

Chapter 4

Educational Contents and Creativity in Virtual Environments: ST.ART Project

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ABSTRACT

This chapter reflects on the educational potential of virtual worlds and draws on the results of ST.ART project - Street Artists in a virtual space (www.startproject.eu). ST.ART project innovative aspect embraces both the topic (street art) and the methodology (virtual platforms as e-learning and 3D virtual worlds) as well as the pedagogy applied that uses an inquiry-based method (learning by doing) to support a traditional deductive teaching pedagogy. This approach is not only related to the use of a relatively new technology but also to the educational, pedagogical, cultural, and motivational benefits derived from the chosen methodology. The chapter describes new insights and findings that emerged during the experimentation phase of the project and that were never anticipated when the project was first designed.

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INTRODUCTION

The use of ICT in education is an important element in the EU's strategy to ensure the effectiveness of EU education systems and the competitiveness of the EU economy. EU Member States agreed on the promotion of creativity and innovation - including the use of new ICT tools and teacher training - as one of the priority areas for the education system (Strategic Framework for Education and Training - ET 2020). The Digital Agenda for Europe initiative defines the enhancement of digital literacy and skills as one of its main focus. As our experience suggests, the use of new technologies as a support to training involves new active and collaborative teaching models that reduce traditional methods. Students today learn differently from those of previous generations and have different attitudes toward education; the use of technological tools can render a positive impact on student's learning outcome. As outlined in Bishop, J. (2009) a virtual world is an online community where users can interact with one another, use and create objects, it represents a powerful media for education offering a wide range of tools for innovation in learning. The use of virtual worlds offers the possibility to apply different communication codes at the same time. Project-based learning activities use a graphical application that builds on students' curiosity, motivates and empowers them.

ST.ART project could play a key role in promoting the inclusion of non-traditional paths in the educational system and to disseminate information on issues of contemporary art, aesthetics and civic responsibility.

ST.ART is a 24 months project co-funded by the European Commission - Education, Audio-visual and Culture Executive Agency within the framework of the Lifelong Learning Programme – Sub programme Comenius Multilateral Project (project number 503230-2009-LLP-IT-COME-

NIUS-CMP). In ST.ART the choice to use the virtual world Open Sim, has been driven by the requirement of a permanent virtual world suitable for people below 18 and the ability to restrict access only to participants, i.e. secondary school teachers and their students. This is to recreate the real didactic context in terms of social environment, where the educational relation between teachers and students is not affected by external interactions. Additionally, Open Sim is an open source software and this allows institutions to customize the software to their needs. The pivotal topic around which the project unfolds is street art. Street art is art made in public spaces and over the last decade it has become one of the most popular and controversial art form in the contemporary art scene: it is considered by some as a plague while for others it is an artistic expression or a tool to communicate dissent and expressing concerns. In this context the main aim of ST.ART project is to have students (16 to 18 year old students in secondary school, especially in art schools) better know street art, its origins, roots and latest developments and understand street art forms and aesthetics. The main theme around which the project unfolds is street art and its perception among the youngsters: this topic alone is multi-faceted and brings itself several further issues mainly related to the perception of the urban environment. The idea of an innovative technological environment draws on the global social scenario characterized by an on-going interaction among people from different backgrounds and different countries. ST.ART project involved 5 secondary schools, especially art schools from Austria, Italy, Lithuania and Malta. The choice of art schools is related to the topic of the project: street art, and the countries are all experiencing the emergence of this contemporary art form. The schools are partners of the project and their teachers are users therefore they participated in the development of the educational contents and environments. The schools have all the technological tools

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