Web meeting

Monday, 25th June 2018

11:00 – 12:30 CET

Developing social skills in young people through serious games

Notes

Summary of the Web Meeting

Information and Communication Technology (ICT) has been identified as a powerful tool for fostering independent living and social inclusion of people with disabilities in society. Theotokos Foundation, winner of EPR Innovation Prize 2016, shared their experience using serious games in this context to develop and improve social skills in young people.

➤ Main goals of the Web Meeting:
- To understand the concept and how to develop and use serious games with young people with disabilities.
- To identify the success and/or impact of the tool.
- To identify opportunities for future collaboration, including funding ideas for EU funded projects.

- **Understanding serious games**

Serious games are games designed for a primary purpose other than pure entertainment, such as learning or training for young people (12-30 yo) with intellectual and or developmental disabilities. This educational tool is structured around role playing and decision-making in virtual social contexts. It is designed to be easy to use and to involve the student as active players in order to improve and teach communicational and social skills as well as problem solving.

Through concrete scenarios at locations such as the mall, the bus, school, the cinema and the supermarket, the students are taught about the implications of the decisions they make and are reinforced for the right decisions or corrected for the wrong decisions. The different scenarios tackle different objectives in social skills that are deemed essential to function in our society: anxiety control, politeness, social interaction, empathy building, coping with overcrowded places, communicating and recognizing feelings, etc.

Because students face a diversity of issues, customization based on specific characteristics is possible and different versions of the problem-solving scenarios and ways to stimulate motivation are available so that the individualized approach of the game improves the student's experience.

- **Developing and using serious games: opportunities and limitations**

Opportunities
- Increases concentration on the task at hand.
- Reduces anxiety as there is no real world consequences.
- Reduces stress as compared to a one-on-one interaction.

Challenges
- *High cost*
  Developing the programme required a lot of investment and the involvement of many specialists from different disciplines. It was co-funded by the European Regional Development Fund (80%) and National Funds (20%), but it was found insufficient to develop the software to its fullest capacity and the lack of funding ultimately constrained creativity.
- *Limited research opportunities*
  Monitoring and evaluation of the programme's benefits relies heavily on perceptions from family members or therapists and observations under real conditions. Gathering hard data on the impact of any particular tool or method of therapy is challenging due to the difficulties in isolating the effect of one part of the therapy process which usually involves other tools and methods.
  Furthermore, performance ability in the game does not mean achieving the goal, which lies in the observable progress in social situations. Therefore, uncertainty about the goal success remains after the activity.

- **Assessing the success and/or impact**
- ✓ Despite the aforementioned issues in evaluating the impact of the digital tool, the experience of the students is very positive. They report to like using computer games and therapists wish they could have more funding to use ICT for therapies.

> **What students say…**
> *'It's fun and I laugh a lot!'*
> *'I learn how to be friends with someone'*
> *'I learn how to behave in social situations'*

Common challenges and mutual interests

/ Common challenges:
- ➢ Address the lack of funding.
- ➢ Transpose the digital tool for other organizations and translate the game in other languages than the existing Greek version.
- ➢ Train more professionals.

/ Mutual interests:
- ➢ Understand how this tool can improve digital/ICT skills and develop synergies with the broader subject of improving ICT skills of people with disabilities for a better inclusion in our digital society and labour market.
- ➢ Promote cooperation between EPR members through experience/material/ideas sharing.

/ Possible future steps – Action point:
- ➢ Further promote social inclusion through holistic approaches to therapy, combining diverse tools and methods, including digital tools.
- ➢ Addressing issues of EU funding resources to unlock possibilities of further development and exploitation of serious games. EPR to monitor future funding opportunities for serious games for EPR members.
- ➢ Identify and exploit links to the Digital Agenda for Europe.