



THE COMPUTER PARTY “THE GATHERING”.

Development of skills and attitudes in a youth culture based on heavy use of ICT.

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THE COMPUTER PARTY “THE GATHERING”

- Topic: ICT and socialization.
- <http://www.gathering.org/tg08/video?223>
- More than 5000 youths
- Mostly 14 – 25 years old
- *The event* is their common interest.
- How do these young people develop computer skills and competences?
- How do their common experiences with and interest in computers shape their attitudes and their prospects for the future?



Theoretical and methodological perspectives

- “There are no technological revolutions without cultural transformation”
Castells, Manuel 2001: Informationalism and the Network Society. In: Himanen, Pekka 2001: The Hacker Ethic and the Spirit of the Information Age. Vintage, London, 155-178, p.177
- What happens when new technology is introduced and taken into practice?
- Focus on *heavy users* of digital technology.
- Methodology: the *perspective of the actors*
- Field research 1999-2002
- 12 in-depths qualitative interviews (mostly with crew)
- An interactive qualitative questionnaire, 715 answers



“Hackers” and “nerds”

- The crew mostly belong to youth who often is characterized as *hackers* or *nerds*.
- Various types of self representations are performed in opposition to the stereotypes of hackers or nerds.
- The youth are underlining that their values are cooperation, social relations and friendship.
- They use the term *hacker* as a name of honor.



Girls in a “boy’s culture”

- Girls are less than 20%.
- A subculture with strong masculine traits.
- Technological knowledge is the highest value
- The girls usually are competent users rather than technology freaks.
- Female hackers might be found at TG.



Computer skills and knowledge

- To gain control over and interact with a machine gives them an experience of *pleasure*.
- A genuine interest in technology is an important drive, and so is the possibility to do something they feel that they really master.
- Computer enthusiasts support the ideology of *sharing* the technological knowledge.



The informal learning process

- Trying and making mistakes.
- *Curiosity* is the motive power.
- The most important resource is *learning by own initiative*.
- Not afraid of destroying.
- To observe what friends and peers are *doing*.
- Attending LAN-parties to exchange information and knowledge.
- TG is the ideal arena of informal learning by peers in an atmosphere of pleasure and playfulness.



Computer use as an introduction to professional life

- Their use of computers has an important function as a preparatory training for professional life.
- They have been *socialized into a professional culture* which is based upon an ethic of work that differs from most of professional life.
- It is the strong and enthusiastic interest for technology that is their drive, combined with a task-oriented working ethic.
- High time exposure in front of a computer by no means makes them passive.



Characteristics of a youth culture based on heavy use of ICT

- The continuous demand of learning something new.
- “The culture of speed”*.
- “The law of continuous acceleration”*.
- A feeling of living in the midst of an acceleration determined by technology.

*Himanen Pekka: The Hacker Ethic and the Spirit of the Information Age 2001:22-23.



Values and attitudes

- Flexible and capable of adjusting to new technologies.
- Cooperation and network building.
- Depend on personal networks, especially in connection with professional work.
- Focused both on teamwork and on competition.
- No respect of traditional authorities and hierarchy on the working place.
- Responsible for their own learning.