

Promoting Youth Civil Engagement through Web-based Games

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Abstract

People spend three billion hours a week playing online games, and in this paper Henrique Conca Bussacos argues that some of this activity can be diverted into building civic engagement. Bussacos draws on recent research about “gamification,” where creating games in previously non-game contexts changes behavior on the part of participants. While gamification for the purpose of civic engagement is still in its infancy, practitioners in education have long found turning lessons into games as beneficial to encouraging student engagement. Games based around social causes or disaster relief can encourage empathy on the part of players toward victims, although Bussacos acknowledges the potential of an awareness campaign built around entertaining players to trivialize a crisis like earthquake relief. However, the advantages of such a game approach can be compared to those of microfinance, according to Bussacos, where large numbers of potential stake holders can be organized around promoting large-scale change through small-scale actions.

The paper includes a case study of Conecta, an online game that was created by the Brazilian community foundation ICom. Conecta’s main goals are to create awareness about community issues, to share knowledge and data about local challenges and to stimulate actions by providing links to tools and resources that facilitate the players’ engagement. Along with online game play, players are organized into flash mobs which meet in person once every month or two in order to accomplish tasks like cleaning a beach. Bussacos highlights the possibilities of such game-based organizing, but he also discusses the challenges in both building a wide player base and ensuring that games include entertaining gameplay while still being content driven. While this paper focuses on community foundations within Brazil, its lessons are applicable to any foundation seeking to creatively promote youth engagement using technology.

To request the full version of the paper, please click [here](#)

