

Power to the children!

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Times of crisis are opportunities that reveal something which would otherwise be almost invisible. In severe crises, the intrinsic bond connecting members of a given human society is difficult to detect. Instead, periods of crisis illuminate the fact that there is something else, something external, that welds people together very effectively as a single body, acting in concert: namely, a specific threat, and the fear that accompanies it. Yet, people who are only prepared to stick together and support one another in adversity will subsequently scatter in all directions once the crisis is overcome and the threat averted. For social beings, which we all are, this is extremely unhealthy.

STAYING HEALTHY – BY MEANINGFUL DESIGN

Since, for the past century, medical science has predominantly concerned itself with investigating what makes us ill, or things that are “pathogenic”, ever more doctors are now beginning to address the question of what actually keeps us healthy, in other words the things that are “salutogenic”.

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Findings yielded by the research of these doctors correspond precisely to that which, deep down, everyone has always known, but which we have only rarely consciously attempted to act upon: to become and remain healthy, we need to actively design the way we live together. Design our coexistence such that each individual at least has the feeling of comprehending,

more or less, what is happening around them, and why the things they experience are as they are. Simply knowing and understanding what is happening in the world does not suffice, however. Anyone wishing to remain healthy in such a world also needs to be able to influence, to co-create, the things that they have understood. Yet, even this sense of one's own ability to shape things is still not enough. We humans also need certainty that the things we have understood and are capable of shaping are things that are important and which have meaning. Otherwise, understanding and development avail us nothing.

DEVELOPING A CONCEPT OF THE PURPOSE OF COMMUNITY

For humans in a society to coexist, they need to develop a concept of why they are actually living in that community. This includes things that a society's members are pursuing as a whole and the direction in which all are jointly headed, in other words, what the purpose of their coexistence is and the importance given to each of them in shaping and developing said coexistence.

GIVING CHILDREN AND ADOLESCENTS SPACES TO EXPERIENCE CO-CREATION

The concept underpinning a community can be formulated by creating opportunities and forums for meetings and exchange, for collective activity and experience, for discovering and creating things together. These should not only be open to specific social classes, interest groups or age groups, but comprehensively to all social classes or backgrounds and to people of all interests and ages. The experiences gained by children and young people growing into a society are the ones that matter the most. What they need are vibrant experiential spaces where they can learn from one another and help shape society together.

CITIZENS SHOULD SHARE THEIR SKILLS WITH YOUNG PEOPLE

By opening up schools and nurseries, children and teens should be invited, encouraged and inspired anew to discover all there is to find in their towns and communities, to help shape the things there are to influence and to address any issues that are close to their hearts. They should be supported in this by educators, teachers and, above all, citizens who have special skills, abilities or knowledge and who enjoy making these talents available to children and can use their skills to assist young people in implementing their plans.

CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE BECOME STAKEHOLDERS

This approach is so promising precisely because it turns children and young people into stakeholders. Perhaps they will find creative solutions to municipal projects that have become stuck in old thought patterns, or pay attention to local problems for which nobody has hitherto felt responsible. Perhaps they will establish companies or cooperatives that may even open up new, as yet unthought of, horizons

for the economic development of the community. Perhaps they will set out to hunt for treasure and find something along the way that was always there in their community, but had thus far remained unseen. Perhaps they will become ambassadors of a new relationship culture, organise forums and meetings for all those who, until now, preferred to avoid one another. Perhaps they will start a circus, put on plays, build a petting zoo... Who knows? One thing is for certain, and this is that young people need no dangerous crises, and above all no growing fears, to strengthen the intrinsic bond that ties them together as a community.





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