

6TH EUROPEAN CONFERENCE IN E-GUIDANCE: *WIDENING ACCESS TO LIFELONG GUIDANCE*

ABSTRACT

TITLE OF THE SPEECH

Adopting Virtual Worlds

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SHORT AUTHOR(S) PROFILE



Patrice Chazerand was Secretary general of the Interactive Software Federation of Europe (ISFE) from May 2002 to July 2009. ISFE is the trade federation of European publishers of PC and videogames (see www.isfe.eu).

From 1999 to 2002, Mr Chazerand was vice-president, European affairs, at Viacom, the US-based corporation that includes Paramount, MTV, Nickelodeon, CBS and other world-famous brands standing for quality entertainment..

From 1989 to 1999, he took part in the landmark deregulation of European telecoms as director, government affairs, AT&T France.

Mr Chazerand spent the first fifteen years of his career as a French diplomat, seven of which posted in Washington D.C.

Mr Chazerand graduated from HEC, France's leading business school, and Sciences Po, the Paris School of Government.

ABSTRACT

Virtual worlds are here to stay and grow: we'd better make the most of them.

1. Online games offer the most surveyed (and incidentally profitable) subset of virtual worlds. Some interesting lessons can therefore be drawn as regards their impact on education and governance.

1.1. The OECD conference on videogames and education (Santiago, October 2007) and the "Games in Schools" conference (Strasbourg, May 2009) identified several pointers:

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- interactivity makes for child-centered, hence customized education. Putting students in charge, eliciting a sense of responsibility and ownership are proven ways to make knowledge appropriation faster and more effective.
- instant feed-back enhances self-esteem: this is why games are so widely used in business schools and in business itself. Human nature at its best will seek, not shun competition and all kinds of measurement and evaluation.
- air-tight immersion secures total attention, a key learning asset that seems increasingly elusive to a growing number of teachers.

1.2. The above described features are typical of online games and virtual worlds. They may suit a regular curriculum:

- more and more teachers are keen to use ICTs to bring students' attention back to the classroom, In 2006, the Mediapro study pinned down a widening gap between school and home/street: students would seemingly give undivided attention to game consoles, home PCs, mobile phones, and precious little of it to school curriculum.
- interestingly, Mediapro also found that the youth are eager to get from their elders, parents and/or teachers, a sense of how ICTs can make their own life more productive. The way football coaches will enhance their team's skills by setting them in perspective, likewise teachers can help turn their students' passion for virtual worlds into an asset which will improve their performance at school and, later on, their real life. The other way around, the ability to author a context, to explain how ICTs fit the broader world will restore adults' authority. Virtual worlds offer the perfect tool to this effect.
- at times, the classroom itself turns virtual (see courses given on Second Life)

1.3. Learning how to behave in virtual communities elicits proper behaviour in the real world

- virtual communities afford a propitious, safe test bed for learning the ropes of social behavior. The outstanding skills you need to display to be elected as the helm of a WoW league carry value in the real world as well. By replicating the trial and error process whereby the youth have always learnt how the real world is governed, the experience of virtual worlds offers a helpful training to whoever wants to make the most of real world governance.
- virtual communities being interactive, it takes two parties to govern them: gamers commit to play by the rules, game masters have to shape or read the rules so that at all times the game is balanced and attractive, EULAs, PEGI Online, the CoE guidelines and other legal provisions are enforced.
- Game designers are Gods (Richard Bartle), just like game masters are judges. It therefore occurred to the Council of Europe that time had come to work on their first-ever guidelines to industry, released in October 2008. This innovative piece of education/regulation has been widely hailed as a first step towards the "real world assisted governance of virtual worlds" advocated by Viktor Mayer-Schönberger.

2. The challenges ahead

2.1. The above findings show that we are at a crossroads. Our society may decide that virtual worlds are:

- just a fad soon to wane away
- a form of escapism that provides unwarranted, risky distraction from pressing issues in the real world

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- thus worth fighting or at least containing.

2.2. Alternatively, policymakers may want to make sure that all citizens enjoy the benefits of the Information Society. This is the choice made by the EU institutions.

- Education is their favourite testing ground: see FP7 call on “Technology Enhanced Learning”.

- e-Inclusion has inspired many steps taken by DG Info and aimed at self-training, job mobility, ageing better, etc.

- the Web 2.0 is often seen as a “digital equalizer” able to afford everybody the same chance, irrespective of social status, education level or location.

2.3. For Option 2 to prevail around the world, the regulatory environment must be right. In this respect, the workshop on virtual worlds the UK government held jointly with the OECD on March 11, 2009 concluded:

- most virtual worlds offer a combination of content, media and plain space

- all three components have long been subject to time-honoured legal provisions

- as a result, logic would recommend a mix of applicable law and light-touch regulation. The latter is not even starting from scratch, as exemplified by the ongoing debate under the auspices of the Internet Governance Forum (IGF).

Conclusion

1. Virtual worlds provide effective tools to get students and citizens ready for the 21st century

2. To make the most of them, policies and incentives must be designed and enforced to make access to virtual worlds ubiquitous, affordable, harmless and user-friendly, also to encourage their use “from cradle to grave”.

3. Most critically, the regulatory environment must be just right, i.e. conspicuous enough to inspire trust and light enough not to stifle innovative use.

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www.isfe.eu

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