INTERVIEW

with *Mr. Erik Reuvers,*

Consultant Media Literacy / Consultant Search Engine Advertising

to *Eva Semertzaki,* editor *Synergasia*

The 9th International Conference of the Committee for the Support of Libraries was held in Athens at the Eugenides Foundation on 15-16 November 2013. The topic of the conference was Education and Libraries in the Digital Age. Mr. Erik Reuvers, Consultant Media Literacy / Consultant Search Engine Advertising, was one of the distinguished speakers who talked about the state of gaming in Dutch libraries. Although Mrs. Janta van Lienden, member of the Committee, was so kind to arrange a meeting with Erik for the interview, for family reasons I had to cancel the live interview. Consequently, this interview is being feasible by using email as the communication tool.

ES. Mr. Reuvers, how did you decide to get involved in the development of games and how have you connected your job with libraries? Tell us about your professional activities.

ER. I've always been drawn to gaming – and started out quite young. When I was 18 I got the chance to work at a gaming company, and I worked my way up from there. At some point in time, the library of Rotterdam approached us to ask if we could help them with gaming to reach young kids. It grew gradually from there, and since 3 years I've been working for ProBiblio using the lessons I learned in the game industry and bringing them to libraries, although my topic of interest has become much broader: media literacy.

ES. What are the collection development policies for libraries regarding games? How do you think libraries, and especially public libraries, can benefit when they introduce games for their clients?

ER. The market in The Netherlands is difficult when it comes to games. Libraries are free to let people play any game physically within the library, but if a library wishes to lend the game to its customers only certain titles can be used. The collections that libraries hold vary greatly – some decide not to include 16+ or 18+ titles, some focus only on family games with a 3+ PEGI rating.

Gaming is a huge market, and it will only become larger in the future. Libraries are sometimes seen as boring, dusty places and gaming can help change this. I like to see games as virtual story tellers; in essence they are no different from books.

ES. It is usually believed that it is harmful for the mental and physical health of children to sit in front of a screen for a long time. How do games contribute to the intellectual development of children, if so?

ER. There are many research papers out there that argue that gaming is a positive activity for both mental and physical development, and naturally there are research papers that come to the opposite conclusion. I don't advocate children playing games for 8 hours a day – I believe all things must be done in moderation. We can argue the growth of cognitive skills, hand eye coordination, multitasking etc. but essentially we are talking about a fun activity! Libraries have a role in this as well, as they are seen as institutions for families. Children should be allowed to play, but for moderate amounts of time.

ES. In the past, the socialization of children was achieved with traditional games and toys. Do you think that young people miss the opportunity to get socialized as a result of modern computer gaming and how?

ER. Yes and no, physical contact and interaction can be missed during video gaming, and in no way is digital contact a substitution for physical interaction. But to say, as some do, that people sitting at home playing video games lack social lives or that they do no interact is clearly false – nearly every game has a communication platform. If you play video games and stay in touch with friends across the world like this, and still go out with your friends to the movies etc. there shouldn't be a problem. If gaming isolates the person completely, it's an entirely different story – parents and guardians have a role to play here in making sure moderation is applied.

ES. Among others, there are educational and entertainment games. What categories of games do you suggest as the most appropriate for collection development?

ER. The games a library offers to play within the building should not have a playtime longer than 15 minutes or so. This makes sure that children don't come in to play multiple hours at a time. Also, they should not have a PEGI rating over 12, as you want it to be broadly accepted.

If we're talking about games people can take out and play at home, you need to see what

developers are ok with their games being used in such a way. In the Netherlands we have deals with a number of developers – some allow us to lend all games to customers, others only allow some, and still others allow no games to be lent out.

ES. What kinds and categories of games are usually introduced in Dutch libraries and what types of libraries are they addressed to?

ER. In the Netherlands we use gaming within normal libraries. University libraries are an entirely different entity – I have little to no experience with them. Games like Mario Kart still work very well within Dutch libraries because the games are short, you are able to play together and you are able to have a competition within the game!

ES. Video games and other categories require specific equipment to operate. In my perspective, this infrastructure is expensive and at the same time, it becomes obsolete quickly. How can a library afford to replace the equipment for games in order to become competitive with other playgrounds?

ER. It depends on what you wish to achieve as a library. Budgets are always low, so you can't have a goal that sets the bar too high. As a library, you don't need to have the best or newest equipment – you just need to have a fun collection so people that don't have the equipment at home, can still enjoy it! It's not so much about what you have; it's about what you do with it!

ES. Does the library have any reason to keep dated games and infrastructure in its collection for historical reasons or is it necessary and costly to replace it?

ER. A lot of older games carry a lot of nostalgia with them. Games like Pong, Pacman and Mario never really go out of style – people are always drawn to them. I think libraries should focus on the role they can play for the community – if there are groups around that already play older games, invite them to do it in the library! Figure out what you can do with them. As I said before, as a library it's not possible to have the best most modern collection – but you can cater to a mainstream audience.

ES. With computer/video games young people may become computer literate but they lose contact with the print world of books. How do you react to this statement?

ER. Games may prevent people from picking up books at that time, but they are still reading within the game, and experiencing a story with character development. It may not be a

paper book, but it is a story in every way! We need libraries that connect with young people, and this is a way to do it. Perhaps paper books can connect with the game with similar plot structures and circumstances.

ES. There are educational components in the entertainment games. Which are the characteristics a developer should have in mind in order to create a game that libraries can include in their collections and present to users without being harmful?

ER. First of all it needs to be a family focused game – it should be playable by children and adults alike, with a competitive element within the game. Ideally the game should be finished within 15 minutes and should let multiple people play at a time. Besides that they should be void of any 12+ material like violence, drugs, cursing etc.

ES. In your opinion, how can a library utilize the games in its collection in order to get a return of investment? Would you suggest any marketing tips to librarians in order to make games attractive to the community of users?

ER. I would say: start small. You are entirely dependent on what consoles people have at home. Maybe there are a lot of xbox's out there, but maybe it's Wii's. Realize that the people that rent the games will probably be mothers. Try out a starting collection with some Wii games, and some Nintendo DS – and figure out what people want to rent! Then go from there – make decisions based on the lending of games. And draw attention to the fact that you have this new feature! Report it to local media, newspaper etc. and get in touch with youths to tell them about this!

ES. It is conceived that when we are thinking about games our mind correlates them with children and teenagers. Are there games addressed to older people in Dutch libraries?

ER. Some games can easily be used for older people. Think of simple games like Wii bowling – everyone knows how to bowl, and it's a very natural sort of game to play in a video game. The same goes for most racing games. Elderly people want to play games, but there's a real barrier since they don't know how to play. You have to be patient with them, and stimulate them a little, but once they get going…

We had great success with bringing young people together with older people to play video games. Young people are the teachers ☺

ES. Are there any evaluation tools for a librarian before acquiring games for the library?

ER. Think of the demographic of the library – what type of people are members and what type of games do they play? What could the library offer them?

Other than that, make sure that you are up to date with publishers and rights when you lend games to customers – you don't want to face a lawsuit!

ES. A meaning of the new term 'gamification' is the combination of learning and fun. Could you please elaborate more on it?

ER. Gamification can be described as the implementing of game principles in real world situations. They make the world a fun place to work and learn. Think of examples like musical stairs – they make noise when you take a step, making it more fun to take the stairs. Gaming teaches us that it's alright to have fun – if we can let people enjoy education the same way we enjoy gaming today, the world would become a better place for it.

ES. How do you foresee the evolution of games in libraries?

ER. I think it depends on the library and its targeted audience. Taking budgets into account we cannot easily have an up to date collection and compete with home situations for young people – but we can create a place where people can come together and enjoy games, and lend games. I hope that gaming will be embraced within libraries the way music and DVD's have, but this will take time…

ES. I would like to thank you very much for allocating time to reply to those questions. The information you provide is significant for Greek librarians who either would like to introduce games in their libraries or evaluate and make them more attractive for users.