

Virtual reality game to teach peacekeeping skills

February 9 2016, by Fiona Tyrrell

A new virtual reality game to train international military and police in peacekeeping skills such as communication, cultural sensitivity and gender awareness is being developed by an EU-wide consortium led by a team of researchers from sociology, computer science and psychology at Trinity College Dublin.

It is planned that all military, police and civilian personnel being deployed in EU [conflict prevention](#) and peacebuilding missions such as those to Afghanistan, Palestine and Libya will be able to receive training through the online role-playing game – 'Gaming for Peace'.

The game will allow users to experience simulations of challenging scenarios from conflict and peacebuilding missions to learn communication and cooperation, gender awareness and cultural competency skills. Entering the game as avatars, players will role-play as a member of another organisation, a different gender or nationality, and so will experience a variety of conflict zone scenarios from a range of different perspectives.

The 'Gaming for Peace' project has been funded by a €2 million grant from the European Commission under the Horizon 2020 programme. Led by Trinity, it brings together 14 collaborative partners from academia, military, police, civil actors and business, including the PSNI, the Finnish military, the Polish military and Polish police, Laurea University in Finland, the Ted Kennedy Institute at NUI Maynooth, Upskill in Belfast, and Irish computer games company Haunted Planted,

led by Mads Haahr, who is also an Assistant Professor in Computer Science in Trinity.

The project is also supported by the European Security and Defence College, which oversees the training of all EU personnel deployed on peacekeeping missions, NATO and a number of UN bodies.

Assistant Professor Anne Holohan, Department of Sociology, and the coordinator of the 'Gaming for Peace' project said: "Current training for personnel involved in conflict prevention and peacebuilding missions does not prioritise the critical softer skills of communication and gender and cultural awareness. Most missions require a variety of organisations to coordinate and cooperate together – militaries from different nations in Europe, police from all over Europe, civilian actors from different countries. Success in preventing conflict is to a considerable extent dependent on their ability to work together well in the mission."

"The 'Gaming for Peace' tool will allow personnel to role-play someone of a different gender or ethnicity or who is part of a different type of organisation, leading to greater understanding, better communication and cooperation, and more optimal performance as peacebuilders will result. For instance, a male police officer from Northern Ireland could play being a female police officer from Finland or an NGO worker from Spain, and that improved understanding will lead to more efficient and effective communication and cooperation when assigned to a common task or mission."

"Training a large number of personnel before deployment on a mission is expensive and logistically difficult, with most training involving travel and fixed times, and consequently, many personnel get little or sporadic training, particularly in the area of soft skills such as communication and gender and cultural awareness. 'Gaming for Peace' will produce a game that is accessible to all personnel before deployment at minimal cost.

The only thing that is required is an internet connection."

The project also involves a novel process of curriculum development which will allow users to evaluate the game and add their own experiences of conflict prevention and peacekeeping missions to the game. The [game](#) will be able to be accessed anywhere via the internet and can be customised at low cost by different stakeholders. The 'Gaming for Peace' project is expected to be completed by 2018.

Provided by Trinity College Dublin

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