Intercultural communication and the Internet. The role of intercultural communication in Internet societies

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The subject of our paper is an analysis of intercultural communication, in Internet societies, concentrated on group cooperation in MMORPGs (Massive Multiplayer Online Role Playing Games). The main purpose of our study was to show that Internet societies tend to have a highly developed structure of organization, enabling them to work together on very sophisticated tasks. Even though in MMORPGs a traditional face-to-face communication is replaced by the computer-mediated communication, we can still observe emergence of specific group cultures as defined by traditional sociology. Also, a rather important factor is that due to the fact that the Internet societies found in MMORPGs are made up of players from different cultures, world regions, the cultural aspect of their interaction is not only visible in their actions, but also tends to have a strong influence on players' behaviors and group organization. The fact of a long cooperation among players playing the MMORPGs also results in a very specific form of communication and a highly complex in-group culture.

Key words: *Internet, communication, group, organization, structure*

Introduction

The main purpose of our three month research of Massive Multiplayer Online Role Playing Games (MMORPGs) was to analyse their revolutionary impact on our understanding of social dynamics. In this article, we focus mostly on the relation between computer-mediated-communication (CMC) on the emergence of specific group cultures in virtual groups created in the game context. After structural sociology (Szmatka, 1989, 53), we define group culture as a set of group norms and values, constituting the basis for a certain behavior of group members. Group culture is based on a set of punitive structures, i. e. a system of positive and negative sanctions employed by a group towards its members, depending on the level of their conformism to the given norms/values. Punitive structures create incentives for individuals to stay in a group; they support group actions, regulate group attitudes and help solving group conflicts. As such, they constitute a fundamental element of group cohesion.

We demonstrate that, even though in MMORPGs the traditional face-to-face (f-t-f) communication is replaced by the CMC, we can still observe emergence of specific group cultures as defined by traditional sociology. Describing firstly the characteristics of CMC, we then present the evolution of research on virtual collectivities, showing the innovative character and social potential of MMORPGs. Using one of the MMORPGs, *The World of Warcraft*, as a case study, we then move to the analysis of virtual group cultures, providing also explanations for "virtual nationalisms", virtual homophobia, and other phenomena, combining the "real" reality with the virtual one.

The general statement we make through our research is that, thanks to the rapid development of virtual communication technologies, it is not only possible, at the moment, to recreate social reality in "virtual environment", but we can also create a hyperreality, in Baurdillard's sense of the word. The hyperreality, where "the real is produced from miniaturized units, from matrices, memory banks and command models – and with these it can be reproduced an indefinite number of times. It no longer has to be rational, since it is no longer measured against some ideal or negative instance. It is nothing more than operational. In fact, since it is no longer enveloped by an imaginary, it is no longer real at all. It is a hyperreal" (Poster, 1988).

Virtual communication

In the simplest way, we can divide virtual communication into synchronic and a-synchronic. The former includes Internet chats[1], Skype and other communication forms, providing for a running exchange of messages between conversation participants. The latter relates to such type of communication where the moment of message sending is separated from the moment of response receiving (if the response arrives) by a certain amount of time (e. g., e-mail); or to Internet forums where a communicate works as an announcement under which the interaction partners place their comments[2].

Because "groups" in MMORPGs use mostly the synchronic textual communication mode, it is necessary to note that there were always two problems related to research on collectivities communicating in this way: firstly, compared to real discussion, a synchronic, textual CMC excludes all forms of non-verbal communication, the latter being one of the crucial information sources in group processes (Ruesch, 1973; Amado, Guittet, 1975: 11–28; Masterson, 1996). Secondly, uncertainty, deriving from the easiness to manipulate one's virtual identity, weakens the significance of virtual relations for a broader social context and hampers a conclusive research in the virtual social environment.

What we claim is that the recent progress in CMC technology, incor-

[1] Because of different topics of chats and the feeling of "co-participation" in a conversation resulting from a necessity to log into the chat, this kind of virtual spaces is often called *chat rooms*.

[2] This differentiation takes into consideration a situation where there is an actual exchange of information between individuals. It does not include www sites, which are a communicate themselves; however, it is a passive communicate, one-side only (some of them, however, provide links to chats, forums, etc.).

porated into online games, allows for overcoming the aforementioned problems and enables us to examine virtual social life from a brand-new, important perspective. Below, we compare the research on MMORPGs with previous studies, trying to establish a possible impact of CMC on social dynamics.

Research on CMC

The questions posed in the first phase of research concerned, mostly, comparisons of task results and group processes between CMC and traditional, f-t-f communication users in many different variants[3]. (among others, Adrianson, Hjelmquist, 1999). Even though the results were differentiated (Guzzo, Salas, 1995: 61–63)[4], a significant part of research showed a so-called equalization phenomenon in groups using CMC (Dubrovsky, Kielser, Sethna, 1991; Kiesler, Siegel, McGuire, 1984; also: Moreland, 1998). What was suggested is that in virtual groups, as a result of the anonymity of group members, the impact of social norms (and thus of group culture) on the behavior is significantly weakened (this was measured, among others, by the amount of swearwords), there is no role structure, and the status of group members is more or less equal.

In our study, the group members did not routinely work together. With familiarity, routines and social norms, established groups may overcome or create the problems in decision making that experimental groups did not exibit (Dubrovsky, Kiesler, Sethna, 1991: 140)[5].

The aforementioned comment was later proven by research on the so-called "virtual communities". "Virtual communities" relate to dynamic collectivities which emerge when a number of people communicating via CMC begin to share common habits, become interdependent, take common decisions, identify with something greater than the sum of their individual relations and manifest a long-term commitment to common well-being (definition of "community" after Shaffer and Amundsen in Palloff, Pratt, 1999, 26). The development of virtual communities was a result of the application of CMC to many domains of social life, for example, to education. Palloff's and Pratt's research on "virtual classes", i.e. collectivities of individuals participating in a particular online academic course, showed that as a result of long-lasting virtual cooperation such collectivities began to create affective bonds (surprisingly, anonymity, which hampered any type of group organization in the first phase of research on CMC, here, with time, became a factor facilitating openness among participants and fostering common sympathy). Furthermore, there

[3] Group members know each other/don't know each other; structured task/unstructured task, etc.

[4] The authors have analysed the existing research on task groups using CMC available until 1995 and realized that often results of some of them are in an absolute contradiction with the results of others.

[5] Most of the first studies used a one-session laboratory experiment with groups created ad hoc, often not very familiar with communication technology, interacting no longer than for an hour, working on tasks of little significance (Guzzo, Salas, 1995: 73).

was noted also the emergence of basic norms regulating social behavior and a sketch of role differentiation (measured via content analysis and frequency of communicates sent and received by each participant) (1999: 36). According to S. Barnes (2003: 102; also H. Rheingold in Slevin, 2000: 91), it would be a consequence of two factors: firstly, the evolution of the "human aspect" of CMC, allowing for transmission of non-verbal communicates – thanks to, among others, emoticons (visual communicates based on graphic signs[6]), individuals could start expressing the mutual understanding of even ironic, sarcastic and humorous messages. They could, therefore, visualize their emotions, i. e. recreate a certain aspect of communication, traditionally reserved to mimics and body language.

According to the author, such developments should not be surprising: in any collectivities pretending to last, developing basic rules concerning communication becomes an absolute must. This was already noticed earlier by Judith Donath (1996: 1.2): "In order for on-line systems to function well as social environments, it is essential that the participants be able to communicate (…) social information: they need to have a fluid and subtle cultural vocabulary for conveying social information and they must be able to perceive the patterns of activity and affiliation that reveal the structure of a community". This is why, with time, as was observed, members of virtual communities began to apply "real" rules of social interaction to a virtual situation, taking into consideration that, after all, they were interacting with a real, live partner (op. cit., also Barnes, 2003: 63).

Despite the above, virtual communities are based mostly on auto-categorization, they do not develop advanced group structures, and, in effect, the aspect of any structural pressures (the main subject of our research) has, after all, only a limited impact on the behavior of individuals. This is why, for some time it seemed that any attempts of a sociological analysis of virtual phenomenon will not go beyond the definition of "community" as defined above.

Contrary to these prognoses, the further development of communication technology, combining advantages of CMC with achievements in the field of computer graphics (e. g., MMORPGs) revolutionized two things: firstly, it allowed for creation of visual virtual worlds via software which, once installed, recreates a certain 3D virtual space on the user's screen; secondly, it enables a user to create its virtual representation – avatar. Thanks to Internet connection, the users, via their virtual representations, begin to function and interact in a common virtual space.

As a consequence, the imagined process of sharing a common virtual space, as described by Barnes (2003, 225), became a visual representation of the world, where the individuals might not only "feel", but also see and experience the presence of others. The analysis of such collectivities provides, therefore,

[6] Like ☺ , ☹ , etc.

a brand-new research perspective for social sciences. This is also because of the fact that in this case, part of social information can be transmitted to virtual world via one's avatar. As stated by J. Suler (1996, chapter "Group games using avatars"): "By this point it should be obvious that props make interacting easier and more efficient by providing a visual means to express oneself. They are very useful communication tools".

One of the best examples of such environments are the MMORPGs.

What is MMORPG?

MMORPGs have evolved from traditional Role Playing Games (RPGs), so-called "feature games". In traditional RPGs, real players personify fictional characters functioning in fictional worlds. The worlds of RPGs are based on certain guidelines contained in particular games' concepts and "game systems" (further). This allows for some form of inter-subjectivity; nevertheless, both setting and action of RPGs exist mostly in the imagination of each player separately. The main purpose of RPGs is to perform a role in a planned scenario and to reach certain goals while acting according to a particular set of rules. In developed game systems, every aspect of fantastic world is regulated: its history, geography, principles of physics (and possibilities to breach them via magic, for example), etc. Information on characters' attributes is enclosed in the so-called "characters' quantification mechanism" which includes, among others, strength, agility, intelligence, skills and knowledge in certain domains. These features are written into "character's card" which allows for the continuity of the character's life in the same form in several sessions of the same game.

Communication in RPGs is based mostly on spoken descriptions. Their mechanics derives from sets of mathematical formulas, which enable players to estimate the impact of characters' features and other factors on the possibility of success in undertaken actions. These factors might be measured (mass, size of items) and estimated (e. g., given as points on a certain scale – percentage or descriptive – like the density of fog or the degree of discomfort caused by armors). The "fortune" factor is comprised in dice throws. In case of doubts, the Game Master, depending on the game's systems, may also influence the events of the game. In traditional RPGs, the Game Master creates the scenario for sessions/games and is the only one who possesses a full knowledge about the particular game world (thanks to special handbooks for Game Masters), having a decisive voice regarding interpretation of the rules. The Game Master makes for "eyes and ears" of players, i.e. s/he describes what they see, how the environment responds to their behavior and controls the non-player characters appearing during the game – all in order to maintain the cohesion of action. The only that does not fall under direct control of Game Masters is the decision of players regarding the characters' behaviour and means they will choose in order to reach their goals.

Currently, one of the most popular RPGs is "Dungeons & Dragons" created by Gary Gygax and Dave Arnesona (first edition

in 1974). Because of its great success, the rules of the third edition of this game were implemented into on-line games. As a result, a new category of online games emerged, i.e. MMORPGs based on the Dungeons & Dragons system (among others, *The World of Warcraft*, *EverQuest*, *Ultima Online*, *Dark Age of Camelot*). Three questions need to be underlined Firstly, in traditional RPGs, the sessions required the physical proximity of players (i.e. f-t-f communication). This is why, and secondly, there was always a limited number of game participants. Thirdly, the world itself, the characters and actions existed in principle in players' imagination.

The first question (f-t-f interactions) and the second one, depending on the capacity of servers (limited number of players) were overcome with the appearance of MUDs, i.e. Multi-User Dungeons. The first one was created in 1979 by Roy Trubshaw and Richard Bartle from Essex University. In MUDs, the world, characters and actions are communicated via a textual description displayed on the screen of computers connected to the server. After logging into the system, individuals choose (and save on the server) the name of the character, physical appearance, items it possesses, etc., and then begin to play, communicating with other players present in a game by communication interface (chat). It is important that, because the world of MUDs is also encoded in a textual form (i.e. in textual sequences like: you enter a room. You see door on your left and right. Which one you choose?), we observe an important evolution of the Game Master's role. In MUDs, this term to a certain extent relates to programmers-creators of MUD, who rarely or never are present in a game itself, being responsible mostly for the game's "logistics", i.e. encoding of new elements of the game's world (also as a response to players' suggestions) and the general supervision over the course of the game.

Using CMC, traditional RPGs have two fundamental consequences: firstly, players no longer share physical proximity as such, yet they "participate" in a certain imagined "virtual space" the borders of which are defined by the saved system and the scenario of the game and which exists as an information on a server even if no players are logged in. Secondly, in MUDs, we observe a rapid development of textual "non-verbal" communication hidden, for example, in information on names, appearance, mimics and emotions, gestures, physical body reactions, the tone and volume of voice, colours, smells, etc. All these guidelines, besides communication itself and creating a certain level of "intimacy", help to sustain the cohesion of events and the constitute a basis for a particular "social order". It is important to stress, however, that the aspect of non-verbal communication, with regard to RPGs and MUDs, helps to build a platform between the virtual and the "real" reality. Taking into consideration that both MUD and RPG worlds are imaginary spaces, non-verbal communication among real players is actually of secondary importance.

The application of computer graphics to MUDs (so-called graphical MUDs or MMORPGs) changes the third question traditionally ascribed to RPGs, i. e. the imaginary form of games' worlds and char-

acters. Game systems (created in or transmitted to the Internet) appeared as visual, 3D worlds inhabited by moving and synchronically communicating 3D representations of players – avatars. In this way, the traditional role of Game Masters was substituted by "visual mass statement" via computer graphics, addressed to all participants of a particular game. At the same time, players obtained the possibility to present their characters via avatars created from a given range of variations (gender, physical appearance, clothing, etc.) which, from the sociological point of view, brings a meaningful innovation.

Currently, the majority of MMORPGs are commercial ventures, i.e. requiring periodical payments for access to servers and, thanks to the Internet, also global ventures. One of the key aspects of popularity of the given MMORPG is the quality of virtual representation of the world (i. e. the quality of the mass communicate of the world in question) as well as the quality of social interaction tools. As stated by J. Donach, "if they [tools for social communication] are poorly designed, the on-line world may feel like a vast concrete corporate plaza, with a few sterile benches: a place people hurry through on their way to work or home. If the tools are well designed, the on-line world will not only be inhabited, but will be able to support a wide range of interactions and relationships, from close collaboration to casual people watching" (1996, 1.1).

The impact of all the aforementioned developments on our understanding of social interactions and social dynamics can be then perfectly summarized by the same author in the following words: "Champions of the virtual world have long claimed that the features of true community – affiliation, support, a sense of belong – could be found on-line (…). Many social scientists are now in agreement. They point to the support found in sympathetic newsgroups (…), the many opportunities to establish and maintain social ties (…), and the evolution of cooperative strategies (…) as evidence that real and significant social structures exist in the on-line world" (1996: 3.1).

Social forms in the World of Warcraft

The basic social form uniting the World Warcraft (WoW) players is a team. The team is made up of 2–5 players cooperating together to effectively reach the goal or goals impossible to accomplish by a single player. Teamwork gives players experience points (determinants of avatar promotion to subsequent levels), and their quantity depends on the number of players and the levels of defeated *mobs*[7]. Consequently, the points gained are equally distributed among the players. The team, which can be created in various ways (by general chat or by a special group search chat, or by containing known players and asking them to join) is usually formed by a player who needs to complete a *quest* and needs support. The team-forming player becomes instantly the team leader. In an effective team, each character has a spe-

[7] The *mobs,* like players, function on the level system: if a player on level 40 kills a mob on level 20, the quantity of points gained will be rather low.

cific role resulting from the *class* of the avatar. Teamwork and achieving goals often leads players to gaining new items which can be distributed among players, usually by the team leader or randomly if their value is not high. The more worthy items can be used later on by the players to compete with more demanding players or monsters, or can be sold on in-game auctions. The items and the way of their distribution among players in the team lead to a creation of a complex system of goods distribution (known as DKP (Dragon Kill Points) which is a player-created currency used solely to exchange the DKP points for the possibility of getting an item in a team)

Five-man groups can join together to form larger formations known as *raids* (up to 40 players). These groups are capable of finishing the hardest in-game tasks, i. e. *raiding the dungeons* full of most valuable items and extremely strong *mobs*[8]. In PVP realms, players can use this group organization to attack other players, or to create a more effective force in large-scale battles in virtual *battlegrounds*.

Players, apart from creating teams, can make up a more general social form known as *the guild*. The guilds have no maximum member limitations, although to form one, 10 players are needed to sign. The guilds are more or less organized communities, however, the best guilds have features of highly developed social groups. Most commonly, the guilds function outside the game too – on websites and online forums. The highly developed g*uilds* have a developed level of organization, rules players have to obey while participating, and even requirements for new players wanting to join, as to their level, language skills, game experience. During our research, we managed to find guilds requiring even sexual orientation as a recruitment factor (gay and lesbian guilds) and guilds with strict rules of recruitment policy (CV and motivation letter). The intercultural conflicts among players, based on prior in-game experience or simply intolerance, sometimes lead to *guild* rules offensive or even racist towards wanna-be members of different countries, world regions or cultures, although such practice in-game is strictly forbidden. Usually the rules of recruitment demand players to be adult (according to guild masters, teenagers are not happily recruited because of the frequent conflicts with parents and computer bans, resulting in their inability to arrive on raids).

The *guilds* are usually formed on one player's initiative, and after gathering the necessary 10 players he becomes the guild master. With the further development of the *guild*, the leader can set ranks (promote officers) establishing a form of hierarchy inside the guild. Each Guild must have a name (which cannot be offensive) and a logo visible on *avatars*' armor or clothes. The *guilds* create a world of competition among players in the game, and the more creative and

[8] Dungeons are virtual terrains formed solely for the purpose of a large group cooperation. Defeating *mobs* in dungeons gives prizes available nowhere else in the game.

engaged the players are, the bigger the possibility that their guild will become known and recognized among other players. The inside role of the players of one guild is mainly supporting other players, allowing them to accomplish their goals more easily (according to players, guild friends are much more eager to help other guild members in accomplishing goals). The second important factor is the *raid* creation, and most experienced guilds have a highly developed system of organization of large-scale raids. Usually, the officers and guild master try to make sure that all players will arrive in one place at a specified time. If a player fails to participate in subsequent guild raids he can be punished, degraded or kicked out of the guild. Most servers of a WoW game have guild rankings, and players in all realms are very well aware of the biggest guild's position in the hierarchy of their friendliness, openness to new members and, most importantly, their accomplishments in the game. The *guild* membership is one of the most important factors of the *late-game*, i. e. the competition of high-level players. In player's words, without the *guild*, you are nobody in the game, and your status among other players is similar to an outsider. (No guild – no highly organized raids – no raids – no high level items – no items – no further progress – lower status)

It is a matter of prestige for players to be a member of highly recognized guilds. The best guilds recruit only players on the highest (currently 70) level and organize raid groups made up solely of guild members. The invitation to best guilds is regarded or can be compared to recruitment in highly recognized real life institutions. On the other hand, players from high level guilds are subject to the strongest pressure (guilds create probationary periods, demand participating in 8-hour raids, and require constantly a high efficiency in completing goals). In our opinion, the guilds represent the biggest source of structural pressure on players, resulting in serious conflicts among members and guild masters or officers and a guild-to-guild migration of players tired of routine and strict hierarchy (a popular trend is creation of "friends only" guilds, or no strict pressure guilds called, e. g., "Playing for fun", "Just wasting time", etc.).

Communication

The structure of communication in groups has a more or less decentralized character, due to the specificity of the communication medium – the Internet chat. There are several types of chats inside the game, allowing a player to communicate with all players in current location (general chat), players inside the team (party chat), guild (guild chat) or with a single player (whisper). Due to a highly structuralized level of tasks in the game, the groups often create a centralized cooperative organization, with the leader in the central position and (inside raids) a developed leadership structure (officers giving orders to smaller teams inside raids). The leadership in the hardest dungeons requires a very high level of coordination, accurately shown by N. Yee: "The

problem with a complex raid is always the same. Communication. That is the one key factor in an effective [raid]. Not only the ability to communicate with others, but having others listen to and understand what they are supposed to do. The most important lesson I have learned in running large scale raids is to get other player to be quiet and follow orders. Once this is established then the raid goes smoothly. I was able to stop the raid at any point and get players to listen to specific instruction before continuing. One raid in particular was well orchestrated using a Command Chat which had only the group leaders participating. They then relayed the information to their respective groups and followed orders. Anyone who went rogue on the raid was immediately removed from the command chat and left to die. It was a harsh punishment but only rarely happened more than once".[9]

Such situation indicates a limited informational independency of positions not connected with leadership and consequently the lack of the decision-making factor of such players. These factors decrease the satisfaction of group members compensated, on the other hand, by the rewards resulting from an effective task completion and items.

The structure of communication, both on team and guild levels during task completion, points out directly to the position of avatars in the role structure and group stratification. Apart from that, on the guild level, the guild masters are the only individuals communicating the strategy, schedule of events, etc. to the rest of the team. The strong requirement of coordination results in the tendency of a large number of players to act negatively on the efficiency of group communication: the more members in the guild, the higher the level of informational saturation of the guild leader, resulting in the development of leadership structure (improving the roles of officers) and a higher informational dependency of guild members and their lower satisfaction. Because of that, the factor of communication leads, together with the aspect of interpersonal attractiveness patterns and functional aspect of the quantity of players necessary for raids, to a structural limitation of players in one guild. The outside game development of players and their need to cooperate faster and more effectively forces the search for better methods of communication inside the groups, based on the sound rather than the text. Currently, the majority of players inside the guilds communicate via voice chats rather than solely text CMCs.

The term *group culture* in WoW society refers mainly to the guild aspect as the most stable group structure inside the game. Much information considering the rules of the guild, its general character, aims and values, as well as information about sanctions can be found on guild websites. Some guilds create a more developed structure of information considering their purposes, needs or even the sex orientation of players; for example, the Prismatic Champions guild advertised as one of the first gay-friendly guilds in the WoW game.

The conformist requirement towards group rules is an attempt of creating and maintaining a necessary level of group co-

[9] http://www.nickyee.com/daedalus/archves/000859.php?page=3

herency, based on punitive structures and patterns of interpersonal attractiveness. Group coherency allows the group to apply more pressure on the members, resulting in a higher efficiency of the group. Insubordination towards the set of rules can result in firing a player or in some situations banning all communication with the player by all guild members (ignore function).

Origin, culture and language as in-game factors of player's attractiveness in guild structures

During our study, we have found that the guild organization on European servers we made our research on has a very strong tendency to develop more and more regulations regarding the cultural aspects of real people, rather than in-game avatars. The initially contempted tendency to create national guilds (recruiting only Poles, Russians, Norwegians, etc.) has recently become more popular due to the ever growing demand of better communication. Guild masters we spoke with told about communication problems with people speaking bad English, forcing, as they say, some of them to ban players from non-English speaking countries. On the other hand, many people have found the tendency of players from the same country to speak their language so irritating that they do not accept people from selected countries, stating that they create groups inside guilds, not allowing other players to understand what they are speaking about. Less commonly, arguments about cultural differences are used, and usually they are based on an individual player's behaviour and generalized on his country's culture. Many players have found political correctness to be the best method of avoiding conflicts resulting in a guild breakdown, which caused many guilds to create strict regulations as regards sanctions to people who insult others because of their race, sex, beliefs, etc. The Blizzard company, the creator of WoW, has also an in-game policy of banning insultive players from the game for 24-hour periods.

A bigger conflict can be seen between, generally speaking, Europeans and Asians. European players show a variety of forms of racism and hatred towards Chinese players, treating all Chinese-speaking players as *Chinese farmers* – people who do not play the game for fun, but for profit (Chinese players are known in the community to sell the ingame currency, gold, for real currency through e-bay). We have also encountered a negative attitude towards players that have not achieved their level themselves, but bought a ready 70-level character on the Internet auction (the price of such avatar ranges averagely from 100 to 500 U.S. dollars). Usually such behavior is connected with the origin of the player (common opinion heard among players: *People from India are all a bunch of e-bays*, i. e. they have all bought their characters on auctions and can't play the game well). Apart from these examples, it is rather difficult to determine cultural aspects as important for most of the guilds, and usually their policy of recruitment is based on much more practical issues (knowledge of language for a better communication and cooperation, 18+ age for a better raid frequency).

A very interesting issue of the WoW

game is the relation of male players towards female players. From the guild masters point of view, female players are better officers and usually allow a better community cohesion to appear. Due to the fact that the number of female players is still not very high, the guilds often have milder recruitment policies towards females, and their advancement in the guild hierarchy can be quicker. On the other hand, some players argue that with the increase of females in a guild many new problems arise, pointing out to a higher level of competition among female players and their generalized tendency to cause conflicts among male players. A very common and interesting feature of WoW communities is in-game weddings. The ceremony is treated more or less seriously, but usually gathers much attention and is very commonly filmed and put on guild websites.

With the continuation of our research on Internet societies, lately concentrated on WoW community, we have noticed a very big change in the attitude of the majority of players. First, almost everybody treated MMORPG as a method of relaxation and sought the fastest method of becoming rather powerful than popular. Currently, with the increase of knowledge of people who play the game we can see that many players are more interested in other players than in the game, itself. What at first was only a means to reach the goals of the game, e. g. is communication, has become one of the factors making people play the game for the third year on. What we find both fascinating and frightening is the level of engagement of people belonging to the community. A quarrel with the teammate seems to evoke as much emotions as a quarrel with a schoolfriend, a harsh message from guild master is treated like a warning from a boss in a large company, and a general assault of players from a guild on one player can result in his migration to another server. With the group structure of virtual communities, so similar to a small group structure in real life, the high level of player organization and hours spend with people sharing, as they say, the same passion on voice and text chats, new questions for inquiry, not only of sociological, but also of anthropological and philosophical importance start to arise. The simulation and the Internet communication such as the one in MMOPRG have certainly become something more than just a, bizarre way of wasting time, if more and more of the 9 million people involved treat it as the only means to communicate with others: "A strong motivation for me and, what has most propably caused my addiction, is cooperation and coexistence with others in a perfect and effective group. The aims are not important, we can gather experience or farm a dungeon to get some items for somebody, when everything is running smoothly and everyone does what he should, then I feel great. (…) When my group achieves something what nobody before had achieved, it is for me a source of great joy and satisfaction as well as frustration, because even if everything goes well but somebody does something wrong, I get angry and the conflict is in the air. (…) Interaction with others, possibility of relying on them and their trust in me… these are the causes I play the game" (WoW player, 20 years old).

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TARPKULTŪRINĖ KOMUNIKACIJA IR INTERNETAS: TARPKULTŪRINĖS KOMUNIKACIJOS VAIDMUO INTERNETO BENDRUOMENĖSE

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S a n t r a u k a

Straipsnyje pateikiama tarpkultūrinės komunikacijos, egzistuojančios interneto bendruomenėse, analizė, atlikta bendradarbiaujant su grupės MMORPG (angl. *Massive Multiplayer Online Role Playing Games*) nariais. Šio tyrimo tikslas buvo parodyti, kad interneto bendruomenės linkusios turėti gana išvystytas organizacines struktūras, įgalinančias jų narius dirbti kartu atliekant intelektines užduotis. Nors MMORPG tradicinė akis į akį komunikacija yra pakeičiama kompiuterių perduodama komunikacija (angl. *computer mediated communication*), vis tiek galima pamatyti, kaip formuojasi specifinės grupės kultūra. Tyrimo metu nustatytas dar vienas svarbus veiksnys – interneto bendruomenėse, kurias sudaro MMORPG nariai iš skirtingų kultūrų, pasaulio religijų, matyti, kad kultūriniai jų sąveikos aspektai ne tik atsiskleidžia iš jų veiksmų, bet taip pat turi didelę įtaką žaidėjo elgsenai ar grupės organizavimui. Ilgo bendradarbiavimo veiksnys rodo, kad tarp žaidėjų, priklausančių MMORPG, yra susiformavusių specifinių komunikacijos formų ir integruojanti grupės kultūra.