

## **Educational Imaginaries of Technology**

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### **Introduction**

Our everyday use of digital technologies, platforms and infrastructures is often portrayed as an autonomous technical development, guided by clever and independent innovations, rather than broad sociotechnical imaginaries that inspire parliamentary support and governance. This presentation will consequently shed the light on the often-overlooked structural and societal efforts that have historically shaped the digital citizen of today. For the past 70 years or so, non-formal adult education about computers and computing has been a key part of political ambitions to create a desirable future. Over time, digital technologies have also become a precondition for the enactment of citizenship. That is, ‘digital citizenship’ is increasingly positioned as a fundamental requirement for democratic participation. The purpose of this paper is to trace how the digital citizen, and its accompanying problems, has been construed over time, particularly through *educational imaginaries*. What problems is the digital citizen a solution to? *Who* has been presented as problematic, and who, subsequently, has become the primary target for educational solutions? *What skills* have been described as indispensable for the digital citizen during different periods in history? By using Sweden as a vantage point this paper provides both concrete examples as well as perspectives on transnational discourses. In focus for the study are discourses concerning non-formal adult education, in the form of awareness campaigns, social programmes and adult liberal education about computers aimed at the general citizenry, during three periods in time: the 1950s, the 1980s, and today. The contribution is a critical take on how the citizen has increasingly become connected to digital technologies, and how this convergence has at the same time created digital exclusion.

### **Methodology and material**

Drawing on Foucault’s genealogical approach, sociotechnical imaginaries of digital citizenship are here seen as comprising objects of analysis from which contemporary beliefs can be gleaned. Genealogy is, however, not a method for revealing the historical origin of a phenomenon, rather genealogy (and origin) can be understood ironically, where its purpose is to reveal the multitude of momentary scenes where activities and ideas are shaped. A genealogical approach is a form of critical analysis that asks what forces, connections and

articulations make certain things appear natural and inevitable? What processes, procedures and artefacts have laid the foundation for truths and knowledge that we take for granted? A policy can be described as a programme, or a course of action, which is shaped in a specific historical and national (or transnational) context. Policies are often construed in order to fix things, something or someone, and as such, there is a (set of) problem(s) that needs to be addressed and changed. Problem and solution thereby configure each other in that policies can be seen as result of a formation and definition of problems (a problematization process). Problematizations are central to governing forces, and consequently these problematizations become methodological points of entry. A genealogical analysis of problematizations seeks, like Foucault also suggests, 'to reestablish the various systems of subjection: not the anticipatory power of meaning, but the hazardous play of domination' (Foucault, 1984, p. 83). This paper examines problematizations as the historical co-constitution of imaginaries, knowledges and power-configurations, which still impact on society today. The material consists of documents from three eras, which have been selected and studied. The material consists of reports, research documents and policies aimed at governing computerization (13 propositions, action programmes, and reports; 15 paper articles; and 5 conference/congress reports, totalling about 2,600 pages).

## **Conclusions**

This presentation will show how the governance of the digital citizen has changed across history. The change can be described as a shift from governmental control relying on specific imaginaries of techno-utopianism towards commercially driven, and abstract, digital inclusion. The ambition has always been to bring all citizens on board for the creation of the desirable future. However, the notion of 'all citizens' has also enveloped conceptualizations of the normal, and the 'othered', of those who need to be adjusted, and those who do not. That is, computerization has been construed as requiring certain skill- and mindsets, so much so that a new type of (desired) citizen has been construed. Everyone who ends up outside this new type effectively also ends up in the 'upside down' of digital citizenship. What these groups of people have in common is that they were already vulnerable groups, who were regarded as marginalized, problematic, or different. In other words, it is the already excluded who need to be included through new technologies. Already exposed groups are construed as in need of digital skills. Non-formal adult computer education, in the form of awareness campaigns, social programmes, and liberal education, has been political forms of governance, because computers have been seen as much too powerful to be allowed entrance into society without considering

their consequences. Thus, the (imagined) effects of computerization have been problematized and governed, in changing ways, throughout modern history.

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