



European Youth Conference on

Internet as a Commons and the New Politics/ New Economy of Commoning

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May 19 -21, 2016, Belgrade

The key feature of the Commons, as Yochai Benkler describes it, is that no single person has exclusive control over the use and disposition of any particular resource. Instead, resources governed by the concept of the commons may be used or disposed of by anyone, under rules that may range from 'anything goes' to formal rules that are effectively enforced.

After the political concept stating that public interest is met only through balanced interests of private owners faced its own tragedy, ideas of renewing platforms for open and shared resource economy have grown stronger. Those ideas are now rooted in the original vision of the Internet as a participative, decentralized and inherently democratic environment. But, of course, the original vision cannot be simply reactivated, it rather needs to be adopted to the change of social, moral and economic circumstances.

However, we are at the crossroads. The Internet, and particularly the „next big thing“ – the internet of things – can either lead to more sustainable and democratic solutions or to more problems. The more pessimistic approach expects that digitalization, smarter digitalized environment and internet of interconnecting everything, provoke more layoffs than creating new jobs, more consumerism, excessive paternalism, lock-in business models and threatened



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privacy. It is in this context that the idea of basic income is offered as a fallback position for those who might run the risk of getting laid off permanently.

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The more optimistic approach, e.g. represented by Jeremy Rifkin, is aware of these threats but considers the internet of things as a changemaker of our socio-political environment. What lies ahead are possibilities of an “internet for everybody”: a changemaker that is challenging some of our beliefs about economic, social, and political life, the new interconnectedness of the internet for all shows that social capital – i.e. trust and the abilities of cooperation – might be as vital as market capital, that access is as important as ownership, sustainability more important than consumerism, that collaboration is more sustainable than competition, virtual integration of value chains is giving way to lateral economies of scale, intellectual property making room for open sourcing and creative commons licensing, GDP becoming less relevant, superseded by social indicators measuring the quality of life, a economy based on scarcity and profit gradually being substituted by an economy of abundance where an increasing array of goods and services are produced and shared for free. It is the deep ambivalence of the digitalization of the world that needs further debate and action.

The conference wants to offer ample space for a European debate on how to fight for the Internet as a commons:

Public Infrastructure in the Digital Age

The Internet as a whole has become an important part of our global public sphere. It provides access to a wealth of information and knowledge and the possibility to participate, create and communicate. This public space consisting



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of Internet infrastructures is increasingly threatened from two sides: centralization and commercialization by the dominant positions held by big telecom and Internet companies, as well by an increasing trend in state regulation, surveillance and censorship of the web. This poses important questions on how we choose to organize and regulate our digital societies, and how Internet governance models can be developed and implemented to ensure fair and democratic participation. Also, how human rights, enshrined in universal declarations and conventions, can still be saved or, at least, adapted to technologically changing environments.

When it comes to the future of the Internet, a key discussion is one of infrastructures: who owns, runs and controls them? The question of regulation, and who oversees the regulators, is rendered complicated by the transnational nature of the net. Therefore, considering the multi-cultural universe, even a European prospective will not be sufficient. But European solutions could turn out to be a model for other political and cultural systems.

As much as people expect a broadly and equitably accessible Internet open to diversity, we are, slowly but surely, moving away from it. Monopolization of Internet infrastructures and services by companies such as Facebook and Google has gone hand in hand with privacy intrusions, surveillance by intelligence organizations and the unlimited use of personal data for commercial gain. As we all interact on these centralized commercial platforms that monetize our actions, we see an effective enclosure and manipulation of our public spaces. Democratization of the Internet infrastructure and activities is essential in keeping a free, open and democratic Internet for all to enjoy



equitably. But how can we get there, being compatible with the building of state-of-the-art successful infrastructure in the future?

Debates concerning net neutrality, infrastructure neutrality and Internet monopolies reflect the important choices that are to be made. It is essential that the EU formulates a comprehensive vision on the Internet that addresses the protection of civil liberties such as free speech, access to information, and privacy, but also the growing commercialization of our digital public spaces and the commoditization of personal data with the effect of the market encroaching on all aspects of our daily lives. Only then can the EU make relevant interventions regarding the Internet and its governance.

tags: Internet as a Commons, net neutrality, infrastructures, growing commercialization of our digital public spaces, data protection

Open Innovation

Far from being yet another innovation, the Internet is a novel way of solving problems while supporting creativity and communication. The Internet fosters new forms of corporate, cultural, artistic, creative and knowledge-based goods, as well as interaction between consumers, stakeholders, companies and the general public – the internet of things virtually as an internet for everybody. The behavior of individuals, corporations and institutions in terms of how they cooperate online is currently changing. This not only implies new forms of employment and new job opportunities, but also new technologies and new business models, like Jeremy Rifkin is conceptualizing them in his “Zero Marginal Cost Society”. We are facing the challenge of the internet of things, where everything and everyone is interconnected and can be used or misused for whatever controlled or uncontrolled purposes.



Internet-enabled innovation is a topic that goes far beyond corporate technology management. The following questions are of particular interest:

How can the Internet change the acquisition of knowledge? Will open data technology with powerful text and data mining algorithms (TDM) be exclusively controlled by private or governments' interests, or can it be controlled and used by civil society interests?

Particular aspects which require a deeper analysis should be pinpointed, such as Open Science, participation (online and through the outernet), Internet-enabled business models and the index of Internet-enabled innovation.

tags: open innovation, patents and copyright, open access to knowledge, Open Science, Creative Commons, copyright in support of education and science, enclosure of the Commons by copyright extension and patenting; internet of everything as a changemaker

Republic 2.0 – is the public going to be privatized?

Does the Internet foster public communication and public debate or is it conducive to privatization of the public for the sake of consumers' freedom?

The Internet has become a universal technical platform that shapes **public communication** and has deep impact on the **formation of public opinion**. The main questions of this section are: What does the normative structure of this new ecology look like, how is this normative structure being developed and how is it shaping our understanding of democracy, public interest and republican engagement?

It is noticeable that new intermediaries, as well as established information brokers, play an important role in that structure – but it is, in fact, the



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traditional media in particular who act as mediators in the field of Internet communication. What impact do these formations have on the production and selection of content and what does this mean for normative structures and governance concepts?

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How do social media platforms behave? What is it that determines how people interact with other users on these platforms? What are the most important factors (legal regulations, informal social norms or software design) and how do they interact?

tags: formation of public sphere and public opinion, information law, legal aspects of crowd-sourcing, when data become news, motivation for participating in e-petitions, public communication vs. marketing

Objective:

Overall objective: young people from all over Europe become involved in **European networks** on the issues of the conference, such as the [commons-strategy](#) group, [ENCES](#), etc; participants become involved in local Commons activities.

Young people from all over Europe learn about the **activities of the European Greens**, inter alia in the field of the struggle for an Internet for all, the Internet as a Commons, Fight for preserving Privacy, Creative Commons, Open Innovation and Open Science.



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Activists and scientists from Serbia become better prepared for **negotiations on intellectual property law** (Chapter 7) between Serbia and the European Union which are likely to commence in the next years.

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Some of the topics will cover issues that are on the European political agenda. The conference will contribute to the public debate on this agenda by means of a **Public Declaration**.