Group for Gaming
in International Relations

a spin-off of Humboldt-Universität zu Berlin's gamelab.berlin
part of Humboldt-Universität zu Berlin's Humboldt-Innovation GmbH
Ziegelstraße 30
10117 Berlin

To: The Honorable UN Special Rapporteur in the field of cultural rights,
Prof. Dr. Alexandra Xanthaki (via E-Mail, April 28th 2023)

Dear Professor Xanthaki,

I am writing to share my thoughts and insights regarding the impact of gaming and gaming-based proto-metaverses on the status of cultural rights worldwide, and vice versa.

As the most prevalent and most digitally cultural technique of our times, gaming requires (and deserves!) significant consideration in the agendas and policies of international organizations, governmental bodies, NGOs, philanthropic institutions, think-tanks, and policy advisors. In the interdependencies of gaming and cultural rights there are opportunities to utilize - e.g. for the SDG's "Decade of Action" - as well as risks which need mitigation.

Here, they can both only be outlined to argue more research and consideration is advisable:

In today's digital age, gaming has emerged as a powerful medium for cultural expression, engaging individuals and communities on a global scale; by 2027, there are expected to be 3.10 billion gamers worldwide[1]. Therefore, it is essential to acknowledge gaming as a form of cultural production and consumption that should be integrated into cultural rights frameworks. "*Artists, civil society and policymakers must engage in what is becoming a decisive moment in technology, as AI and video games take on global significance for art, activism, and cultural diplomacy*"[2], as *The Diplomatic Courier* recently accurately stated.

Firstly, recognizing the significance of gaming as a cultural technique, it is crucial that actions taken by the United Nations and other international organizations on cultural rights incorporate game art, game design, gaming platforms, etc. and related aspects. By doing so, cultural rights initiatives can tap into the vast potential of gaming to foster cultural exchange, creative expression, and social interaction, while also monitoring risks and dangers. Furthermore, integrating gaming into cultural rights agendas can help bridge the gap between traditional cultural practices and the rapidly evolving digital landscape.

Secondly, to fully understand the impact of digitalization on various forms of culture and arts, it is advisable to engage the knowledge and experience of the gaming community. This community encompasses not only game artists and designers but also players and other stakeholders who actively contribute to the evolution of gaming. Modern games often incorporate multiple art forms in a truly transmedial and interdisciplinary way, such as music, visual arts, architecture, and storytelling, transcending traditional boundaries and engaging

---

[1] www.statista.com/outlook/dmo/digital-media/video-games/worldwide
[2] www.diplomaticcourier.com/posts/for-artists-and-activists-a-crucial-moment-in-ai-and-video-games

diverse cultural elements. By involving the gaming community in discussions and decision-making processes, a more comprehensive understanding of the intersection between gaming, cultural rights, and broader cultural landscapes can be achieved, benefiting all involved in culture and beyond; notably all impacted by technology related to gaming, including but not limited to AI, Virtual Reality, Blockchain, (proto-)Metaverse(s).

Lastly, it is necessary and appropriate to review and revise existing policies, regulations, recommendations, and guidelines concerning cultural rights to include game artists, game studios, and the gaming community at large. This inclusion would ensure that gaming is recognized and protected as a cultural practice deserving of support, preservation, and accessibility - notably the right to freedom of artistic expression of game artists around the world, who at the moment still might struggle to to be recognised by many programs supporting artists at risk. It would also facilitate the development of policies that address the specific challenges faced by the gaming industry to achieve the SDGs, promote diversity and inclusivity, global justice and human rights, and empower game creators to exercise their cultural rights freely.

In conclusion, the cultural significance of gaming and gaming-based (proto-)metaverse(s) cannot be understated. As the world becomes increasingly interconnected through digital platforms, it is imperative that cultural rights agendas and strategies adapt to include gaming as a vibrant and influential cultural medium - and as a community of artistic "prosumers" often at the forefront of technological, cultural, and social innovations. By leveraging the knowledge and experiences of the gaming community, revising existing policies, and embracing the multifaceted nature of modern games, we can foster a more inclusive and comprehensive approach to cultural rights in the digital age.

Thank you for your attention to this matter, and I hope my suggestions contribute to the ongoing discourse surrounding cultural rights and their integration into development agendas.

Yours sincerely,

Manouchehr Shamsrizi, M.P.P. FRSA

Co-Founder "gamelab.berlin" at Humboldt-Universität zu Berlin's Cluster of Excellence, and Head of the "Group for Gaming in International Relations" of Humboldt-Innovation GmbH

Lead of the German Institute for Foreign Cultural Relations's research program on "*Gaming and Metaverses as Global Public Spheres and Arenas in System Competition - Opportunities and Risks for Foreign Cultural and Educational Policy*"

Associate Fellow, German Council on Foreign Relations' Center for Geopolitics, Geoeconomics, and Technology