

Diversity

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The diversity of species, people, cultures, religions, and opinions has been at risk since the Enlightenment. With the rise and colonization of the dominant Western "economy" (the merchant with the Bible), our technological way of life was preached and used in all corners of the world. Last week I wrote about the news-fake news dichotomy that allows only one truth (the power of fact-checkers increases). It is clear that the increase in scale that communication technology (colonization) has realized has reduced the number of co-existing realities. Still, the process of increasingly global unification and the subordination and absorption of local diversity is far from easy to understand. How does this work?

The internet provides a structure where different opinions and cultures can be revealed and communicated, which is true. Yet worldwide we seem to "regress" to that one global employee, or entrepreneur - who is recognizable in more and more countries. The world citizen (M/ F/other) can participate anywhere in the world, in recognizable activities. Of course there is still (some) dependence on education and training. Universities pride themselves on that: it is not enough to train a good primary school teacher in the Netherlands, every student must certainly do an activity or internship abroad. As my generation roamed the country, our children go all over the world. And that isn't even enough for today's top entrepreneurs like Elon Musk and Richard Branson. In their dreamed future, standardized humanity roams the universe, to Mars, or perhaps even further. But why do we mainly see increasing uniformity? A century ago, even neighbouring regions were recognizable by their own typical architectural styles, traditions and dialects. Now one global style is dominant, with dominant apps, images, culture and language. Languages (and especially dialects) are lost every year. With the emergence of the world citizen, whose surname or skin colour at most reveals a differentiated past, man has become standardized by globalized (technological) machinations. How is that possible? Are there any threatened types of people, that turn out to be less self-evident to standardize?

According to developmental psychologist Heinz Werner (1890-1964), two aspects are characteristic of evolutionary, cultural and individual development: differentiation and hierarchical integration. In the differentiation phase, various solutions are explored to overcome a problem or challenge. In the development of automobiles, for example, headlights are initially placed high, just like on carriages, in order to shine over the horse. Other manufacturers placed them low, on two sides, or only in the middle, white or in colour, etc. Next comes the phase of (hierarchical) integration: the best solution is made the default (standard). Subsequently, new differentiations concern another aspect (for example the front, middle, or rear-mounted engine). Hierarchical integrations are the building blocks for new development, but also limit the possibilities. And so standards ultimately lead to uniformity. This becomes a problem when 1 species, or 1 brand, religion or culture becomes so big that it dominates. As humanity we have become such a globally oiled machine that we have come to dominate the planet, with all the dangers that entails. However, mother nature seems to "know" how to ensure great diversity; "players" who become too big (predominant) automatically run into problems. Technology brought about the large scale on which humanity has become an outright threat to diversity, but the driving force behind it is an unsustainable economic model: infinite growth from finite sources.

We have to think differently, and develop different technology. Away from the increase in scale, back to our individuality and each other. More and more people are walking with labels such as dyslexic, ADHD or autistic. These labels are now more and more integrated as neurodiverse. The neurodiverse human can play a major role in thinking differently and developing different technology. It's for good reason that the "autistic" Greta Thunberg has become the symbol of standing up for the threat to diversity!