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# Ten years later. Towards the careers of long-term gamers in Austria

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## Game research lacks long-term studies

The issue of gaming and its socially integrative functions is a growing area of interest for the social sciences. Despite the continuous development of computer and video game research (Quandt et al., 2008; Großegger 2008; Schorb & Kießling et al., 2008; Lenhart et al., 2008; Castronova, 2005, 2007; Taylor, 2006) and an outline of its future scenarios (Smart et al., 2007), findings on any effects of long-term gaming are still lacking. In particular, only a few specialized studies have addressed the social effects of online gaming in the sector of Massive Multiplayer Online Role Playing Games (MMORPGs). One sociological study by Griffith, Davies and Chappel (2003), for example, shows significant differences between older and younger online gamers, with the social aspects of a game being more important for older gamers as opposed to violent game plots that are less attractive. In addition, older gamers invest more of their leisure time in gaming, while younger players replace education and working time with playing. In Germany, a qualitative study of older gamers (35+ years) yielded a typology of gamers' motivations: Among four discriminating types (casual gamers, issue managers, socializers and leaders), mostly socializers and leaders took part in MMORPGs (cf. Grüninger, Quandt & Wimmer 2008). However, many questions concerning social position, professional careers and social networks, and, hence, the consequences of online gaming for the evolvement of life stories of long-term online gamers remain unaddressed.

In 1999, an Austrian study into the social networks, lifestyles and motivation of online gamers examined the socially integrative effects of gaming in MUDs (text-based multi-user dimensions), 3D game environments and 2D visual playgrounds (Götzenbrucker, 2001). Forty qualitative interviews with gamers highlighted the fact that, contrary to the expectation of social seclusion, online gamers were highly communicative people and well integrated in society. The results showed that various gaming environments (the text-based MUD *Silberland*, the 3D world of *Ultima Online* and the 2D chat-environment of *Palazzo*) attracted specific types of gamers. While MUDers were younger students, interested in programming and technology, *Ultima Online* gamers had a higher average age (27+ years), preferred role-play and were organized into guilds. Chatters were mostly interested in socializing and meeting people online. These various types of gamers were characterized by different kinds of lifestyles and divergent social positions.

One aim of the present study was to provide insight into the evolving lifestyles of online gamers over a 10-year period, giving the gamers the opportunity to share their game-playing experience. Central to the research project was a focus on the current habits and lifestyles of the online gamers as well as on the mutual influences of media/games and lifestyle (termed mediated lifestyle in this article). Fifteen out of 40

online gamers (the chatters were excluded due to a lack of gaming experience) agreed to participate.

Accordingly, where individuals were still online gamers, the following issues were addressed: Whether they still prefer the same games they played in 1999? To what extent their motivation changed due to changing life situations? To what extent do they feel the social practice of gaming has affected the construction of the gamers' (social) identity? Do they still perceive gaming to be socially integrative? Were there any social costs to their gaming activities and habit? How does a change in lifestyle affect gaming habits? Finally, what is the meaning of MMORPGs as long-term gamers and to what extent has it changed over the course of their gaming career?

### **Identity construction, social network constitution and media domestication practices in game play**

To provide better insight into the gamers' personal evolvment, the intersection of lifestyles, biographical phases and gaming practices, a triangulation of theoretical approaches as well as methodological tools was induced. Cultural theory frames the examination of the gamers' identity construction and biographical phases, while the approach of media domestication focuses on the technology-related adoption processes of games and gaming. Social network theory supports the idea of structurally based processes of social integration and is also used as a search tool within ego-network analysis.

The construction of *identity* can be viewed as a process that helps the individual to manage meanings circulating in society (cf. Hall 1997). These culturally formed meanings play an essential role in the process of self-positioning as they represent a kind of classification system that marks identity and difference through symbolic distinction (cf. Woodward 1997:35). As a result of the relatively novel dimensions of the interplay of media and identity in online environments, gamers might have the possibility to position themselves freely within the online role-playing game, applying practices of symbolization (cf. Hipfl 2004:14).

Correspondingly, "self-evolvment" and "self-positioning" (cf. Köhl 2003) seem to be common motives of most online role-playing gamers. This leads us to one thesis of the study, namely that gaming is to be seen as being supportive of personal evolvment. Whether or not a game offers possibilities for creative production with options of "self creation" is very much dependent on the type of game. As our 1999 study showed, MMORPGs function as life simulations (cf. Götzenbrucker 2001) or — as Turkle (1998) called it — laboratories of identity construction. This means that the gamers' identity construction tends to be influenced by acts of gaming and positions/roles in games. The present study aimed to yield new insights into mechanisms of self-positioning and distinction related to long-term gaming, affecting the gamers' whole biography.

How do *biographical parameters* such as the transition into another phase of life, influence motivation and playing habits? Predictably, movement from adolescence into a family and work-dominated phase affects both time management and leisure time activities. Undoubtedly, rule-based lifestyles do not permit playing MMORPGs

that intensively to the same degree. “Turning points,” that is, “a transition important for the subjects that brought a change in life” (Sackmann 2007:59), initiate an alteration of lifestyle and, therefore, influence online game consumption. Thus, we asked how long-term gamers, that are still actively playing, manage to incorporate online role-play gaming into their (changing) life situations?

A further theoretical focus is on *social networks and social capital*. In general, social relations are a part of the social capital of actors and, in fact, as a form of reputation system they support social security. Bourdieu (1983) defined social capital as a sum of all the social resources a person or group is able to bind. Thereby, reciprocal relations permanently enhance social recognition and integration. Changes in social capital depend on directly and indirectly cultivated relationships. These findings were not only proven within real-life settings but also within virtual settings (Haythornthwaite et al., 1997; Wellman et al., 2001; Ellison et al., 2007) such as MUDs and MMORPGs (Götzenbrucker 2001).

Weak ties in social networks have the advantage of being informal, leading to reduced social costs and being innovative, as heterogeneous relations and alternative ideas are bound (Granovetter 1982). Conversely, strongly tied networks tend to be closed, homogeneous — providing social support — but insular, reinforcing beliefs rather than introducing new ideas or contacts (Burt 2000). Former research shows that in virtual environments more weak ties are built and maintained by the users than strong ties. For instance, the contacts on social network sites (such as Facebook) support weak ties (so called “bridging social capital”) as well as strong ties (so called “bonding social capital” Putnam 2000) but mainly support formally and personally known relationships (Ellison et al. 2007) in a sense of maintained social capital.

The results of the 1999 study also showed that virtually built relations could enhance the trustworthiness and supportive dimensions of social networks, but consisted mainly of weak ties (Götzenbrucker 2001). The present study also asks questions about the dimensions and strengths of relationships in social networks. Specifically, were the gamers able to transform their cyberspace friendships into long-term and/or even real-life (non-virtual) friendships?

New technologies do not only influence the users’ habits, social relationships, networks and lifestyles (cf. Eichmann 2000) but are, in turn, interpreted as being “domesticated” (cf. Silverstone 1999) and, therefore, shaped by the users. The meanings of new media and technologies are not inherently fixed, but are the active products of the technology’s social articulation (cf. Morley 2003). According to Silverstone (1999), the *process of domestication* of new media and technologies such as online role-playing games takes place on four different levels. Firstly, the technology is appropriated by the users (appropriation) and is subsequently placed into the household (objectification). The users then fit the technology into their daily routines and time structures (incorporation). At the final state of conversion, the personal meaning the user has attached to the technology is finally made part of the public meaning. Following this process of adoption, the study describes how MMORPGs gradually embed themselves into the everyday lives of the gamers by increasingly becoming part of their “individual media menu” (Röser 2007:17).

## Methodological Approach

While questionnaires were used in the frame of the former study in 1999, the present research was carried out with qualitative in-depth interviews, which allowed for deeper insights into the gamers' attitudes. This concept is traditionally based on the theory of symbolic interaction and reflects on the interviewees "as experiencing subjects who actively construct their social worlds" (cf. Silverman 1993). The qualitative analysis of the data was related to the concept of grounded theory (cf. Glaser & Strauss 1998)<sup>1</sup>.

Two versions of the interview guidelines were prepared for the current as well as the ex-gamers, comprising the following clusters of domains of inquiry:

1 Gamers' behavior, game preferences	5 Private/professional consequences
2 Motivation	6 Game quitting Scenarios
3 Gamers' personal career	7 Friendships
4 Positive/negative gaming experiences	8 Social Networks

Within the 1999 study, the Fischer ego-network generator — an additional quantitative questionnaire — was used to analyze the social networks of the interviewees (Fischer 1982). Collecting information about the social relations of one actor/ego (in our context, each gamer is an ego) to other actors allows good insight into his or her social integration. We are able to understand whether an actor has close friends and kin or even weak ties, and whether they are part of large or small networks.

In the current study, a total of 15 interviews were conducted, which cover more than 50% of the formerly interviewed online role-playing gamers (27 of 40<sup>2</sup>) in the 1999 study. Three were not interviewed, due to a lack of time and nine disappeared from the study completely. The age of the interviewees ranged between 30 and 52 years, while their educational level was higher than average for Austria. Seven hold an academic title, five were still pursuing their studies or had completed secondary education, with only two gamers possessing no secondary education. Most interviewees had a technology-related job and can be described as pioneers of the digital generation. Approximately 80% have full-time jobs, two thirds live with partners and approximately 50% of the interviewees have children. Two thirds were still gaming.

## Effects of long-term gaming

### Long-term gamers' identities: On the interdependency of lifestyles, identities and motivation for playing

I like playing because it's fun, but I enjoy it in the same way as reading a book.

One aim of the study was to assess the long-term effects of online gaming on the gamers' identity construction. The motivation for playing is understood as sets of meanings building the basis of a classification system marking identity and difference (cf. Woodward 1997). Lifestyle represents such a system of symbolic distinction.

Most *still active gamers* currently play regularly and have continuously integrated the game into their lives, considering it as a possibility for self-evolution in a space without constraints. However, the opinion that gaming was a "waste of time" was prevalent amongst the interviewees. But what then is the meaning of gaming for the still active long-term gamers?

All the interviewees who still play (*still active gamers*) prefer online role-playing games (MMORPGs) to other computer games. Most *still active gamers'* motivation has changed considerably over the last 10 years. While they felt dedicated to an achievement principle (competitive motivation) at the beginning of their gaming career, they are mostly interested in socializing now. Participants tended to turn into "casual games" or engage in other less time-consuming games using "inter-spaces" (for example short breaks) (cf. Hume/Truch 2006:160) to accommodate the desire to spend less time playing.

In the evening I can decide whether I want to watch TV for two hours with my girlfriend or -if I am not interested in the film- if I prefer sitting in front of the computer. I don't have any other options. This is the only time I have to do something like this...

Throughout their career, they continuously became emancipated from predefined game structures, developing their own definition of success. Only a few *still active gamers* were convinced that their basic motivation for playing had not changed at all over the course of time. These gamers tended to criticize the increasingly commercialized gaming landscape. They identified with the "power" or "hardcore gamer" type who is geared to the achievement principle...

All the games on the market today are quite simple. That is to say that in times of EverQuest, even EverQuest 1, people were playing in groups of 70 people, as this was necessary to be successful. All the games are so easy to play nowadays when you are able to reach the same goals playing in groups of five or six people.

Playing remained a substantial feature of their everyday life.

The different meanings reflected by varying motivations for playing provide the basis for a symbolic distinction marking identity and difference (cf. Woodward 1997). Some gamers drew a *distinction between other types of gamers* (“nerd”, “casual gamer”, “power gamer”) or *other types of games*<sup>3</sup>, with some viewing themselves as representatives of a “creative elite” or as part of the “core-scene”.

As role-playing gamers are generally a highly heterogeneous group with respect to their gaming motives, “motive conflicts” (Siitonen 2007:211) — “conflicts” resulting from contradictory expectations of the game — can arise. For most long-term gamers, playing MMORPGs became one leisure activity of many, representing an “experimental space” and/ or a “space for communicating with others”. Only a few gamers still invest most of their spare time in playing. The results show that the preferred game is chosen in accordance with the actual life situation and that a change of life situation can also lead to game abandonment. One interviewee describes the initial moment of change, a so-called “turning point” (Sackmann 2007:59) in life as follows:

Actually, it was when I started with a part-time job. It was not really abrupt because I still entered the game to chat (...). But to play for two hours a day- that was not possible anymore.

The grouping of the different types of motivation into motivational sets builds the basis for a long-term gamer typology. As the motivation represents meanings, each gamer-type also consists of a set of meanings, marking a conception of identity as a gamer.

### A long-term gamer typology

Richard Bartle’s (1996) typology (*achievers, explorers, socializers, controllers/killers*)<sup>4</sup> allows a categorization of online gamers according to aspects of action with respect to interaction and gamer and environment-orientation<sup>5</sup>. To be able to compare the 1999 data with the current data, all the interviewed *still active gamers* were assigned to Bartle’s typology according to their motivation: Only five interviewees could definitely be assigned to one type; all the others were multiply assigned. *Socializers* still form the largest group (8 out of 15 persons). Interestingly, a relatively high number of *achievers* was registered (7 out of 15 persons). *Explorers* ranked third (6 out of 15 persons) and the smallest number of people were categorized as *role-players* or *controllers/killers*. On the basis of these patterns and the diverging motivational sets that were identified, the following gamer-typology<sup>6</sup> was developed:

- Type 1: *Communicative role-players* enjoy experiencing fantasy-settings and new environments. They love to play different roles by incorporating some aspects of their own personality into their role-playing. Communicating and networking with other players is more important than achievement for them. “If you can play with someone, you will also have good arrangements with that person in real life...” This type represents the socializer who wants to distinguish himself from the power gamer type “who only wants to gain action points”. Through the process of habitualization, gaming is completely

incorporated into everyday routines and takes a permanent place in the gamer's life.

- Type 2: *Anarchists* complain about commercialization and the orientation towards the average gamer, a type of gamer they want to distinguish themselves sharply from rather than from the power gamer. These average gamers prefer safe structures with predictable mechanisms of gratification. Conversely, *anarchists* prefer risk, control, insecurity, adventure and the possibility of acting out evil behavior (such as cheating, killing, lying, stealing) in a space without rules. Thus they are also acting on other gamers. They view themselves as the “dinosaurs” of the gaming scene, a part of a technological avant-garde “*standing out from the crowd of other players*”, as it were.
- Type 3: *Steady gamers* see the game as an integral part of their life. “*You experience things that are unimaginable to happen in everyday real life.*” They arrange their schedule according to their media consumption and are generally interested in (new) technologies. Despite the entrance into another phase of life, they manage to integrate the game into their lives by applying adaptation strategies<sup>7</sup>. Although they argue that they are playing less nowadays due to changing life circumstances (compared to former times), they still show a relatively high level of involvement – especially in the field of achievement.
- Type 4: *Designers* are mostly interested in the mechanics, the environment and the technical background of the game. They want to construct their game world on their own, particularly because they are only interested in the game if there is a possibility of co-designing. They like challenges and want to try out new things, especially acting on the game world. For designers, the game is a field of creative activity. For example “*creating a gamer community*” or “*working on my programming skills*”.

While the motivational sets representing type 2 and 3 do overlap on some points, there are no similarities between type 1 and 3. However, what all four types of gamers have in common is that the setting of the game is very important for them. The game is seen as an additional space for communicating, thus a pleasant expansion of “real-life” communication structures.

## The impact of computer supported social networks

It was the fascination of playing and communicating with people far away...

The social networks of the online gamers revealed a change in size between the studies. A decline from 17.2 to 13.7 contacts was measured, which is a 20% drop in social capital. Only three of ten *still active* gamers extended their social networks.



In total, 22% of all existing network contacts were *online gamer friends* — people interviewees know through gaming or friends with whom they started the game in common. Only one gamer lacks *online gamer friends* in his network, and 8 out of 14 have congruent contacts from 1999. In total, 17 out of 45 *online gamer friends* were congruent in the social networks and the average number of *online gamer friends* in the social networks is 2.7 (see Table 1).

Interview partner	Status: still- or ex-gamer	Ego-network size 2008	Ego-network size 1999	Network difference	Online gamer friends 2008	Online gamer friends 1999
IP1	SG	10	18	- 8	1 (-6); n.Ov *	7
IP2	SG	19	30	- 11	4 (-1); 2 Ov**	5
IP3	EX	8	missing data		2	
IP4	EX	17	missing data		3	
IP5	EX	14	17	- 3	3 (-2); n.Ov	5
IP6	SG	28	15	+ 13	3 (+1); 1 Ov	2
IP7	SG	25	19	+ 6	10 (+4); 5 Ov	6
IP8	SG	6	10	- 4	3 (-3); 3 Ov	6
IP9	SG	9	20	- 11	5 ( 0); 2 Ov	5
IP10	SG	13	15	- 2	4 (+2); 2 Ov	2
IP11	SG	15	38	- 23	0 (-4)	4
IP12	SG	3	7	- 4	2 (-1); n.Ov	3
IP13	EX	12	9	+ 3	2 (+1); 1 Ov	1
IP14	SG	17	12	+ 5	2 ( 0); n.Ov	2
IP15	EX	8	14	- 6	1 (-3); 1 Ov	4

Table 1: Ego-networks of online gamers (comparison 1999-2008)

\* No overlapping contacts with gamer friends from 1999

\*\* Two overlapping contacts with gamer friends from 1999

These results contradict any thesis that online contacts rarely develop into long-term contacts. Additionally, the interview results show that long-lasting in-game friendships do not automatically transform into close friendships.

Furthermore, two gamers found their jobs through their online gamer network, two other male interviewees established romantic partnerships with female gamers and one gamer reported to have built a fruitful relationship with an owner of an elderly care center. In addition, gamers were strongly motivated by the international networking possibilities provided by online games — which comprises not only conversation but also travelling to foreign countries (in this case, *bridging social capital* is gained)

In contrast, ex-gamers stress the fact that their friendships to other gamers were mostly restricted to actions within the game, which is not presumed to be an ideal basis for establishing serious, strong, long-lasting relationships. In their opinion, core-friendships (or so called *bonding social capital*) mainly exist with non-gamers.

Another group of interviewees started playing together with friends from real life. Thus, they used gaming as a shared leisure activity — and a possibility for keeping in touch and *maintaining social capital*.

From the perspective of the interviewees, friendships and relatives are classified through their hybrid character, as in most cases both virtual and real life components exist. A successful change from poor to richer communication channels (such as telephone or face to face) is absolutely necessary to build up trust. (cf. Döring 2003; Parks & Floyd 1996) 75% of the interviewees reported to have extended their connection activities by using diverse available communication channels and facilities to keep in touch with their gamer friends.

### **Domesticating gaming: The stages of a gamer's career**

At the beginning, you explore the environment, learning how to move and to chat. (...) If you are 'inside' then, social structures evolve, then you are part of a group, more or less integrated.

Another aim of the study was to analyze the domestication process of online role-playing games. As a result, four stages of a typical online gamers career were identified, which can be viewed as tracing the different levels of media domestication (cf. Silverstone, Hirsch & Morley 1999:15-29). Time turned out to be a crucial factor for evaluating playing habits (cf. Neverla 2007). At the beginning of their career, gamers invest a lot of time in playing. This indicates a high level of involvement, which gradually decreases over the course of time. When the gamers started their gaming career, MMORPGs were played by a small group of people, representing a kind of technological avant-garde. As the process of domestication illustrates, the long-term gamers gradually integrated online games into their permanent media repertoire through processes of incorporation, routinization and habitualization.

Passing through the stages, the gamers' reflection on the usage of the (formerly new) technological phenomenon constantly decreased.

The *introductory phase* can be described as the stage of *appropriation*, where the main focus lies on testing various types of games and getting to know different sceneries and settings. This stage is characterized by an "effect of novitivity" (Döring 2003:440), which means the general tendency that entering an unfamiliar media setting results in excited and intense usage. At the *stage of intensification (level of objectification)*, the gamer starts to build up (mostly short-term) social relationships with other gamers. These "warm experts" (Lehtonen 2003:373) aid with learning about the game's mechanics. At the *stage of social inclusion*, the game is already fully integrated into daily routines and time structures. At this time, gamers have to deepen their knowledge about game-strategies by intensively cooperating with others. This is when the level of peer pressure and commitment rise. "And if you become a member of a guild, there will be no way back." At the *final stage*, which represents the level of *conversion*, the gamers' playing habits and motivation change due to changes in their life situation. At this stage, some gamers turn into "casual gamers", playing those types of online role-play games that do not demand such a high level of commitment and involvement. Instead of sticking to one game, they seek out new challenges. One gamer described the typical stages of his gaming career as follows:

At the beginning you explore the environment, learning how to move and to chat. These are the things you have to get to know first. If you are "inside" then, social structures evolve, then you are part of a group, more or less integrated, and someone or other helps you to get some amenities, almost like in real life. But in the end it was getting boring, even if the system was really highly developed by that time, it was growing perpetually and anyhow it had changed: The perspective remained the same. The regions (in the game) have expanded a bit, but not the perspectives. What I mean is that how you change as a gamer, from the beginning to becoming an average gamer, always stays the same. The only way to rise up is to invest time massively, then you can certainly be successful.

The long-term gamers described various strategies of adaptation, helping them to fit the game into their current life situation. Some interviewees organize their game-playing habits according to their fixed schedule and, in turn, adjust their daily routine according to their playing habits (*arranging and incorporating the game*). Another strategy is to fill "inter-spaces" (Hume/Truch 2006) connecting different social fields (work sphere, social sphere and private sphere) with playing. The game is viewed as one option in a diverse range of leisure activities. Some of the interviewees referred to the game as a "social event" they join to meet and communicate with people (*ritualization*).

The fact that the gamers developed such "strategies of adaptation" to make the game life-compatible stresses the importance of a *life-work-game balance*. Even if online games have lost significance over the course of time, they are nevertheless still regarded as one option in a diverse range of (media-related) leisure activities by most of the interviewees. "Playing online games is like watching a film or reading a book for me- no more, no less!"

## Conclusion

The findings of the current study provide clear evidence of the interdependency of gaming behavior, motivation for playing and lifestyle. “Turning points” in the gamers’ lives are an important parameter. The entrance into work life or the birth of a child can lead to a decrease of engagement in playing or even to game abandonment. Changes in life situation are reflected in an alteration of playing habits. The game loses significance because of a shift of priorities in life over the course of the gamer’s career, but is still an integral part of the gamer’s individual media menu.

Activities related to media simultaneously involve time (cf. Neverla 2007). Thus, time handling plays an important role in the process of incorporating social practices of gaming into everyday life. When life situations change due to the transition from a period of education to a period of life determined by work, time capacities diminish drastically. Rule-based lifestyles regulated by work and family life hardly allow playing online games intensively. This is why some gamers develop specific strategies of adaptation (such as arranging and incorporating the game, filling of inter-spaces and ritualization) to still be able to incorporate the game into their lives. Their aim is to create a *life-work-game balance*.

The “stages of a gamer’s career” illustrate how a (formerly new) technological phenomenon can be domesticated through its usage. Correspondingly, long-term gamers represent a new “media lifestyle”, which similarly incorporates the virtual and the real world.

Concerning the thesis that gaming is seen to support personal evolution, diverging positions were identified. Although some gamers referred to playing online games as a “waste of time”, all the interviewees were convinced of the high entertainment value of these games.

The motivations for playing differ according to the meaning the game has for the gamer. Based on the long-term gamers’ diverging motivational sets, four different types of gamers were identified. These types vary regarding their focus of playing and strategies of integrating the game into their everyday life. *Communicative role-players* enjoy playing different roles, and are interested in the possibilities for communication offered by the game. *Anarchists* prefer risk and see the game as a parallel world where they can take on the role of the “bad guy”. They view themselves as “*dinosaurs*” of the gaming scene and want to distinguish themselves from the “*average gamer*”. *Steady gamers*, who do not intend to quit gaming completely, strongly identify with the game and can be assigned to the group of achievers. *Designers* are mainly interested in the technical and environmental background of games and want to create the game environment by themselves.

To summarize, the gamers represent three positions towards the establishment of relationships and social networks. The majority of the interviewees take the view that no “real” friendships can be established in online games, but rather only predominantly weakly tied relationships that are focused on specific interests and essentially on socializing components (*bridging social capital*). A smaller group of interviewees insist that they have also established real friendships within games; especially international relations were reported to be very relevant. For this group, the switch from virtual to real-life friendships requires indispensable personal contact

(*bonding social capital*). Some gamers stressed the usefulness of gaming for keeping relationships with their friends when changing lifestyles (job, family) complicate the maintenance of friendships in general (because of lack of time or geographical distances) (*maintained social capital*).

Taken together, the findings provide an account of the interdependence between playing habits and life situation. The interviewees can be characterized as pioneers of the digital generation who gradually “domesticated” online games. To summarize, the results — as 10 years ago — highlight the positive effects of the social practice of online gaming for social integration and self-evolvement. The fact that the gamers maintain their social networks (partly consisting of gamer friends) throughout changing biographical phases and stages of their gaming careers stresses the socially integrative aspects of online gaming.

However, these findings can only be viewed as a starting point for further research activities focusing on the long-term effects of online games. Future questions of related research could possibly deal with the integration of online games into family life, the quality of long-term relationships established in online games or the intersection of online games and other new media and ICTs.

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## Notes

- <sup>1</sup> Rather than describing a phenomenon, the objective of this inductive approach is to generate theory on the basis of collected data. In the context of this study, a combination of inductive and deductive category generation was applied (cf. Reinhoffer 2005:133). The first step of the data analysis was to identify the interviewees' "conceptual maps" (Hall 1997:18) concerning their gaming experience by incorporating the meta-theoretical level. The next step was to form and interweave categories following the principles of openness and parallelism of data collection and data analysis.
- <sup>2</sup> 13 interviewees in 1999 were users of a 2D chat environment called Palazzo
- <sup>3</sup> For example, most interviewees disapproved of "World of Warcraft" because of its predictable structures and the young age of most gamers.
- <sup>4</sup> The typology of Bartle divides the users of MUDs into four groups: Explorers: People who come to see what is there and to map it to others. Their challenge is discovery. They are "interacting with the game world". Socializers: People who come to be with others. Their challenge is to form groups, communicate and share objectives. They want the world to have extensive social infrastructure and shared activities: they are "interacting with other players". Achievers: People who come to build. Their challenge is to accumulate things worthy of social respect. They are "acting on the world". Killers/Controllers: People who come to dominate



other people and are interested in competition and defeating others. They are “acting on other players” (cf. Castronova 2005)

- <sup>5</sup> According to the results of the 1999 study, most interviewees categorized themselves as socializers (communication, interacting with other players). 14 (of 40) respondents saw themselves as achievers (acting on the world), 13 as role-players (and killer, acting on other players); 10 interviewees can be described as explorers. As the types of gamers are not exclusive, some interviewees were assigned to multiple categories.
- <sup>6</sup> Some ex-gamers who basically were still interested in gaming could also be categorized according to this typology. As the types represent diverging motivational sets, some gamers could also be assigned to two or more types. Especially type 1 and 3 seem to be overlapping.
- <sup>7</sup> see page 318