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Gaming Stories

Digital Storytelling and Player Experiences: Well-Being, Social Connections and Personal Growth through Video Games

Co-funded by the European Union

Table of Contents

03 About the project

06 Digital Storytelling and Narrative Surveys

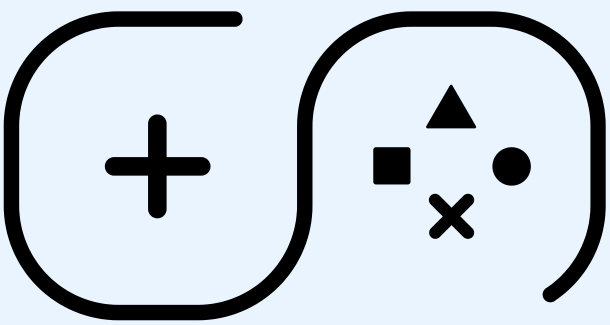
14 Participants and Survey Findings

31 Gaming Stories: An Anthology

45 Reflections and Implications for Educators

56 Conclusions

57 References



About the project

Adventures Are Better Shared! A guide for educators and facilitators in videogame education, is a small-scale partnership funded by the **Erasmus+ Programme** of the European Union, under the **Adult Education sector.**



In detail, the project's objective was to explore how contemporary gaming cultures can be better understood within adult learning environments, particularly in relation to **digital participation**, **social interaction** and **informal skill development**.

Across Europe, video games represent one of the most widespread forms of digital engagement among adults. Despite this, gaming is often perceived with scepticism in educational and social contexts. Precisely for this reason, **the project aimed to challenge these perceptions by exploring gaming as a cultural and social practice that can contribute to personal development**, **digital literacy and community participation**.

By combining expertise in **adult education**, **non-formal and informal approaches**, **community-based learning**, and **digital social work**, the partnership sought to create new opportunities for dialogue between educators and gaming communities over a 24-month period, mainly across Italy, Iceland and Sweden.

More specifically, a central focus of the project has been the **development of new perspectives on how digital environments may shape (and foster) social interaction**. Gaming spaces, particularly multiplayer ones, indeed seem to encourage collaboration, communication and problem-solving, all of which are relevant to broader discussions on digital competences and active participation in digital societies.

Within the Erasmus+ Adult Education framework, the project thus contributed to the promotion of **inclusive digital competences, by recognizing the value of informal learning processes that often emerge within online communities**.

By exploring gaming as a social and cultural practice, the partnership aimed **to support educators in better understanding the digital lives of adult learners** (and gamers), and the forms of participation that shape them.



This publication is developed within the framework of one of the core activities of the project, focused on **validation, networking and community engagement around gaming experiences**. Coordinated by **Rafíþróttasamband Íslands** (Iceland), this phase of the project brought together adult gamers and educators from different European contexts in order to explore **how gaming is experienced in everyday life** and how these experiences relate to **well-being**, **social participation** and **personal development**.

Through the collaboration of the project partners and their respective networks, participants from different countries were invited to share their perspectives on gaming culture, community interaction and the role of digital environments in shaping contemporary forms of social connection.

The material collected through these activities was gathered primarily through **narrative and participatory surveys** conducted both online and within community settings. These contributions form the basis of the present booklet, which brings together **a selection of reflections and personal accounts shared by adult players**. By presenting these experiences in an accessible narrative form, **this methodological anthology aims to offer educators, facilitators and community practitioners a closer understanding of how gaming environments can support social interaction, informal learning and the development of civic competences in addition to digital competences**, also providing insights into the everyday realities of gaming communities across Europe.

Partnership

Close in the Distance

Italy, Leading Organization

an Italian non-profit organisation focused on **digital volunteering**, **social inclusion** and innovative educational practices. The organisation works with young adults and vulnerable groups, promoting the positive use of **digital culture**, including gaming, as a tool for empowerment and community building.

RÍSÍ

Iceland, Partner

a national **esports federation** in Iceland. It supports gaming communities, promotes **healthy gaming environments** and develops initiatives connecting gaming culture with education, well-being and social participation.

Sverok

Sweden, Partner

Sweden's national umbrella organisation for gaming associations and one of the largest youth organisations in the country. It supports thousands of clubs and communities dedicated to video games, tabletop games and other forms of interactive culture.

Digital Storytelling and Narrative Surveys

1 Storytelling as a Participatory Method

This anthology represents an example of **digital storytelling applied within an adult education context**. Through the collection of personal testimonies, narrative surveys and shared reflections, the activity (and, more in general, the project) **invited adult gamers to narrate their experiences of gaming, well-being and social interaction**. In this sense, the publication itself should be understood as a narrative outcome of **a participatory storytelling process, where individual voices and lived experiences are brought together in a shared collection of stories**.

To better frame the **methodological approach of both this anthology and a substantial part of the project as a whole**, it is necessary to **further define what "digital storytelling" is**, at least from the perspective of the partnership and its primary and secondary target groups:

To put it simply, **digital storytelling is the evolution of traditional storytelling within digital environments**. Rather than relying on written or oral narration alone, it combines different media and expressive forms — such as text, voice, images, sound and online interaction — in order to communicate personal experiences in a more immediate and engaging way. At its core, however, **digital storytelling remains a narrative practice**: its main purpose is not technological display, but the construction and sharing of meaning through stories.

What makes this approach especially relevant is its **participatory nature**. In digital storytelling, individuals are not just "recipients of information", but **active contributors who select memories, interpret experiences and give them narrative form**. This process allows participants to reflect on their own lived experience while making it communicable to others. For this very reason, **storytelling is both expressive and relational**: it helps individuals organise experience, recognise what is meaningful, and place personal events within a broader social and cultural frame.

From our point of view, **this participatory dimension is particularly valuable in adult education**. **Adult learning is indeed strongly connected to experience, self-reflection and the interpretation of everyday life**. For this reason, narrative-based methods are especially effective in contexts where the objective is not only the transmission of information, but also **the recognition of prior experience, the development of critical awareness and the strengthening of individual voice**. Digital storytelling supports these processes by linking reflection, communication and digital expression, while also encouraging dialogue, **peer exchange** and the **co-construction of knowledge**.

Digital Storytelling and Narrative Surveys

1 Storytelling as a Participatory Method

From a more general educational perspective, not strictly linked to adult environments, another key strength of digital storytelling lies in its **adaptability and replicability**. It can be implemented in formal, non-formal and community-based settings; it can be used with small groups or open online communities; and it does not necessarily require advanced technical expertise. Educators and facilitators can apply it through simple and accessible tools, using guided prompts, narrative surveys, digital platforms and collaborative discussion spaces. This makes digital storytelling **a particularly accessible methodology**, especially when transferability and replicability are key objectives.

Within ***Adventures Are Better Shared!***, storytelling principles were combined with **narrative surveys and online engagement practices** in order to gather personal experiences from adult gamers across different European contexts. As anticipated early on, the stories collected during this process formed the basis of the present anthology, which aims to document these experiences while also offering educators a methodology that can be adapted and replicated in future educational or community-based activities.

2 Designing the Narrative Survey

As already outlined above, narrative surveys were designed and administered to collect personal accounts from adult gamers about their relationship with gaming and its perceived impact on everyday life. Rather than functioning as a quantitative questionnaire, the survey was structured as a narrative-oriented instrument aimed at encouraging reflection and personal storytelling. This approach allowed participants to describe experiences in their own words while still providing a shared structure that would make the collected material comparable and analysable.

The methodological choice to rely on narrative forms of data collection is grounded in a well-established body of research that highlights the role of storytelling as a cognitive and social process through which individuals organise experience and attribute meaning to events. Scholars of **narrative learning** have emphasised how human beings tend to interpret reality through **stories and narrative structures**, which function as tools for understanding personal experience and communicating it within a social context (Bruner, 1996; Bruner, 2003).

Digital Storytelling and Narrative Surveys

2 Designing the Narrative Survey

In educational environments, storytelling therefore becomes not only a communicative practice but also **a reflective and interpretative process that supports self-learning and self-awareness**. These methodologies extend these narrative practices within contemporary media environments by combining personal narration with the affordances of digital communication and participatory culture. As noted by Lambert (2007) and later educational applications of the method, **storytelling activities can help participants articulate lived experiences, while digital platforms facilitate the circulation and sharing of these narratives within communities**. From this perspective, storytelling may become a fully participatory practice, able to encourage individuals **to move from passive media consumption towards active cultural production and meaning-making** (Jenkins, 2006). In educational and community contexts, narrative-based methods have also been recognised as valuable tools for fostering specific transversal skills and competences. Various classic studies on digital storytelling in education have highlighted how the creation and sharing of personal narratives, as "simple" as it may seem, can indeed strengthen the expressive abilities of participants, supporting their critical thinking and broader learning processes (Petrucco & De Rossi, 2009; Ohler, 2008; Robin, 2006).

Within adult education in particular, these approaches resonate strongly with **experiential learning models that recognise the central role of personal experience in any learning process**. Turning back to the specific objectives of ***Adventures Are Better Shared!***, the questionnaire combined two types of questions. The first section included **basic demographic and contextual information**, such as age group, gaming habits and general patterns of media use. These elements were necessary in order **to situate the narratives within a broader social context** and to better understand the background of participants. The second and most substantial part of the survey consisted of **open narrative prompts designed to invite participants to reflect on specific moments or aspects of their gaming experience**. These prompts encouraged participants to recall personal memories connected to gaming, describe situations in which gaming influenced their well-being or emotional state, and reflect on the role that gaming played in their social relationships. Particular attention was given to the possible connections between gaming practices and broader themes such as **socialisation**, **civic participation**, personal development, but also **emotional self-regulation**, **perspective-taking** and **coping abilities**. For this very reason, participants were also invited to share critical perspectives, including potential tensions, related to gaming within their social and personal environments.

Digital Storytelling and Narrative Surveys

2 Designing the Narrative Survey

The narrative structure of the survey was intended **to balance methodological guidance with personal freedom of expression**. Participants were not required to produce structured essays; instead, they were encouraged to respond to prompts in a flexible way, focusing on what they considered "meaningful" experiences. This format allowed the survey to function both as a data collection tool and as a storytelling exercise, consistent with the participatory logic of the broader digital storytelling methodologies.
From a classical perspective, narrative surveys represent a hybrid approach that combines elements of qualitative inquiry and participatory storytelling. The ultimate objective was indeed to foster **reflective learning processes** while simultaneously generating material that could be analysed and shared within the partnership and, more importantly, with other educators across Europe.

Previous research on digital and narrative-based learning highlights how personal stories may contribute to the interpretation of lived experience and to the development of critical awareness, specifically in (and with) digital environments (Lambert, 2007; Ohler, 2008; Petrucco & De Rossi, 2009; Robin, 2006).

In ***Adventures Are Better Shared!***, the narrative survey was distributed primarily through online channels and community networks connected to the partnership. The responses collected through this process will be presented in more detail in **Chapter 4**, which will bring together selected experiences in order to illustrate how gaming practices intersect with well-being, transversal skills, socialisation and personal development **in the lives of countless adult players and European citizens**.



Digital Storytelling and Narrative Surveys

3 Participants and Data Collection

The activities carried out within ***Adventures Are Better Shared!*** involved adult gamers and educators connected to the networks of the partner organisations in Iceland, Sweden, Italy and other European contexts. **Participants were primarily individuals who regularly engage with digital games and who were willing to reflect on their experiences as players and, more specifically, "digital citizens"**, often acting as active online community members and users of virtual environments. Beyond the collection of narratives, the initiative represented an initial effort **to reach out to adult gaming communities and to begin a process of dialogue between gamers and adult education practitioners**.

In line with the objectives of **the second Activity** of the project, the engagement process combined narrative surveys with a series of **participatory workshops and online networking activities**. Four storytelling and discussion workshops were organised across the partner countries, both online and in hybrid formats, allowing participants to share their experiences of gaming in a structured yet informal setting. These activities were complemented by online community interactions facilitated through existing gaming networks, always connected to the partner organisations.

The aim of this phase was not only to collect testimonies, but also to initiate a broader process of **networking and validation of gaming experiences**, encouraging a first point of contact between gaming culture and established educational communities — two environments that often remain distant despite sharing important concerns related to digital participation, civic awareness, well-being and social inclusion.

A primary objective of this cycle of activities was to reach a diverse group of adult gamers with **different personal and social backgrounds, while also taking gender differences into account**. While gaming is often associated with younger (and male) audiences, contemporary industry data consistently show that a large share of players are adults, often women, who integrate gaming into their everyday routines as a form of entertainment, social interaction and digital participation. With this in mind, participants were therefore approached not as consumers of media but as **multifaceted individuals**, capable of reflecting on the meaning and role that gaming plays in their lives.

Ultimately, alongside gamers, educators, facilitators and community workers were invited to engage with the narratives emerging from the survey process and the related online discussions.

Digital Storytelling and Narrative Surveys

3 Participants and Data Collection

Online engagement played an important role in this process.

Community discussions and exchanges were facilitated through digital platforms commonly used by gaming communities, including the ***Discord*** network managed by **Sverok**, online discussion spaces such as ***Reddit***, dedicated online activities organised by **Close in the Distance** and formal and informal networks **strongly connected to esports**, on the part of **Rafíþróttasamband Íslands**.

These environments allowed participants to interact informally, share perspectives and expand the reach of the storytelling initiative beyond the workshops themselves.

As already emphasised in the previous paragraphs, the starting point has always been to consider gaming not only as a form of entertainment but also as **a social and cultural medium** capable of supporting **broader forms of contemporary, civic literacy**. Multiplayer environments, online communities and collaborative play often require communication, coordination and problem-solving skills that resonate with many of the competences at the centre of several European adult education and digital inclusion initiatives.

The data presented in the following sections derive from the narrative surveys and community interactions carried out during the first cycle of project activities. In this sense, the next section offers a closer look at the participants involved and at the main trends emerging from their responses, providing a more detailed overview of the experiences collected through the storytelling process.



Digital Storytelling and Narrative Surveys

4 From Survey to Stories

From an operational perspective, the objective of administering and collecting the surveys was never to gather personal opinions or merely descriptive information about gaming practices, but rather to develop **a starting point for a broader storytelling process in which personal reflections could be interpreted, contextualised and eventually presented as part of a shared narrative collection**, potentially **relevant for educators, social workers and facilitators** — in essence, the different profiles involved in **adult education in its various forms**. On the other hand, the partnership also sought to avoid overburdening respondents with overly demanding interview and narrative formats, as it did not intend to disrupt the **non-formal and informal dimension** that characterised the first cycle of A***dventures Are Better Shared!***.

Consequently, once the survey responses were gathered, the **material was reviewed through a qualitative reading process** focused on identifying **recurring themes**, **meaningful experiences** and **distinctive civic perspectives** emerging from the participants' accounts. Rather than treating responses as isolated data points, the analysis considered them as fragments of **lived digital experience** that could contribute to a broader understanding of how gaming intersects with various personal and educational dimensions.

By doing so, the collected narratives were progressively organised and curated in order to highlight the most relevant dimensions emerging from the testimonies.

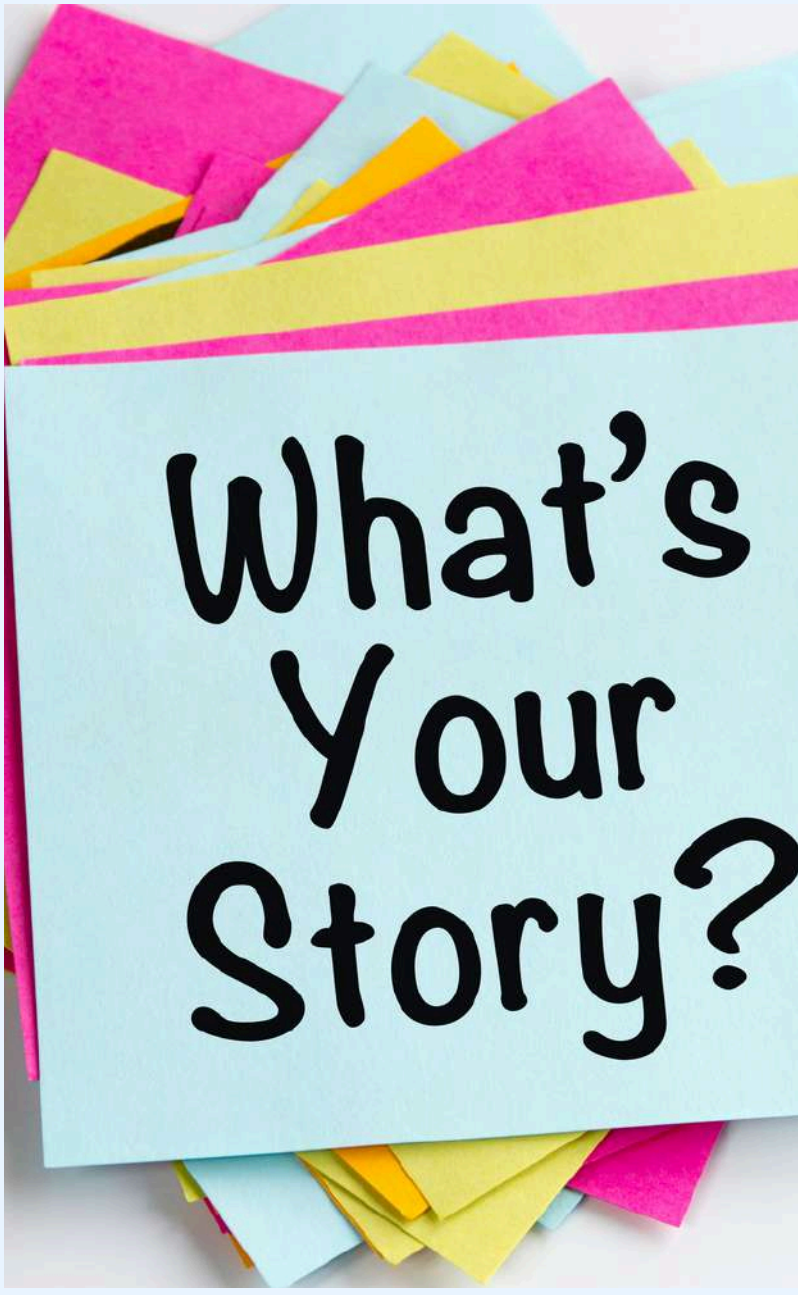
Taking great care not to alter the original voice of the respondents, this interpretative step was deemed necessary, reflecting above all a common approach within narrative-based research and digital storytelling practices: individual testimonies are not simply aggregated but contextualised and reassembled into meaningful narrative sequences. As highlighted in the literature on digital storytelling and narrative learning, stories may reveal **patterns of interpretation** and **shared cultural references** that may remain invisible in more conventional forms of data collection (Lambert, 2007; Petrucco & De Rossi, 2009).

For this reason, the present anthology should not be understood as a statistical report, but as a curated, sometimes edited collection of experiences. The stories included in the following sections represent selected voices from the broader survey process, **chosen for their capacity to illustrate different perspectives on gaming, digital participation, virtual socialisation, transversal competences and virtual habits**. Ultimately, these testimonies will contribute to a richer and more nuanced representation of adult gaming experiences.

Digital Storytelling and Narrative Surveys

4 From Survey to Stories

Beyond the specific objectives of ***Adventures Are Better Shared!***, this methodological approach will also illustrate how storytelling-based activities can be used within adult education contexts more broadly. Narrative surveys and storytelling workshops, even beyond gaming and virtual culture, for example dealing with other significant topics such as sustainability, civic awareness or social inclusion, may offer educators accessible tools for engaging learners, encouraging reflection on personal experience and facilitating dialogue within learning communities. Because they rely on simple prompts, participatory discussion and widely available digital platforms, these tools are considered a particularly suitable medium for the development of informal and non-formal educational pathways, with potentially high effectiveness.



In this perspective, **the transition from survey responses to narrative testimonies** becomes not only a way of presenting research findings, but also an example of how storytelling methodologies can **transform individual reflections into shared learning resources, fostering the improvement of educators' competences across multiple levels, ranging from methodological to thematic and operational.**

Participants and Survey Findings

The Voices behind the Data: A Snapshot of the Gaming Community

Geographical distribution:

A total of **80 respondents** participated in the narrative survey conducted within the first cycle of ***Adventures Are Better Shared!***'s activities.

The participants were primarily adult gamers of diverse background and nationality, reached through the networks of the partner organisations as well as through broader online gaming communities connected to the dissemination activities of the project as a whole.

The geographic distribution of respondents reflects both the core partnership countries and the transnational nature of online gaming communities. The majority of responses originated from **Sweden**, **Iceland** and **Italy**, which correspond to the countries of the partner organisations involved in the project. Additional contributions came from participants located in other European countries and a small number of respondents from outside Europe.

This distribution highlights the **international dimension of gaming environments**, where communities frequently extend **beyond national and linguistic boundaries**.

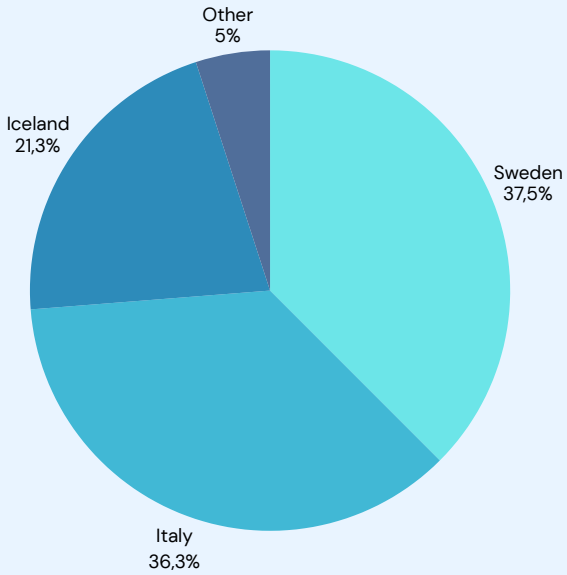


Figure 1. Country distribution of survey respondents.

Participants and Survey Findings

The Voices behind the Data: A Snapshot of the Gaming Community

Age distribution:

Age distribution confirms one of the key assumptions of the project: gaming is widely practiced by **adults and young adults** rather than being limited to teenage audiences.

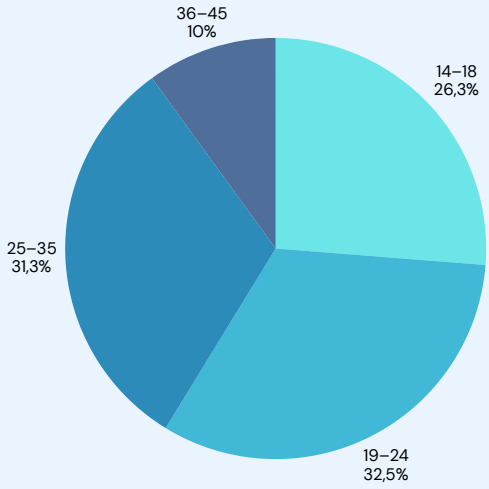


Figure 2. Age distribution of survey respondents.

Weekly routines:

Participants reported regular engagement with video games as part of their **weekly routines**. For many respondents, gaming represents **a stable and recurring activity rather than an occasional pastime**. Several respondents reported playing multiple times per week, often within online multiplayer environments or community-based gaming spaces. This sustained engagement highlights the role of gaming not only as entertainment but also as a social and cultural practice embedded in everyday life.

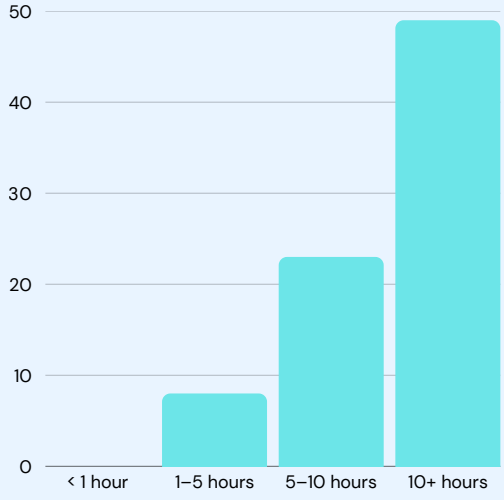


Figure 3. Weekly gaming hours among respondents.

Participants and Survey Findings

From the perspective of adult education, this profile is particularly relevant:

The respondents represent individuals who are already familiar with digital platforms, online interaction and collaborative virtual environments. **Such characteristics make gaming communities an interesting context for exploring new approaches to digital participation, informal learning and community-based engagement**.

The following sections examine more closely the practices, experiences and reflections shared by participants, identifying the main themes emerging from the survey responses.

Gaming Habits and Practices:

The survey responses provide a first overview of the everyday gaming habits of the participants. For most respondents, gaming represents a regular and structured activity integrated into their weekly routines rather than an occasional or sporadic pastime. Many participants reported playing several times per week, often dedicating multiple hours to gaming sessions that take place during evenings or weekends.

This pattern reflects a broader trend observed in contemporary gaming cultures: **digital games function not only as entertainment but also as recurring social practices, fully analogous to more traditional and offline forms of socialisation and interaction**. For adult players in particular, gaming frequently occupies a similar position to other leisure activities such as watching films, participating in sports or engaging in community-based activities.

Multiplayer experiences emerged as a particularly common element in participants' gaming habits. Many respondents reported engaging with games that allow **interaction with other people** through cooperative missions, team-based challenges or shared online environments. In these contexts, gaming becomes a form of social medium where communication, coordination and collective problem-solving play a more important role.

At the same time, single-player experiences remain significant for many participants. Some respondents highlighted the value of **narrative-driven games** or **immersive single-player worlds** that allow them to think, focus, or engage in new challenges or activities, including those of a strictly emotional nature. In these cases, gaming is often experienced as a more individual activity that can support **concentration, exploration, cognitive and emotional engagement**.

The survey responses also indicate a strong familiarity with broader virtual ecosystems. Participants reported playing across a variety of devices and services, including personal computers, consoles and online platforms that support multiplayer interaction and community building. These environments often extend **beyond the game itself, involving voice chat systems, community servers and online discussion spaces where players exchange advice, organise gaming sessions or socialise and interact with each other, often forming lasting personal bonds.**

What emerges is therefore a complex set of habits that combine entertainment, social interaction and digital participation within everyday life. Understanding these practices provides an important starting point for analysing the broader meanings that gaming acquires for participants — themes that will be explored in greater depth in the following sections.



Figure 4. Example of a multiplayer match in League of Legends, one of the most widely played online games worldwide. Screenshot taken from publicly available gameplay footage.

League of Legends © Riot Games, Inc.

Gaming as a Social Environment:

As anticipated, one of the most consistent themes emerging from the survey responses concerns the **social dimension** of gaming. While participants described a wide variety of gaming habits and preferences, many of their accounts converge around a common idea: digital games often function as social settings where relationships are formed, maintained and experienced in ways that are comparable to many offline and traditional communities, in ways **comparable to those found in more typical agents of socialisation and peer education, such as family, school or the workplace**.

Digital Play as a Social Environment

For a significant number of respondents, contrary to more common expectations that interpret gaming as an activity embodying self-isolation, gaming is rather a **shared practice** that unfolds through interaction with other players and broader communities. Multiplayer environments, cooperative missions and competitive team-based matches were frequently mentioned as contexts in which players **communicate, socialise and develop structured forms of civic collaboration**.

Several respondents described their online sessions as **moments of regular social exchange**, fully comparable to meeting friends in physical spaces, for example at school or in the workplace. Voice chat platforms, in-game messaging systems and external communication tools allow players to interact continuously during gameplay. Through these channels, players often engage in conversations that go beyond the immediate objectives of the game: they discuss everyday life, share personal experiences and maintain social ties that extend beyond the virtual session itself.

This aspect appears particularly relevant for adult players, many of whom described gaming as a practical way to maintain contact with friends and peers despite **geographical distance** or **demanding work schedules**.

For participants who no longer share the same physical environments with their friends—due to relocation, professional commitments or changes in life circumstances—online gaming provides a convenient and familiar space for regular interaction and **peer support**. In this sense, gaming sessions often function as recurring social appointments where participants reconnect with their **social and cultural circles**.

The formation of new relationships also emerged as an important element in many responses. Some participants reported that they had met close friends, long-term collaborators or even romantic partners through gaming communities. Multiplayer environments often bring together individuals from **different countries and cultural backgrounds**, creating opportunities for encounters that might not occur in everyday offline contexts. Over time, these interactions may evolve into stable social relationships sustained through repeated gameplay and communication and, quite often, **opportunities for the development of highly relevant basic competences, first and foremost familiarity with foreign languages, even in later adulthood**.

These communities and social gatherings may take different forms: organised teams or guilds, informal groups of players who regularly play together, or larger online networks hosted on platforms such as ***Discord*** or dedicated gaming forums and threads, for example in ***Reddit***.

Digital Play as a Social Environment

More in detail, many respondents emphasised that these community spaces contribute significantly to their **sense of social belonging, especially in situations of personal difficulty**. Participation in such groups allows players to identify with a shared culture, which often includes common references, humour, norms of behaviour and informal rules that shape interactions within the community and which are often more difficult to find in "real" life. In this respect, gaming communities frequently resemble other forms of social groups, developing their own collective identities and practices over time. Another recurring aspect concerns the cooperative nature of many multiplayer games. Participants described situations in which success in the game depends on mutual trust and coordination among team members. These dynamics encourage players to develop skills related to collaboration, leadership and problem-solving. Some respondents explicitly noted that teamwork in **games can resemble forms of collaboration found in professional or educational settings**, where individuals must coordinate actions and share responsibilities in order to achieve common goals.

But more importantly, respondents often emphasised that these interactions are not limited to the game environment itself.

As anticipated, the concept of gaming among respondents at times appears to blend with activities not directly related to video gaming: exchanges frequently continue outside the games through messaging platforms, community servers or social media groups. What begins as interaction within a digital game may gradually expand into a more complex social relationship sustained across multiple platforms.

Looking at the quality of interactions, several responses highlighted how gaming environments can offer relatively inclusive spaces for interaction. In contrast to some offline contexts where social barriers or differences may limit interaction or self-expression, online communities often allow participants to connect primarily through shared interests and collaborative activity. While challenges such as toxicity or discrimination were also mentioned by some respondents, many players described their gaming communities as **fully supportive environments** where individuals can find understanding and companionship.

Taken together, these accounts suggest that digital games frequently operate as social infrastructures capable of compensating for objective difficulties in everyday life, at times taking on a function similar to coping. For many respondents, these interactions formed an important and lasting component of their social lives, contributing to friendship networks, community participation and the development of a stronger sense of self.

Gaming as a shared experience and a tool to build communities.

Understanding gaming as a social environment is particularly relevant within the broader objectives of *Adventures Are Better Shared!*

One of the central goals of the project was indeed to explore how the social and cultural dynamics present within gaming communities might intersect with the **practices of adult education**. If gaming environments already function as spaces where individuals collaborate, exchange knowledge and build communities, they may also represent **valuable contexts for fostering forms of informal learning and digital participation, challenging the stereotype that portrays gaming as the ultimate example of antisocial behaviour, online hostility and, above all, an adolescent activity far removed from the complexity of adult life.**

In this perspective, the survey responses suggest that gaming communities should not be viewed solely through a single lens: they should be understood as dynamic, innovative and not yet well-known social ecosystems where relationships, communication practices and collaborative behaviours develop organically among participants, fostering their personal growth as citizens.

Recognising this social dimension provides a relevant starting point for rethinking **how educators and facilitators might engage with gaming cultures** in more constructive and informed ways.

This will be particularly useful in view of the subsequent outcomes of ***Adventures Are Better Shared!***, especially the manual specifically focused on **videogame education** and on the integration of **gaming within care and socio-educational contexts** involving adults and young adults.

Gaming as a Space for Well-being

Another strong theme emerging from the survey responses concerns the relationship between gaming and personal well-being. While participants described different types of games, play styles and levels of engagement, many of their accounts converge around a common experience: gaming often plays a meaningful role in supporting emotional balance and everyday stress management.

For a large number of respondents, gaming is integrated into daily or weekly routines as a moment of relaxation and mental detachment from other responsibilities. Several participants described gaming sessions as a way to "switch off" after work, study or other demanding activities. In this sense, gaming is not perceived as a passive escape from reality, but rather as a structured activity that allows individuals to temporarily step away from daily pressures and reset their mental focus.

This function is particularly visible in responses describing gaming as a form of **stress regulation**. Many players explained that engaging with a familiar game environment helps them decompress after long or demanding days. The concentration required during gameplay—whether through solving problems, coordinating actions or simply focusing on the unfolding match—creates a temporary shift of attention that allows players to distance themselves from stressful thoughts or situations.

Some respondents explicitly linked gaming to **emotional coping strategies**. In their narratives, gaming becomes a tool for managing negative emotions such as frustration, anxiety or fatigue. Instead of remaining immersed in these feelings, players described using gaming sessions as a way to regain emotional balance. The act of playing (especially in environments that require concentration, timing and decision-making) can help redirect mental energy and create a sense of progress or accomplishment.

This experience is often reinforced by the **interactive nature of games**. Unlike more passive forms of entertainment, digital games require players to actively engage with challenges, objectives and evolving situations. For many respondents, this **sense of agency** contributes to a feeling of control and competence that can counterbalance the uncertainties or pressures experienced in everyday life.

Gaming as a Space for Well-being

Well-being and sense of social inclusion also emerged as recurring elements in the responses. Participants frequently described gaming as a regulating activity that supports **stress management** and **cognitive disengagement** during periods of rest. Some respondents referred specifically to games with slower pacing or immersive environments, such as exploration-based or narrative-driven titles, which they associate with **a sense of psychological balance and emotional comfort**.

At the same time, even competitive multiplayer games, often perceived externally as stressful or based on hateful interactions, were described by several participants as **surprisingly beneficial for well-being**. Players explained that the excitement and adrenaline of competitive matches can create moments of intense focus that temporarily displace everyday worries. Once the match ends, many participants report feeling mentally refreshed rather than exhausted.

Another aspect that emerges clearly from the survey responses is the sense of **psychological and social safety** that some players associate with gaming environments. In contrast to other social contexts where individuals may feel discriminated or constrained, virtual spaces can offer a degree of freedom to experiment with **identity**, **communication styles, social roles and cultural communities, that are often difficult to access in "real" life.**

This sense of belonging can contribute significantly to **emotional self-regulation**, fostering the **development of personal coping competences**, transferable and adaptable elsewhere. Knowing that one can connect with friends or community members through shared gaming sessions provides a reliable form of social support, particularly for individuals who may experience isolation due to geographical distance, demanding work schedules or other personal circumstances. For some respondents, gaming communities appear as **the most consistent spaces for social interaction** in their daily lives.

The survey responses also suggest that the well-being and psychological balance dimension of gaming often emerges through **the combination of several factors rather than through a single mechanism**. Social interaction, social inclusion and acceptance, problem-solving and emotional expression all intersect within the gaming experience. A multiplayer match may simultaneously offer moments of excitement, collaboration and self-validation; a solo session may combine exploration, narrative immersion and inner reflection. Importantly, participants rarely framed gaming well-being in purely "therapeutic" terms. Instead, their narratives tend to emphasise **the ordinary, everyday character of these activities**. In this respect, gaming functions as a familiar and accessible resource for managing daily pressures, proving highly effective even in the absence of a structure explicitly designed as a "serious game" with educational or clinical purposes.

At the same time, some participants also reveal a growing awareness among players of the need to **maintain a balanced relationship with gaming**. Numerous respondents noted that while gaming can support their emotional regulation, excessive play or unhealthy gaming habits may have the opposite effect. This awareness reflects a nuanced understanding of gaming as a powerful but context-dependent activity whose benefits depend largely on **how it is integrated into everyday life**.

Taken together, the survey responses highlight the multifaceted role that gaming can play in supporting well-being among adult players. These experiences help explain why many respondents consider gaming not simply as a pastime, but as a meaningful component of their everyday well-being.

Within the broader framework of ***Adventures Are Better Shared!***, these findings are particularly relevant. If gaming environments already contribute to emotional balance, social connection, sense of belonging, coping and self-validation in the lives of adult players, they may also represent valuable entry points for initiatives aimed at promoting digital participation, community engagement and inclusive forms of learning within adult education contexts.



Figure 5. Example of a relaxing gameplay environment in Stardew Valley, a widely known farming simulation game often associated with calm, routine-based play and stress relief.

Screenshot taken from publicly available gameplay footage.

Stardew Valley © ConcernedApe LLC.

Identity, Belonging and Digital Participation

Among the narrative responses collected through the survey, one theme appears repeatedly and often quite explicitly: many respondents do not simply play games, nor do they consider gaming as an activity strictly tied to a commercial product, that is, to a videogame itself. More specifically, in several answers, gaming is described less as something to be done or consumed and more as a shared cultural space, **an actual extension of one's identity and personal characteristics, strongly grounded in interaction, recognition and participation in common practices**.

As evidence of this, a significant number of respondents directly refer to themselves as gamers, not necessarily in a professional or competitive sense, but **as a way of describing a component of their social identity, connecting them with others**. Participants mention favourite games, long-term habits and recurring social groups, suggesting that gaming operates as a cultural reference point through which relationships and conversations are built.

Concrete examples appear frequently throughout the responses. Several participants mention games such as ***League of Legends***, ***Minecraft***, ***Stardew Valley***, ***World of Warcraft***, all large multiplayer titles where communities naturally develop around shared play.

One respondent, for example, describes weekly gaming sessions organised with friends who now live in different cities, explaining that gaming has become their main way of maintaining regular contact.

Another participant mentions being part of a ***Minecraft*** server community, where players collaborate on long-term building projects and collectively shape the virtual environment over time. These kinds of examples illustrate how digital games can function as spaces where shared projects, rituals and collective experiences emerge. Participation in gaming culture also extends well beyond the game itself. Many respondents refer to activities such as watching streams, discussing strategies online, following updates from developers or participating in community forums.

Platforms such as ***Discord***, ***Reddit*** and ***Twitch*** frequently appear in the narratives as places where players exchange information, validate each other, organise matches or simply interact with "strangers", developing transversal and civic competences, for example linguistic and communicative ones, which are often transferable to other contexts, such as more traditional educational settings or the workplace.

Identity, Belonging and Digital Participation

This type of engagement therefore reflects a broader form of digital participation. Rather than being passive consumers of media, many players contribute actively to the culture surrounding the games they enjoy. They share advice, help newcomers learn the mechanics of a game, recommend mods or organise collaborative sessions. In some cases, players also produce their own content, such as guides, videos or community events.
The survey responses suggest that these activities create a strong sense of social belonging among participants. Several respondents describe feeling "part of a social community" as the most representative aspect of gaming culture itself.

Interestingly, the sense of belonging and inclusiveness described by participants does not necessarily depend on physical proximity or on extended gaming sessions. Regular online interaction — often just a couple of times per week — seems able to foster a strong sense of familiarity comparable to offline social groups.

Some narratives also show how gaming spaces allow individuals to participate in collective activities that resemble forms of civic engagement in digital environments, often beyond a single title or virtual appointment. **Moderating community servers**, **organising tournaments**, **helping maintain respectful communication** in chat channels or **mentoring** new players are all examples mentioned by respondents. While these activities may appear informal, they contribute to maintaining the social infrastructure of gaming communities, also having a strong impact on how these adult "gamers" behave in 'real' life.

In this regard, these findings are particularly significant. They demonstrate how gaming environments can function as a preparatory field for the development of more structured collaborative behaviours, community management and shared responsibility, either online or offline.

These dynamics connect gaming culture with broader discussions around digital citizenship. Participation in online communities requires a range of skills that are increasingly relevant in contemporary digital societies: managing communication across platforms, interacting with people from different cultural backgrounds and navigating shared digital environments.

The findings discussed so far provide a clearer understanding of how gaming should be interpreted within contemporary social life. Rather than being a marginal or purely recreational activity, gaming increasingly appears as an extension of everyday forms of citizenship, embedded within digital environments that are now an integral part of how individuals interact, participate and construct meaning. In this sense, forms of participation within gaming communities can be understood as expressions of **a broader, and inevitably hybrid, model of citizenship that unfolds across both physical and virtual spaces**.

In practical terms, this has direct implications for adult education. An educational activity focused on empowerment, for instance, may fail to recognise that some participants who appear reserved or disengaged in face-to-face settings may instead display strong communicative, collaborative or leadership competences within gaming-related environments. These are not marginal skills, but forms of experience that can be mobilised, translated and expanded within educational contexts.

From this perspective, **integrating gaming into the analytical and methodological toolkit of educators is not a matter of innovation for its own sake, but a necessary step toward recognising and working with the existing practices of learners**. This is, in many ways, one of the underlying objectives of ***Adventures Are Better Shared!*** and of this narrative outcome: to position gaming not as an external element to education, but as a relevant and already active dimension within it.



Figure 6. Cooperative raid encounter in Final Fantasy XIV, illustrating the collaborative environments and real-time communication typical of multiplayer gaming communities. Screenshot taken from publicly available gameplay footage.

Final Fantasy XIV © Square Enix Co., Ltd.

Challenges and Misconceptions about Gaming

Alongside the many positive experiences described by participants, the survey responses also reveal a more complex side of gaming culture: the persistence of hateful interactions, misunderstandings, stereotypes and forms of social stigma.

Looking first at social stigma, the surveys' findings indicate that gaming practices are still perceived negatively by people outside the gaming community, particularly by family members, colleagues or older generations who are less familiar with digital spaces: a recurring theme concerns the idea that gaming is still widely regarded as a trivial or unproductive activity.

Some participants explain that when they mention gaming as one of their main social activities (or as their most significant social interaction), it is sometimes interpreted as a childish and fully negative habit. These reactions appear especially common when gaming is compared to more traditionally recognised cultural activities such as traditional sports, reading, watching films or consuming other forms of artistic culture. In these contexts, players often feel the need to justify or explain their gaming habits in ways that participants of other cultural activities rarely experience.

This perception seems more frequently linked to generational stereotypes. Several respondents note that older relatives or acquaintances tend to associate video games primarily with teenagers or children. As a result, adult players may encounter reactions of surprise or mild disapproval when they speak openly about their virtual habits. One respondent describes being asked why they still play games "at their age," while another mentions that gaming is sometimes treated as something one should "grow out of" rather than a legitimate form of interactive, fully social activity.

People who are not involved in gaming communities keep imagining gaming as **a solitary activity centred around a screen**, rather than recognising the collaborative and communicative dimensions that many players experience. Several participants explain that once friends or relatives see how multiplayer games actually function, involving teamwork, voice communication and shared problem-solving, their perception often tends to change.

Challenges and Misconceptions about Gaming

Another interesting pattern emerges from responses describing the tension between gaming time and other responsibilities. Some participants report feeling that they must manage their gaming habits carefully in order to avoid being judged by others. Even when gaming serves as a way to cope or socialise, players may hesitate to discuss it openly in professional or academic environments where it might be interpreted as a sign of distraction.

In a few cases, respondents also refer to broader cultural stereotypes associated with gamers. These stereotypes often portray gamers as socially isolated, overly competitive or excessively absorbed in digital environments. Participants frequently challenge this image, explaining that their gaming activities involve far more complex, human and cooperative communication, collaborative teamwork and participation in broader virtual communities.

Interestingly, some narratives suggest that these stereotypes are gradually changing. As gaming becomes more widespread across different age groups and social backgrounds, several respondents note that attitudes toward gaming appear to be shifting.

The growing visibility of gaming in mainstream culture (for example through streaming platforms, esports events and public discussions about digital culture) has contributed to a broader recognition of gaming as a legitimate cultural activity.

At the same time, the survey responses indicate that misunderstandings have not disappeared entirely. Players often navigate a cultural space where gaming is simultaneously mainstream and still subject to outdated assumptions.

Many participants therefore find themselves acting informally as interpreters of gaming culture, explaining to others what games actually involve and why they matter to those who play them.

What emerges from these narratives is not a simple conflict between gamers and non-gamers, but rather a process of gradual cultural, transgenerational negotiation, **which reflects the broader challenges and characteristics of well-known "digital gaps", as well as the persistent misalignment between lived digital practices and the competences recognised and addressed across European citizens, geographical contexts, educators and learners**.

Key Insights from the Survey

The survey results provide a series of insights that extend beyond the immediate description of gaming habits.

Taken together, the responses suggest that gaming environments represent complex social and cultural spaces where interaction, participation and learning practices already take place in forms that are often informal, spontaneous and community-driven.
As anticipated, one of the most relevant observations concerns the social structure of many gaming environments. Multiplayer platforms, guilds, servers and cooperative game modes frequently operate as **networks of interaction** in which participants exchange knowledge, coordinate activities and develop shared routines. **From the perspective of adult education, these dynamics resemble forms of informal and peer-based learning that occur outside institutional settings**. Players learn through observation, experimentation and collaboration with more experienced members of the community, often without explicit instructional frameworks.

These practices echo several concepts widely discussed in andragogy. In particular, they resonate with models of experiential learning, where knowledge emerges through direct engagement with activities and reflection on lived experience. In many gaming environments, players continuously test strategies, adapt to challenges and refine their understanding of game mechanics through iterative practice and peer support.

The process resembles what educational theorists describe as **learning by doing**, where competence develops through participation rather than formal instruction. Another relevant aspect concerns the role of community in supporting participation and engagement. Gaming-related contexts often rely on collaborative practices such as mentoring new players, exchanging advice or organising group activities. Such dynamics are comparable to methodologies where knowledge circulates through networks of participants rather than through hierarchical teaching structures.

Within our educational perspective, these aspects should be increasingly recognised as important elements of **holistic learning environments**, where social engagement, scaffolding and peer validation may contribute to sustaining motivation and participation in wider learning processes.

Looking at educators and facilitators working in adult learning environments and their skillsets, these findings open several avenues for reflection.

Rather than approaching gaming solely as a subject of concern or as something "external", it may be useful to recognise the forms of participation, collaboration and problem-solving already present within gaming communities, and to consider how these practices can be directly integrated into educational activities.

In practical terms, this may involve moving beyond generic workshop formats and experimenting with contexts that are already familiar to participants. Instead of simulating communication or teamwork through abstract exercises, educators could, for example, engage learners in collaborative sessions within multiplayer environments such as ***Minecraft***, cooperative matches or structured online challenges, where coordination, negotiation and shared decision-making naturally occur. In many cases, participants are already active in these environments: the educational task becomes one of recognising, framing and extending these experiences rather than replacing them.

Acknowledging these dynamics may help educators build bridges between informal digital cultures and structured learning opportunities, particularly where traditional approaches struggle to engage new audiences. Overall, the findings highlight a broader point: **a more careful understanding of gaming cultures may offer concrete opportunities to reconnect adult education with contemporary digital practices that already shape everyday life.**

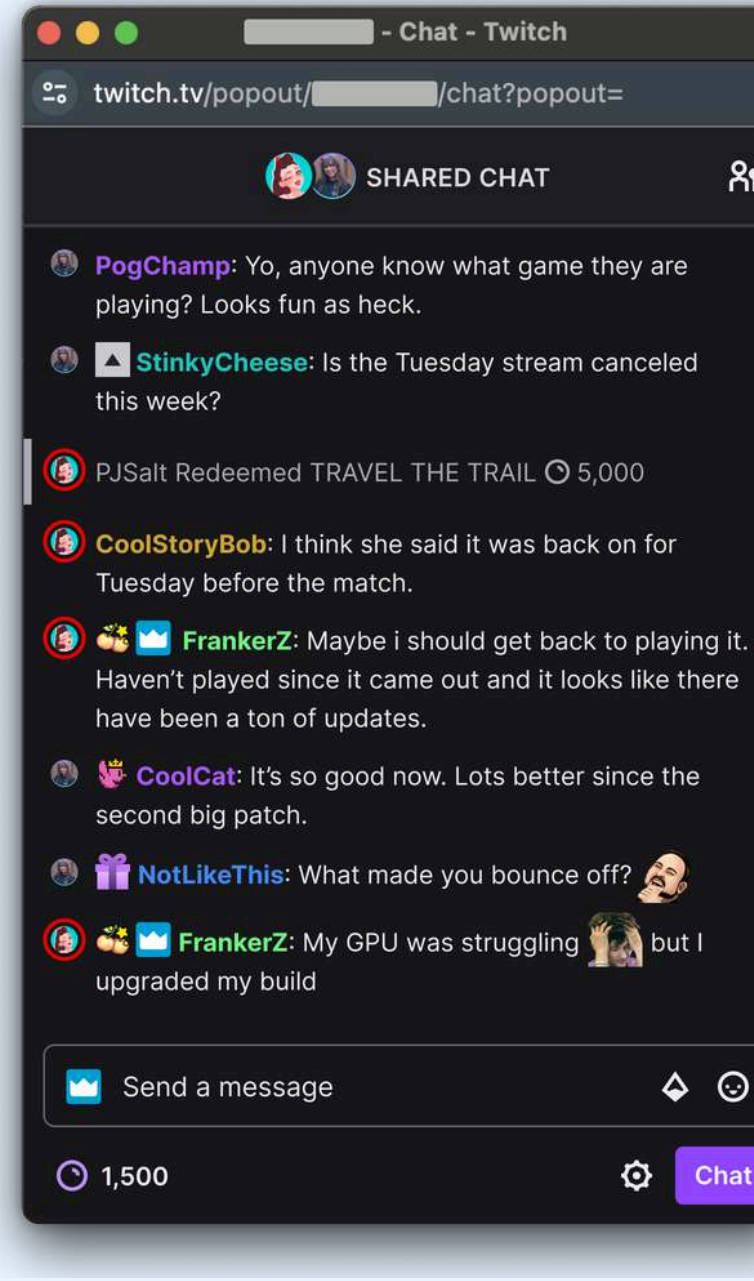


Figure 7. Example of real-time interaction in a gaming stream chat on Twitch, illustrating the participatory culture and peer exchange typical of contemporary gaming communities.

Screenshot taken from publicly available stream content.

Twitch © Amazon.com, Inc.

Gaming Stories: An Anthology

Behind the charts, statistics and thematic insights presented in the previous chapter, the survey collected something more valuable: stories. Each response represents a personal account of how gaming has intersected with everyday life: moments of connection, discovery, self-empowerment and growth experienced by people (and players) across different countries and communities.

The narratives gathered through the survey offer a glimpse into the lived experiences of adult gamers. Some responses are brief reflections; others take the form of more detailed memories.
Together they form a mosaic of perspectives that reveal how gaming is embedded in daily routines, social relationships and personal development. **These stories do not attempt to represent gaming culture and virtual habits in their entirety**. Rather, they provide snapshots of individual experiences that illustrate how digital games are perceived and used by adult people themselves.

Many participants describe their first encounters with gaming in surprisingly similar ways. For some, it began during childhood or adolescence, often through consoles shared with friends or siblings. For others, gaming appeared later in life, sometimes through online communities or multiplayer games that made it easier to connect with people across distance.

Regardless of the starting point, these experiences often evolve into long-term habits that accompany different stages of life.
A number of respondents speak about gaming as part of their everyday routines. Playing after work, joining friends for evening matches or exploring a virtual world during quiet moments of free time are recurring elements in the narratives. **These moments are rarely described as extraordinary events**; instead, they appear as familiar, yet **extremely meaningful cultural and digital practices integrated into daily life**.
In several responses, the social dimension of gaming emerges particularly strongly. Respondents recount memories of cooperative matches, shared activities and more structured forms of collaboration. Multiplayer games often become spaces where people learn to collaborate, to communicate effectively and to gradually build relationships with other players. Over time, these interactions can evolve into stable communities where players recognise each other and develop **a sense of social belonging and self-validation**.

Gaming Stories: An Anthology

Some respondents also describe how gaming environments have introduced them to people and social communities they might never have met otherwise. Through online matches, forums or community servers, players encounter individuals from different countries, cultures and backgrounds, "forcing" them for example to practice a foreign language in order to interact properly. These interactions sometimes remain casual, but in many cases they develop into lasting relationships, maintained through regular communication, sometimes even on a daily basis.

Other stories highlight a more individual aspect of gaming: its capacity to provide moments and tools for emotional balance. Participants describe gaming as a way to cope with stressful environments, mainly through immersion in virtual worlds. For some players, certain games become familiar environments they return to repeatedly, resembling the well-known and extremely effective **grounding method for self-balance and self-regulation**.

However, not all experiences described in the survey are uniformly positive. A few responses also mention tensions, misunderstandings or negative perceptions surrounding gaming, but also moments of discomfort related to the very nature of online and virtual communication, which can sometimes facilitate less accountable forms of interaction, including conflicts and instances of so-called "toxic" behaviour: a very specific form of **hate speech**.

These accounts remind us that gaming, despite its widespread presence, is still interpreted differently across social contexts.

What makes these narratives particularly valuable is their diversity. The respondents come from different countries, age groups and personal backgrounds, yet their experiences often converge around common themes: long-lasting bonds, cooperation, curiosity, challenge, self-expression, self-validation and socialisation. The stories collected here illustrate how gaming environments can support a wide range of experiences, from intense competitive matches to quiet moments of exploration and reflection.

The following pages present a selection of these narratives. They are not intended as exhaustive documentation, but rather as representative examples of the experiences shared by participants and respondents. In some cases, responses have been lightly edited for clarity or length while preserving the original meaning and tone of the participants' words.
Together, these stories reveal something that statistics alone cannot capture: the human dimension of gaming, understood as **a structured way of being active digital citizens and consumers of digital cultural products**.

Gaming Stories: An Anthology

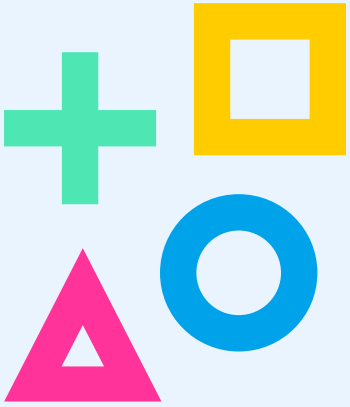
1 First Encounters with Gaming

For many participants, the relationship with gaming began long before the experiences described in the previous chapters. The survey responses often include brief memories of first encounters with video games. For example, moments that range from childhood curiosity to later discoveries during adolescence or adulthood.
These early experiences vary widely. Some respondents recall playing on shared family computers or early consoles with siblings and friends. Others describe discovering games through schoolmates, internet cafés or online communities. In several cases, gaming appears not as a solitary activity but as something that was immediately social, introduced through peers, family members or small groups gathering around the same screen, **challenging the idea of the virtual worlds as symbols of self-isolation**.

The stories collected in the survey reveal how these first encounters often leave a lasting impression. Even when gaming habits change over time, many participants continue to remember the specific moments, places or people connected to their first games. A particular title, a shared multiplayer session or the excitement of discovering a new virtual world can become a reference point that shapes later experiences with gaming.

At the same time, the survey responses vary greatly in length and detail. Some participants provided only brief answers, while others shared more extensive reflections on their early experiences. The stories presented in this section are therefore a selection of narratives drawn from the survey responses. They have been chosen because they offer a clearer glimpse into how participants first encountered gaming and how those early experiences influenced their relationship with digital play.
Together, these short accounts illustrate the diversity of paths through which people enter gaming culture.

Despite these differences, a common thread runs through many of the narratives: gaming often begins as a moment of exploration that gradually evolves into a meaningful and enduring part of everyday life and adulthood.



Gaming Stories: An Anthology

1 First Encounters with Gaming

The stories collected through the survey often begin with a simple moment: a first console, a game shared with family, a late-night session with peer groups, or the discovery of an online community. These early experiences show how gaming becomes part of everyday life through relationships, memories and small formative moments. The following testimonies present a selection of those first encounters.

Ida E., 25–35 — Sweden

"When I started playing video games I was 8 and my younger brother was 6. We used to play together on a PS2 that our aunt gave us as a gift. We would play single-player games and pass the controller to each other whenever one of us died. It was always really fun to play together, and those early experiences helped us develop a sense of cooperation and shared problem-solving."

Lucrezia M., 25–35 — Italy

"My grandfather had a PS1 and loved Tomb Raider. When I was very young and went to visit him, we would play together. I explored the levels while he helped when enemies appeared because I was too scared to face them. Those moments stayed with me, not only as memories of play, but also as early experiences of trust, guidance and shared discovery."

Viktor P., 19–24 — Iceland

"Playing the old LEGO games on the PS2 with my older brother. It was probably one of the first real things that brought us together and made us feel like brothers."

Emil H., 25–35 — Finland

"I've been playing since I was seven, so it's hard to choose one memory. Some of the strongest are booting up Skyrim or Mass Effect 3 for the first time after years of waiting. Guitar Hero and Rock Band with friends were also meaningful experiences we shared together, combining play and coordination in a very engaging way."

Christian W., 14–18 — Sweden

"One of my most fun gaming memories was playing Titan Quest with my friend. I ran into a huge group of enemies and almost died, so I ran back toward him with all of them chasing me. Together we managed to defeat them, and afterwards we just laughed about it. It was one of those moments that brought us closer beyond the game."

Gaming Stories: An Anthology

1 First Encounters with Gaming

Mars L., 14–18 — Sweden
"My first proper online friend group was when we built a giant castle together in Minecraft. We spent hours exploring and playing around in it. I still remember it even though it was five or six years ago. It was one of the first times I really felt part of a shared activity with someone else."

Justin E., 36–45 — Canada
"I won a Mario Kart tournament on the SNES at my local video store when I was around nine years old. It's still one of my happiest childhood memories, winning in front of everyone."

Chris P., 25–35 — Italy
"I remember afternoons spent around the PlayStation playing Final Fantasy VIII with friends. Those moments made gaming part of my everyday life and something I associated with being together."

Erik E., 19–24 — Sweden
"The best memories are when you attend gaming events and meet someone new, and then suddenly you're playing together for hours as if you had known each other forever. It happens quite naturally."

Sara Dogg S., 19–24 — Iceland
"I was playing Overwatch for the third or fourth time when two players started insulting me. Another teammate and a DPS defended me in chat. I didn't know them before that match, but we became friends afterwards. That moment really changed how I see online communities."

Gaming Stories: An Anthology

2 Socialization, Communities and Shared Play

For many participants, gaming quickly moved beyond the experience of a single player in front of a screen. As their stories show, games often become spaces where long-lasting social bonds grow and where shared activities gradually turn into routines. Multiplayer sessions, cooperative challenges and even less structured moments can create moments that are remembered long after the game itself, with a strong impact on daily lives.

Among the most interesting narratives, several respondents describe gaming as one of the easiest ways to connect with others. Some social bonds begin with classmates or siblings and continue online; others start entirely in digital environments and later extend into everyday life. Whether through competitive matches, collaborative worlds or casual sessions with friends, gaming frequently becomes a social environment where communication, teamwork and mutual support seem to naturally emerge.

What is probably more relevant for an educational perspective is that these testimonies reveal how gaming environments can function as informal communities. Players gather around shared goals, develop their own cultures and sometimes build relationships that last for years. The following stories highlight these experiences of connection and collaboration.

Before presenting the testimonies themselves, it is worth noting how often the idea of shared play appears in the survey responses. Many participants do not describe gaming primarily in terms of winning, losing or "passing time", but rather in terms of activities built up together: building something in a virtual world, coordinating during a difficult mission, or simply sharing their feelings and thoughts with other people late at night.



Gaming Stories: An Anthology

2 Socialization, Communities and Shared Play

As anticipated, many respondents describe gaming primarily as a shared activity rather than an individual one. Some memories revolve around teamwork, others around social bonds formed through servers, tournaments or long cooperative sessions. What emerges most clearly is that many of the most meaningful gaming moments are those experienced together.

Erik E., 19–24 — Sweden
"There are too many memories to pick just one. The best ones are when you meet someone new at an event and end up playing together for hours, building things and gathering resources as if you had known each other forever. It just happens naturally.."

Arnar G., 19–24 — Iceland
"When my friend asked me to create an esports team together to compete in national Overwatch leagues. It led to a lot of friendships, and the competitive side made everything more engaging."

Daniele B., 25–35 — Italy
"The first multiplayer Minecraft servers with my friends, trying to understand together how crafting and redstone worked. I still play with two of those friends today, almost fifteen years later. We basically learned everything together."

Malin L., 25–35 — Sweden
"My childhood best friend one day never logged back in, and I never found out what happened. Still, the memories of playing together, endless hours spent grinding for loot in our favourite MMORPG, remain some of the most meaningful."

Gaming Stories: An Anthology

2 Socialization, Communities and Shared Play

Chris P., 25–35 — Italy
"Gaming allowed me to meet many people around the world. Some of those friendships have lasted for years and became part of my everyday life. They're not just online contacts anymore."

Emil H., 25–35 — Finland
"Guitar Hero and Rock Band sessions with friends were some of the most meaningful experiences. We spent hours playing together and it became a shared hobby. It was something we kept coming back to."

Oliver D., 14–18 — Sweden
"I once found an active server in a very old game I thought was dead. I started talking with the people there on voice chat and we decided to keep playing every Friday. They became some of my closest online friends. It just grew from there."

Jupiter F., 14–18 — Sweden
"My friend group organizes a yearly Christmas celebration inside Minecraft with about fifty people. Gaming has helped me find many friends and connect with communities I wouldn't have met otherwise. It's something we now look forward to every year."

Luca R., 25–35 — Italy
"Defeating the Lich King in World of Warcraft after weeks of attempts with my guild. Those moments of cooperation and shared effort are some of the most memorable experiences. It really felt like a collective achievement."

Gaming Stories: An Anthology

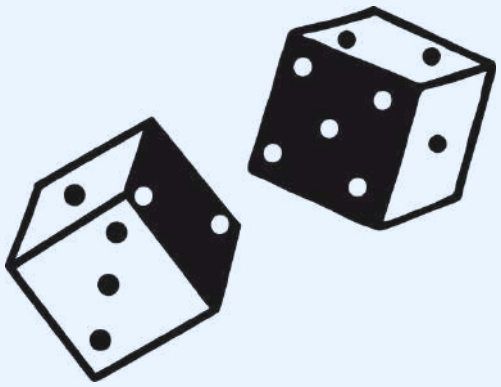
3 Gaming, Well-Being and Personal Growth

Alongside memories and friendships, many respondents reflect on the **personal impact that gaming has had on their lives, on their transversal competences and on their psychological well-being**. Several testimonies describe video games as spaces of comfort, creativity or emotional relief, particularly during difficult periods. Others highlight more practical benefits: improved communication skills, problem-solving abilities, or the opportunity to learn languages and interact with people from different backgrounds.

These stories suggest that gaming can play a role extremely similar to other cultural, educational or social activities.

At the same time, as already stated above, the responses rarely idealise gaming. Participants often acknowledge that the experience can also involve frustration, stress or exposure to negative behaviours online, also due to a general lack of moderation. The following testimonies illustrate this more complex picture, showing how gaming can contribute to well-being while also reflecting the broader dynamics of digital social environments, which can be easily expanded to virtual realities outside of gaming itself (for example social networks).

Before turning to the stories themselves, it is worth noting that many participants speak about gaming in terms of balance. **Games are rarely described as a perfect escape or a universal solution**, but rather as one cultural tool within everyday life: a medium that can provide self-esteem, coping or learning opportunities, while still requiring awareness of its limits.



Gaming Stories: An Anthology

3 Gaming, Well-Being and Personal Growth

Respondents frequently describe games as spaces where they can cope with stressful environments. Others emphasise how gaming supports creativity, language learning, confidence or social interaction. At the same time, several testimonies acknowledge that gaming experiences can include frustration or emotional challenges, particularly in competitive environments. The following stories illustrate this complex relationship between gaming, personal growth and well-being.

Mist M., 19–24 — Iceland
"Video games helped me through many tough times. During Covid-19, they became one of the main ways I stayed connected with classmates and friends, offering a sense of continuity and a needed distraction in a difficult period."

Seweryn A., 19–24 — Poland
"Gaming gives me comfort when I feel depressed and helps me take my mind off things. It also pushed my creativity. I started drawing fanart and gradually improved my artistic skills thanks to game characters and stories."

Emil H., 25–35 — Finland
"My English improved significantly because I started playing games at a young age and needed to understand them. At the same time, gaming helped me develop a more structured approach to logic and problem-solving."

Ida E., 25–35 — Sweden
"Playing video games has definitely improved my reaction time and coordination. I also feel that it contributed to developing cognitive and problem-solving skills that I use in other areas of my life."

Carla Q., 19–24 — Italy
"Video games helped me develop problem-solving abilities, especially through puzzles and environmental challenges."

Gaming Stories: An Anthology

3 Gaming, Well-Being and Personal Growth

Tiziano S., 25–35 — Italy
"Leading my group during difficult raids in Final Fantasy XIV made me realise I had leadership skills I wasn't aware of."

Erik E., 19–24 — Sweden
"I'm not even sure I would still be here today without the gaming community. I struggled a lot in middle school, and gaming became a space where I could meet people without the pressure I felt in real life. Most of my friends today are people I first met through games."

Kai S., 19–24 — Sweden
"Through games I met many wonderful people and even expanded my hobbies. I started cosplaying more because of game characters, which made it easier to connect with others who share the same interests."

Tobias D., 25–35 — Sweden
"Gaming helped me develop problem-solving skills and the ability to organise complex information. It also taught me that sometimes you have to give something up to gain something else: a mindset that applies beyond games."

Luo Caspian L., 14–18 — Sweden
"As someone with social anxiety, gaming helped me make friends and find social groups where I felt more comfortable."

Gaming Stories: An Anthology

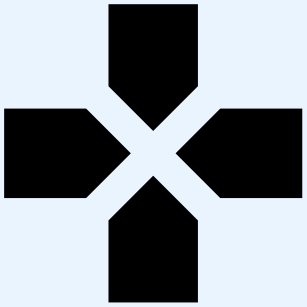
4 Challenges, Harassment and Difficult Experiences

Many of the stories collected in this survey describe gaming in a positive and often moving way, especially when paired with complex phenomena such as **social anxiety, isolation and lack of self-esteem**. On the other hand, respondents also speak openly about the more difficult sides of online gaming spaces. Competitive environments, voice chat and anonymous matchmaking systems can sometimes become contexts where frustration, hostility or discrimination emerge more easily than they would in face-to-face interactions. In this sense, gaming tends to resemble the more well-known and controversial realms of social networks and social channels.

More in detail, several participants recount situations in which insults, harassment or exclusion occurred during multiplayer matches. These experiences appear most frequently in highly competitive titles such as FPS or MOBA games, where players often interact with strangers and where performance is constantly judged by teammates and opponents. For some respondents these episodes remain occasional annoyances, while for others they have shaped the way they approach online gaming itself.

A number of testimonies also highlight issues related to gender and identity. **Women and LGBTQ+ players describe receiving sexist remarks, homophobic comments or unwanted attention once their identity becomes visible through voice chat, usernames or social media profiles**.

Some respondents explain that they have learned to ignore these behaviours or to block abusive users, while others mention adapting their playstyle or communication habits in order to avoid confrontation. These stories do not portray gaming spaces as uniquely hostile; rather, they reveal how online communities often reproduce the same social tensions that exist in broader digital culture. Yet they also show that players continuously develop ways of navigating these environments — relying on moderation systems, supportive communities, or simply the solidarity of other players who intervene when harassment occurs.



Gaming Stories: An Anthology

4 Challenges, Harassment and Difficult Experiences

Although negative experiences appear across many responses, they are rarely described as the defining aspect of gaming. Instead, participants often frame them as one element within a broader ecosystem that includes lasting social bonds, creativity and shared play. The following testimonies highlight some of these more difficult encounters while also showing how players respond to them.

Mist M., 19–24 — Iceland
"As a woman who has been playing video games since childhood, I've experienced my fair share of negativity in different gaming spaces. Sometimes it's small comments like 'you're the best gamer girl I've played with', but other times it becomes more openly hostile. People assume women can't reach the same ranks or dismiss their opinions about games."

Sara S., 19–24 — Iceland
"Being a bisexual person in gaming can be difficult at times. I've been harassed in voice chat when playing alone. It hasn't stopped me from gaming, but I've learned to ignore a lot of those comments."

Eyrún E., 25–35 — Iceland
"Sexual and gender-based harassment happens quite often. Sometimes players will throw games because they think someone is playing badly or react to how a person sounds in voice chat. Experiences like that eventually led me to step away from some competitive FPS games."

Lovisa L., 14–18 — Sweden
"Being a girl in gaming from a young age sometimes meant being targeted with stereotypical and sexist remarks (for example, being told to 'go back to the kitchen'). It affected my confidence when I was younger, but over time I became more resilient."

Nilas P., 14–18 — Sweden
"When you play competitive games you almost always meet toxic people who get angry and insult others. Sometimes it can affect you too, but over time you learn how to deal with it."

Gaming Stories: An Anthology

4 Challenges, Harassment and Difficult Experiences

Mattias G., 19–24 — Sweden
"I spent many years playing League of Legends, so I've seen just about every kind of insult in chat. It didn't affect my life too much, but it clearly shows how toxic some competitive environments can become."

Jódís H., 25–35 — Iceland
"As a woman, I've received plenty of sexist comments while playing online. Some players simply refuse to play with you once they realise you are a woman."

Luo Caspian L., 14–18 — Sweden
"I've experienced bullying and exclusion in some games. And yes, even though it is 'just a game', it can affect your mood for the rest of the day or even more."

Gabriele D., 36–45 — Spain
"Many online games are full of toxicity. I've witnessed racism and harassment in some multiplayer communities. It didn't affect me personally too much, but it led me to avoid certain environments."

Arnar G., 19–24 — Iceland
"Harassment is unfortunately part of online gaming and, probably, of everything related to digital activities. Blocking or muting players helps, but it doesn't always solve the problem."

Reflections and Implications for Educators

Listening to Digital Lives: Why Narrative Surveys Matter

One of the first questions an educator might ask when encountering a project such as ***Adventures Are Better Shared!*** is deceptively simple: **why collect stories about gaming at all?** From the outside, narrative surveys about players' memories, friendships or frustrations may appear anecdotal or loosely structured compared to traditional educational research tools. Yet this type of material serves a specific and increasingly recognised function within **adult education and media education contexts**: it allows educators, facilitators and other practitioners to access the lived digital experiences of participants in ways that conventional questionnaires or statistical data rarely capture.

Lifelong learning has long emphasised the centrality of experience in the educational process. Extremely valid methodological approaches (Bruner, 2003) have highlighted how individuals interpret their lives through narratives, organising events into meaningful stories that help them understand both themselves and the social environments they inhabit. From this perspective, storytelling is not simply a form of expression but also a cognitive process through which people interpret reality, reflect on past events and communicate their experiences to others.

When these narratives concern digital environments (such as online games, virtual communities or multiplayer platforms) they become particularly valuable sources for understanding contemporary forms of participation and social interaction.

Within the framework of our small-scale project, the narrative survey was therefore designed **less as a tool for measurement and more as a tool for listening**. By inviting participants to describe their memories, relationships and challenges related to gaming, the survey generates qualitative material that reveals how digital environments are experienced from the inside. These accounts provide insights into aspects of gaming culture that are often invisible in purely technical or statistical discussions: **the emotional attachment** to specific games, the importance of online relationships, the ways players cope with stress or anxiety, and the tensions that can emerge in virtual environments.
For educators approaching the topic of digital culture from outside the gaming community, these stories perform an important bridging function. Many adult educators, facilitators or social workers encounter gaming primarily through public discourse, where it is often framed in simplified terms: either as a harmless hobby or as a problematic form of screen consumption.

Reflections and Implications for Educators

Narrative testimonies complicate these assumptions by showing the everyday reality of gaming practices. They reveal that gaming environments are neither purely positive nor purely negative, but complex social spaces where collaboration, creativity, conflict and personal growth may coexist.
This perspective is particularly relevant in the context of non-formal and informal educational methodologies, that rarely take into account the pervasiveness of the digital, focusing instead on more "traditional" learning environments. On the other hand, online games (as well as social networks) actually represent one of the most widespread forms of social interaction today, especially among younger adults.

Understanding how these environments function (from communication patterns to community norms) can therefore help trainers, social workers and educators better engage with learners whose social interactions increasingly take place in hybrid online–offline contexts.
The narrative survey used in this project can thus be understood as a preparatory step: **a way of mapping experiences before attempting to design educational responses**. In this sense, rather than approaching gaming through abstract assumptions, educators are invited to start from the voices of the participants themselves.

Another important dimension of this approach concerns empathy and perspective. Reading personal accounts of gaming experiences, whether they involve teamwork in difficult situations, social bonds formed across countries, or moments of harassment in voice chat, helps educators recognise the emotional and social significance that these fully virtual environments may hold for participants.
This recognition is particularly important when working with adult learners who may not initially perceive gaming as relevant to education. Stories make these connections visible by illustrating how digital practices intersect with language learning, collaboration, identity exploration and community building.

At the same time, narrative methods also encourage critical reflection. Because the survey includes both positive and negative experiences, **it highlights the ambivalent nature of online communities**.
Respondents speak about long-lasting contacts and support networks, but also about sexual harassment, exclusion or racial discrimination. For educators, this dual perspective is valuable: it prevents idealisation while also avoiding simplistic moral judgements about virtual cultures.

Reflections and Implications for Educators

In this sense, the narrative survey may function as a diagnostic instrument rather than a final educational product. Its purpose is not to provide definitive answers about gaming, digital culture, virtual habits and their complex relationship with learning processes, but **to create a starting point for dialogue between educators and gaming communities, to be understood as a widespread cultural phenomenon**. By documenting how players themselves interpret their experiences, the project offers educators a first orientation within a complex cultural landscape.

The insights emerging from these stories also contribute to a broader understanding of digital participation in contemporary society.
As communication technologies increasingly shape everyday social life, activities such as gaming, streaming or online collaboration become central arenas where individuals develop **communicative, organisational and social skills**. Narrative accounts allow these processes to be observed in concrete terms, making them visible to educators who might otherwise overlook them.
For this reason, storytelling-based approaches have become increasingly common in educational innovation projects, particularly within non-formal and informal educational contexts.

They provide a flexible and accessible method for exploring emerging digital cultures while also producing materials that **can be shared, discussed and further analysed**. In the case of ***Adventures Are Better Shared!***, this anthology serves precisely this purpose: it translates a set of individual experiences into **a collective resource that educators can reflect upon and use as a point of entry into discussions about gaming, community and digital participation**.

Seen from this perspective, the narrative survey is not an isolated research activity but part of a broader methodological pathway. It prepares educators to approach gaming environments with greater awareness and curiosity, offering them a first glimpse into the social worlds that players inhabit.
The next step, explored in the following sections of this chapter, is to consider how these insights can inform educational practice and support the development of new forms of media education and digital competence training.

Reflections and Implications for Educators

Understanding Gaming Cultures Through Narrative

If the first step of the narrative survey was to listen to the voices of players, the second step concerns interpretation. As stated above, the general objective of this narrative anthology and digital storytelling exercise was to develop useful lenses through which educators can begin to understand the cultural environments in which many learners spend a significant portion of their time.

For educators who are not themselves familiar with gaming environments, the world described in these testimonies may initially appear fragmented: different genres, platforms, communities and communication styles coexist within a vast and constantly evolving ecosystem. Yet the narratives collected in this project reveal recurring patterns that help clarify how these environments operate socially. Respondents described cooperation often in similar terms, lasting social bonds and connections through virtual spaces, but also the development of informal civic rules governing behaviour in online communities, and strategies developed to navigate conflicts or tensions.

From an educational perspective, these stories reveal that gaming environments are not merely technical platforms but complex social spaces.

In terms of communication, cooperation and other significant basic skills and competences, the anthology offers an interesting point of view, especially when respondents describe their experiences in multiplayer environments: leadership roles and abilities emerge and strengthen, shared goal structures tend to develop harmoniously, and community norms are gradually established.

As previously mentioned and described, many respondents tend to interpret "gaming" in a broad sense, including very different platforms and tools: Discord servers, forums or social media groups, just to mention the most frequent ones. This behaviour or tendency is particularly interesting because it reinforces the idea that gaming can function **as an entry point into broader forms of digital competence and digital readiness**.

In this sense, digital literacy is not limited to the technical use of productivity software, but involves a practical familiarity with contemporary platforms, online communities, content ecosystems and the dynamics that shape visibility, interaction and participation in digital spaces.

Reflections and Implications for Educators

Another relevant element that emerged quite often is the nature of what we described as “lasting social bonds”: respondents tend, more precisely, to describe them simply as friendships formed through virtual spaces, with a strong focus on collaborative learning and on participation in communities that share the same goal. Narrative surveys help make these human and civic connections more visible and recognizable, by situating gaming experiences within the broader contexts in which they occur.

Another important insight emerging from the collected testimonies concerns the diversity of motivations behind gaming practices. Some respondents emphasise competition and achievement, recalling tournaments or challenging cooperative missions that required intense coordination. Others focus on exploration, creativity or storytelling, describing the emotional impact of narrative-driven games or the satisfaction of building virtual worlds together with meaningful virtual acquaintances. For many players, these different motivations coexist and shift over time depending on the game, the community and the personal circumstances of the player.

Understanding this diversity can help educators move beyond simplified assumptions about gaming. In public debates, video games are sometimes portrayed as homogeneous activities associated primarily with distraction and solitary behaviours.

Narrative methods have proven to be particularly well suited to uncovering these dynamics, encouraging participants and respondents to describe experiences in their own terms. Instead of forcing respondents into predefined categories, open narrative prompts allow individuals to highlight what they personally consider truly meaningful.

As a result, unexpected themes often emerged: the importance of shared goals and informally defined social rules, the role of gaming during periods of isolation, or the ways in which people learn to navigate conflicts within virtual environments.
For educators engaged in media education or digital competence training, these insights can be especially valuable. They reveal how digital environments become spaces where individuals practise communication, negotiation and collaboration, skills that are usually at the centre of many “offline” educational and professional pathways.

Reflections and Implications for Educators

A particularly significant point to emphasise is that these skills and educational values are not always developed intentionally within online communities; they often emerge organically through repeated interaction and shared problem-solving.

At the same time, the narratives also highlight the challenges present in online environments. Participants describe online realities as “real life mirrors” with fewer social filters, encountering hostile behaviours, discriminatory remarks or aggressive communication. On the other hand, they also tend to find allies and coping mechanisms in those same virtual realities.

This balanced perspective may help educators understand both the opportunities and the risks associated with participation in digital gaming cultures, reading them as complex extensions of everyday life and not as isolated, exceptional and less significant or impactful settings.
In practical terms, this means that narrative testimonies can serve as a valuable interpretative resource, providing concrete examples of how gaming communities function, how people interact and what types of experiences participants may consider meaningful. By analysing these stories collectively, educators can begin to identify patterns that inform their understanding of digital participation among adult learners.

Our anthology therefore aims to perform a dual function: on one level, it documents personal experiences that illustrate the diversity of online gaming cultures across different countries and adult communities. On another level, it wishes to offer educators a structured opportunity to explore these environments from the perspective of the people who inhabit them.

This interpretative step is extremely relevant before moving toward actual educational applications.

Understanding how gaming cultures function, how players communicate, collaborate and navigate digital spaces, creates the foundation upon which more targeted educational initiatives can be built.

The next section of this chapter will therefore shift the focus from interpretation to practice, examining how insights from narrative surveys can inform educational strategies and support the development of digital competence among educators themselves.

Reflections and Implications for Educators

From Stories to Educational Insight: How Educators Can Read Gaming Narratives

A first reason why the narrative surveys collected in our anthology matter is that they help educators recognise gaming not as a marginal leisure activity, but as part of the ordinary "onlife" condition in which contemporary social life unfolds.

The notion of onlife, as developed in the European debate on hyperconnectivity, describes the erosion of any rigid boundary between online and offline experience: in this sense, digital environments are no longer external spaces occasionally accessed by users, but ordinary settings in which identity, interaction and participation are continuously negotiated.

Read in this light, the testimonies gathered through the survey do more than document gaming habits, as they show how adults tend to **inhabit digital environments as meaningful social worlds**, where communication routines, emotional investments and shared norms are both experienced and structured, often with a significant impact on what is usually referred to as the "offline" world.

More precisely, from an educational perspective, these insights may offer an initial interpretative resource for understanding how learning, participation and relational life increasingly develop within hybrid environments.

Very often, when discussing digital competence or digital readiness, particularly in adult education, the focus tends to remain on technical proficiency.

This perspective risks overlooking aspects that are likely far more relevant, such as civic participation, the development of social skills and social interaction, critical orientation, and the construction of identity within networked environments.

These dimensions appear much more aligned with current understandings of digital literacy and with the evolving ways in which individuals participate in contemporary digital cultures.

Reflections and Implications for Educators

Digital Communities, Social Withdrawal and Alternative Spaces of Interaction

A second relevant insight emerging from the narratives concerns the role that gaming environments may play **as alternative spaces of social interaction, particularly for individuals who experience forms of social withdrawal, anxiety or difficulty in navigating traditional offline environments**.

In recent years, several strands of research in media psychology and digital sociology have explored how **networked environments may function simultaneously as spaces of refuge and as arenas of social participation**.

While public discourse often frames intensive online engagement primarily through the lens of problematic internet use or digital dependency, empirical studies have increasingly highlighted the more complex role that digital platforms can play in sustaining social ties, especially for individuals who might otherwise experience isolation or marginalisation (Kardefelt-Winther, 2014; Cole & Griffiths, 2007).

On the other hand, within the testimonies collected in ***Adventures Are Better Shared!***, gaming frequently appears as a socially structured environment rather than a solitary activity.

Multiplayer sessions, community servers and cooperative challenges create opportunities for interaction that are perceived by respondents as accessible and emotionally manageable, particularly when compared to face-to-face contexts that may involve stronger social pressure or evaluative dynamics.

From this perspective, gaming environments can operate as "third spaces" of social interaction: environments that exist outside traditional institutional contexts yet still provide opportunities for meaningful relationships, social communication and community formation.

From an educational perspective, these narratives may help shift the interpretation of gaming from a purely recreational activity to a potential relational infrastructure within contemporary digital culture. Understanding these patterns can help educators approach gaming cultures with greater nuance, acknowledging both the opportunities and the challenges associated with digital participation **while recognising that, for many individuals, these environments already function as significant arenas of social life**.

Reflections and Implications for Educators

Informal Learning and Peer-Based Knowledge in Gaming Communities

A third relevant dimension emerging from the narrative testimonies concerns the presence of **informal learning processes within gaming and, more broadly, virtual communities**. Many respondents describe situations in which knowledge is acquired not through formal instruction but through observation, experimentation and interaction with other participants. Complex social structures, guild systems and community servers frequently operate as environments where more experienced members guide others in a largely spontaneous and collaborative manner; strategies are collectively discussed and problem-solving skills are progressively refined through practice.

These dynamics closely resemble what educational research describes as peer-based or community-driven learning processes.

These observations also resonate with well-established theories in adult learning and experiential education. Andragogical approaches emphasise that adult learners tend to develop competences more effectively when learning activities are embedded in meaningful contexts and when individuals can draw directly on their own experiences (Knowles, Holton & Swanson, 2015).

Similarly, the use of videogames and interactive environments appears to align closely with **Kolb's experiential learning model**, which highlights how knowledge often emerges through cycles of concrete experience, reflection and experimentation rather than through abstract instruction (Kolb, 1984).

Furthermore, these environments can also be interpreted through the lens of **communities of practice**, where learning occurs through participation in shared activities and through the gradual acquisition of competence within a group (Lave & Wenger, 1991; Wenger, 1998).

In many of the narratives collected in this project, respondents describe precisely this type of progression: **individuals initially join communities as novices, learn from more experienced players and eventually contribute knowledge themselves by mentoring others or organising collective activities**. From our educational perspective, recognising these dynamics is particularly valuable because it highlights how digital environments may already host forms of collaborative learning that resemble educational methodologies traditionally developed within institutional contexts.

Reflections and Implications for Educators

For educators and facilitators, these insights provide a useful starting point for rethinking how learning processes may unfold in contemporary digital cultures. Rather than viewing gaming environments solely as spaces of entertainment, they can also be interpreted as ecosystems in which communication, coordination, problem-solving and knowledge exchange are continuously practiced through participation. In practical terms, this means that educators may recognise and build upon experiences that learners already possess.

For example, when facilitating a workshop on effective communication or teamwork, **acknowledging that some participants regularly engage in cooperative multiplayer games may provide a meaningful entry point for discussion**. Players who coordinate strategies in online matches, negotiate roles within teams or resolve conflicts in gaming communities are often already practicing forms of communication, collaboration and decision-making that closely resemble the competencies addressed in many educational or professional training contexts. Recognising and valuing these experiences can help educators connect formal learning objectives with practices that participants already perform in their everyday digital lives.

Gaming Cultures and Contemporary Digital Competence

Another relevant, and final, aspect emerging from our storytelling exercises and narratives concerns the relationship between gaming practices and the **development of contemporary forms of digital competence and digital readiness**. Several respondents implicitly describe a level of familiarity with digital environments that extends far beyond the basic use of software or productivity tools.

Participation in gaming communities often requires navigating multiple platforms simultaneously, including communication systems, streaming platforms, forums and community servers. In these contexts, individuals learn how to coordinate information across different channels, interpret community norms, manage online identities and interact with diverse digital audiences. **Put simply, these practices highlight a broader understanding of digital literacy and may provide useful insights for designing digital literacy pathways, which represent a significant part of the work carried out by many adult education practitioners**.

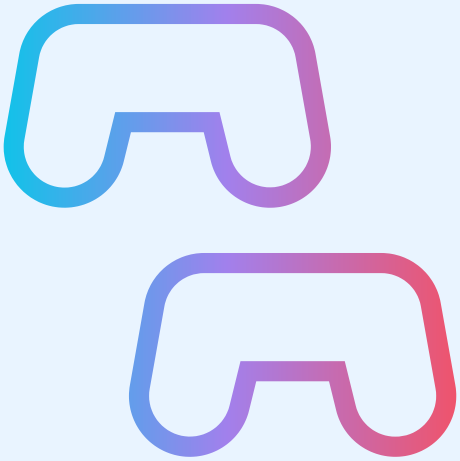
Reflections and Implications for Educators

Frameworks such as the European DigComp model emphasise that digital competence involves not only technical proficiency but also social interaction, inclusive and proactive communication, information management and civic participation in digital environments (European Commission, 2022).

The experiences gathered in our anthology illustrate how many of these competences are already exercised informally through participation in gaming communities and, more broadly, through engagement with videogames, despite the fact that such activities are often still viewed with scepticism or dismissed as merely recreational. In many cases, it is precisely through becoming active participants in gaming environments that adults begin to develop the practical ability to evaluate information shared within communities, interpret platform dynamics and participate in collaborative digital spaces that require coordination and negotiation with others.

The primary objective of this narrative deliverable is therefore to help illuminate how gaming environments may function as gateways to contemporary digital cultures in their broader sense.

Through repeated interaction within these ecosystems, participants gradually acquire practical knowledge about the functioning of platforms, online communication patterns and the dynamics that shape visibility and participation in networked environments. Recognising these experiences may help educators move beyond narrow conceptions of digital competence and begin to familiarise themselves with a broader notion of digital literacy: one that includes the transversal ability to navigate complex digital ecosystems, interpret social dynamics online and participate responsibly, as **digital citizens**, in the networked public sphere.



Conclusion

The narratives collected in this booklet provide a first exploratory insight into how adult gamers experience digital play as part of their everyday lives. Through the survey responses and the testimonies presented in the anthology, a more nuanced picture of gaming emerges: one that goes beyond common stereotypes and highlights the social, emotional and cultural dimensions of contemporary gaming communities. **For educators working in the field of adult education, these stories offer an opportunity to better understand digital environments that many learners tend to inhabit regularly**.

The testimonies illustrate how gaming can function simultaneously as a space of self-expression, social interaction, civic awareness, creativity and informal learning. They also reveal the challenges that participants may encounter, including harassment, exclusion or misunderstandings surrounding gaming culture. Taken together, these perspectives help situate gaming within the broader landscape of **digital participation that increasingly shapes everyday communication and community life**.

From the perspective of ongoing education, the purpose of this survey was not to produce statistical conclusions about gaming habits, but rather to collect **qualitative insights that could support a process of familiarisation for educators**. Listening to the voices of players allows educators to approach gaming culture with greater awareness and curiosity, recognising the diversity of experiences and meanings that participants attach to their digital practices.

Within ***Adventures Are Better Shared!***, this anthology therefore represents an initial step in a broader learning process, reskilling and upskilling in relation to digital worlds. The stories gathered here help build a bridge between gaming communities and the field of lifelong educational methodologies, creating a foundation for further reflection on how digital cultures intersect with learning, well-being and social participation.

The insights emerging from this survey will feed into the next phase of the project, particularly ***Activity 3***, which focuses on developing training resources and educational materials for educators interested in exploring the potential of videogame-related practices in adult learning contexts. By familiarising educators with the experiences and perspectives of gamers, the present work contributes to preparing the ground for the course and methodological manual that will follow.

By bringing together the voices of players and the perspectives of educators, this anthology sought to encourage a more informed and reflective engagement with gaming culture as part of the broader landscape of digital media and contemporary virtual learning environments.

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