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If one considers the world's population from the point of view of digital usage, it is currently split into two groups: "digital natives" and "digital immigrants". Those for whom portable computers and cell phones with internet access have always been a part of the world – and those who – even 20 years after the Internet's evolution into a mass medium – are still grappling with this new public sphere. Those born in 1980

or later and grew up in the light of a screen – and those born before 1980 who were already adults by the time they purchased their first cell phone.¹

On the threshold to the next society

Currently, the digital immigrants represent the larger of the two groups. Digital immigrants are in charge of companies and countries, teach, coach, and educate the digital natives as teachers, executives, and politicians. Surprisingly, it is them who guide through a process which reorganizes our cultural memory step by step: to a “next” society, as sociologist and systems theorist Dirk Baecker first characterized our current society in 2007.² A next society with electronic media. Before us, according to Baecker, three other social “epochs” learned to cope with their own specific dominant distribution media: tribal cultures with language, advanced civilizations with writing, and modern society with book printing.

This recent transformation will probably not be completed until there aren't any digital immigrants left. Until then the upheaval remains a central social topic. It manifests itself among other things in the different value system of either group: while digital natives believe above all in openness, transparency, networking, and speed, for digital immigrants personal contacts, data protection, security, and quality are tantamount.

1 Cf. Palfrey, John / Gasser, Urs: *Born Digital: Understanding the First Generation of Digital Natives*. New York 2008.

2 Cf. Baecker, Dirk: *Studien zur nächsten Gesellschaft*. Frankfurt am Main 2007.

As an image of the space in which values emerge and are negotiated, we might think of a playground. It represents recreation, encounters, self-expression, games, fun, and interaction, but also competition, conflict, and the drawing of borders. This space is increasingly being replaced by a digital medium: instant messaging. If one wants to retain physical contacts, it will be necessary to establish playgrounds outside the school. For Swiss children and teenagers, Migros Culture Percentage offers such a space in the form of the digital competition bugnplay.ch.

Beginnings of the World Wide Web, beginnings of competition

Dominik Landwehr, project leader of the competition, recalls the beginnings of the competition: “In 1998, the Internet and the World Wide Web were new – schools were at a loss and unable to deal with the issue of how this new medium should be dealt with and integrated into the curriculum.” Migros Culture Percentage reacts to these gaps in the syllabi by collaborating in 1998 with the American internet competition Thinkquest as a Swiss partner. The core idea was to popularize on the one hand the Internet as a working tool in education and, on the other, teamwork as the new organizational forms of the future.

In projects such as Thinkquest, kids and teenagers learn that knowledge itself is no longer a competitive advantage in the digital age. Instead they now learn to identify among the abundance of information the relevant knowledge for the solution of specific problems as much as they learn to understand, critically

examine, and properly apply it. In all this they have to be skillful about the specific knowledge they may not have. The work and project groups for such tasks emerge as flexibly as they also dissolve again.

Being flexible and staying flexible

In 2005, the use of computers and the Internet becomes part of federal and school teaching and training programs. Once more, Migros Culture Percentage engages with this development and adapts its competition concept. At the time it is foreseeable that the Internet is only a fraction of the technological environment and that the future will also be marked by other developments of the new media. Hence in 2006 the competition bugnplay.ch is born. It represents the only niche in Switzerland for DIY projects in the context of robotics and installations, remixing, video, and other disciplines of digital culture. To anyone wanting to invent something the competition offers the opportunity of mutual exchange and of generating publicity: from stories about services all the way to mini robots. With the competition celebrating its tenth anniversary in 2016, content still remains multimedial and open. Increasingly popular are video and animation films, a fact that Dominik Landwehr attributes to the advanced technology and its general accessibility.

The competition of Migros Culture Percentage addresses everyone between the ages of 8 and 20, although the 8- to 11-year olds (Kids) have only been participating since 2010. Since then the category kids is the one most in demand in the competition:

“Taking things apart, demolishing, tinkering and newly arranging is part of the philosophy. Kids in particular have more temporal and mental capacities for such extracurricular activities than high-school graduates for whom their final exam and plans for the future have priority.” Participation of 17- to 20-year olds has been increasing with the admission of final year high-school projects. These are often of outstanding quality, since graduates spend much time and energy on them. Participant numbers overall are continuously growing, because the institutional conditions are constantly being adapted to the rapidly changing present and due to the credibility of the competition. Another advantage is the collaboration with partners abroad.

Partners in neighboring countries

The organizers of the youth media competitions in Hungary, Germany, and Austria regularly exchange information, taking cues from one another and learning from the mistakes and successes of the others. Counterparts to the Swiss edition of Thinkquest are the multimedia prize [mb21](http://mb21.de) for children and teenagers in Dresden and the competition in Linz, [u19 – Create Your World of the Ars Electronica](http://u19-CreateYourWorld.com) since 1998. The partnership is felt to be a win-win situation for all sides, created at minimal expense for all, being easily accessible and easy to maintain.

Kirsten Mascher, an educationist and project leader of [mb21](http://mb21.de), experiences 2015 as the year with the highest number of submissions in the history of this competition. It is the only one among the international

partners that addresses participants up to the age of 25. Accordingly, the biggest increase is in the academic sector. The competition is now also nationally supported by the Federal Ministry for Families, Women, Senior Citizens and Youth. This recognition testifies to the fact that educational media work is also considered necessary by the state. Furthermore, it enhances the credibility of the competition for participants, and the organizers take pride in it.

Meanwhile in Linz, the promotional slogan is "Shaping the World of Tomorrow". Meeting the topic is more important as a condition for participating than the choice of medium, which does not necessarily have to be digital. A milestone for teenagers is an international workshop to which the winners of the four youth contests are invited. One participant of such a workshop was Lea Hofer, aged 18 at the time, a twofold winner of bugnplay.ch. She recalls: "For a few days you live together with other like-minded people of the same age in a youth hostel, speaking English, of course, and developing a project of one's own, which in our case was a so-called 'serious game'." Lea Hofer explains the expression and legitimizes the existence of these games by declaring: "These so-called digital serious games do not primarily serve as pure entertainment, but far more they convey knowledge, information, and skills." Some participants do the programming, others create the sound, and yet others work on the graphics or the concept.

A new (educational) practice and cultural technique

The mode of operating described by Lea Hofer is collaborative, and the work atmosphere thereby created cancels out the old role model of teachers who know and students that learn.³ Additionally, the sense of travelling and of being away from home enables the teenagers to exchange experiences, which opens up horizons across country borders and acts as inspiration. Teenagers thereby learn to handle digital media with confidence. They not only have the general overview of the various new options, but they also utilize them purposefully in a mixture of play and knowledge transfer. Here the life and educational praxis of tomorrow is already being lived today.

What is at stake is more than just media competence or the promotion of technological hobbies. Berlin media educationist Daniel Seitz is convinced that media education can contribute an important social input towards political participation, self-development, and creativity. The critically reflected use of new media is desirable, and at best the teenagers are shown the social, political, and cultural relevance of their technical abilities. Here virulent topics such as programming are transformed into cultural techniques with ethical implications: after all, it is today's children who will program the self-propelled

3 Cf. Rösch, Eike / Seitz, Daniel: Digitale Bildungskultur – Neue Chancen für die Medienpädagogik. In: Lauffer, Jürgen / Röllecke, Renate (eds.): Chancen digitaler Medien für Kinder und Jugendliche – Medienpädagogische Konzepte und Perspektiven. Dieter Baacke Preis Handbuch 7. Munich 2012, pp. 65–70.

cars of tomorrow. Who wouldn't want them to do that responsibly and critically? Seitz bets on the interlocking of education and its institutions: "Extracurricular and curricular media education must work together in sustained networking in order to achieve comprehensive digital education."⁴ We are still far from that goal today.

Pearls before swine?

Society has already successfully transformed itself three times. But cultural critics may object: doesn't society adapt itself anyway to specific new circumstances and challenges – organically and without educational assistance? The cultural sponsorship of Migros Culture Percentage banks on generating social surplus value and is particularly engaged where changes occur in culture and society that are relevant for the future. A competition such as *bugnplay.ch* creates in a playful manner the fertile ground on which personal initiative and responsibility can develop. Conditions which in view of securing prosperity, quality of life, and competitiveness are essential.

For Kirsten Mascher, the necessity of such competitions can be traced to very individual needs: "Growing up has never been easy, but especially in media societies it poses a challenge. For some the digital world creates disorder and a feeling of getting

4 Esken, Saskia: Humboldt und die Algorithmen. In: Der Tagesspiegel, April 26, 2015, p. 7.

5 Email exchange between the author and Kirsten Mascher November 2015.

lost in the mass." The aim should not and cannot be to prevent people from looking at a screen. "Rather, it is a question of encouraging the creative use of media, in order to enable young people to negotiate their way and better understand media, to question them and to adapt their uses for their own ideas."⁵

In summary, the competitions constitute the area of the playground and the frame for successful learning processes. Media hereby replace the former skipping ropes and balls; in other words, those playful means through which one tries out the abilities and skills to which one is thrown back as an adult: responsibility, rules, disappointments, knowledge, diplomacy, self-esteem, and self-confidence. Playing and learning merge seamlessly. The topics of these games are randomly replaceable, as long as they stimulate the imagination. But in all of this – as with the analogy of the playground – encounters and relationships are still the crucial adhesive. Because after all transformations of society, what continues to remain is the need to belong to a community.

Translation: Henry Taylor

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