SAVE IT: Saving the dream of a grassroots sport based on values

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Abstract. SAVE IT is an European collaborative partnership project, which allows to several groups of stakeholders with different backgrounds on sports, education or computer engineering, to collaborate in this experience whose main goal is to support innovative and educational approaches to reduce and prevent violence and tackle racism, discrimination, and intolerance in grassroots sports as football. This general goal is a relevant issue with an international dimension (e.g. discrimination episodes at grassroots level have taken places in virtually all Member States in the European Union). Reducing violence in sports is an important issue that has been incorporated into the European politics, and it is also clear that large disparities exist between Member States about how to handle these problems. The SAVE IT project will design a learning methodology oriented to grassroots sports in order to reduce violence, racism and discrimination, by promoting the recognition of sports values and teaching to the main target groups (kids, youngsters, coaches). For this purpose, it will be designed two kind of learning materials; on the one hand, development of learning modules to educate on values to be used to by coaches. On the other hand, development of contents for serious games with the goal of being used by kids and young practitioners. The innovative aspect of this project is based on the designing of new didactic materials to teach sport values, and new educational tools based on gamification, that will be used to reach these target groups through training activities.

Keywords: Serious Games, Sports, Tolerance, Interactive Learning Environments, Gamification

1 Introduction

Sport is a human activity resting on fundamental social, educational and cultural values. It is a factor making for integration, involvement in social life, tolerance, acceptance of differences and playing by the rules[1].For many people, sports and in particular football, is part of their identity. However, many of these people, especially young people, take their frustration with them to the pitch or to the

stadium. Playing the sport of football has been associated with violence since its beginnings in 13th century England. Nowadays football is still confronted with a number of threats such as violence, racism, discrimination and intolerance, among others [2].

Those threats challenge the fundamental values of European political and cultural integration. Equally, racism and violence in grassroots sport jeopardise the role of sport as an important contributor in the fields of education and social inclusion and its capacity to generate jobs and economic growth.Undoubtedly, sport is a growing social and economic phenomenon which makes an important contribution to the European Union's strategic objectives of solidarity and prosperity [3]. Despite efforts in this field, the prevalence of violence and racism in sports, and more specifically in football, is well-known in Europe.

In this context emerged the SAVE IT project (Saving the dream of a grassroots sport based on values). SAVE IT is a European project belongs to the Programme Erasmus + SPORT. In this project there are involved a mix of complementary participating organisations working in the field of football and / or education from different European countries such as: Cultural y Deportiva Leonesa (Spain); Universidad Autónoma of Madrid (Spain); Altum Foundation (Spain); Fare Network (UK); KAS Eupen (Belgium); Lask Linz (Austria); Piacenza Calcio (Italy); Boavista FC (Portugal), and Association Internationale de la Presse Sportive - AIPS (Switzerland - Italy).

The main goal of SAVE IT project is to promote the recognition of the sport values as a key element for fighting against intolerance, racism and other forms of discrimination, for promoting integration, and draw attention to its relevance for the integral development of our youngsters. The project will be focused on football, although its results and impacts will be transferred to other sports.

Next section will provides a brief introduction related to the initiatives carried out in Europe tor fight against any kind of discrimination in the sports. Section 3 shows a description related to different technologies as Virtual Worlds or serious games that could be used to reach some of the SAVE IT goals. Finally, Section 4 describes the methodology of the SAVE IT project to develop a potential serious game that could be employed to promote social integration between youngsters.

2 Previous Initiatives

In the European Policies, generally, children are encouraged to enroll in sports activities. Studies show how some sport activities has been contributed with the reduction of the delinquent behavior and increased academic and social performance [4].

In this way, reducing violence in sports is certainly being taken seriously across Europe, and a number of initiatives have been launched; here are several examples: The Football People Action Weeks that challenge discrimination and celebrate the contribution that people make to football with events that increase social inclusion by bringing people of different communities together through sport. The When Racism Wins, Sport Loses campaign in the Netherlands, No al

Razzismo in Italy, and the Europe-wide initiative, All Different All Equal are other examples [5].

In Spain, different campaigns have been developed to prevent violence and promote sportspersonship in sports, including grassroots sports, and one example of this is the campaign called count to three. In this campaign, three points were emphasized: (1) Cheer for effort as much as for success, (2) Respect decisions from coaches and officials, and (3) Show sportspersonship [6].

3 Education in tolerance through Games

Play is an important contributor to human development, maturation, and learning. Despite, the majority of research has focused on the negative effects of video game playing due to an abundance of studies on violent games. Thus, these studies does not reflect the potential of video games as a medium for promote educational values [7].

Games technology is widely available, fun and entertaining for people of all ages.Its utilization combined with traditional training and educational approaches it could provide one of the most powerful tool of knowledge transfer in almost every application domain. [8].In this sense, tools like Virtual Worlds (VW) or serious game have demonstrated a great potent for the education.

The interesting to explore the potential of Virtual Words to promote cultural values and language learning has been increasing from the past decade [9]. Virtual Worlds (VWs) have become a very popular application that has been used in different fields, from games (including serious and educational games) to simulation or education [10]. This is mainly due the highly immerse environment provided by these VW. In these environments it is not only possible to see, hear and touch virtual objects, but also to create, edit and manipulate them as if they were physical objects [11]. For this reason, and their attractive of 3D environments, and the sense of realism for the users who access them, it is a very useful tool for promoting social values between students [12]. According Kaplan [13], Virtual worlds are probably the ultimate manifestation of Social Media, as they provide the highest level of social presence and media richness of a great of majority applications studied.

Since 2002, an increase a Serious Games production has been observed in sectors like military defense, education, corporate and health sectors[8]. A serious game is a *computer application, for which the original intention is to combine with consistency, both serious aspects such as non-exhaustive and non-exclusive, teaching, learning, communication, or the information, with playful springs from the video game* [14].

Although there exist a huge number of games, there are really few efforts to develop games based on sport values and their rules. However, serious games can be a perfect complement to the entire educational community in the purpose of transmitting knowledge. But also can be very useful for education based on values such as those comprising a grassroots sports, especially at an early age, so primary and secondary students would be an excellent target for this new kind

of serious games. When one player spend 40 hours gaming, learns not only new vocabulary and concepts, but also systems of thinking ways of seeing the world which could be applied toward the respect for the diversity [15].

In this project, it opted to used serious games as alternative to traditional training methods due to they are embedded with sport education teaching/learning strategies and other elements more attractive for the youngsters. Furthermore, serious games can facilitate the focus on specific and intentional learning outcomes in order to achieve sustained changes in performance and behavior.

To develop this kind of games it is possible to use a large number of technologies based on game developing, from traditional 2D and 3D software developments kits for video consoles as Xbox or PlayStation (Unity 3D is maybe the most popular example), to more lightweight technologies as HMTL5/JavaScript that allows to develop simple games on 2D (or 3D) that can be executed on traditional Web browsers. So, these lightweight technologies, provides a good number of software frameworks (as Phaser, Construct 2, ImpactJS, pixi.js, Three.js,.) which can be used to design, develop and finally deploy a game within SAVE IT project. All these technologies allow to create low cost games that can be used by a huge number of users (or players) and that are multiplatform so it is possible to run these games in a large number of popular electronic devices (tablets, smartphones, PC,...) [16].

4   Methodology

As it was described in Section 1, the main goal of SAVE IT project is to support innovative and educational approaches to grassroots sports in order to contain violence, racism, discrimination and intolerance in grassroots football, promoting the recognition of sports values and teaching these to the target groups (kids, youngsters, coaches) and other: referees, parents, fans, spectators, the mass media and organizations) as key elements in fighting against such threats, and to draw attention to the integrated development of youngsters.

In summary, the overall goal of this project can be summarized into two specific goals:

- Development of learning modules to educate on values to be used to by coaches.
- Development of contents for serious games with the goal to being used by kids and young practitioners.

To achieve previous goals, a complete methodology has been established. The first step, will focus on collecting and identification the information related to positive events that take place in European countries, taking into account, the successful cases about athletes both in grassroots and professional football, or any sports in general. In addition, all of them have stood out as a reference for good sport practice and for defending sport values such as respect, tolerance, cooperation, responsibility, courtesy, integration and dialogue.

The second step will be to analyze the information gathered and produced from a **Guide of Best Practices in Sport Values** in both grassroots and professional football, and in the field of sports in general, with the aim of promoting these values and disseminating these cases among sports organizations, clubs and associations, public authorities, the mass media, and society in general.

Once, these information have been analyzed and structured, the next step will be to develop training materials that will be tailored for the purpose of taking into account the different target groups. The training will focus on teaching values such as respect, tolerance, cooperation, dialogue, promote respect for differences, and to learn from others. The learning material will be developed and tailored differently by taking into account two main target groups:

- Direct: On the one hand, children and young practitioners on grassroots sports will learn through serious games; and on the other hand coaches on grassroots sports will do the same through online contents complemented with workshops, and once the training is completed they will get a certificate of recognition as Leaders in values.
- Indirect: We will work in sports values with parents/families, sport organizations, fans and spectators and mass media through different learning and information means (brochures, posters, campaigns, news, etc.).

According the target groups, previously defined (kids, youngsters, coaches) the training materials will have two different formats:

- Serious Games for the youngest practitioners.Through didactic games and learning materials, young practitioners will learn how sports can be a great way to make new friends, become more understanding of each other, and develop important personal strengths.
- Online format for coaches.Through practical workshops, coaches will discover firsthand the views of experts in the field, capable of discussing these approaches, and will learn how to best apply these teaching techniques in their work as coaches on Leaders in Values.

Finally, the training and testing phase, the serious game development will be put through a quality process (a trial and error process) that will look for: easy accessibility, adequacy to educational purposes, flexibility for a common European use, and adaptability to an online use,etc. It will be Implemented and tested on the field of the previously developed educational tool, evaluating their usefulness and impact over the target groups (coaches, trainers, parents, children, youngsters, young athletes enrolled in grassroots sport clubs).

5 Conclusion

Europe has demonstrated a special sensitivity in tackling this problem by offering the opportunity to study this phenomenon through European projects and creating programs to confront it. Therefore, it is absolutely necessary to create

tools and educational programs to prevent and protect football practitioners, especially in grassroots football, from these harmful practices.

An important thought related to SAVE IT project, is based on the idea to change the values in youth sport and prevent violence, discrimination and intolerance, through education. To allow this it will be necessary to change the contingencies of the sport context as well, especially the ones related to parents, fans, clubs and spectators, in the sense of rewarding supportive behaviour towards referees and coaches and applauding fair play behaviour and respect toward opponents.

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