

Report by the Creative Game Manager

1. Objectives

The scenario for the game was set such that participants would –

- a) Have the opportunity to reshape, based on new approaches, their perceptions of the world and current tendencies in society, the role of people in the modern world, flow of information, knowledge, mass media, the ability to stay informed, to be well educated and so on;
- b) Analyze the basic concepts and categories based on the above and put into circulation new ideas, characteristic structures, systems and infrastructures, which constitute the mechanisms for the circulation of information and determine the peculiarities of the effects of information on a person;
- c) Reveal the values making up the flow of information and determining its main characteristics ;
- d) Discover and determine the existing connections between the mechanisms of civilization, cultural norms, specific characteristics of sub-cultures and the flow of information;
- e) Analyze the concepts of “markets”, “supply”, “demand”, “producer” and “consumer” in the sphere of mass media and, at a broader level, in the production of information and its exchange (or sale and purchase);
- f) Analyze the perceptions about electronic or digital societies and network systems held by different groups of people representing Armenian society, including both specialists as well as people who consider themselves connected to the field of mass media in one way or another;
- g) Reveal new tendencies for the development of mass media;
- h) Define the demands regarding the form and content of mass media, and finally,
- i) Define the objectives that specialized groups have to set themselves and the issues they have to tackle as well as propose other, preferably unpredictable, proposals.

2. “Diagnosis” and Conclusions

- a) A clear dissatisfaction with the current state of mass media in Armenia and, as a result, a lack of desire to analyze that state. That attitude was not explicitly stated mostly, people would simply avoid the topic and try not to go into detail about describing, for example, the product that is on offer in the Armenian media market, its genre-specific characteristics or the system;

The thoughts expressed by the participants were rarely reinforced by examples based on the Armenian reality. In other words, a hidden message saying “Well, we all know about that” was constantly in the air.

But the game facilitators' efforts to get the complete picture revealed a number of questions, which were not getting answered and, in some cases, remained without a clear answer based on the concepts of cause and effect even at the very end.

The reflection showed that the main reason for this is the prevailing confusion in the market and the absence of transparent relations as well as the unanswered question about what the consumer wants and what the basis of the producer's work is. What also basically remains unclear is who these consumers are and who is responsible as far as the formation of the concepts of demand and production in this area is concerned.

- b) The virtual space in Armenia continues to remain mainly an elite zone, both in the sense of how it is manifested as well as considering how that space is used and the characteristic features of "residing" in that space.
- c) The game revealed an absolute dissatisfaction with the Armenian media sphere. Moreover, that dissatisfaction is based on all sorts of reasons and is equally characteristic for groups that are ideologically from opposite camps.
- d) The consumer (at least the consumer that was presented during the course of the game, who should be our focus) has a much higher level of maturity and a much wider range of interests than the producer. This also explains the tendency of the consumer to seek information from the outside world – foreign television and radio stations, websites, gossip and so on.
- e) In a symbolic sense, the flow of information and information channels do not correspond to each other and often do not even match. In the Armenian media space, the flow of information is largely not channeled, which is a result of a lack of awareness about the consumer or the addressee. This in turn means that that flow is not adapted to our reality or our demand for information.

As a result, a number of small or medium-sized subcultures develop, which often end up being comical in nature.

- f) One could consider the demand towards the media space to provide people with not only information, but also knowledge to be quite unexpected. People should have the opportunity to learn and to recognize besides the ability to just be on the receiving end of flows of information.
- g) What was also unexpected is the following result, which emerged from my report as well as those of the game and the facilitators. Based on the characteristics of how ideas developed during the game and the direction in which they headed one could conclude that **Armenian society, once thought to be traditionally collectivistic, cannot be considered to be so any longer. It holds quite strong individualistic tendencies within itself.** If the previous creative games had shown a simple state of nihilism and a fragmentation of awareness, then the last two games clearly showed the following – first, **the fragmented perception of the state of the world and a similar worldview have been overcome and, second, some of the proposed solutions have very strong individualistic features and go so far as to be anarchistic, even though this is still relatively mildly expressed¹.**

¹ The Hackers' Manifesto states the following as part of the principles of hackers' ethics – "unlimited and complete access to all consumers, free information online and a decentralization of governance (power) in the webnet". Loyd Blankenship wrote, in *The Conscience of a Hacker*, "This is our world now, the world of codes and electronic

- h) From my point of view, the following result of the game is also of great significance. There were no serious problems linked to the ways in which information is delivered, spread, “packaged” or “labeled” and the means used to do these. But **the quality of information, its content and accurate addressing were considered serious issues**. The unwavering lack of confidence voiced by all the groups towards the information which was being addressed to the majority of the Armenian audience by the Armenian (and not only the Armenian) mass media was just one example of the dissatisfaction and the demands towards the content of the news and its packaging. The most important of these was the value base of the text in the messages.
- i) At the same time, our society’s frustration with being a closed one was expressed both explicitly and implicitly. This is manifested in two ways because on the one hand **there is a certain fear towards modern or civilized flows of information and, on the other, there is the desire to receive these flows without restrictions and distortion**. All the groups proposed varying and multiple filters, some of which exist objectively while others are created artificially. The ways in which these filters are used, the “explosions” and “channel clogging”, show the real attitude which exists towards the information which is considered external, and in case of a radical approach – foreign, dangerous and hostile.

At the same time, the groups showed a conscience *volaspiration* towards openness (a rough translation of the word which Gevorg Ter-Gabrielyan had used, which I understand to mean a combination of volition and aspiration) including when this *volaspiration* led to individual informative acts.

- j) One of the most important results of the creative game can be described as follows – **a desire to actively occupy the external informational space, primarily the virtual and the web-based, in different ways and through some interesting proposals, in order to take our own worldview and values to the outside world**.
- k) The game, in essence, circumvented the issues related to the development of mass media. **This is, in all probability, due to the lack of confidence towards the mediators, as already mentioned, whether they are the authorities, the owners, the reporters or other mediators**. This issue was raised only when discussing the unsatisfactory quality, low level of interest, small print runs and other topics of these media. Another issue that was not discussed was the potential end of the era of paper media, paper books and even television. Perhaps the only exception to this was the discussion of the “specialized” group. Therefore, the main concern which was expressed was the presence of a mediator.

3. Projects²

During discussions within the groups, issues often came up related to Armenia’s overall modernization and it was noted that if the necessary steps were taken to reform the state and societal systems (the rule of law, liberalization of the domestic market, stimulation of economic

pulses. We make use of a service already existing without paying for what could be dirt-cheap if it wasn't run by profiteering gluttons like you. We seek after knowledge, we value knowledge.”

² The appendix *Facilitators’ Reports on Group Work* describes the projects developed by the groups. In my report, I have therefore listed only the projects which organically arose from the whole process or which developed through the synthesis of a few projects proposed by different groups.

mechanisms, optimization of the management system and more), the problems in the mass media sphere would be rectified naturally.

However, these were countered by arguments calling for the activation of the role of the mass media in achieving the changes towards the modernization necessary for the state and society. The discussions also saw an important role being given to the need to broaden the influence of the “fourth estate” and increase the resources at its disposal, which would lead to the establishment of universal human values in our society.

- a) **e-Armenia** – The aim of this project is the “**e-mamization**” (see the report by the facilitator for the “electronic-digital society” group) of Armenian society. The project has an education component (**the corresponding education of all the young people in the regions of Armenia, after which all of them would be able to make small presentations online on various sites like YouTube, Facebook and so on**). The value emphasized in this education is “You have a right to know” and therefore “I am ready to work, in order for you to know” (see the report by the facilitator of the “I [don’t] read newspapers” group). The topics need to be relevant and social, aiming to remove that which is not transparent or is in the dark.

It would be useful to set up a Virtual Journalism Club in each region of the country, probably through the involvement of other donors, and provide it with the necessary equipment with the organizers’ retaining the right to coordinate and supervise those clubs. The Youth Bank (an EPF project) participants and those young people involved in the YPC youth initiative could be a part of this project. At the end of their education, a competition could be organized of the work that they have done and the winners would be given equipment and their work would be written on discs and distributed.

- b) **Village Reporter sub-project** – this offers **updates about the situation in all inhabited areas, knowledge about the real situation on the ground, the provision of information about the lives of everyday citizens and an analysis of everything that is truly of concern** – a picture of Armenian life that is maximally complete and painted of values.

This is also a battle with the importance given artificially to imagined topics.

But the educational programs needed to reach these aims have to be developed very carefully and meticulously.

- c) **Armenian web** – The aim of this project is the creation of new and the activation of existing information channels, or, as one of the group facilitators said – the “tubization” and “de-tubization” of information flow. An analysis of virtually all the groups demonstrated a deficit of information channels at the disposal of the active representatives of Armenian society. In order to remove this deficit, **a Consortium of Armenian webmasters may have to be formed and a value-based protocol may have to be agreed and signed, allowing them to collaborate and link to each other. With more density in the web, society would be better informed and there would be more competition among producers.** This project has the potential to be developed into a number of different sub-projects working in various directions.
- d) **Consumer education** – The aim of this project is to form the consumer’s demand for information. The basis of this project should be formed by serious research, which would reveal not the current demand in the media market but rather people’s real demands, their actual need for information based on their requirements for economic, labor and social activity, leading to social and cultural activation in their locations, villages and cities (success stories).

The answer to the question “What do we really need to know?” will be the basis of the educational activities.

- e) **The “Laboratory”** – This is a research group supervising the implementation of projects and introducing modifications during the course of this work, reacting to changes in the landscape, constantly organizing snap surveys analyzing the content value of the projects and the attitudes towards them by the people and, more widely, by society.
 - f) **“The New Journalist” project** – What is a professional journalist in conditions of the progressive irrelevance of paper mass media and the transformation/disappearance of mediators? A small series of activities is proposed, aimed at studying this issue.
4. If necessary, the projects described by the group facilitators in their reports will be translated from the game’s terminology to a more understandable language.