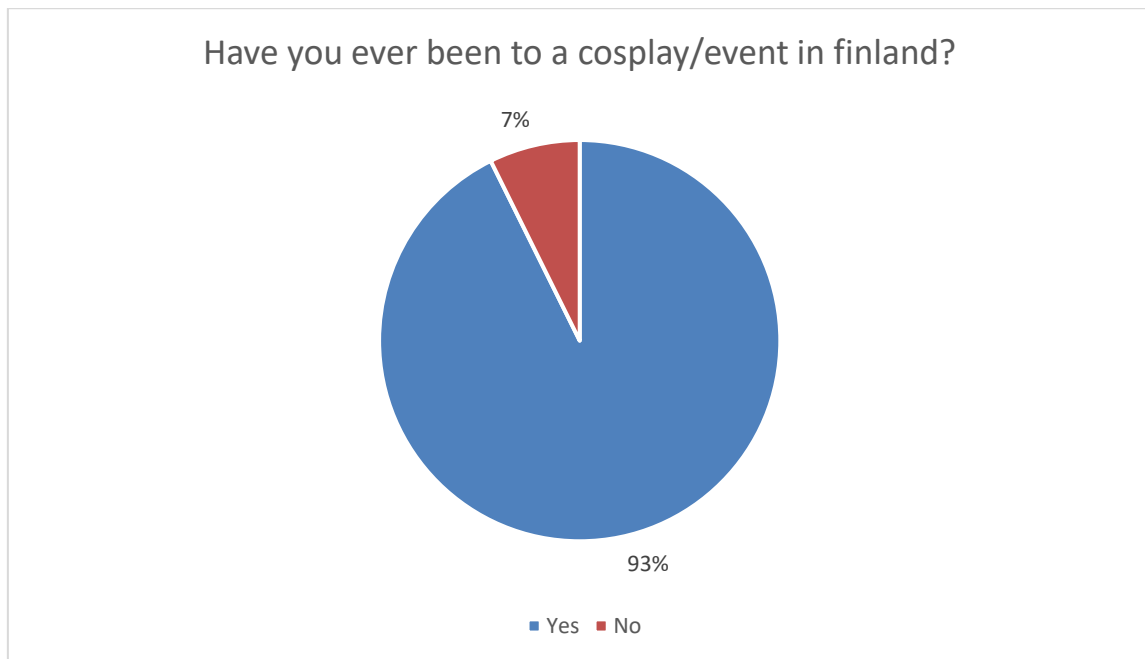


Figure 1

The survey was conducted during 6.4.2024-30.4.2024 both in Finnish and English. A total of 42 respondents, aged 15 or older, were recruited through online link and community outreach efforts. As figure 1 shows, 92% of respondents had been to a cosplay/event in Finland. This was expected since the survey was sent out to the cosplay community, and I expanded the sample through initial participants.

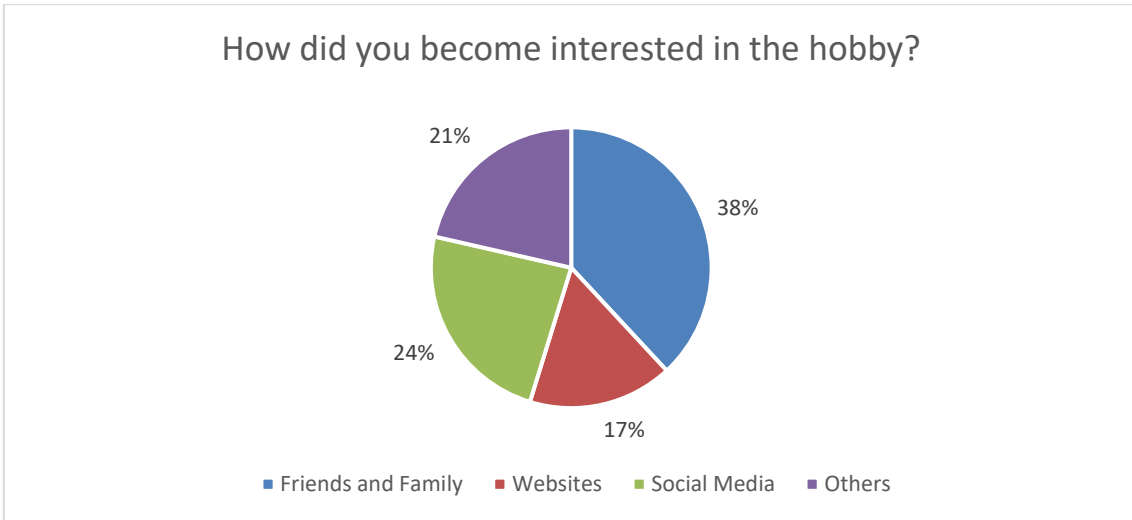


Figure 2

Figure 2 illustrates how respondents became interested in cosplay as a hobby. In the same figure, 38% respondents became interested in cosplay via friends and family, 24% from social media, and 17% from websites. Among respondents who answered others, they became interested by anime, visiting cosplay convention (specifically Tracon), and internet forum. This is in line with earlier studies by Abramova et al. (2021) which show that one of the key motivational factors is a desire to share friends' activities.

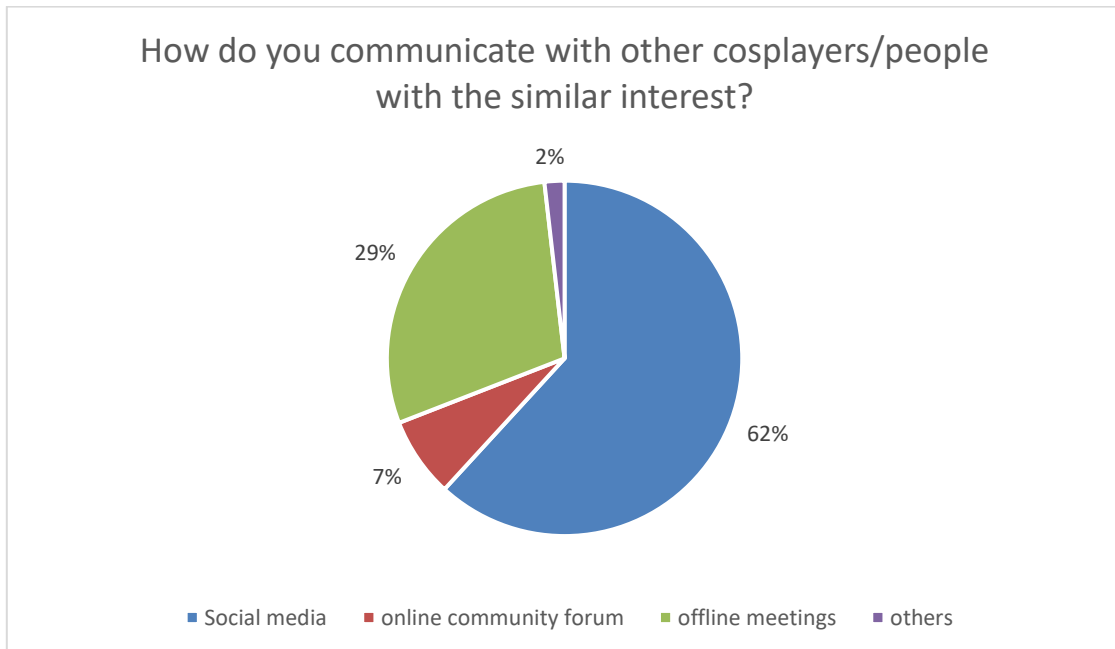


Figure 3

The respondents were asked what communication method they are using for socialising and information for the activities. Most of respondents answered

with multiple options, which shows they are likely to use mixed communication methods. However, social media is used most frequently (62% of the respondents), and offline meetings are important, too (29% of the respondents). In addition, 7% of the respondents replied that they use the online community forum and 2% of use others. This finding will be developed through the following questions about the experiences and perceptions towards the cosplay convention, in detail.

5.2 Sense of Inclusiveness in Cosplay Convention and Event

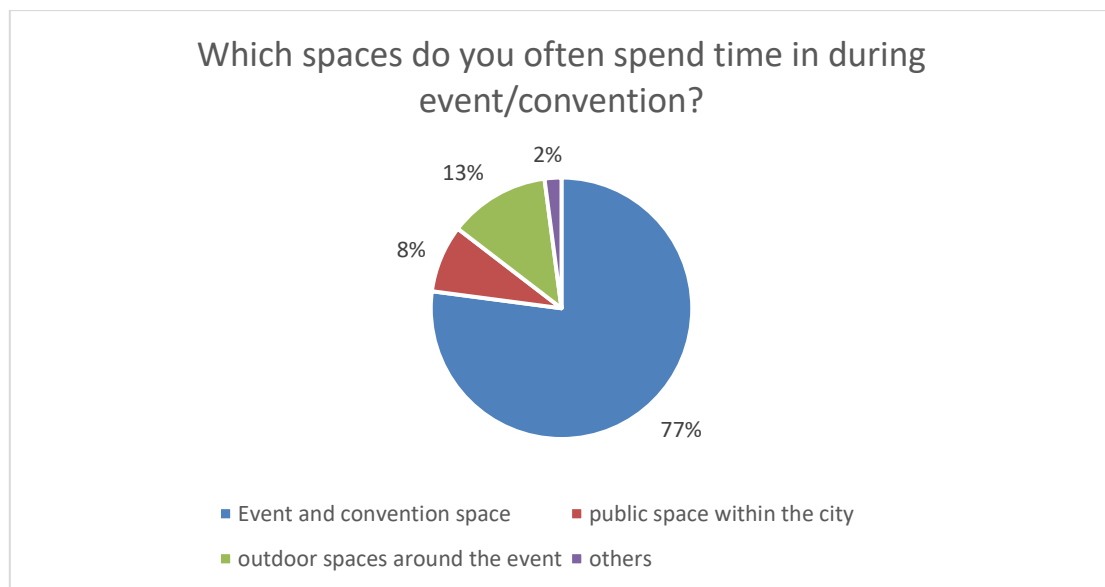


Figure 4

Figure 4 describes respondents' preferable spaces during cosplay convention and event. 77% of respondents mostly spend time in event and convention space, and 13% in outdoor spaces around the event, and 8% in public spaces within the city, and others elaborate as all of above or corner of the convention venue. This finding identifies the popular areas and attraction points of the cosplay convention to understand which spaces need to be allocated more resources for activities such as performance, socialising, and events. In addition, it helps to understand the event layout for effective space planning.

Do you think such spaces helps to build the sense of togetherness and connection among other cosplayers and people who share interests?

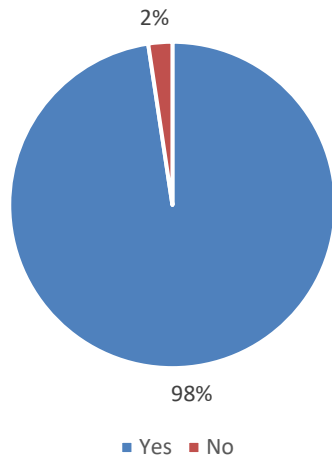


Figure 5

Figure 5 asked if convention space can enhance the sense of belonging and connection within the cosplay culture. 98% answered yes and 2% answered no. Total of 28 of respondents who answered yes continued to elaborate. Respondents commonly shared that convention space is used for socialising, performance, and feeling inclusive.

After this question, the respondents were asked to describe their experience of sense of togetherness (e.g. sense of belonging) and connection through the convention and event. Several respondents highlighted that the convention offers the space for sense of togetherness and community connection. One respondent remarked, "Being within the convention provided a sense of belonging to a huge group of people. The spaces with people who share the same interests feel safer and more welcoming...this shared experience build a mutual understanding and connection, that creates base for a strong friendship and social network."

Additionally, some respondents emphasized that the convention/event make them feel safer because they are surrounded by people who has a similar hobby. Some other respondents reinforced this opinion, stating, "Talking to people online is nothing compared to seeing and hanging out with them in real

life. Everyone cosplaying together also creates unity, compared to being just one “weirdo” dressed up in public.”

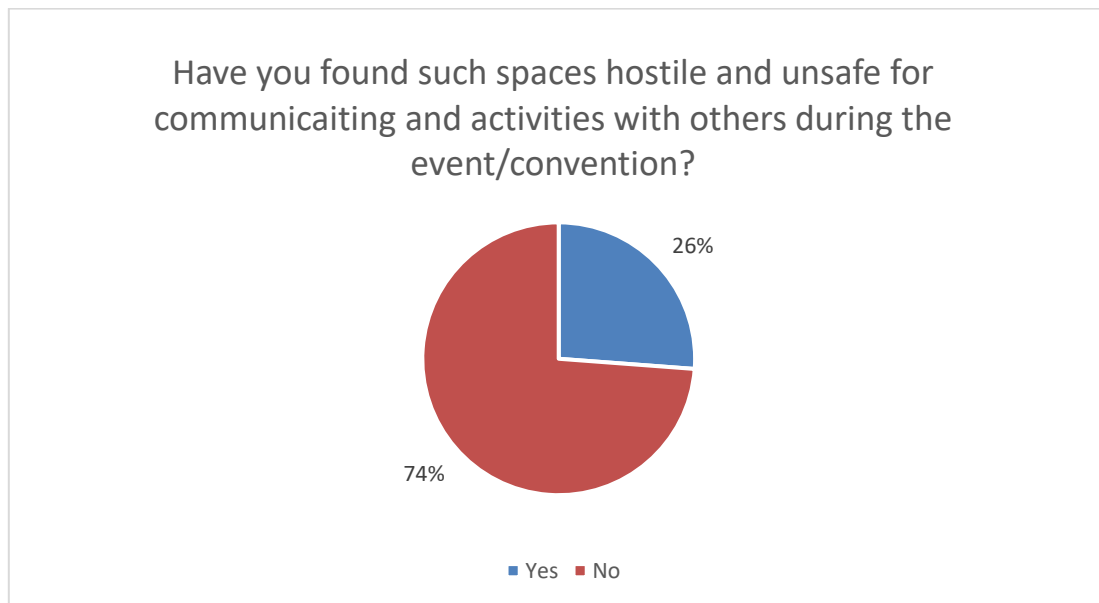


Figure 6

Figure 6 shows the hostility and unsafeness for activities in convention spaces. It shows that 74% of respondents do not face hostility and unsafety, and 26% of respondents answered they do. However, some respondents elaborated some instances regarding to safety and harassment issues happened in the convention. One respondent stated, “...Many men end up using the community to fulfil their dark thoughts and prey on younger members of the community by taking photos and interacting inappropriately with them.” Also, other respondents stated, “...people harassing cosplayers...because they were “showing skin” or...wanted to make the person uncomfortable.”

In addition to that, some respondents addressed another aspect of safety concerns in terms of harassment based on their appearance and this leads to different ways of harassment. One respondent noted, “...I often fear I’ll suddenly get cancelled for cosplaying something at a convention and have mocking pictures taken without my consent or even get attacked...” and another respondent also noted, “If the convention space is in very public and busy place...it causes more attention towards cosplayers. The attention may be good...but it can also be...negative and hostile.” To consider the introversion of

cosplay community, respondents tend to articulate their negative responses towards the public atmosphere in cosplay convention.

After that, respondents were asked if there is something that organiser can take into account to solve this hostility and the feeling of unsafeness. Respondents commonly suggested availability of report options, increase security guards around the space, and expel of attendee who breaks the rule. One respondent remarked, "...Organiser should make an effort to address con-goers (it refers to people who goes to a convention) social media behaviour... "please respect other even if they like things you don't agree with" does make me feel seen, and a little bit safer, knowing I can turn to con-staff for help if something happens."

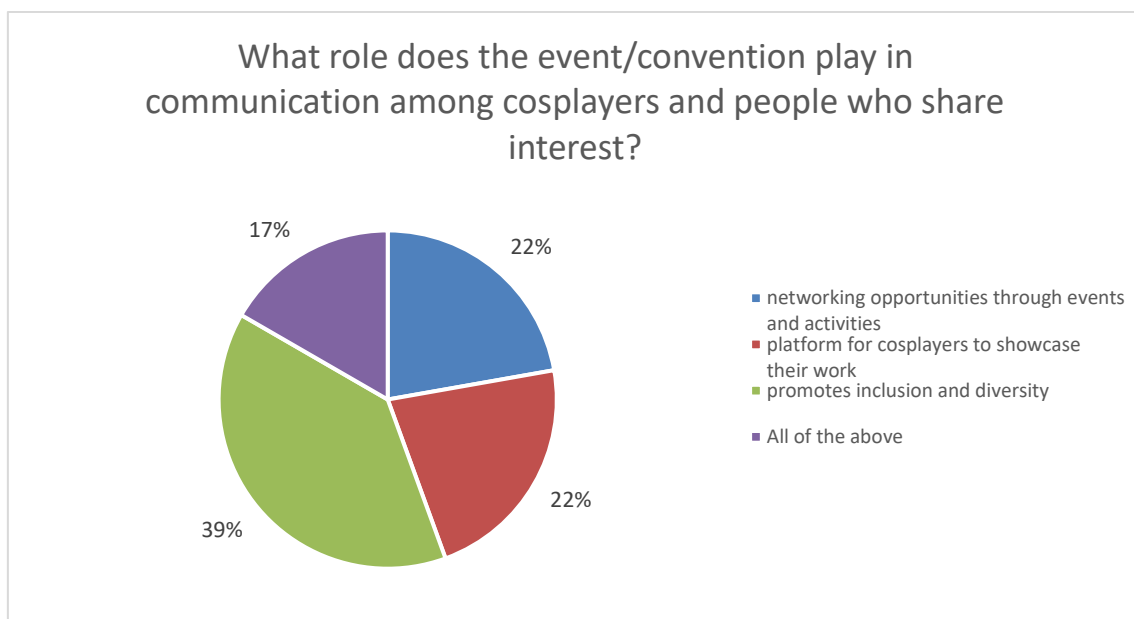


Figure 7

Figure 7 shows the role of the event/convention for cosplayers and people who are into cosplay culture. 39% of respondents answered event/convention promotes inclusion and diversity. Several respondents stated that cosplay convention does help to foster sense of togetherness especially through the events like cosplay competition. Additionally, many respondents highlighted interaction and socialising with other cosplayers. One respondent noted that the cosplay convention is the place that the culture is celebrated and welcomed. Another respondent noted, "On one hand, conventions really bring people

together with cosplay groups, meetups, discussion panels and other activities...The only thing really keeping me in the hobby are the real person to person connections we make at events and offline friends." Some respondents described cosplay culture and community in Finland and highlighted the importance of the meaning of convention for them. One respondent noted, "The cosplay community is in a way rather introverted in the sense that if you don't know a cosplay enthusiast beforehand, it can be difficult to join the crowd...So for some, *Conit* is the only place to network properly or make friends with the same hobby! *Conit* is the highlight of the year for a large part of the visitors, as they get to express themselves through cosplay and spend time with like-minded people."

Continuously, 22% think the event/convention as a platform for their performance and showcase and another 22% think it offers opportunities of networking through events (e.g. cosplay competition) and activities. Others elaborated as all of the above.

6 CONCLUSION

The research has been conducted to study how urban spaces can enhance a sense of belonging and community bond within cosplay culture. This research is valuable because it highlights the importance of appropriating urban spaces for cosplay culture, and it can improve the sense of belonging within the community and enhance social inclusiveness through cosplay conventions.

This research utilised a case study and an online survey. Throughout this work, I have argued that cosplay conventions foster a sense of belonging and community bond. It demonstrates that the use of both the venue (e.g., the Tampere-talo and Tampere Hall) and public park (e.g., Sorsapuisto) in Tracon positively impacts enhancing the sense of belonging and social inclusiveness. Additionally, utilising multiple urban spaces has positive impact on various support for the cosplay conventions by fostering social inclusiveness, strengthening cultural pride, and increasing the safety.

This research explored the interactive dynamics between cosplay conventions and urban spaces, highlighting that cosplay conventions play a significant role in fostering the inclusive and supportive environment for cosplayers. The results from the case study and survey highlight the importance of Sorsapuisto, which has been appropriated and transformed according to cosplayers' narratives and creativity, meeting their needs and desires. These approaches foster individual expression and creativity and offer spaces for interaction.

An important aspect to consider is the role and nature of different spaces, in this case, such as Tampere-Talo (indoor) and Sorsapuisto (outdoor). Sorsapuisto provides an open, natural environment that encourages more gatherings and diverse activities, and local engagement, which can enhance the

visibility and accessibility for cosplayers and passerby. However, outdoor setting may expose to increased possibility of public harassment. Therefore, adding more securities and safety volunteers could provide protection from the possible harassment. On the other hand, Tampere-Talo offers an organised, secure environment that can provide shelter and privacy, which prevent possible harassment and accommodate introverted visitors. Although, indoor spaces may limit the scope of activities due to space constraints. Expanding the available space and offering flexible room layouts could accommodate a wider range of activities and larger attendee numbers.

The case study shows that Tracon, as a cosplay convention, significantly contributes to a growing sense of belonging and underscores the importance of conventions for cosplay culture. Lamerichs (2014) stated, “cosplay establishes a unique subculture within fandom that is intimately connected to the space of the fan convention.” The survey indicates that cosplay conventions foster a sense of belonging and enhance social inclusiveness, as evidenced by many respondents’ experiences attending cosplay conventions in Finland.

However, since the research focuses on a single, specific case, the results may not fully represent cities or areas with different cultural, social, or urban dynamics. To the best of our knowledge, future research should explore various cases to assess how various uses of urban spaces affect the sense of belonging and social inclusiveness in cosplay culture. Comparative research may be helpful to understand the utilisation of urban settings and venues in fostering an inclusive environment.

Finally, this research challenges the idea of using urban spaces for cosplay conventions. By doing so, I suggest the role of cosplay conventions with various aspects and highlighting that Tracon contributes to a sense of belonging and community bond by offering the socialising activities and the space for sharing interests and hobbies. Besides, the appropriation and active utilisation of urban spaces enhanced the quality of experience and perception towards cosplay convention through allowing passerby, expanding available spaces, and increasing harassment prevention around the venue locations.

7 APPENDICES

Appendix A

Survey Questionnaire in English

Title: Exploring how the cosplay event/convention and urban space shape communication and socializing among cosplayers.

Questionnaire instruction

This survey is conducted as part of bachelor's thesis project.

These questions aim to explore participants' experiences and perceptions regarding contribution of the cosplay event/convention and urban space nearby to a sense of belonging and social inclusion within the cosplay community and impact on the improvement of urban spaces around the event/convention.

All responses will be kept anonymous and will be permanently deleted once the thesis is produced. Additionally, all data will be used solely for research purposes.

Contact information: yuran.im@tuni.fi

Section 1

- 1) To participate in this survey, you must be 15 years old or older. Please ensure if it this applies to you.
 - A. Yes, I am 15 years old or older.
 - B. No, I am not.
- 2) By continuing with this survey, you acknowledge that you are voluntarily participating in this survey conducted by Yuran Im, a student researcher

at Tampere university. Your responses are entirely anonymous and will be deleted once the thesis is produced.

- A. Yes, I understood.
- B. No, I do not want to participate.

Section 2

Questionnaire about experience and perception of cosplay and event/convention spaces.

Instruction: Please do not mention personal information in your responses such as your full name, contact information, address, social security number, or any other identifying information. If personal information is mentioned, it will be removed by the researcher.

- 1) How did you first become interested in this hobby(cosplay)?
 - a. Friends and family
 - b. Websites (e.g., Google, Yahoo, Reddit, official website etc.)
 - c. Social media platforms (e.g., Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, etc.)
 - d. Others, Elaborate:

- 2) Have you ever been to cosplay event/convention in Finland?
 - a. Yes
 - b. No

- 3) How do you communicate with another cosplayers or people who has similar interest?
 - a. Social media platforms ((e.g., Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, etc.)
 - b. Online community forums
 - c. Offline meetings (e.g., convention, event, private meeting, etc.)
 - d. Others, Elaborate:

- 4) Which spaces do you often spend time in during the event/convention?
 - a. Event/convention space

- b. Public spaces within the city (e.g., shopping mall, stores, cafe/restaurant, etc)
- c. Outdoor spaces around event/convention
- d. Others, Elaborate:

5) Do you think such spaces helps to build the sense of togetherness and connection among other cosplayers and people who share interests?

- a. Yes
- b. No

6) If yes, could you describe your experience?

Answer:

7)Have you found certain spaces hostile and unsafe for communicating and activities with others during the event/convention?

- a. Yes
- b. No

8) If yes, could you describe your experience?

Answer:

9) Could you share your opinion on what can organizer do in order to solve this hostility and the feeling of unsafeness?

Answer:

10) What role does the event/convention play in communication among cosplayers and people who share interests?

- a. Provides networking opportunities through events and activities
- b. Provides a platform for cosplayers to showcase their work and attract people
- c. who share the same aspirations
- d. Promotes inclusion and diversity within the cosplay community and create an environment that contributes to open communication
- e. Others, Elaborate:

11) Could you describe your experience of how attending the event/convention has influenced your sense of togetherness within the cosplay community?

Answer:

12) Could you share any specific instances or examples where you felt a strong sense of belonging or connection with others during your time at the event/convention?

Answer:

Appendix B

Survey questionnaire in Finnish

Title: Tutkimus selvittää, miten cosplay-tapahtuma ja kaupunkitila muokkaavat viestintää ja sosiaalista vuorovaikutusta cosplay-harrastajien keskuudessa.

Questionnaire instruction

Tämä kysely toteutetaan osana kandidaatintutkielmaa.

Kysymykset pyrkivät selvittämään osallistujien kokemuksia ja näkemyksiä siitä, miten cosplay-tapahtuma ja lähellä sijaitseva kaupunkitila vaikuttavat kuulumisen tunteeseen ja sosiaaliseen osallistumiseen cosplay-yhteisössä sekä niiden vaikutusta kaupunkitilojen parantamiseen tapahtuman ympäristössä.

Kaikki vastaukset kerätään anonyymeinä ja ne poistetaan pysyvästi kandidaatintutkielman valmistuttua. Lisäksi kaikkia tietoja käytetään vain tutkimustarkoituksiin.

Yhteystiedot: yuran.im@tuni.fi

Section 1

1) Osallistuaksesi tähän kyselyyn, sinun on oltava vähintään 15-vuotias.

Varmista, että tämä pätee sinuun.

- a. Kyllä, olen vähintään 15-vuotias
- b. Ei, en ole

2) Jatkamalla tätä kyselyä hyväksyt, että osallistut vapaaehtoisesti tähän kyselyyn, jonka toteuttaa opiskelijatutkija Yuran Im Tampereen yliopistosta.

Vastauksesi ovat täysin anonyymejä ja ne poistetaan, kun tutkielma on valmis.

- a. Kyllä, ymmärsin.
- b. Ei, en halua osallistua.

Section 2

Kysely kokemuksista ja näkemyksistä cosplaysta sekä tapahtumailoista.

Käskey: Älä mainitse vastauksissasi henkilökohtaisia tietoja, kuten koko nimeä, yhteystietoja, osoitetta, henkilötunnusta tai muita tunnistetietoja. Mikäli henkilökohtaisia tietoja mainitaan, tutkija poistaa ne.

1) Kuinka alun perin kiinnostuit tästä harrastuksesta (cosplay)?

- a. Ystävät ja perhe
- b. Verkkosivustot (esim. Google, Yahoo, Reddit, viralliset verkkosivut jne.)
- c. Sosiaalisen median alustat (esim. Facebook, Instagram, Twitter/X jne.)
- d. Muut, tarkenna:

2) Oletko koskaan käynyt cosplay-tapahtumassa Suomessa?

- a. Kyllä
- b. Ei

3) Kuinka kommunikoit muiden cosplay-harrastajien tai samanlaisten kiinnostusten omaavien ihmisten kanssa?

- a. Sosiaalisen median alustat (esim. Facebook, Instagram, Twitter/X jne.)
- b. Nettifoorumit
- c. Tapaamiset kasvotusten (esim. tapahtumat, yksityiset tapaamiset jne.)
- d. Muut, tarkenna:

4) Missä tiloissa vietät usein aikaa tapahtuman aikana?

- a. Tapahtumatila

- b. Kaupungin julkiset tilat (esim. ostoskeskus, kaupat, kahvila/ravintola jne.)
- c. Tapahtuman ympärillä olevat ulkotilat
- d. Muut, tarkenna:

5) Uskotko, että tällaiset tilat auttavat rakentamaan yhteenkuuluvuuden tunnetta ja yhteyttä muiden cosplay-harrastajien ja saman kiinnostuksen kohteen jakavien ihmisten keskuudessa?

- a. Kyllä
- b. Ei

6) Jos vastasit kyllä, voisitko kuvailla kokemuksiasi?

Vastaus:

7) Oletko kokenut tietyt tilat vihamielisiksi ja turvattomiksi kommunikoinnin ja toiminnan kannalta muiden kanssa tapahtuman aikana?

- a. Kyllä
- b. Ei

8) Jos vastasit kyllä, voisitko kuvailla kokemuksiasi?

Vastaus:

9) Mikä rooli tapahtumalla on cosplayerien ja samaa kiinnostusta jakavien ihmisten välisessä kommunikaatiossa?

- a. Tapahtuma tarjoaa verkostoitumismahdollisuuksia tapahtumien ja aktiviteettien kautta
- b. Tapahtuma tarjoaa alustan cosplay-harrastajille työnsä esittelemiseen sekä houkuttelee ihmisiä, jotka jakavat samoja tavoitteita
- c. Tapahtuma tukee yhteenkuuluvuutta ja moninaisuutta cosplay-yhteisössä ja luo ympäristön, joka edistää avointa viestintää
- d. Muut, tarkenna:

10) Voisitko kuvata kokemuksiasi siitä, miten tapahtumaan osallistuminen on vaikuttanut yhteenkuuluvuuden tunteeseesi cosplay-yhteisössä?

Vastaus:

11) Voisitko jakaa joitakin konkreettisia tilanteita tai esimerkkejä, joissa tunsit vahvan kuulumisen tai yhteyden tunteen muiden kanssa tapahtuman aikana?

Vastaus:

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