



Ministry of Education, Science and Culture



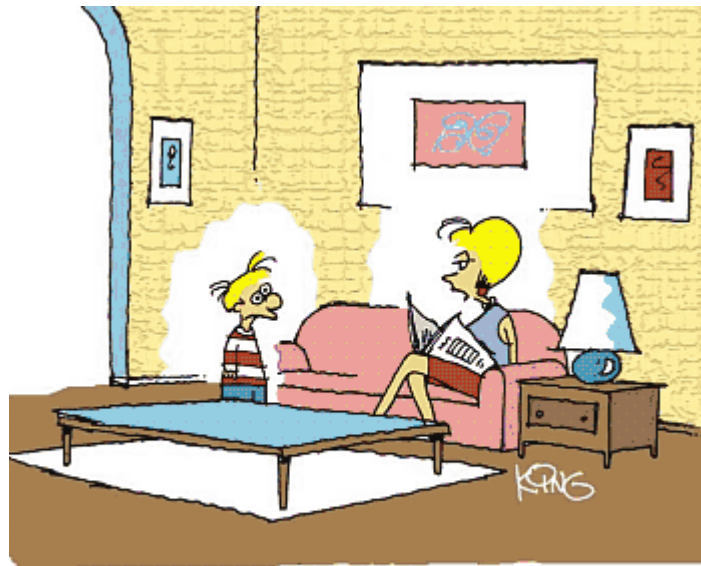
Strasbourg, 14 April 2009

MCM(2009)015

**1st Council of Europe Conference of Ministers
responsible for Media and New Communication Services**
A new notion of media?
(28-29 May 2009, Reykjavik, Iceland)

Austria

Spotlights on media literacy and users' empowerment



"No, you weren't downloaded.
You were born."

Source: <http://medienabc.files.wordpress.com/2008/08/image001.png>

Introduction

*"Indeed, the purpose of an encyclopaedia is to collect knowledge disseminated around the globe; to set forth its general system to the men with whom we live, and transmit it to those who will come after us, so that the work of preceding centuries will not become useless to the centuries to come; and so that our offspring, becoming better instructed, will at the same time become more virtuous and happy, and that we should not die without having rendered a service to the human race in the future years to come."*¹

These words were written by Denis Diderot in 1755 in an article entitled *Encyclopédie*, which appeared in volume five of the *Encyclopédie, ou Dictionnaire raisonné des sciences, des arts et des métiers*, which grew to 35 volumes by the year 1780. What would Diderot say today, on the 225th anniversary of his death, if he were to meet Jimmy Wales, the founder of *Wikipedia*? We don't know, but we can certainly assume that he would be pleased.

Around 140 authors contributed to the classic *Encyclopaedia of the Sciences, Arts, and Crafts*, which Diderot co-published with Jean Le Rond d'Alibert. The contributing authors included famous contemporaries like Voltaire, Rousseau, Montesquieu, as well as a host of specialists from all disciplines, including craftsmen and merchants.

¹ "En effet, le but d'une Encyclopédie est de rassembler les connaissances éparses sur la surface de la terre; d'en exposer le système général aux hommes avec qui nous vivons, & de le transmettre aux hommes qui viendront après nous; afin que le travaux des siècles paffes n'aient pas été des travaux inutiles pour les siècles qui succéderont; que nos neveux, devenant plus instruits, deviennent en même tems plus vertueux & plus heureux, & que nous ne mourions pas fans avoir bien mérité du genre humain." http://fr.wikisource.org/w/index.php?title=Page:ENC_5-0635.jpg&action=edit&redlink=1 (last accessed on 29 March 2009)

In theory anyway, everyone who wants to can contribute to *Wikipedia* texts. *Wikipedia* is based on the principles of a *neutral point of view*, *verifiability*, *no original research*, and *respect towards other users*.² There is no authorship of a text in the classical sense, as there is no longer any separation between receivers and producers. This lends a key aspect to *Wikipedia*: The fact that the authors are anonymous and *a priori* have no more authority than other users gives rise to a dynamic process of continuous questioning, checking, discussion, fine tuning, and updating of knowledge.

Wikipedia exploits the potential of the network of networks, a potential that many media futurists thought they saw in the new media of their day (e.g., Bertolt Brecht with radio³ or Hans Magnus Enzensberger in his text in support of the *Emancipatory use of media*, which requires *network-like communication models*⁴).

The internet and paradigmatically *Wikipedia* are actually able to make good on these claims. The same potential could be said to exist for all other social networking tools, as they are able to dissolve the barriers between production and consumption formerly erected by technology.

The Google Generation – incapable of reflection?

There has also been increasing criticism to the effect that *digital natives*⁵, i.e., the generations who have grown up with computers, are not capable of using the new media in a critical, reflective manner.

According to a study entitled *Information Behaviour of the researchers of the future*⁶, digital education is lagging far behind the pipe dreams and promises of the digital age as the so-called era of democratised knowledge. Again according to this study, the so-called *Google Generation* youth have catching up to do as far as using search engines and information sources on the internet are concerned. Many young users allegedly perform internet searches in a very superficial manner and at best merely skim content. With a brief *Google* or *Wikipedia* search, research for scientific works can generally be completed within a few minutes.

Furthermore, the study authors conclude that briefly skimming a few search results and impatience in doing research are not just symptoms limited to the *Google Generation*, but are prevalent among all age groups, from students to professors. To sum up the study findings: Compared to past generations, the information skills of the *Google Generation* have neither improved nor worsened!

However, none of the reports on this study appearing in online editions of renowned German language newspapers⁷ made mention of this last point. Why? Because no one actually read the study. Instead, these reports used a press agency message⁸ as a source, in which the findings were reported in a considerably abridged form and wherein the study authors were cited as associated with *Sheffield University* in Great Britain. In reality, however, this study was sponsored by the *British Library* and conducted by the *Centre for Information Behaviour and the Evaluation of Research (Ciber)*, based at

² <http://de.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wikipedia#Grunds.C3.A4tze> (last accessed on 30 March 2009)

³ "Radio could be the most wonderful public communication system imaginable, a gigantic system of channels - could be, that is, if it were capable not only of transmitting but of receiving, of making the listener not only hear but also speak, not of isolating him but of connecting him." Bertolt Brecht: Radio as a Means of Communication. In: Bertolt Brecht: Collected Works in 20 Volumes. Vol. 18, 1330-1370, Frankfurt a. M., p. 127-134

⁴ Hans Magnus Enzensberger: *Constituents of a Theory of the Media*. In: *Kursbuch* 20, p. 159-186, 1970

⁵ This term was first coined by Marc Prensky (<http://www.marcprensky.com>).

⁶ <http://www.bl.uk/news/pdf/googlegen.pdf> (last accessed on 24 March 2009) The purpose of the study was to find out how future researchers who are still in school handle digital sources and how they find information.

⁷ Compare: <http://diepresse.com/home/techscience/internet/378982/index.do?from=simarchiv>; <http://www.sueddeutsche.de/computer/547/440289/text/> - (last accessed on 28 March 2009).

⁸ <https://pte.at/news/080423024/generation-google-leidet-an-informationsmangel/> Original text from the *Presstext Austria News Agency* used as the source for the reports on this study appearing in German language online editions of newspapers (last accessed on 24 March 2009).

University College London. This not insignificant fact would have been relatively easy to research, and most of the private bloggers who reported on this study also provided the link to *Ciber*.

If based on this story one were to state that all journalists merely crib from press agencies without any critical thought, there would most likely be a cry of outrage from the sector. Rightly so?⁹

What is more or less openly expressed in many commentaries on media use by the younger generation is a misty-eyed view of how the media were used back in the pre-digital age. This view, however, is far removed from reality. Merely as a reminder: What information sources were available to the generation of those attending school in, say, the 1960s and the 1970s? Textbooks, for starters. And then, depending on the social status and educational background of one's family, anywhere from 20 to 500 books. Plus a TV program and two or three radio programs. In libraries, students used to delve into the card catalogue, in which every dissertation ever written on a given topic in the respective country was listed in a neat, orderly fashion. Anyone who then took the trouble to dig out one of these dissertations just to see what literature the author used could quickly ascertain that as a general rule, between three and five reference books were used and cursorily summarised with relatively little critical thought.

The complaint about the *Copy and Paste Generation* thus overlooks the fact that past generations also plagiarized. The only difference is that back then there were no search engines for easily finding out who copied from whom.

What is really new?

Alvin Toffler¹⁰ coined the term *prosumer* to describe one who is both producer and consumer, sender and receiver of information and messages. Reading magazines and newspapers online before they go into print, googling information, or putting what one's own experiences on the net in the form of blogs, image blogs, or podcasts serves to individualize sending and receiving, and frees the user from bothersome, time-consuming trips to the news-stand or library. Thanks to laptops, cell phones, WLAN, and hotspots, desks and screens can now follow their users everywhere and are becoming the gateway to globalisation, connecting everyone with everyone.¹¹

An obvious flaw in the new media world is that the *prosumer* generally receives little or no compensation for what he produces, either voluntarily for himself (direct marketing), for others (*Open Source*, *Wikipedia*), or in place of another (personal responsibility, foresight).

The reality of digital natives – Facts and figures on the Austrian example

- In the age group of 14 to 65 year olds, of whom approximately 80% are users, the internet can be described as a mass medium, and the generation of those younger than 29, of whom 91% use the medium, is growing up with the internet.¹²
- 9 out of 10 Austrian youths are familiar with publically accessible photo and video sharing sites like *YouTube*, and almost two thirds of them use such websites at least once a month.¹³

⁹ British journalist Nick Davies examined more than 2000 reports appearing in respected British newspapers and confirmed that ca. 60% of these reports were entirely or mostly copied from news agencies or commercials (also see: <http://www.flatearthnews.net>).

¹⁰ <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Prosumer> (last accessed on 24 March 2009).

¹¹ Maresch, Rudolf: Wissensgesellschaft 2.0 – Über Lebensverhältnisse, Arbeitsstrukturen und Kommunikationsbeziehungen in der Gesellschaft des 21. Jahrhunderts. (Knowledge Society 2.0 — Living conditions, labor structures, and communication methods in 21st century society.) In: Iglhaut, Stefan / Kapfer, Herbert / Rötzer, Florian (pub.): What if? Zukunftsbilder der Informationsgesellschaft (What if? Future visions of the information society) Heise Zeitschriften Verlag GmbH & Co KG. Hannover 2007. p. 31-55, here p. 41.

¹² http://www.gfk.at/imperia/md/content/gfkaustria/pages/customresearch/gfk_online_monitor_4_qu_08.pdf - GFK Online Monitor 4/2008 (last accessed on 24 March 2009).

- A similar situation exists with social network sites (e.g., *Facebook* or *MySpace*): 86% have at least heard of such a website and almost half of all 12 to 24 year olds access a website like this at least once a month.
- 42% feel that they are part of an online community, and almost half would also actually like to meet their virtual "friends" in person.¹⁴

The great value that youth place on communication with friends is nothing new. What is new however, are the opportunities and possibilities available to today's youth for getting in touch with their friends.

Digital Natives versus digital immigrants

Children and adolescents are *digital natives*; most of them have never known life without the internet. For them the internet has become such a standard part of daily life that they use it without even thinking about it. One could say that for children the internet has "disappeared", just like the power grid that we use and take completely for granted has for us — unless of course the lights go off.

Today's youth cultures and how they express themselves in areas like music, fashion, and social contacts are inconceivable without digital media, or to put it another way, they were constructed by these media in the first place. In this respect, the internet is gradually replacing television as the key medium.

However, the internet was not created by *digital natives*. The creators of this network of networks are encumbered by all of the outlooks and judgments that they acquired while using the older technology that they grew up with. What that means is described as follows by American political scientist Benjamin R. Barber:

*"Academics educated in libraries and reference rooms full of books and periodicals find in the Internet a wonderful research tool. (...) And they naturally assume that will be its primary purpose. But our children and grandchildren, socialized in the image-rich culture of television and the net, have little experience of books or libraries and will bring a different set of expectations to the new technology. They may never learn to use the Web as a reference tool because they have no reference skills, and will in any case use it for quite different purposes. Growing up in a text based, word centred culture, we see the Internet as a place to use words and text. But our children and grandchildren, who grow up in a television world of images and pictures, may see the Web as a source primarily of pictures and images, especially as broadband facilitates the flow of images. They may see in scrolling text a rather primitive use of the new technology, something resembling a souped-up turbo-telegraph. Our generation has in fact designed a technology whose consequences we can not foresee because those who use it will not have grown up in our generation's culture."*¹⁵

Digital Immigrants, or everyone born before 1993 (invention of the *World Wide Web*), to all intents and purposes "do not understand this world anymore." To put it another way, where harmony and acceptance are simulated, in the end it boils down to the fact that they are indeed merely "simulated".¹⁶

¹³ It should be noted here that internet applications making it possible to network with other users online and to upload personal content such as photos, videos, or short texts relatively effortlessly (Keyword: Web 2.0) have only been around for a few years (for example, *YouTube* was founded in 2005 and *Facebook* in 2004).

¹⁴ http://www.gfk.at/imperia/md/content/gfkaustria/data/press/2009/2009-02-02_online-communities.pdf - GFK Austria Online Study 2009 (last accessed on 24 March 2009).

¹⁵ Benjamin R. Barber: "*The ambiguous effects of digital technology on democracy in a globalizing world*". (<http://www.wissensgesellschaft.org/themen/demokratie/democratic.pdf> - last accessed on 24 March 2009).

¹⁶ Stefan Weber: Schon mal was von Text Jockeys und Powerpoint Karaoke gehört? Jugendmedienkulturen – Kulturtechniken – Wissenskultur: Skizze einer Revolution in den Köpfen und Apparaten. (Ever heard of text jockeys and PowerPoint karaoke? Youth media cultures — cultural skills — culture of knowledge: Outline of a revolution in minds and machines.) In: „Medienimpulse – Beiträge zur Medienpädagogik“, Vol. 15, no. 60, June 2007, p. 3-11.

Digital Literacy

*"Media skill is nothing more than the ability to think critically and question things."*¹⁷ (Joseph Weizenbaum)

The internet is a *pool medium*, out of which users have to assemble their own information potpourri. Or to phrase it in a rather solemn manner, they are *damned to freedom*. Certain skills are needed in order to be able to survive in this world of independent information research.

The introductory quote from Joseph Weizenbaum points out that it's not so much providing the fundamental know-how in handling the new information and communications technology, as children and adolescents generally pick this up on their own. What is much more critical is acquiring the ability to analyse the acquired information in terms of its plausibility, to interpret information relative to the immediate context, to understand different cultural backgrounds of information, and to pick and choose information.

It is therefore critical that the education system assume the socio-political function of ensuring that the whole population has a fair share in the information society and that those who do not have the necessary technological skills or lack the technological means for using the internet (particularly disadvantaged groups such as low income or undereducated persons, high school dropout senior citizens, or migrants) also have access to this technology.

Media competence and digital literacy in the Austrian education system

Media literacy is one of the integrating principles in Austrian education. It is specifically named in the media education policy decree of the Federal Ministry for Education, the Arts and Culture. As a part of media pedagogy, media education has been an educational principle since 1973. The goal is to generate measures that critically and analytically integrate both the traditional mass media and the new media, particularly the Internet, into education.¹⁸

The possibilities offered by the computer should be used for independent, goal-oriented, and individualised learning and for creative projects. When using computers in instruction, access must be made as uncomplicated and as easy as possible for the students. Various different, age-appropriate networking systems are needed.

Students should experience the computer as a learning tool in elementary school and acquire the necessary ICT skills in concrete situations and in a collaborative manner. Also, the use of learning platforms and social software (Wikis, Weblogs, Social Bookmarking, ePortfolios) has become widespread.¹⁹

PoliPedia.at - Youth Participation in the Social Web

Young people generally show an affinity to unconventional forms of participation; at the same time, they integrate digital media and Web 2.0 technologies into their lives as a matter of course.

¹⁷ Joseph Weizenbaum: *Wo sind sie, die Inseln der Vernunft im Cyberstrom? Auswege aus der programmierten Gesellschaft.* (Where are they, the islands of reason in the cyberstream? Ways out of the programmed society.) Verlag Herder. Freiburg im Breisgau 2006.

¹⁸ All relevant information about the concept of media literacy in the Austrian education system can be found on the website <http://www.mediamanual.at>. *Mediamanual* is an interactive platform for integrative media work in schools which offers pupils, students and teachers material for practical media education.

¹⁹ A summary of all IT methods used in schools can be obtained from the *Future Learning* strategy of the Federal Ministry of Education - http://www.bmukk.gv.at/medienpool/17141/konzept_en_kurz.pdf – (last accessed on 24 March 2009).

On the initiative's Internet platform (<http://www.entscheidendbistdu.at>), Web 2.0 offers are provided for young people (video blog, text blog, etc.); there are links to all projects of this initiative, including the wiki project *PoliPedia.at* (<http://www.polipedia.at>).

Within the scope of the *PoliPedia.at* project, a collaboratively developed multi-media online textbook of political education on the Internet, using social software (wikis, blogs, tags, video clips, etc.), is being created. Young people are provided with an opportunity of creating contents by their own independent work and of using them in an active manner. They are producers and consumers at the same time. *PoliPedia.at* helps them to acquire and reinforce their skills of action and participation, to act independently as part of a team and to increase their skills in handling the new media.

The central element of the platform is the wiki, which permits quick and simple publication and editing of texts. The wiki not only permits text contributions, but also the inclusion of multimedia components of all kinds (pictures, video clips, podcasts, *YouTube* videos, documents). Each wiki contribution can be tagged with freely chosen key words that create a category system, set up by the users, of new connections and relations between contributions that have nothing in common with a hierarchically ordered table of contents. Users can revise and comment on existing wiki contributions and exchange opinions with other users in this way. In order to discuss current affairs or to post one's own opinion, blogs were established; these provide opportunities for the expression and exchange of personal opinions. There are no barriers to accessing the platform.

Saferinternet.at - Awareness building

Saferinternet.at (<http://www.saferinternet.at>), the Austrian awareness node in the *European Internet Safety Network (Insafe)*, seeks to give children, youths, parents, teachers and other interested parties tips and support to highlight and avoid risks when using the Internet, while at the same time *Saferinternet.at* illustrates the positive aspects of Internet use. The mission of *Saferinternet.at* is to empower citizens to use the Internet, as well as other information and communication technologies, safely and effectively.

Saferinternet.at runs information campaigns, provides information and teaching materials about safe and responsible use of the Internet, organises events and works closely with all Austrian projects in the area of safer Internet and the *European Internet Safety Network*.

Austrian Youth Portal

The *Austrian Youth Portal* (<http://www.jugendinfo.at>) was established in order to be able to guarantee wide access to all available information to adolescents and young adults; care has been taken to exploit synergies with other existing websites with youth-relevant and youth-policy-related contents.

The *Youth Portal* was conceived as an initial source of information and offers an extended collection of links primarily for adolescents and young adults, as well as for multipliers of youth work and political decision makers.

The wide range of services offered is supplemented by up-to-date tips and information concerning competitions and by a newsletter. Moreover, young people are regularly invited to participate in online surveys and/or weblogs on current events or problems.

This simple method of target-group-oriented involvement of young people enjoys increasing popularity and is contributing to a constructive exchange of opinions between the younger generation and the authorities of public administration in a spirit of active citizenship.

The *Austrian Youth Portal* offers low-threshold access to the huge amount of information on offer on the web. By editing information on various subjects in this way, the portal offers help to anyone who finds it difficult to find his/her way around the flood of information confronting anyone who accesses the Internet.

Computer games as an integrative tool

Computer and video games have long since assumed an important place in the mixture of recreational activities for most children and adolescents. Contrary to the frequently expressed prejudices of adults, communication in playing computer games is of great significance to youth: Young people want to play with others! In the scope of the Austrian youth study "elf/18"²⁰, a survey was conducted on the favourite ways of playing computer games. 38% of the youth surveyed said that they played computer games "among a small circle of friends". Many of those surveyed also engage in other ways of playing computer games with high levels of communicative and sociable interaction: "online" (30%), "LAN parties" (over 9%), and at least 6% form "clans, guilds, etc.", thus playing in de facto "sports associations."

From these figures it is clear that playing computer games as a recreational activity is of great importance, and that social and camaraderie aspects are a significant part of playing. In other words: on one hand part of being in the peer group is playing computer games, and on the other hand playing computer games makes social contacts, communication, and camaraderie possible.

Playing computer games can contribute significantly to still another area: Many commercial computer games have a high potential for enhancing a wide variety of skills. As a general rule, popular computer games are used for entertainment, but besides their entertainment function, they also have great potential for enhancing cognitive skills, adaptive media skills, personality skills, and social skills.

The Federal Agency for the Positive Rating of Computer and Video Games (*Bundesstelle für die Positivprädikatisierung von Computer- und Konsolenspielen (BuPP)*, <http://www.bupp.at>) of the Ministry of Youth preselects newly released games and then subjects approximately 25% of them to a thorough and structured analysis, which focuses on their skill enhancing potential. Games fulfilling specific quality criteria and deemed appropriate by qualified professionals after discussions in an evaluation committee are awarded a rating. The title, description, and basis for the rating are then published on the *BuPP* website. Employing suitable measures to build trust, not only among parents but also among the youth playing the games, is another task of the *BuPP*.

In the wake of horrible incidents in schools, the calls for a general ban on violent games are becoming louder and louder. Implied is the monocausal correlation between playing these games and the actual outbreaks of violence. Media impact studies have been dealing with these questions for many years. In view of the discrepancies among the findings, however, a linear, monocausal effect in the sense of "*the consumption of violent media content leads to actual violence*" cannot be established.

Nevertheless, it goes without saying that not every game is suitable for every age. There are games that are made for adults only and that therefore should only be played by adults. Ratings to protect minors, such as those of the *Pan European Game Information (PEGI)*, provide information on age appropriateness.²¹ *PEGI* approval ratings are clearly visible on most games. For the market, such ratings are to some extent already mandatory, and for parents and educators they constitute the initial and very simple step for responsible child rising.

And even more important is the fact that parents are communicating their values and beliefs regarding the proper upbringing of their children in a respectful, compassionate manner. Parents do not need to beat around the bush when they deny their children certain contents! On the contrary: doing so in a sincere and plausible manner comes closest to the ideal of responsible parenting.

²⁰ Study of the Institute of Youth Culture Research 2006.

²¹ <http://www.pegi.info/en/>.

Summary

Basic computer and internet skills are a prerequisite for nearly all professions nowadays. Skills in using the no longer new media are already a standard requirement, and most citizens also use ICT and the internet in their everyday lives as a source of information, as a research tool, or as a communications medium.

Digital media applications are the gateway to diverse forms of expression, design, and communication. However, digital media are also leading to a paradigm change in terms of learning itself: towards more self-organisation and greater personal initiative. In order to be able to use these "new cultural skills" effectively, obviously it is necessary to master the "old" cultural skills first.

In recent years the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe adopted various texts (declarations, recommendations and guidelines) that deal specifically with the new information and communication technologies.²² These texts, while highlighting the great opportunities offered by new information and communications technologies, especially the internet, focus above all on elucidating the potential dangers and protecting minors from the risks associated with the new technology.

No one disputes the necessity of calling attention to the potential hazards and actively opposing illegal content on the internet. But isn't it high time for the generation of those who develop, refine, and who are the primary users of the internet and all of the new applications associated with the Web 2.0 concept to be included to a much greater extent in this process? Isn't it high time for the *digital natives* to be given an equal voice in discussions on the social design of new technologies?

The only way that the discussion on the potential of new technology and its applications can advance beyond the state of "pedagogical reactionarism" is if *digital natives* and their arguments are treated with respect.

By enabling the young generation to participate, the Conference of Ministers in Reykjavik is taking a major step in this direction. The success of the Council of Europe in establishing an institutionalised exchange of ideas and experiences between *digital natives* and *digital immigrants*, perhaps in the form of an interdisciplinary forum in which all relevant stakeholders are included, would constitute a significant advance in developing a generation-spanning regulatory framework for the information and knowledge society.

²² Recommendation Rec(2006)12 of the Committee of Ministers to member states on empowering children in the new information and communications environment; Recommendation CM/Rec(2007)11 of the Committee of Ministers to member states on promoting freedom of expression and information in the new information and communications environment; Recommendation CM/Rec(2008)6 of the Committee of Ministers to member states on measures to promote the respect for freedom of expression and information with regard to Internet filters; Declaration of the Committee of Ministers on protecting the dignity, security and privacy of children on the Internet (2008).