

The Vienna Document

Xnational Net Culture and "The Need to Know" of Information Societies , by Open Cultures Working Group

Vienna Draft Document by the Open Cultures Working Group hosted by "Towards a Culture of Open Networks" - a collaborative program developed by Sarai CSDS (Delhi), Waag Society (Amsterdam) and World-Information.Org (Vienna).

Information technologies are setting the global stage for economic and cultural change. More than ever, involvement in shaping the future calls for a wide understanding and reflection on the ecology and politics of information cultures. So called globalization not only signifies a worldwide network of exchange but new forms of hierarchies and fragmentation, producing deep transformations in both physical spaces and immaterial information domains. While global information cities increasingly resemble neo-medieval city states, market concentrations establish a dominion over knowledge. On the way to information feudalism, diversity seems to loose out. Nevertheless global communication technologies still hold a significant potential for empowerment, cultural expression and transnational collaboration. To fully realize the potential of life in global information societies we need to acknowledge the plurality of agents in the information landscape and the heterogeneity of collaborative cultural practice. The exploration of alternative futures is linked to a living cultural commons and social practice based on networks of open exchange and communication.

We an open group of artists, researchers and cultural activists recognize common ground for transnational exchange and collaboration towards a culture of open networks. Cultural practices surveying information grids of global cities paint landscapes of global transformations and provide depth to an outlook towards a future that has already begun. Cultural investigations into the urban grids of communicative practices are at the base of mapping options and negotiating conditions of socio-cultural reality. Cultural collaboration, providing a wealth of perspectives and ideas in communication practices, is in itself a transformative process, an agency of change. We need to value the diversity of emerging recombinant interactions and networks of imagination that provide a rich resource for our future cultural heritage.

We applaud all initiatives that reclaim the benefits of new communication technologies for the common public.

We know that the future is too precious to leave it to experts; digital human rights in everyday life are everyone's concern.

We trust nodes open of information cultures to explore the diversity of choices in the shaping of information societies based on semiotic democracy.

We recognize that street level open intelligence is of high public value and a cultural process that is highly dependent on information climate and environment conditions.

We do not accept a world where popular culture and human heritage is fenced in and IP restriction management separates us from our own thoughts.

We appreciate the fact that boundaries between users and producers become permeable in new communication environments and new practices dissolve traditional notions of authorship.

We are committed to critically observing the mindsets of possession and the creation of scarcity as processes implementing control in the information economy.

We refuse to live in an information society where nothing belongs to all of us, but everything is owned by cartels, locking human knowledge into the vaults of private interests.

We acknowledge that knowledge is for those who do, not for those who don't, because cultural progress implies that ideas emerge from exchanges, from communication, from interaction.

We do not want a world where you need a license to whistle a song or access your own memories.

We value information as a human resource of cultural expression rather than a commodity to be sold to consumers.

We anticipate a silent spring in Information Society's landscapes when even a bird's song becomes subject of copyright control.

We realize that intangible information resources raise the issue of a digital ecology, the need to understand ecosystems constituted by information flows through various media.

We urge to ask who benefits from technology that is never neutral, empowerment and participation or domination and containment.

We reaffirm that security concerns are not an excuse for pervasive surveillance and control environments linking personal profiles and producing social sorting and segregation.

This text is a document that emerged from a work meeting in Vienna June 2005. This draft of the Vienna Document is written by Konrad Becker and Felix Stalder based on the inputs and contributions made by the members of the working group.

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