



21<sup>ST</sup> CENTURY:  
THE  
GAMIFICATION  
OF LIFE

What will it be?  
Break down or *break out*?



“Barbecues and ballgames, is that it?”

In the 21<sup>st</sup> century the very meaning of “change” is changing.

In all human history change was the exception, not the rule: change was what happened between two stabilities.

Now, in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, stability is a short moment of equilibrium or stability in the flow of constant and unpredictable change.

We are, however, still living our lives, including most of our working lives, with the mind-sets of the old centuries, and change and even more constant change is regarded a threat to stability, to predictability.

This causes stress, anxiety, depression, uncertainty and fumbling in the quest for possible life directions.

21<sup>st</sup> century change means the dissolution of solid structures, such as lifelong employment, family, social security, belonging and community cultures.

Of course such dissolution has been going on for decades, even for centuries.

But in the 21<sup>st</sup> century such dissolution becomes the overarching dynamics of the society, making constant and pervasive change the normal state of affairs, not the exception, not a momentary crisis.

In the 21<sup>st</sup> century most people cannot expect to enjoy lifelong employment. One will need to manage mixed professional careers, including considerable career shifts and times of unemployment, part time jobs or project based jobs.

One will increasingly need to create own jobs, projects, enterprises and to engage in on the flight learning and capacity building all along the life span.

Some time ago: my father was a carpenter; therefore I will be a carpenter.

Then later: my father was a worker, but now I can join higher education and become a dentist - for life.

Now: what most people can look forward to are mixed working lives, full of surprises and unexpected challenges, and full of changes, be that forced or voluntary changes.

Marriage and family is regarded the most stabile factor in most people's lives. It's for life. Even as recently most people are divorced at some point and live in mixed families, marriage and family is still regarded a lifelong engagement, and divorce a threat, a crisis, something disturbing and disrupting.

Leaving ones country and culture is for the few; for adventurers and people in exceptional circumstances, such as ambassadors, researchers, football players or business creators.

Changing country and culture is regarded a major drama in one's life and is only for the few.

Similar patterns are true for almost all fields of life and work.

Our mind-sets automatically seek stability and try to counter change.

This is why entrepreneuring is not a natural option for most people. Entrepreneuring is risk-taking and for most of us such adventures should be avoided - as should unemployment, part time jobs, short-term project contracting, etc.

In the 21<sup>st</sup> century realities, change is increasingly forced upon us. We are the objects of change affecting more and more people's lives and work.

But we instinctly resist. We fight back and develop countering mechanisms, supported by public policy and administration still deeply rooted in the mind-sets of old societies.

Such changes have taken place for many decades and perhaps even centuries.

What is different in the 21<sup>st</sup> century is that change becomes intrusive, embracing more and more structures of life and work and becomes still more present in people's lives.

Of course, from a very theoretical point of view this is simply the climax and result of the entire history of capitalism, along with its quantum leaps of globalization, but all this doesn't matter much. What matters is that constant change and dissolution of solid structures are making their way into the everyday lives of people.

In the 21<sup>st</sup> century the very meaning of "change" is changing, we said.

Change is no longer an identifiable phenomenon; different forms of changes are interacting, generating new changes and change patterns and creating unpredictable almost stochastic outcomes and situations.

Ironically, in times of increasing "control" through advanced technology and Big Data, the world is becoming increasingly unpredictable.

Where does all this lead?

In our context it leads to serious reflections on what learning, education and capacity building means in the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

Celebrated 21<sup>st</sup> century lifelong competences are for example digital fluency, problem solving and language skills, and even the ability to learn to learn.

*What about the capacity to manage constant and life-wide change?*

Is our entire education and learning culture still producing and retaining outdated mentality about life and work?

Are we still being invited to struggle against and fear constant life-wide change?

The rhetoric of the opportunities of change has made its way to most European and national policy these days.

However, it remains rhetoric as long as people still fears and tries to counter change, strongly supported by public safety-first and control mentality.

The capacity to manage change, constant and life-wide change, is not optional, it is a clear-cut need for more and more people at all levels and in all sectors of the European societies. Change is a reality, *the* reality.

And, believe me, it has just started.

The lack of capacity to manage change will produce all sorts of negative impacts on economy and social and personal life in the future.

Fearing and countering change might be called the new epidemic lifestyle disease.

Its wider threats to social life, coherence, health and sustainability are almost unimaginable.

*How can we work with people to bring about new change mind-sets, to lead them in a direction from being an object of change to becoming a subject of change?*

*How can we include this mission in our culture, education system and in social practice?*

Clever people will not hesitate: let's create an adult education course for change management!

If you have traditional adult education courses in mind, forget it!

Any attempt to work with people to develop new mind-sets on change needs to go *epic*.

What does that mean?

It means that only holistic, deep and life story related processes are likely to have an impact on people's conception of constant and life-wide change,

including such complex structures as emotions, self-images and how one imagine one's life circle and the meanings of this life circle.

In short, people will need to re-create their life story to be able to not only manage but appreciate, connect to and "live" change. It will take no less than a sea change, as stated by the European Commission in connection with the call for a cultural revolution in education.

No classroom course will do the job.

What is needed is long-term change processes integrated in people's lives, based on real-life activities and changing minds through taking action and experiencing the results of their actions.

⇒ *This is where gamification comes in...*

Not the populist and superficial version of "gamification" paving its ways into the market these days, but gamification in its potential and full-blooded meaning of a set of existential principles and values, "how you see yourself and the world", with the capacity to change paradigms of thinking, self-images and acting.

Gamification in its serious versions is about changing mentality.

Some time ago religion was able to offer people a coherent way of thinking about life and one's place in life.

Later on science, growth and consumption tried to take over this role, but not very successfully, as this paradigm did not penetrate well into the life-wide needs of people.

Perhaps this is one of the reasons that we are so fragile in our response to change: the science, growth and consumption paradigm did not offer substantial life philosophies for most people.

Why think about *gamification of life* as a technique to help manage change?

Some people would argue, from a mathematical or philosophical point of view, that life is already a game: your destiny is played by where you are born, what you experience along your life, who you meet, and if you have a traffic accident. This certainly makes one's life game-like and far from being planned and controlled.

However, as the clever German philosopher Hegel explained, life might be a game "an sich", but not yet "für uns".

It means that life is not experienced as a game by most people. It also means that the game of life cannot be made useful to us, unless we take over life as a game, or precisely: gamify that life "for us" that was already in itself a game.

By the way, the fundamental gameness of life is precisely what makes it possible to gamify it, for us.

All this might sound somewhat crooked.

But there is a point.

The gamification of life means that one regards life as a game, a game to be played, and a game in which you can lose or win or both.

Gamified mentality dramatically changes for example life expectancy: you really don't know what will happen, even after a long university education, but you know you need to play to win, and to win you need to take any opportunity to make progress, to exploit the new situation and to make the best out of what is available in that moment.

In such epic games, nothing is for life. In fact the very idea of the game or the drama is that any equilibrium, any harmony or any clever plan will be challenged.

In this way gamification help one deal with change.  
In this optic change is expected, even wanted, as it offers new opportunities to play the game and win.

This 21<sup>st</sup> century mind-set is totally different from the religious mind-sets based on destiny.

Perhaps life *is* destiny, or a game or totally stochastic.

We don't care what life "is" in itself. What we care about is how to play the game that life has become to us; how to play it well, and how to regard a loss as yet another opportunity to get into the game.

For some very special people, it was always like this. A few people always played life as a game; some won, some lost.

However, today in 21<sup>st</sup> century Europe, we all of a sudden witness a lot of people becoming *life changers*, whether forced or voluntary life changers.

We even witness projects and other initiatives for life changers and for people who wish to help and support such life change.

The process of especially forced life change very much resembles what we call the gamification of life.

A forced life change is triggered by one or more dramatic attacks on your normal life, taking you far away from well-planned and well-conceived life perspectives and challenging you with managing your life in very different ways, and doing that through developing very different mind-sets.

What life changers often do along their life change process is precisely to gamify their life.

They learn, often from hard work and many struggles, to meet change, to manage change, to get back into the game after a serious set-back and to start seeing change as opportunities, not simply as threats.

To make a long story short, let's try to indicate, mostly for further discussion and reflection, some of the many changes in mentality that such gamification can bring about - if managed well, if reaching the proper epic levels and if full-bloodedly unfolded:

Opportunity is not something that is given to you; it is something that you take

Change is expected; static situations are unproductive, but can be used as time-outs

Change becomes a "lifestyle", a way of seeing things

What you win is not for good; it must be re-won, and perhaps you will lose it

You need to take some risks; if not, you will not win

You will need to address new challenges or obstacles in new ways; if not you will disappear in the crowd

You need alliances to win games; to team up with people going in your direction

Sometimes rule-breaking is necessary to overcome new and unforeseen difficulties or challenges

Along constant change you might need to create something that was not there, and re-create it if needed: economy, work, social life

Stakeholders, institutions and people in the community are all players in the game; you need to get them into *your* game

Playing the game gives you pride, satisfaction and self-confidence; not playing does not

If you lose, it's of less use to blame globalization, the politicians or your neighbour: you need to play the game differently

Should you need to leave the game for different reasons, those moments are opportunities to re-mobilize and get back in the game

Playing the game does not mean that you are at war; pride can only be gained from fair-play and from respecting your co-players and their achievements

Playing the game does not mean that you should act without proper orientation: you can only play the game well if you are able to estimate your options, resources and the possible outcomes

Playing the game does not mean that you should act irresponsibly: in fact life games are governed by very important ethics, such as respect, fair-deal and supporting others

The important thing is that most people living in the 21<sup>st</sup> century need to build capacity to manage and develop new mind-sets to cope with and benefit from constant and life-wide change.

If not, they will find themselves helplessly struggling in the water streams of exponentially increasing change curves, affecting their lives without them being able to respond.

The challenge to European policy and institutions is to find ways to integrate *dealing with change* and *gamification of life* into the communities of societal activity.

Included in this mission is to start supporting people and institutions gamifying work and life, based on trust, and stop blocking such change through excessive control measures and bureaucratic procedures.



PS

And, by the way...

Gamification in its full potential can also help many people escape the endless boredom of consumption and monotony, we inherited from the industrial society, and make individual life matter, make it important, bouncy and alert... make it *epic*.