

# Meta and the metaverse will provide powers well beyond our wildest dreams

*Our education is not always adapted to our current times. Ibrahim Ouassari who took the initiative of Molengeek has understood this very well.*

MOLENBEEK, BRUSSELS, BELGIUM, June 14, 2022 /EINPresswire.com/ -- Stephanie Schretlen, a [Meta](#) employee, came to [Molengeek's](#) Geek Summit on Friday, June 10, 2022, to talk about Meta's view of the metaverse. Meta is the parent corporation of Facebook, Messenger, Instagram... Dutch-American Stephanie Schretlen is a member of Meta's EU policy team in Brussels and works mainly on the metaverse, so she was the right person to talk about this topic at this event in Molenbeek, Brussels. Andy Vermaut, president of the World Council for Public Diplomacy and Community Dialogue, was in attendance and had a front-row seat for the three-day meeting in Brussels. Stephanie Schretlen mentioned that "at Meta's event Connect in 2021, Mark Zuckerberg not only announced the name change from Facebook to Meta but also announced that the company would shift its priority to the metaverse. What? The metaverse is a set of digital spaces, including 3D experiences that are all interconnected so you can easily move between them. It lets you do things you couldn't do in the physical world with people you can't physically be with. These spaces will be accessible through AR (Augmented Reality) and VR (Virtual Reality) devices but also your PC and mobile. Stephanie Schretlen made it very clear that it is not about replacing in-person experiences, it is about making what we do online better and more meaningful." Molengeek where the Geek Summit took place, is a Sint-Jans-Molenbeek-based Belgian technological ecosystem and training facility. Its objective is to make technology accessible to everyone, regardless of background or academic level. The organization is divided into three sections: coworking, training, and events.



Ibrahim Ouassari of Molengeek and Stephanie Schretlen of Meta (Facebook) get along nicely. Within Meta, Stephanie Schretlen is working on the metaverse, and Ibrahim Ouassari is working on the elaboration of human capital in a variety of new and digital ecosystems.

Taking notes from the Covid era & keeping oneself in check

They picked the right woman in the right place over there at the Molengeek Summit. Stephanie Schretlen is an enthusiastic, vibrant lady. She exudes enormous positive energy while she is speaking and interacting with the people at the conference.

Stephanie Schretlen explains: "We are all relieved to get back to the office and attend physical gatherings since the last two years have shown us that there is nothing that beats being together in person. However, when this is not possible or practical, the digital world can still help us feel connected to our families, friends, and colleagues. But for all the progress we have made, there is still a lot to do to improve that digital experience. The metaverse will help us answer this challenge by helping get us even closer to feeling that 'in-person' connection."



Andy Vermaut says: "I spent three days as a guest at Ibrahim Ouassari's excellent Molengeek conference, and I have never felt more at ease. It felt like returning home with these nice and loving individuals. This initiative deserves worldwide support."

Stephanie Schretlen: "Yes, we see three worlds coming together with metaverse: the real world, the augmented world, and the virtual world. The world of augmented reality is one in which we add a layer to what you see in the physical world to augment it with both expression and utility. For example, having a screen with arrows appear in front of you to show you the way to your destination. The virtual world is putting yourself in a virtual experience that transcends time and space. Right now, however, transitioning between worlds is quite cumbersome with either many clicks or having to put a headset on. Down the line, our vision is that we will be able to seamlessly connect between these three worlds. "

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*Stephanie Schretlen,  
European Policy Officer of  
Meta*

## Improving the Online Experience

Stephanie Schretlen says "Metaverse will enable users to elevate how we currently interact online. Our family of apps will be bridged from 2D screens into more immersive experiences. For

example, imagine being able to join a call with your family where you are sitting in the same living room, with family pictures on the wall and nostalgic furniture in the room to make you feel at home. And one of the areas that I'm most excited to see evolve is education. The metaverse will allow education to become more immersive. Imagine learning how historical cities and buildings were built by actually seeing them get built, right in front of you. People will be able to choose to study and train in places that felt off-limits because of where they live or what they could afford. For example, imagine being able to go to any university in the world by teleporting into lectures by the most famous professors. Or imagine you are a medical student, you can learn new techniques for surgery and practice until you get it right, simply by putting on headsets," Stephanie Schretlen tells us with her brilliant shining eyes.

## The digital economy

Stephanie Schretlen enthusiastically continues "While we can't experience the full potential of the metaverse today, glimmers of it are here. For example, Meta has already created Horizon World and Horizon Workrooms for business gatherings which gives that feeling of presence – of sharing a virtual, three-dimensional space. We have regular meetings in Horizon Workrooms internally and it's great. In Horizon Workrooms you can collaborate with people in digital spaces. It lets you turn your gaze to see a group of people around you, read people's body language and use spatial audio to hear quiet chatter, interruptions, or laughter from wherever it is coming in the room. When I initially met with a colleague, we put this to the test. He sat directly opposite me at first, but then he exchanged positions and came to sit next to me on my right. Particularly how the audio changed and how his voice came from my right blew me away. AR is already being used to enhance the online experience – from creative features in videos to trying on sunglasses while online shopping. While not full AR, Ray-Ban Stories already lets you take pictures and video, listen to music, and do calls, all while keeping your phone down, and your eyes up. This is a step on the way to being able to eventually wear normal-looking glasses, that allow screens to appear in front of you and that you control with your fingertips. To bring this vision to life, we need to fit a supercomputer into a pair of normal-looking glasses of about 5 millimeters thick. This is still years in the making"

## Economic opportunities

Stephanie Schrethen discusses the future "It's difficult to predict the likely economic impact of the metaverse. Measuring this impact of any technological innovation is tricky, especially during the early stages of development. However, looking at related technologies and consumer behaviors, we know that even if the metaverse accounts for a fraction of what the digital economy delivers today, its impact will be significant. The metaverse will expand the digital economy and increase its overall impact on the global economy. For example, Global spending on AR and VR, including hardware, software, and training, was over \$12 billion in 2020; Europe now accounts for about one-fifth of the global XR market, and by 2023 it is expected to become second with 25% share of worldwide revenues after 51% in Asia; XR Production in Europe is expected to grow by 47% annually over the period 2020 - 2026."

## The practice of Responsible Development

Stephanie Schretlen talks also about the ethical principles: "The metaverse will not be owned or built by any one company. Meta is just one of many contributors but we are taking our contribution very seriously. The metaverse will not be built overnight but we see this as a long-term vision that will come to life over the next decade. We know that creating these next-generation technologies also requires responsible development practices. That is why we have created Responsible Innovation Principles to guide our work. The four main principles for Meta are #1: Never surprise people. We are transparent about how our products work and the data they collect. We communicate clearly and candidly so people can understand the tradeoffs we considered, and make informed decisions about whether and how to use our products. Since augmented and virtual reality is new experiences for most people, we explain how our products should be used safely and responsibly. #2: Provide controls that matter. Augmented and virtual reality technologies blend the virtual and physical worlds, and people's expectations about how they should work are still developing. We provide controls — where and when they matter — to put people in charge of their experience. This includes visual indicators and physical controls such as camera shutters, age and comfort ratings in VR, and enabling people to set personal boundaries in virtual worlds. We won't offer controls for everything, but people should always have enough information to make informed choices about whether and how to use our products. #3: Consider everyone. In a world where augmented and virtual reality technology might someday be ubiquitous, we must consider everyone who comes into contact with our products. We build products that are inclusive of our diverse community and design hardware that isn't one-size-fits-all. Just like when the camera was invented and society established norms around when it was appropriate to take photos, we also need to consider people who aren't using our products, such as by adding indicators when cameras are in use. We know we can't do this alone, so we conduct user research and work with in-house and external experts. #4: Put people first. When deciding what's right for our business, the individual, and the community, we prioritize what's best for most people in the community. This starts with being responsible stewards of people's data. When we do collect data, we treat it with the sensitivity it deserves. We take precautions with particularly personal types of data — whether it is being collected for research purposes or to power our products."

## Make technology accessible

Andy Vermaut: "I was indeed a guest for three days at Molengeek, the free innovative training center in Molenbeek (Brussels). The initiative is getting support not just from the general population, but also from the business sector, including Google, Facebook, Samsung, Proximus, Microsoft, PricewaterhouseCoopers, and many more. Here they prepare people in almost no time for a job in social media marketing, programming and website development, etc., with cyber security and data analysis to be added soon," says Andy Vermaut, President of the World Council for Public Diplomacy and Community Dialogue. "It's incredible what they do in such a relaxing environment, particularly how a diversified team of coaching practical engineers teaches

complicated programming in 6 months without charging a dime... This effort exists in Belgium as well, in Charleroi and Borgerhout, and will soon be in Laeken (also part of Brussels), but it might also be continued via this informal manner of learning... I'm astounded that individuals with no previous understanding of computer science can construct complicated database-linked websites in such a short amount of time... "

MolenGeek has established itself as a leader

Andy Vermaut explains what exactly MolenGeek is all about: "A group of entrepreneurs led by Marina Aubert, Geoffroy Verney-Carron, Morad Chaboun, and, of course, Ibrahim Ouassari initiated the idea of MolenGeek in 2015. Initially intended to be one-time event to assist young people in the commune of Saint-Jean-Molenbeek who were having difficulty obtaining work, the endeavor rapidly became a reference point in the European IT ecosystem. Ibrahim Ouassari and Julie Foulon remained with the project and later co-founded the MolenGeek ecosystem, but meanwhile, Julie Foulon has quit MolenGeek to create her own project for women in technology in 2019. MolenGeek was given non-profit status in June 2016. Google compensated MolenGeek 200,000 euros in June 2018. Google CEO Sundar Pichai visited MolenGeek and discussed it at the World Economic Forum Davos on January 20, 2020. In the same year, he singled out Ibrahim Ouassari as an "innovator who is stitching together a brighter future" in "Wired" magazine. The MolenGeek idea is growing beyond Saint-Jean-Molenbeek to boost digital technology awareness in other European cities such as Padua, Amsterdam, Antwerp, and Charleroi. MolenGeek has established itself as a leader in the fields of education and technology throughout the years. The Geek Summit, MolenGeek's first inaugural conference, took place in 2021. The objective was to de-mystify digital information, battle false information, and, most importantly, make it accessible, and the second Geek Summit just took place last week. Yes, I am deeply impressed with what this project offers to people who might otherwise never start an education. It is an added value for Belgium and Europe, but I think the whole world can learn from this. This project should be exported all over the world."

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