

Chapter 9

Serious Games Teaching Values: Discussing Games Dealing with Human Rights Issues

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ABSTRACT

The number of serious games dealing with human right issues has increased in recent years. All of them want to teach/present certain values and make players think about the contents presented. Therefore, it is interesting to have a closer look at different ways of how these games try to integrate values. After discussing the development of human rights digital games in brief, this chapter is going to have a look at various game elements that can express and embody values. Several examples will illustrate how games might more or less successfully deal with human rights and values. Finally, some research results will be presented discussing what serious games might be able to achieve.

INTRODUCTION

Games for change (often also called games with a purpose or serious games) are designed in order to influence the behaviour or attitude of players. This fact links them to the basic goals of human rights education, which also aim at changing attitudes as well as teaching values and competences (Amnesty International, 2015). Up to now there has not been a lot of evaluative research showing how a digital game might achieve social change. Klimmt (2009) argues that playing serious games might motivate players to elaborate on the content of desired social changes. They might also lead to knowledge acquisition/comprehension, and attitude change/persuasion in players because of “the unique properties of digital games” (Klimmt, p. 250). These unique properties are multimodality, interactivity, narrative, social use, and the situation of playing a game. In the same paper, Klimmt admits the following: “But this should not be mistaken for the assumption that one, some or all of these mechanisms are operating in any given serious game and that, consequently, serious games are a guaranteed success for communication campaigns” (Klimmt, p. 265). As this chapter will show, there are some mechanisms that might be applied successfully, whereas other examples show that the same mechanisms did not work out as intended.

DOI: 10.4018/978-1-5225-0261-6.ch009

Swain (2010) and Stokes, Seggerman, and Rejeski (2011) examined factors that further social change in people who were playing certain games. These authors argue that video games as a tool “increase capabilities for civic engagement and outreach” (Stokes et al., 2011, p. 4). Moreover, digital games are seen as an environment providing direct experience and immersive learning as well as social actors, meaning that digital games can create relationships, provide feedback, and model behavior. Bogost (2007) sees digital games as an expressive as well as a persuasive medium as they represent how real and imagined systems work. Players are invited to interact with these systems and should judge them. Wagner (2007) claims that transfer from a (digital) game to reality can only take place if there is a strong emotional binding between virtual and real identity, which is important when talking about empathy – a factor that is of increasing importance when talking about games dealing with human rights topics.

Having a look at the topics of human rights and human rights education, one will find various serious games dealing with specific (violations of) human rights by having the player either experience a playable character whose rights are violated or putting the player in the role of someone wanting to help groups of people whose rights are violated. Digital games cover various human right topics including the effects of civil war, such as *This War of Mine* (11 bit studios, 2014); civic rights, such as *People Power: The Game of Civil Resistance* (York Zimmerman, 2010); helping people after natural disasters, such as *Inside the Haiti Earthquake* (PTV Productions, 2010); and (trans)gender issues, such as *Dys4ia* (Anthropy, 2012). Certain topics are quite frequently addressed in games (e.g. poverty); others are rarely dealt with at all (e.g. disability). When talking about poverty for example, one can see how diverse the topic is presented. Game topics range from being homeless, such as *Homeless: It's No Game* (Wetcoast Games, 2006) and refugees, such as *Darfur is Dying* (Ruiz, 2006) or *Against all Odds* (United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees [UNHCR], 2005), to linking the topic of poverty to education, such as *Ayiti – The Cost of Life* (Global Kids & Game Lab, 2006). Games that have been developed in the last four to five years make use of social networks (Facebook games like *WeTopia* (Sojo Studios, 2012)) or are designed for mobile devices, such as *Hobson's Choice* (Harris, 1998) or *My Life as a Refugee* (UNHCR, 2012). Some games are restricted to a certain period of time and a large community playing together, such as *Catalysts for Change* (Institute for the Future, 2012). Additionally, some games are also used by charities to raise awareness and quite often use in-game purchases to collect money for their projects. Apart from the topic dealt with and the form of the game, one will find even more differences when having a look at the underlying game design. Some of the games are very educational, while some of them are also fun to play and resemble commercial entertainment games. This chapter is going to discuss the development of serious games dealing with human right topics and is going to have a closer look at how values are embedded and communicated.

BACKGROUND

Human rights education has been an important issue when talking about traditional approaches and teaching material for many years (cf. Brander et al., 2012). The World Programme for Human Rights Education (United Nations Human Rights [UNHR], 2015) is currently in its third phase, meaning that human rights training should be further implemented and promoted. The first phase concentrated on primary and secondary school systems whereas the second phase targeted higher education and human rights training programs for teachers and educators. In order to address the needs of modern education, lifelong human rights education also has to consider digital media and further, games and mobile apps,

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