

# Gaming against gender stereotypes to fight gender-based violence

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## ABSTRACT

The effectiveness of gamification for educational purposes, especially if connected to supporting the tackling of social issues, such as the prevention of gender-based violence, remains under-researched.<sup>1</sup> We asked: “can a game produce beneficial effects for individuals and the society?”<sup>2</sup>, or rather: “can an online resource, such as a game, support the fight against gender stereotypes, against gender-based violence and contribute to the prevention of sexual violence?”. Starting from the potential impact of video games on players and society, and from a reflection about the strong linkages between gendered representations, gender stereotypes, and gender-based violence, the transnational EU-funded project “CONVEY – Counteracting sexual violence and harassment: Engaging Youth in schools in digital education on gender stereotyping” set out to develop a video game that would raise awareness about gender stereotypes and the sexualisation of women (and men!), especially in digital media, and even aspire to be an agent for behavioural change amongst young people. The development of the game design was carried out through a participatory approach, directly engaging groups of young people and survivors of sexual violence or harassment in the drafting of its script, and an “embedded design” approach, that would support conveying the message of the project without solely focusing on it or being too obvious about its intent.<sup>3</sup>

The “point-and-click” game of the CONVEY project features an investigation style of gameplay, highlighting both the criminal nature of abuses and at the same time supporting the agency of the players, who will feel more involved and empathetic with the survivors whose crimes they are solving. CESIE, Coordinator of the project, is working with Sylphelabs S.r.l. towards the technical development of the video game, which is now ready for beta-testing.

Once finalised, CESIE and the whole project partnership will couple the game with one training programme for teachers and one for students, which will be delivered in schools across the project countries (Italy, Bulgaria, Cyprus, Greece, Ireland, and UK). A

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<sup>1</sup> Dicheva, D., Diche, C., Agre, G. & Angelova, G. (2015). Gamification in Education: A Systematic Mapping Study. *Educational Technology & Society*, 18 (3).

<sup>2</sup> Kaufman, G., & Flanagan, M. (2015). A psychologically embedded approach to designing games for prosocial causes. *Cyberpsychology: Journal of Psychosocial Research on Cyberspace*, 9(3), article 5.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid.

behavioural change study will be implemented simultaneously to measure the effectiveness of the game and of the educational structure provided through the training programmes to sway attitudes and behaviours of young people (and players) towards gender stereotypes.

The final step of the CONVEY project will be to advocate to include the game and training programmes in the regular curriculum of secondary schools across Europe; this aim is supported by research.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> Ke, F. (2009). A Quantitative Meta-Analysis of Computer Games as Learning Tools. *Handbook of Research on Effective Electronic Gaming in Education*, IGI Global, New York, pp. 1-32.