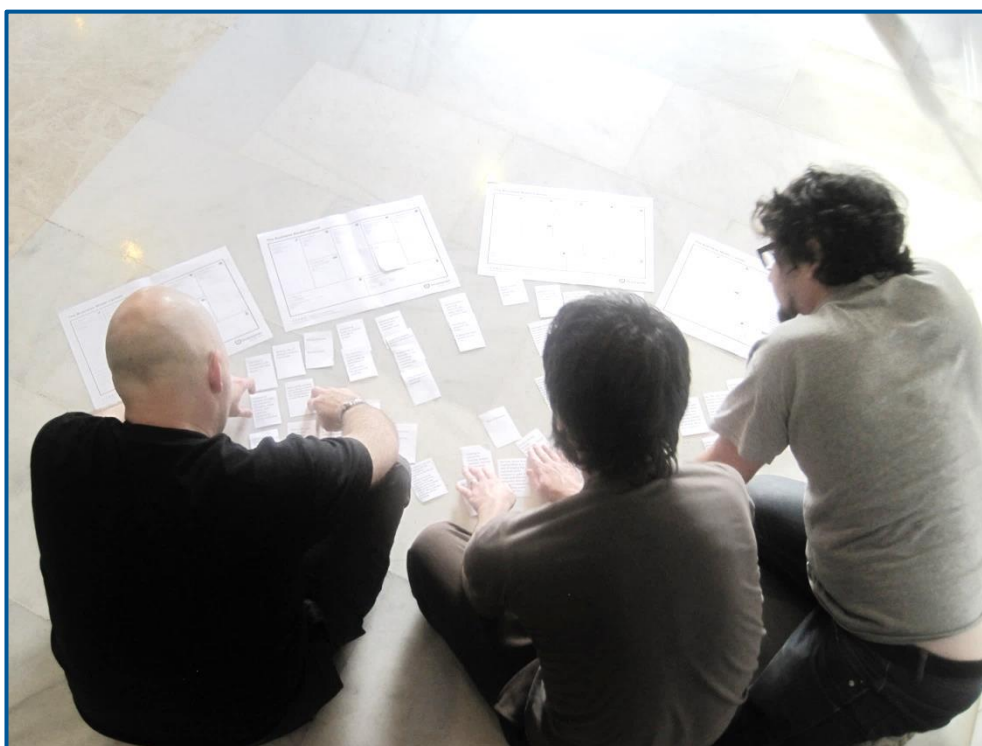# 10 MAJOR SHORTCOMINGS OF GAMIFICATION

OR

10 MAJOR CHALLENGES TO FUTURE GAMIFICATION

Gamification is increasingly recognised as a useful and innovative methodology in very many contexts, including creating new mentality, competences and capacity among less resourceful citizens such as unemployed, migrants and NEET youth.
It is promoted and practiced as a methodology to offer new learning opportunities through non-academic and playful approaches.

Along the first waves of gamification those methodologies were primarily used in limited and controlled contexts such as with managements, groups of employees and similar.
Expectations were raised that these methodologies would also benefit less resourceful citizens and in more informal contexts, offering an alternative to traditional adult education, labour market services and second chance provisions for NEETs.

However, gamification practice has shown that there are serious limitations to the use of gamification methodologies when building capacity among less resourceful citizens.
In this text we choose to call these limitations *shortcomings*.
Shortcomings indicate that gamification has not yet developed methodologies to respond to what those citizens need.

In addition we should be rather careful with new and promising approaches, easily made popular through the high-speed communication and opinion-making of the globalised world.

In various contexts we have pointed to and promoted the potential of gamification for capacity building of less resourceful citizens.
However, in this context we wish briefly to draw attention to some serious shortcomings of gamification for these target groups – and to the fact that serious experimentation will be needed to counter those shortcomings.

Let us, then, list the 10 major shortcomings of gamification in connection with the development of new mentality, competence and capacity among less resourceful citizens.

The rather limited ambition of this text is not to discuss these shortcomings in detail, but simply to point to some serious challenges to gamification approaches to less resourceful citizens in the future.
These shortcomings do not include the use of gamification methodologies in other contexts.
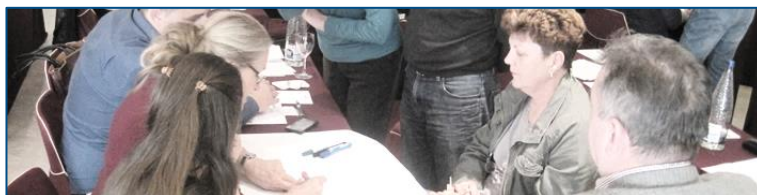
1

SIMULATION

Unlike authentic entrepreneurial capacity building methodologies, gamification is basically *simulation*.

The gaming takes place in artificial worlds, simulating the real world.

Gamification activity does not include linking to real-life activity and it does not in itself result in real-life activity.

Such gamification activity might result in some forms of mentality change among less resourceful citizens, but this mentality change is isolated from any real-life experience.

There is increasingly consensus that entrepreneurial capacity building must take place in real life, working through real-life challenges.

Gamification challenge

Efficient gamification approaches will need to deploy in and link directly to real-life action, strongly combining simulated gameplay with gamified real-life action taking.

2

RESISTANCE

For many reasons gamification creates considerable resistance among less resourceful citizens, in particular among those citizens mostly in need of alternative pathways.

In fact one might say: the less resourceful the citizens involved, the stronger the resistance.

This tendency might prove devastating for any meaningful gamification activity and prevent any mentality change to happen.

Gamification challenge

Efficient gamification approaches will need to develop more realistic gameplay, for example through strong links to the reality that surrounds less resourcefully citizens. Such elaborated methodologies will need to be able to create respect and credibility among the participants.

3

ETHICS

When applying gamification strategies among less resourceful citizens, a major concern arises.

Most of these participants are trapped in complicated and very negative life situations and in desperate need of change.

Is it ethically appropriate to engage such people in often long-term gameplay not at all pointing towards or leading to any form of real-life change?

<u>Gamification challenge</u>
Efficient gamification approaches will need to develop strategies that link much closer to the real needs of less resourceful citizens, instead of stalling or postponing taking real action.

4

CLOSED SETTINGS - CENTRIPETAL NOT CENTRIFUGAL
Gamification activity basically takes place in closed and controlled settings – somewhat like education.
It is basically centripetal, pointing towards itself and closing the activity around itself, not centrifugal, pointing to real life and generating outwards action taking.
In times where we are encouraged to take education out of the classroom (open schooling), it seems regressive to limit gamification activity to settings similar to the classrooms.

<u>Gamification challenge</u>
Efficient gamification approaches will need to create immanent mechanisms that leads gamification activity towards real-life and towards engaging in real change.
Such centrifugal gamification should not consist in pointing towards post-festum real-life activity, but build in centrifugal mechanisms at the heart of gamification itself.

5

SYMBOLIC ACTING-OUT
Less resourceful citizens are known to develop very strong and mostly negative feelings about their life, situation and perspectives – frustration, anger, aggression, depression and even hatred.
Gamification approaches offer those citizens symbolic acting-out and working-through opportunities through the various forms of gameplay.
However, the feelings are often so strong that such symbolic approaches are not able to offer sustainable change, and as the gamification activities are not leading to any substantial action-taking in real-life (including struggling for real change), the burdensome feelings will reoccur after the termination of the gamification activity.

<u>Gamification challenge</u>
Efficient gamification approaches will need to develop such strategies that allow in-depth and sustainable re-direction of the energies of strong feelings towards and in the form real-life struggling.

6

SYSTEM DEPENDENT

The closed gamification gameplay is depending heavily on systematic preparation, structuring and organisation.

This form of gameplay is therefore evidently more suitable for short, punctual, limited and highly controlled settings, such as a workshop or series of interdependent workshops or similar types of sessions.

However, the lives, social situations and needs of less resourceful citizens are normally quite messy, uncontrollable and cannot successfully be matched by sessions in a workshop room.

Thus present gamification gameplay tends to narrow down and reduce the actions fields really needed to engage less resourceful citizens in adequate taking action and capacity building processes.

Gamification challenge

Efficient gamification approaches will need to develop more flexible and changeable gameplay approaches able to play out over longer time periods and to incorporate a variety of real-life occurrences.

7

MENTALITY BEFORE ACTION

Gamification as we know it is fundamentally rooted in the very classical occidental education discourse: first mental/theory/knowledge/competence then action/real-life/change.

The idea that gamification might change the mentality of less resourceful citizens *to prepare them* to take real-life action to bring about change, based on this mentality change, is strongly rooted in this tradition.

21st century capacity building strategies, on the other hand, including emerging entrepreneurial approaches, base the capacity building approaches on the assumption that authentic and sustainable mentality change takes place *through* taking real-life action and deeply integrated in taking real-life action.

Gamification challenge

Efficient gamification approaches will need to develop gameplay approaches incorporating mentally change as a result of progressive and stepwise action taking.

Such gamification strategies will need to leave the classical educational dichotomy: mental / action or knowledge / practice.

8

SEMI-COMPETETIVE

Present gamification practices allow simulated competition among the gamers.
But only simulated and in very soft semi-competitive forms.
The idea is allowing symbolic competition without hurting anybody.
However, competition is increasingly a reality of life, like it or not, and it makes little sense to protect people in serious and difficult life situations against those realities.
The protection strategy might even generate a lack of capacity to deal with real-life competition.

Efficient gamification approaches will need to develop real-life approaches that can handle and manage and integrate the forms of competition less resourceful citizens will be challenges with as soon as they open the door to pursue real-life change.

9

NO LIFE RESULTS

A major shortcoming of present gamification is that it does not create any life results, it merely simulates such results. Everything remains at symbolic level.
However, symbolic action does not bring food on the table or meaningful lives.
Less resourceful citizens are depending on a growing feeling of "doing something about it" to sustain their interest and engagement in capacity building activities.
They need to see some small results of their engagement to believe in it.
Gamification in its present forms only offers this at symbolic level.

Gamification challenge
Efficient gamification approaches will need to *link symbolic to real* to offer credible and meaningful capacity building for less resourceful citizens.

10

PUNCTUAL, YET ENDLESS

Gamification activity is designed to work in punctual settings – such as a mentality change workshop or seminar for company managers or school teachers.
Gamification mechanics demand well-defined, closed and controlled settings.
On the other hand, the gameplay can in principle go on for ever and without leaving the controlled settings. It is punctual, and yet endless.
But in capacity building for less resourceful citizens *time* matters…
An integrated approach to mentality change and capacity to take action needs to work across considerable time periods such as a few or several months.
The needed mentality change and capacity building cannot be punctual, or even multi-punctual, and on the other hand it cannot be endless, but must be framed by a strong mission with concrete and tangible results.

Gamification challenge
Efficient gamification approaches will need to develop gameplay across considerable and less controllable time periods to allow sustainable mentality change and taking action capacity. Such gamification approaches might exploit the basic principles of capacity building missions: *the mission is the game…*

AND THEN SOME...

When developing and practicing gamification for less resourceful young people, such as what is called NEETs, an additional and quite serious shortcoming is in play.

One might base gamification approaches on the unfortunate argumentation that precisely because young people are deeply immersed in game worlds, these young people will be highly motivated for gamification approaches to capacity building.

The reality is, however, different: precisely because they are immersed in game worlds these young people will <u>not</u> be motivated to engage in what we know as gamification!

Not only will these young people approach gamification or any other activity with maximum suspicion and resistance; but in addition no gamification activity will be able to compete with the forms of digital game worlds in which the young people are deeply engaged in their everyday life.

They will most likely meet gamification activities with disrespect, disinterest and considerable resistance.

The focus should therefore not be on gamification itself, but on how and to what extent the proposed activity is able to challenge the young people to such a degree that the resistance can be broken.

One of the only ways to accomplish this is precisely to engage the young people in dramatic, impressive and powerful capacity building activities far beyond what they imagined they could be part of.

<u>Gamification challenge</u>
Efficient gamification approaches for less resourceful youth will need to develop powerful mixed reality mission mechanics to challenge the young people and to break down considerable resistance.

IN CONCLUSION

In case, and only if, gamification upholds its ambition to offer strong alternatives to less resourcefull citizens and to the capacity building of those citizens – much and highly qualified <u>experimentation</u> will be needed.

The experimentation should not be carried out at local level, but should be addressed systematically through a series of dedicated and sharply profiled Erasmus+ and Horizon initiatives in the remaining part of the programme periods.

This paper might serve as a starting point for such experimentations.