

Wizards of OS4

Press Release

Information freedom rules

The year is 2006. 15 years after the launch of the GNU General Public Licence, ten years after John Perry Barlow declared the independence of cyberspace, and five years after Wikipedia was founded. Time for stock taking. Free protocols enable the Internet. Free software rules on the servers. The freedom movement in the sciences advances in big steps. The free cooperative online encyclopedia Wikipedia is well-established as a reference. And every day more people are freely creating and sharing cultural expressions of all kinds. But what is the freedom that we mean? Is freedom ruling or a niche? What rules has freedom brought forth, which does it require in order to become sustainable? Is there an essence of freedom or is it gradual, composed of options as Creative Commons suggests? Is „freedom from“ more important or „freedom to“? Do only those have freedom who can afford it or those that have nothing left to lose? Can you make a living with free information? Can you sell free beer? WOS4 charts this open territory while it unfolds in front of us.

The Wizards of OS with three conferences and several workshops has firmly established itself as a place where the foundations of cultural creativity in the digital age are being debated internationally, interdisciplinarily and at high level. The fourth Wizards of OS under the title „Information Freedom Rules“ again wants to infect its participants with the radical spirit of freedom and creativity, in talks, discussions and workshops present the most impressive developments of the last two years and entice its participants to collaborative explorations of the possible.

The Issues of WOS4

Authorship and Culture

Thanks to the Digital Revolution culture is being made by all. Flickr, YouTube and the Internet Archive prove it. Cultural configurations are shifting fundamentally, from daily practices to whole biographies, from strategies of referring to cultural heritage to new musical and visual genres. The effect is the most pronounced where from creation to distribution and perception the work never leaves the digital realm as in the case of the netlabels of digital music.

Copyright law protects the “author subject” and its „intellectual property“ as they were formulated in the 18th century. By contrast, the media environment of the 21st century supports the remixing of existing works and an intellectual generosity und promiscuity. In appropriations, tropicalisations, hybrids and mashups the author does not disappear at all but as a point of crystallisation of reputation her role is being renegotiated – between personality rights and freedom of art, between wage labour of professionals and self-expression of all.

Brazil has taken on a special role as the nation of free culture. Through the „Pontos de Cultura“ hundreds of local cultural groups in the whole country are brought into the digital age, thanks to recycled hardware, free software and a network, in which they present their creations and learn from each other. Also in international fora Brazil promotes cultural diversity, access to knowledge and a more equitable global knowledge order. The age of Wikipedia and Open Access in the sciences – and with it WOS4 – raises old questions in new ways: Does quality arise through collectivity or competition, through free cooperation among equals or through expertocracy, through networks or hierarchies?

Economy and Labour

Public domain and commons knowledge are prerequisites of innovation. That much is clear. Free creative collaboration brings forth not only new forms of artistic expression, but also welfare and therefore incentives for authors and users. The means of production and distribution of information are no longer scarce. On this basis free culture has emerged.

Today's clash of civilizations takes place between Creative Commons and creative industries. On the one hand Digital Restrictions Management (DRM) is used in an attempt to create scarcity in order to generate a market. Individual creativity turns into "intellectual property." Culture turns into "content."

On the other hand there is creation from abundance. "Commons-based peer production" is what Yale law scholar Yochai Benkler calls the model that proved itself so powerfully in free software and in Wikipedia. Culture is exchange and reciprocal inspiration. What is technologically possible and a millionfold reality in peer-to-peer networks cannot be rolled-back by law or technology. Thereby the question becomes central how money can be earned with free bits.

Is a market for cultural goods feasible without any copyright enforcement? The Nigerian film industry that has become the third largest behind Hollywood and Bollywood seems to prove it. Added value through physical distribution on VHS tape or disc, or through performance and contract programming, voluntary and statutory arrangements by which users collectively remunerate authors and performers, and arrangements by which users jointly buy a work for it to be free, are among the models that will be discussed at WOS4. A separate panel is dedicated to the question how in biotechnology free innovation and profit can go together.

Rules and Tools of Freedom

Copyright law like never before plays a central role in the artistic and economic conditions of creative production. Since the turn of the millennium it has been adapted to the new digital environment. Did this adaptation succeed? Where does it hinder innovation, where does it support the structures of free culture? The European Commission is currently reviewing the Directive on Copyright in the Information Society from 2001. WOS4 has invited the protagonists to elaborate on the issues at hand.

Licences like the GPL and those of Creative Commons with the means of copyright produce the commons that enables the cooperative creation of free culture. Also these licences are this year undergoing critical review. The electromagnetic spectrum – the central resource for the increasingly mobile, radio-based media environment – is due for re-regulation as well. What are the options, which are favourable to a free infrastructure? Free Software is the pioneer and role model for all branches of free culture that follow. It is established and at the same time continues to be highly dynamic. What are the next chapters in this success story? Does the focus shift from software to data or to the open interfaces of web-services? With the trend towards mashups, what remains of privacy?

„Die Gedanken sind frei“ – Eben Moglen, one of the legal protagonists of free culture, reminded us at WOS3 of this battle call that echoes through the centuries. In contrast to those of our ancestors, our movement, the movement of free culture is not utopian but creates facts. Based on free means of production and distribution new structures of organisation and income emerge, free art and music, free technology and possibly even a free society. WOS4 will contribute to advancing this freedom movement.

**Wizards of OS 4 - Information Freedom Rules
International Conference**

**September 14 to 16, 2006 , Columbia Hall and Columbia Club, Columbiadamm 13-21, 10965
Berlin
wizards-of-os.org**

WOS4 is organised by WOS e.V. in cooperation with the Working Group Informatics in Education & Society of Humboldt University Berlin as well as the Berlin media-culture centers Tesla and c-base. As part of the *Year of Informatics*, WOS4 is supported by the Federal Ministry of Education and Research, the Hauptstadt Kulturfonds (Capital Cultural Fund) and the Bundeszentrale für politische Bildung) Federal Agency for Civic Education. It takes place under the auspices of Minister Dr. Annette Schavan.



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