

# Chapter 21

## Prosumers Building the Virtual World: How a Proactive Use of Virtual Worlds Can Be an Effective Method for Educational Purposes

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### ABSTRACT

*With the development of new digital technologies, the internet, and mass media, including social media, it is now possible to produce, consume, and exchange information and virtual creations in a simple and practically instantaneous way. As predicted by philosophers and sociologists in the 1980s, a culture of “prosumers” has been developed in communities where there is no longer a clear distinction between content producers and content users and where there is a continuous exchange of knowledge that enriches the whole community. The teaching of “digital creativity” can also take advantage of the fact that young people and adults are particularly attracted to these fields, which they perceive akin to their playful activities and which are normally used in an often sterile and useless way in their free time. The didactic sense of these experiences is that we try to build a cooperative group environment in which to experiment, learn, and exchange knowledge equally among all the participants.*

### INTRODUCTION

*If traditional societies based the centrality of their experiential area in the succession of seasons, a consequence of the primacy of agricultural work, industrial societies had the experiential center in the relations of production, considered as the sign of the self-realization of the individual. The contemporary*

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*era has experiential centrality in consumption and in its evolution in prosumerism. (Piergiorgio Degli Esposti, 2015)*

With the development of new digital technologies, the Internet, and mass media, including social media, it is now possible to produce, consume and exchange information and virtual creations in a simple and practically instantaneous way. Think of websites like YouTube, Wikipedia, Instagram, Flickr, but also stores (marketplaces) and dedicated sites for the purchase and sale of artistic digital semi-finished products such as *Deviant Art*, *Sketchfab* or for multimedia applications and games such as Steam itself or the stores of *Android*, *Apple* or gaming platforms such as *Steam*, *Unity*. As predicted by philosophers and sociologists in the 1980s, a culture of “prosumers” has been developed, which means communities where there is no longer a clear distinction between content producers and content users and a continuous exchange of knowledge that enriches the whole community.

At the same time, the skills of digital creativity are increasingly in demand in the professional market, especially in the field of marketing, in the field of entertainment (cinema, music, art), and in the same area of Education and Training (*Report on World Development 2016* - The World Bank). The teaching of ‘digital creativity’ can also benefit from the fact that young people and adults are particularly attracted to these fields. They perceive akin to their playful activities and are typically used in a sterile and useless way in their free time.

Both the authors have experienced that it is possible to build a cooperative group environment to test, learn, and exchange knowledge equally among all participants. In particular, they experimented with ways of learning that allow enhancing people’s creativity by motivating them to learn in a more in-depth and rewarding way, and in turn to teach others even when they do not feel sufficiently prepared, to understand better the complexity of the context in which they operate. Within the same educational path, the creations of the various participants can be shown, shared, and remixed, favoring the “open-source” circulation of the works produced to progressively create increasingly complex settings and ideas, without having to use pre-built materials provided by companies or individuals, mostly not cheap and not within reach of most educational institutions. As will be seen shortly, the didactic activity can be developed along different complexity lines, in which the material generally needed for these experiences can be basic or optional. Before proceeding with the analysis of the necessary skills and technical tools, it is essential to consider what assumptions this study is based on:

## **1. SOME BASIC CONCEPTS**

### **1.1 Prosumer: The Origins**

In 1972, Marshall McLuhan and Barrington Nevitt proposed in their book *Take Today* that every consumer in the field of household electricity could become a producer in turn. This concept became very realistic with the advent of renewable energy at home. The futurologist Alvin Toffler in 1980, in the book *The Third Wave*, coined the term “prosumer” by combining the terms producer and consumer, predicting that the roles of producer and consumer would merge, giving life to a new category of users.

Toffler indicated in the First Wave the settled agricultural society that replaced the hunter-gatherer cultures (Neolithic Revolution), while in the Second Wave the society of the industrial era (transition from the Iron Age to the Steel Age), which began in Western Europe and later spread throughout the

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