

Sunday, August 18, 2013

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Prof. Maged N. Kamel Boulos
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Dear Professor Boulos,

Thank you very much for accepting my manuscript (pending the minor revisions). I am very pleased that that you and the reviewers concluded it is a strong manuscript worthy of inclusion in *The Journal of Virtual Worlds Research*. I have submitted a revised manuscript based on the reviewer's commentary. Please also find my own responses to the reviewer's comments attached to this letter that detail the revisions I have made to the manuscript.

Also, please note that I can supply vector files of the maps that I draw, or high resolution rasters as necessary so that they appear undistorted and as they should in the published article.

Again, thank you very much for your acceptance of the manuscript. If I can answer any questions, provide any additional information, or make any additional revisions, please do not hesitate to contact me.

Sincerely,

Heath Robinson

Heath Robinson

Question 1

Are the title and abstract appropriate for the paper?

Reviewer 1: *I found the title a bit off-target, leaving me unsure what the article would be about. How about “Aspatial Economic Geography in Virtual World” – would that work? I don’t a question in a title is generally a good idea. Similarly, the abstract felt like a pasting together of phrases from the paper. Could it be re-written to reveal more clearly exactly what the article is about?*

I accept the position that a title should not be a question. Therefore, I have changed to the title of the article to “The Aspatial Economics of Virtual Worlds”. The abstract has also been rewritten as follows:

This article compares and contrasts the economic geography of the physical world with that of virtual worlds, with an analytical focus on the spatial (and aspatial) characteristics of Blizzard Entertainment’s Diablo II (released in 2000) and its massively multiplayer online roleplaying game World of Warcraft (released in 2004). The purpose of this article is to show that although virtual worlds are not immune to aspatial economic laws, geographic constraints on economic interaction in virtual worlds are optional inclusions. Virtual world designers can manage the inclusion, disinclusion, and degree of emphasis on space and place in order to carefully craft a specific user experience. Hence, even though virtual worlds may provide the illusion of operating in a spatially bounded environment, the underlying mechanics of the world may not have spatial constraints. Nevertheless, the article concludes that there still remains a role for geographic analysis in virtual worlds, especially because, though space may be deemphasized, virtual world designers still may go to great effort to emphasize place to create the users' experiences. Further, the study of the economics of virtual worlds may provide insight into possible future economic situations of the physical world as increasingly more physical goods become digital.

Reviewer 2: *An abstract contains the aim of the paper that states - ...to examine the impact on..., which is more suitable for an article with an empirical part in it as it implies some examination being done through quantitative data analysis mainly. Since this article is an evaluation of geography in VW, the aim needs to be rephrased.*

I am not sure that “examine the impact on” necessarily implies quantitative data analysis, but since it was thought to be misleading, the phrase no longer appears in the abstract.

Question 2

Adequacy of the Introduction (background and/or context of the study including topical discussions, scenarios, etc.)

Reviewer 1: *Introduction is good. It helped me understand more clearly than the abstract what the paper was actually about.*

Reviewer 2: *It is fine*

Thank you both. No changes have been made in this area.

Question 3

Adequacy of literature review, or if a practical paper, adequacy of examples. (Does not preclude some literature review. Please provide your opinion as to whether or not the references used in this paper are sufficient, appropriate, and up-to-date, or suggest additional references.)

Reviewer 1: *Use of literature is excellent. Scope is broad, yet each reference is relevant to the paper. Author's strong grasp of the literature is well demonstrated.*

Reviewer 2: *The discussion in the literature is referenced throughout, clearly presented.*

Thank you. No changes have been made in this area.

Question 4

If this is an empirical paper, is the methodology appropriate?

Reviewer 1: *Not an empirical paper*

Reviewer 2: *N/A*

No changes in this area.

Question 5

**Thorough analysis of the issues addressed in the paper
(in the context of the existing literature)**

Reviewer 1: *The analysis is thorough and logical. The only think that hampers the analysis a bit is that it is sometimes a bit rambling. Please see my suggestion below in #6.*

Reviewer 2: *Fine*

No changes, but see responses to suggestions in #6.

Question 6:

**Clarity of the arguments presented
(Logical consistency, flow of argument, reasons/examples/proof
for all points, etc.)**

Reviewer 1: *The clarity and logic of the arguments is actually better than at first meets the eye. Some of the arguments and supporting evidence at first appear weak, but upon further reading and thought, they are actually quite compelling. I am wondering if this problem might be helped by organizing the points of*

analysis with their discussion and documentation around a series of “principles.” Under the main headings the author has already supplied, each principle could be clearly stated, then a discussion could follow. This small addition might make the main principles addressed by the author easier to see by readers, improve the readability of the paper, and reveal the author’s excellent knowledge of the subject matter.

Reviewer 2: *Good consistency of arguments presented*

I am very happy that the second reviewer thought the article fared well in this criteria, but upon reading the article though again, I am sympathetic to the first reviewer’s (minor) critique. While I am not exactly sure what is meant by orienting them around “principles” I did feel that the introductory sentences in some of the sections could be improved to better communicate why the section was relevant to the central argument of the article. Therefore, I went through and adjusted some section introductions. I won’t try to quote all of those here, but I hope that that upon a second reading of the article, the first reviewer would agree that each section’s relevance is better established now.

Question 7

Language issues (Word choice, appropriate language registers, grammar, etc. We plan another round of copy editing, but please state your impression here).

Reviewer 1: *Comments: Overall impression is excellent. However, please proof-read carefully for small grammar errors and types. Generally well written with good use of language.*

Reviewer 2: *Appropriate Language*

The article has undergone more rounds of proof-reading for typographical errors.

Question 8

**Are the references sufficiently complete throughout?
(Please indicate significant omissions)**

Reviewer 1: *Nicely done*

Reviewer 2: *Yes, but change works cited to a list of references at the end of the paper.*

I am unclear as to what this exactly means. The literature in the end is actually cited in the manuscript, and so is more than just a list of references. I only want to include in the list works that are actually cited in the article, and don’t want to include references simply for the sake of references. However, if the commentary is simply that I just need to change the words “Works Cited” to the word “References”, that simply an editorial decision and I leave that with the editors.

Question 9

What is your overall assessment of the paper?

Reviewer 1: *I thoroughly enjoyed reading this paper and feel that JVWR’s readership will also enjoy it. My main suggestion is to clarify the arguments by using the “principles” organization suggested in #6*

above. I really believe this will make the main points easier for readers to follow and also reveal the author's excellent grasp of this area.

Reviewer 2: *A reasonably good article*

Thank you. Please see my response to question #6.

Question 10 **Suitability for publication on this issue**

Reviewer 1 Other Comments: *One paragraph the author might want to take a critical look at: At bottom of page 20, the statement is made that distinction between “real” and “virtual” economies is unnecessary and aspatial economic models may be equally applicable in each. This is logical and well evidenced in the paper. Then it is stated that it may be unnecessary to distinguish between the study of virtual vs. real economies. This is where I swallowed hard! What about the fact that there ARE spatial aspects in physical economies?? These can be avoided in virtual worlds, but not in the physical world – at least not yet. Is the author referring here ONLY to aspatial economic aspects in stating there may be no need to distinguish between physical and virtual economies? If so, this should be made very clear.*

I am puzzled here, because the position and quite the reviewer ascribes to me does not appear in my manuscript. The reviewer says that I state, “ it may be unnecessary to distinguish between the study of virtual vs. real economies”. This is quote is not present in my article. As submitted the passage in question was:

Also, the similarities between the virtual economies and the economy of the physical world, such as the parallels between the PoW cigarette-based economy and the emergence of the Stones of Jordan as money in the world of *Diablo II*, further reinforce the idea that the distinction between the “real” and the “virtual” is unnecessary and (aspatial) economic models may be equally applicable in each. Therefore, one may not need to distinguish between the study of “virtual economics” and “real economics”.

Given the confusion here, I have slightly modified the passage to the following:

Also, the similarities between the virtual economies and the economy of the physical world, such as the parallels between the PoW cigarette-based economy and the emergence of the Stones of Jordan as money in the world of *Diablo II*, further reinforce the idea that the distinction between the “real” and the “virtual” is unnecessary and (aspatial) economic models may be equally applicable in physical and virtual environments. One may not need to distinguish between the study of “virtual economics” and “real economics”.

I am in complete agreement with the reviewer that it is still necessary to distinguish between real and virtual *economies*, but not *economics*.

Reviewer 2 Other Comments: *Overall, a well presented article on an interesting and timely topic. Good referencing throughout, clear arguments supported with documentation.*

Thank you. I am pleased to have your support.