Survival of "homo ludens" in wilderness of "digital continent"

The game has always been one of the essential components of human life; it has determined and determines human life to such extent that man can be defined as a "player" – *homo ludens.* In recent decades we have witnessed great and important changes in the game development and its role in the life of an individual and society as a whole. During the last decades of the last century, technological development has significantly shifted the horizons of the gaming options, i.e. it has seriously changed the matrix of the game and opened up new gaming industry perspectives. This progress has brought new elements into the game world, but has neglected some essential features of the past forms of the game and consequently has dramatically changed the culture of the game and its former guidelines, endangering socio-educational elements of the game and setting the new ways and rules to the game. The game has been separated from its natural environment and technically moulded into new tools that have brought revolutionary changes to the playing space. The beginning of these changes came after the creation of new toys of electronic age. With the subsequent development of the Internet and social networks, these changes will take even more serious outlines. If we tried to recognize the main characteristics of the revolution in the gaming industry, then we would first observe the separation of players from their own environment and self-sufficiency of their own gaming experience, without socialization that had been an important part of the game. The game becomes sheer entertainment and pastime while other important elements like togetherness, responsibility, rules, creativity and imagination, disappear. The player turns subtly into the machine. The game is separated from the playground, i.e. it retreats into the corners of the living space, becomes lonely and self-sufficient and is reduced to technical skill.

If we mention some of the modern "toys", we shall gain insight into the development of new forms of games through tools for fun that have gradually deprived the game of imagination, sociality and

beauty. Some of them are in the museum of memories while some still dominate today in the entertainment market, true, in new, redesigned or electronic more advanced releases.

Let us mention Rubik's Cube, a toy that in the 80's of the last century experienced unprecedented success; it has been sold in 350 million copies and become a timeless toy. Almost a fifth of that-time world population was having fun with this unusual toy. In some way, along with the ingenuity of this toy, we could say that it is a pioneer of the game that becomes an end in itself and in which others can only be amazed observers of trying to find the right combination.

A step forward in separating the game experience from social environment was made with the creation of Tamagotchi, an electronic pet produced in 1996 and sold in 76 million copies. Users were offered a toy that should be "kept alive", fed, cured, walked and be tied with it as if it were a real pet. The lack of caring for the little nuisance was paid in the way that the pet "died". The player is separated from social games and possessively tied up with non-existent "being on batteries". No matter how much the child might get used to taking care of others through this play, this gadget pushes him away from social life and classic ways of playing. Tamagotchi toy seems to be re-experiencing its renaissance. In the new advertisement the new manufacturers point out that the attractiveness of the product is proof that "love will never leave the fashion".

In the 90s of the last century the first IT revolution takes place, showing its fruits also in the areas of the game world. The first home computers ZX Spectrum, Commodore 64 and Atari are being produced, and the world of games is unstoppably being transferred to home computer screens. One can remember the first computer games like Pack Man, Tetris, Super Mario, Duck Hunt, Pokémon, Prince of Persia as well as the beginning of new game forms that even more intensively separate children and the young from social and family life and firmly tie them to the screens and games experience. At that time already, clear signs of game addiction were felt, but they were mainly ignored. The story continues with the development of games consoles: Nintendo, Sega Mega Drive, up to Sony PlayStation at the beginning of the nineties of the last century.

It is undisputed that computer games bring a new dimension of entertainment in everyday life. Little by little the game is being separated from the community, it loses its important social component, and the game space is reduced to the screen surface. By the later development of these games, enviable sophistication of

graphics and speed has been achieved, but the principle remains the same: the player is completely immersed in the newly created world in which the game is an end in itself. The attractiveness of computer games is a base for addiction development because there is no social component to control the game in which several participants would manage the interaction during the process of playing.

The development of the Internet and social networks has additionally jeopardized the survival of classic forms of gaming and introduced a component of virtual sociability into the gaming space. Also, in the game area, there is difference between the "old generations" and the representatives of those who have grown up with a multi-screen entertainment. It is possible to observe the difference between the *digital natives* and those called in this analysis *digital newcomers*. New generations growing up in the world of avatar, virtual friends, likes, smiles and statistics of clicks, find a different way to play. Classic ways of entertainment, playfulness, companionship and competition are rather strange to them; indeed, in the essence the classic games seem to be too simple and primitive, so that they are unable to reveal their magic, sense or social importance, since they have been delighted with the new age digital games. This generates a generational, and also culturological gap between "our" and "their" game.

Moreover, social networking services often help the development of new forms of gaming creating new playgrounds within the digital space. It is undeniable that within the online group there are "game rules" that the participants are supposed to keep if they want to remain and hold out in the game. Digital environment imposes the world of selfies, likes and followers as a relevant determinant by which we know how good we are in the new living space. The new game encourages the participants to expose their lives to community to get an insight into their everyday details. The digital "admiration" or disregard, have become a benchmark for the new games success.

The phenomenon of online games creates an addictive relationship with unknown teammates in the network space who become our inseparable friends. The associations of players are being formed; hidden behind virtual identities, even if unconsciously, they become co-creators of new *digital culture* in which the game plays an important role. Playing is treated as a life-style, and *gamers* as persons who have succeeded to realize serious status within the network space.

Interesting development of new forms of playing is reflected in the emergence and inexplicable popularity of the online game for mobile

gadgets *Pokémon Go.* It is strange and not quite understandable how the popular cartoon from the 90s of the last century has suddenly come to life in a virtual animation which has become so popular that as a phenomenon deserves a serious socio-anthropological and psychological analysis of the modern age social trends. Surely, Pokémon-mania, as it was characterized at the time of its emergence, clearly shows the style, essential features and guidelines of modern online games. An uninformed observer, but probably many others who tried to better understand the phenomenon of the Pokémon game, could not understand how it was possible that crowds of people (in the first month of its existence the game had over 100 million of downloads) walked along the streets staring at the screen of their small mobile phone in a frantic search for virtual creatures. Virtual life had astonishingly entered into the real life of people. It was unbelievable that the awareness and attention, in fact the entire activity of many people, could be moved to virtual reality. The impression was that the crowd, deeply immersed in the new game, noticed neither people nor the life around; busily looking for virtual beings they resembled Diogenes of Sinope who with a lit candle searched for a man in the Athens squares. Perhaps the inexplicable persistent walking of crowds down the streets is indeed a reflection of looking for a man in general disruption of relationships and crisis of true humanity. However, the phenomenon of the Pokémon Go game points to the development of a new culture in which the game is going to lose some of up to now unquestionable dimensions and try to live in completely new frames which seem to be less creative and sociable. The game in which the separation from real life and close people is the main determinant is an end in itself, it opens the door to new forms of autism and encourages escape from real life. The crisis of society is also reflected in the crisis of the game, no matter how digitally attractive and challenging it is.

It seems certain that we shall see more and more people masked with 3D glasses who, though only physically, share common space with us. They are captured by their virtual world of relationships and imposed games and live in a parallel world. Because, the world of digital dimensions into which they have stepped with a lot of passion, has its rules. In this world, only the one that fully devotes to it and agrees to the basic rule of life can survive, and the rule is very simple and cruel: you exist only if you are *online.*

It is possible to notice that technological development, the emergence of the Internet and social networks, creating a new digital culture, have significantly influenced the creation of new forms of

gaming. The modern age games have drifted apart from their natural environment, from the playgrounds in the classical sense, but at the same time they separate the participants themselves from the real life. One might say that the simplicity of game increases its social dimension. Technical progress in the development of toys has contributed to the players' self-sufficiency, diminished creativity and deprived the game of imagination and competitive spirit. The worrying amount of autism in new games and playfulness is becoming a new form of heavy addiction and modern age disease.

New games have ceased to be a shared entertainment, where people socialize and live together. They have lost the element of creativity, rest and learning and have become a way of isolating and escape from real life and from people. The technical elements of game separate people from natural family and social environment and push them to asociality separating them from family and friends. The games addiction is manifested through an uncontrolled need for playing as long as possible, neglecting the family, friends, school or job, personal hygiene and need for sleep. Many people remain isolated in a captivating game with unknown co-players of the network world. The newly established frivolity of relationships and "friendship" can be defined by the newly established slogan: It's all a game. Also, rituality and self-sufficiency of a virtual game often becomes the essential element and new religiosity that develops within the digital world.

Such approach to the game primarily relativizes the seriousness, creativity, imagination and sociability of the game itself, but at the same it makes the approach to life itself frivolous. Social and religious life develops in the parallel digital world, as well as the life of the game itself. The game often becomes compensation for the poverty of real life and becomes an oasis of insouciance and illusion. Digital service *Second Life* clearly shows the ranges and possible wrong ways of parallel worlds within the digital continent. *Homo digitalis* the man with a false identity and mask of the chosen avatar wants to be *Nobody,* as it is a unique way for him to become *Somebody* within the existing world that ignores individuality.

Special attention in observing the new forms of gaming should be paid to the connection between games and violence. There are several reasons that connect games and violence. First of all games are designed in the way that violence is their essential determinant. The game contents are full of violence, whether with fights for survival or wars with opposing sides. On the other hand, players in the virtual space feel anonymous, safe and protected and can express

their frustrations and impulse for violence and fighting in a way that will not be sanctioned at all. Violence from the streets often moves into the virtual world through the game or through the various ways of digital violence which is more and more present.

Heavy addictions are related to new forms of gaming. There are numerous clinics in the world that are trying to help those who are captured within the space of digital life and game. We also have two clinics in Zagreb dealing with the Internet and gaming addiction treatment. The Zagreb psychiatric hospital "Sveti Ivan" has responded to the internet addiction so that they opened a day-care hospital for internet addicts, the first such institution in Croatia. Since 2017 there has also been the Outpatient Clinic for computer, games and virtual world addicts at KBC "Sestre Milosrdnice". About forty children pass through their rehabilitation treatment every year, mostly teenagers.

Unfortunately, it happens that the God-inspired primary connection between gaming and health is interrupted, and many forms of modern plays become "illness". The Church is aware of harmful effects of video games especially on children. Therefore, Pope Benedict XVI points out the fact that video games "in the name of entertainment, exalt violence and portray antisocial behaviour"; he also appeals to the leaders of media industry "to educate and encourage producers to safeguard the common good, to uphold the truth, to protect the individual human dignity" (Benedict XVI *Children and the Media: A Challenge for Education,* Massage of the Holy Father Benedict XVI for the 41st World Communications Day (2007), IKA 07.03.2007, No. 10, pp.21.

The future of the game that we have known so far is uncertain and questionable. On the life scene we can see *Homo technologicus,* the man whose personality and behaviour resemble a machine by the outward characteristics, i.e. *Homo sapiens* considerably changed by technology. In that unusual coexistence of biology and technology, technological advances have a significant impact on human personality, which is more evident today than ever before. The question is if the classic forms of the game that we are accustomed to are simply lagging behind the times; is it necessary and is there a way to try to return the game to the known frames of imagination, togetherness, simplicity and creativity, or should we unquestionably allow the new, digital generation to pave the new ways for the game and give it new meaningful frames?

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