THE GOETHE-INSTITUT AND DIGITAL CIVIL SOCIETY

MAPPING THE STATUS QUO AND FUTURE OPPORTUNITIES

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ABOUT THE GOETHE-INSTITUT

The Goethe-Institut is the cultural institute of the Federal Republic of Germany. It promotes the knowledge of the German language abroad and fosters international cultural cooperation.

The Goethe-Institut has been working closely with civil society actors in Germany and in its host countries for many years and takes up their topics, perspectives and developments as part of an international exchange. The global post-digital society makes it imperative to engage with the challenges and opportunities of digitalisation and the associated societal changes. In numerous international projects such as Latitude, Shaping the Past, Kulturtechniken 4.0, Generation A=Algorithm, Tanz der Algorithmen and many more, the Goethe-Institut highlights, reflects and supports the shaping of positive future narratives from within civil society. Digital Civil Society in Germany and its potential to create sustainable and responsible perspectives as well as its global networking play a central role in this context.

The Goethe-Institut has commissioned SUPERRR to map Digital Civil Society in Germany, with the aim of providing a definition of "Digital Civil Society" and its place within the context of the Goethe-Institut's mission, as well as an overview of current actors, topics and trends. The results are to serve as a working basis and resource for connecting civil society actors at international level with digitalisation and its consequences, expertise, networking opportunities and related education channels and resources.

The Goethe-Institut is striving for an increased role as a global driving force behind the development of a Digital Civil Society. It plays an active part in the discourse on digitalisation by pursuing this debate internally and by creating global spaces for it in its work with others – both physically and digitally.

ABOUT SUPERRR

Superrr is a feminist think tank based in Berlin, founded in 2019 by Julia Kloiber and Elisa Lindinger. Closely linked to developer communities, Superrr researches new technologies and their opportunities as well as their impact on society, focusing on diversity and intersectionality. In recent years, Superrr has focused on understanding the role of Digital Civil Society in Germany during the COVID-19 pandemic and researching the social structures in open-source infrastructure communities and the risk of discrimination in algorithmic decision-making systems in the area of recruiting.

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The Goethe-Institut has embraced digitisation: in the topics and formats of its cultural programme, in its external communication, in its information system, in its digital learning programmes, and, last but not least, through the digital services that are provided internally, in particular in the field of language learning. The Goethe-Institut has an online presence across multiple platforms, it provides digital technologies and engages with new developments in digital technologies and digital culture; it illuminates and discusses them critically. This places the Goethe-Institut in an intermediary position: between German Digital Civil Society on the one hand and the societies in which the Goethe-Institut operates, which themselves are becoming increasingly digitally active and are demanding a digital presence. The Goethe-Institut therefore sits at the interface between the various Digital Civil Societies around the world, but also has its own content-related links to their work.

In recent decades, "Digital Civil Society" has become an increasingly common topic, in Germany and abroad. Yet there exists no generally accepted definition for the term, nor for the term "civil society" itself, which is a relatively recent coinage[1]. The initiative "Strengthening Digital Civil Society" revealed in 2020 just how diverse the organisations and movements are in Germany alone that identify themselves as part of the Digital Civil Society. In addition to established associations, non-governmental organisations and think tanks operating in the field of digital politics, they also include companies pursuing non-profit or social purposes with digital means or developing open-source technologies, interest groups of digitally active people, but also libraries and loosely organised user groups.

1 Jean L. Cohen & Andrew Arato, Civil Society and Political Theory. MIT University Press, paperback edition 1994.

1 DIGITAL CIVIL SOCIETY: A DEFINITION IN THE CONTEXT OF THE GOETHE-INSTITUT

What does "Digital Civil Society" mean for the work of the Goethe-Institut? To explore this question further, we have drafted a definition of Digital Civil Society as a working hypothesis for the specific context in which the diverse activities of the Goethe-Institut come into play. This definition serves as the basis for a mapping of the actors and the issues of Digital Civil Society in Germany.

Economist and innovation researcher Leonhard Dobusch[2] works with a narrow definition of Digital Civil Society and in his review defines it primarily as civil society organisations dedicated to digital technologies and their impact on society. He acknowledges that this excludes many people and social movements that are very much active in this field, but either consciously reject formal organisation or have simply not yet done so. Overall, he assigns a low degree of organisation to Digital Civil Society in Germany. However, the situation has changed since the paper was published: in recent years, a landscape of specialised civil society organisations that are actively shaping digitisation in a variety of areas has emerged.[3]

By contrast, the broadest possible definition of Digital Civil Society is suggested by the idea of post-digital: in a world permeated by technology and datafication, i.e. the continuous collection, evaluation and interpretation of data, we are all affected by the digital sphere and are therefore part of a Digital Civil Society from which we cannot escape – we can only decide whether or not to actively participate in shaping it.

Both definitions allow the Goethe-Institut to understand "Digital Civil Society". On the one hand, it can regard it as the input providers from an organised Digital Civil Society that is becoming increasingly professionalised in order to represent its interests and exert influence and that always has an international or global aspect to its work because of its focus on digital issues. On the other hand, it can view it as the Digitised Civil Society that uses the Goethe-Institut's services on digital topics, via digital media or digital technologies, but might not have the knowledge or resources to actively participate in the discussion about the digital sphere as such and to help shape new technologies. The users' interests may vary greatly depending on their local or socio-cultural environment.

2 https://www.bewegungsstiftung.de/fileadmin/user_upload/bws/bridge/Anlage_1_-_Dobusch_2014_Analyse-Digitale-Bu_rgerrechtsbewegung.pdf

3 Cf. Wiebke Rasmussen, Digitalisierung braucht Zivilgesellschaft, 2019 S. 12. https://www.bosch-stiftung.de/de/publikation/digitalisierung-braucht-zivilgesellschaft www.bosch-stiftung.de/de/

Our own definition focusses on the former interpretation, i.e. as potential input providers from a **Digital Civil Society** who can report on individual topics from their paid or volunteer work:

Digital Civil Society is made up of social movements, collectives or organisations that:
- Provide free access to digital technologies, to digitally available data and knowledge or to the internet for the common good,
- Enable participation, e.g. by providing platforms, but also through youth education, further education and training in media, digital and technological skills,
- Develop technologies for the common good (public interest),
- Reveal the impact of digital technologies on society, or
- Promote and help shape digital policy issues.

By contrast, we understand the recipients and commentators of the Goethe-Institut's offerings with a connection to the digital sphere as the **Digitised Civil Society** in the broad sense. The target group of the Goethe-Institut's digital formats is extremely diverse: their interests, digital skills and preferences are shaped by age, education, cultural and regional context. A wide variety of formats and services are needed to reach these different groups (cf. Section 5).

2 INTERFACES WITH THE WORK OF THE GOETHE-INSTITUT

As a promoter of cultural exchange, the Goethe-Institut's role leads to new fields of action in the information and digital age. What might an intermediary position between the Digital Civil Societies in Germany and other countries look like? How can Digital Civil Society contribute to the work of the Goethe-Institut, and how can the Goethe-Institut bring together issues and actors from Germany and abroad as part of its mediation activities? What requirements for possible information exchange formats arise from the operating methods of German and international Digital Civil Societies?

In specific relation to the mission of the Goethe-Institut, we have identified the following starting points to engage with Digital Civil Society. The list was compiled from an outsider's point of view and may need to be amended by further points of contact arising from the internal perspective of the Goethe-Institut.

2.1 PROVIDING DIGITAL OFFERINGS

The Goethe-Institut already offers various internal and external digital services that interface with open-source communities (e.g. the learning platform Moodle), open-data and open-knowledge movements (e.g. Wikipedia in cooperation with the German National Library). Operational cooperation with these communities is possible and in some cases already underway.

All of the Goethe-Institut's digital services are concerned with data protection, data sovereignty, user rights and participation opportunities, but may also be affected by internet censorship. Here, the issues that are being discussed on a theoretical level within the framework of events or publications of the Goethe-Institut are already being experienced and negotiated in practice. Based on this extensive knowledge, the Goethe-Institut can address both the issues of knowledge management, much discussed in Digital Civil Society, and of missing civic spaces in the digital space (see 4.1).

2.2 COMMUNICATING AN IMAGE OF GERMANY TODAY

Digital Civil Society in Germany is one of the oldest in the world and can look back on an unbroken tradition dating back to the early 1980s. The oldest public hackspaces are also to be found in Germany (e.g. c-base).

Numerous organisations have contributed to digital issues being discussed publicly in Germany for decades and played a part in people demanding their rights vis-à-vis technology providers and digital service providers (cf. Section 3.1 – Sovereignty). A second generation of organisations is increasingly committed to the public debate around data, information and knowledge, and to providing platforms as opportunities for participation. The third generation of Digital Civil Society, however, is dedicated to increasing the participation of constituencies that are underrepresented in digital discourse: by empowering both the young and the old to shape the world through technology; by teaching programming, technology and design skills outside of academic settings, particularly to refugees and women. Many of these initiatives are specific to Germany and continue to shape the discourse on new technologies. Germany has also become a meeting place for German and international artists and designers who engage critically with digital issues in their work (e.g. Nushin Isabelle Yazdani, Lena Ziyal, Julian Oliver, Aram Bartholl, Adam Harvey).

It is hard to communicate an image of modern Germany without acknowledging the increasingly important influence of these actors. Their work has played an important part in shaping certain idiosyncrasies of the German debate around digital technologies, not only in civil society, but also in politics and the economy: a case in point is the hostile stance towards Google, Amazon, etc., not only as digital service providers, but also as investors in German cities. Initiatives such as Fuck off Google and Make Amazon Pay! were founded in Germany before the issue became a matter of concern in New York[4] (where the anger was directed at the massive subsidies promised to the company, rather than their data policy). A fear of surveillance associated with digital payment methods, i.e. by card, app or smartphone, is also being blamed for the nation's preference to use cash (less and less common outside Germany)[5]. The tendency to view new technologies in a social context at an early stage, which is often interpreted abroad as hostility to technology, is another particularity that merits discussion (see Section 3.1 – Sovereignty).

2.3 PROMOTING THE GERMAN LANGUAGE ABROAD

Digital offerings have long complemented the Goethe-Institut's teaching services and are gaining in importance as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic. The new generation is increasingly expecting to work independently and on their own schedule, and to be able to influence content and to participate. The Goethe-Institut can meet these demands with digital means and again draw on existing Digital Civil Society knowledge here (e.g. interactive open-source learning platforms, knowledge created or digitised through crowd sourcing).

At the same time, learning modules on digital terminology could address the idiosyncrasies of the digital discussion in Germany and explain why Digital Civil Society in Germany emphasises certain topics. This is another area where Digital Civil Society, and in particular the numerous organisations in the field of digital education, can make a positive contribution. This would help build a larger international network in a field that is often very focussed on Germany and enable the development of new competencies.

Below we aim to explain the mechanics of Digital Civil Society by looking in more depth at its organisation, networks, issues and operating methods. Based on these specific areas, we also attempt to show which challenges Digital Civil Society must rise up to. Thanks to the numerous events and projects that the Goethe-Institut has accomplished in recent years, the organisation already has links to all of the areas listed below. We will highlight areas for improvement in the work of Digital Civil Society on a case-by-case basis.

4 https://www.nytimes.com/2019/02/14/nyregion/amazon-hq2-queens.html
5 https://www.dw.com/en/times-change-but-german-obsession-with-cash-endures/a-43718626

3 ORGANISATIONAL FORMS AND NETWORKS

3.1 LEVEL OF ORGANISATION WITHIN DIGITAL CIVIL SOCIETY IN GERMANY

Many, but not all, organisations that fall within the scope of the above definition of Digital Civil Society are volunteer-based or non-profit. On the one hand, this is related to the sometimes necessary professionalisation of digital volunteering. When initiatives intend to develop services and applications and make them reliably available to their users, they have to establish resilient professional structures sooner or later. Registered associations are the most common legal form under which staff are employed and third-party funds are raised. However, as the financial volume of an association increases, so does the personal risk for the board members, who are often volunteers themselves. Donation-based models also play a major role in the professionalisation of Digital Civil Society. Here, initiatives developing specific technologies often come up against a limit: even open-source communities rarely manage to achieve charitable status because the creation and provision of free technologies for the public good are rarely recognised as a charitable purpose by tax authorities. They are even considered an argument against non-profit status – according to the prevailing opinion, technological development still falls within the economic sphere. In 2019, for instance, the organisation Freifunk had its previously granted charitable status revoked[6]: an ominous signal for Digital Civil Society.

At the other end of the spectrum we find **individuals** who also contribute a great deal to Digital Civil Society. They are primarily independent researchers, artists, writers and developers.

3.2 NETWORKS IN GERMANY

Digital Civil Society is networked in many ways, both with other civil society actors as well as with organisations outside civil society. However, their demands are often at odds with the economic interests of businesses, which have significantly more resources at their disposal than civil society organisations, which depend on donations, public funding or endowments and which often work closely with volunteer communities, or are even entirely volunteer-run themselves.

Digital Civil Society organisations largely work in close networks with each other and with **individuals** who have established themselves as artists, authors or other self-employed professionals in the field. It is not uncommon for staff of one organisation to be on the board of other organisations – such interconnections promote informal cooperation and speedy agreements to achieve common goals. Due to the often temporary nature of employment contracts, committed employees often move from one organisation to another in the course of their careers. This guarantees that despite a high staff turnover, the experience and knowledge of individuals is retained within Digital Civil Society.

Digital Civil Society is also closely networked with non-civil society stakeholders. However, the way in which they cooperate varies greatly. Cooperation with **political actors and institutions** is double-edged. On the one hand, politics is the main target of Digital Civil Society, but on the other hand, it is often also its adversary. Many established actors in Digital Civil Society, such as the Stiftung Neue Verantwortung, iRights Lab or Das Progressive Zentrum, engage on a non-partisan basis at policy level and endeavour to promote Digital Civil Society through formats such as round tables

6 https://forum.ffrn.de/t/aberkennung-gemeinnuetzigkeit-ab-01-01-2020/3122

These formats are often commissioned directly by ministries or party-affiliated foundations so that the boundary between Digital Civil Society and politics becomes blurred. An example is the Innovationsbüro Digitales Leben (Innovation Office Digital Living), a think tank and innovation driver with the mission to positively shape digitalisation. It was launched by the Federal Ministry for Family Affairs, Senior Citizens, Women and Youth (BMFSFJ) and is implemented by iRights Lab. Similarly, the Denkfabrik Digitale Arbeitsgesellschaft (think tank) of the Federal Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs (BMAS) is implemented by the BMAS itself but cooperates closely with civil society organisations: the Civic Innovation Plattform, a sub-project of the think tank, lists the Prototype Fund as a cooperation partner[7], itself a project of the Open Knowledge Foundation Deutschland, and the digitally oriented Social Entrepreneurship Netzwerk Deutschland (SEND) e. V..

On the one hand, such close, consolidated cooperation between civil society organisations and public institutions integrates individual civil society actors more closely into political decision-making processes; on the other hand, it provides ministries with access to digital competencies that they urgently need. Spin-offs such as the Denkfabrik and the Innovation Office not only allow public institutions to brand themselves as modern, they also provide more flexible career paths for their employees and adaptable work practices – an important prerequisite for attracting digitally proficient people to work with them.

Networking with federal and state authorities is not the only important part of the work of Digital Civil Society. Numerous small associations and sometimes large networks are doing important work, particularly at **local level**. This is where many success stories emerge: the Verschwörhaus in Ulm is a makerspace, an educational institution, a place for political participation – and run by the city council[8]. The Verstehbahnhof in Fürstenberg an der Havel is not a municipal project but has similar objectives. Other initiatives such as neuland21 strengthen local initiatives by providing advice and support on topics such as New Work, mobility, Open Data, eGovernment and Making, and run projects with local partners. Local initiatives are often part of one or more networks such as Code for Germany (Open Data, Civic Tech, Open Government), CoderDojo Deutschland (programming courses for children and young people), Jugend hackt (hackathons for children and young people) or the Verbund Offener Werkstätten (Making, Hardware).

Digital Civil Society tends to network with **businesses** when they have emerged from a civil society initiative. A case in point are software companies that develop open-source products and which are therefore considered as part of Digital Civil Society, although undoubtedly on the periphery. These firms usually do not work for profit, but instead are closely interlinked with volunteer-based, digitally operating communities. One example is Stuttgart-based Nextcloud GmbH, which is developing a cloud solution that is used worldwide. Or the Berlin-based Document Foundation, a charitable foundation under public law, which is the home of LibreOffice, another widely used open-source product[9]. Employees as well as self-employed individuals and a large community of volunteers contribute to both products.

Digital Civil Society has relatively few connections to the **scientific community**. Organisations such as Wissenschaft im Dialog (Science in Dialogue), a non-profit organisation founded by the leading German science organisations, acts as the intermediary.

7 https://www.civic-innovation.de/ueber-uns/unsere-kooperationspartnerinnen
8 https://www.ulm.de/leben-in-ulm/digitale-stadt/verschwörhaus
9 https://www.libreoffice.org/

Cooperation projects usually fall within the scope of "participation". Examples here are citizen-science projects that rely on the participation of civil society and whose data is sometimes made available as open data. Citizen science often takes place in analogue form, but increasingly also on digital platforms. Examples are the app Verlust der Nacht (Loss of the Night), which was launched by two Leibniz Institutes, or the project Every name counts initiated by the Arolsen-Archives in order to digitise vast numbers of documents from German concentration camps with the help of volunteers. Both examples show that such digital projects often acquire volunteers from a wide range of countries. A community emerges, if at all, on the platforms of the research institutions. Digital citizen science projects that originate in civil society are different: here, the sponsors are local communities that implement a project and then pass on any knowledge gained to groups elsewhere. An example is the Luftdaten project, founded in Stuttgart. Luftdaten shares its construction manuals for low-cost fine dust and noise sensors under an open licence and publishes the results of the sensor network as Open Data. The sensors are now in use in countries around the world.[10]

Digital Civil Society's relationship to **journalism** has changed in recent years. For traditional media, it is still an object of observation, or, less often, a partner in dialogue. Digital Civil Society has found its counterpart in journalism with the emergence of non-profit journalism, whose stakeholders often use digital platforms and tools or specialise in digital topics. Representatives include Correctiv, Netzpolitik.org and Netzwerk Recherche, which specialises in teaching digital research skills.

3.3 INTERNATIONAL NETWORKS

Digital Civil Society is well connected internationally. However, networking and international cooperation usually takes place online, as funds for international travel and stays abroad are often lacking. Visa regulations also make personal networking difficult, in particular for actors from the Global South who wish to cooperate with organisations from the Global North. International networking also requires time resources, which are scarce in the voluntary sector. Networking is therefore often piecemeal and based on individual relationships between actors, rather than on structural cooperation between organisations.

Depending on the issues an individual actor focusses on, however, there are differences in how well a digital civil society organisation is networked internationally. Organisations that address social problems based on technical applications are often more closely networked with groups from other countries in order to exchange technical knowledge and negotiate standards and interfaces.

These include, for instance, the Freifunk initiative (which is in communication with partners such as the Spanish GUIFI), software communities and communities centred around Civic Tech. For instance, Code for Germany is part of the international network Code for All, which has 14 core members and 17 affiliated partners. German Wikimedia is also part of a large international network and was the first recognised chapter of the US Wikimedia Foundation.

3.4 NETWORKING AND ITS CHALLENGES

Establishing relations between Digital Civil Society in Germany and others abroad offers great opportunities: its digital solutions and use cases that are discussed, used and, above all, created in Germany often apply universally. The source code of many applications developed by Digital Civil Society is made available under open licences, which is why they are easily adapted for other local contexts or data sets. They are therefore also discussed, applied and refined in other regions of the

10 http://deutschland.maps.sensor.community/

world. Conversely, German Digital Civil Society can learn from organisations from other countries and their success stories. Since Digital Civil Society groups already tend to communicate with each other online and use technologies such as wikis and other systems for their knowledge management, it would be easy to open up the communication networks, make knowledge accessible and therefore to be able to learn from other digital communities around the world. However, for a number of reasons this process is often slow.

A research project specifically aimed at open source developers has shown that even among highly technophile groups, organised face-to-face communication is important for building the necessary trust for collaborations.[11] By communicating face to face, people are also better able to understand the context in which other people work. Conflicts due to different work practices, objectives, communication and other culture-related factors decrease in the digital sphere if people have met in person. Due to limited financial resources, however, communication happens mostly online. Many projects lack good-practice examples of how to set up and run online information exchanges. Misunderstandings or problems are not resolved due to missing or poorly thought-out community support. It is not uncommon for differing expectations among people working digitally to collide. There are no blueprints for how to do international and interdisciplinary digital networking and with cultural sensitivity, or for how diverse groups of people can participate in activities on digital topics.

Regular face-to-face communication in the analogue world is simply too expensive for most Digital Civil Society actors. Volunteer workers often have to pay for travel and events themselves. This also reduces the willingness to network. In addition, classic networking formats such as conferences and conventions originate from a scientific or economic context and do not meet the demands of Digital Civil Society. Participants cannot influence the content of these events and often do not have the space to hold spontaneous coding sessions, planning meetings or discussion groups at such events (cf. Section 5). Event formats that aim to promote communication between international representatives of Digital Civil Society must meet these needs, allow for radical co-creation and leave room for spontaneous developments.

The Corona pandemic has led to massive changes in the events sector. Many of the conferences that previously served Digital Civil Society as meeting places are now taking place online.[12] As a result, their focus is shifting from networking to content. While lectures and discussions are still taking place, workshops and other interactive formats are less feasible to do online. Here, too, good examples of how Digital Civil Society might network instead are missing. Such examples, however, could ultimately lead to events continuing to be conceived online or as hybrid formats even after COVID-19. With good concepts for personal interaction, more people would not only have the opportunity to participate in these events as an audience, but would also be able to actively shape them and get in touch with other participants.

11 https://implicit-development.org/2020/04/08/mirageos-retreat/

12 Cf. the Chaos Communication Congress, which is being transformed into rC3 - remote Chaos Experience: https://events.ccc.de/2020/09/04/rc3-remote-chaos-experience/

4 DIGITAL CIVIL SOCIETY IN GERMANY AND ITS TOPICS

Civil society does not view technology in isolation, but in terms of how it can or should influence social interaction. Various spheres of activity have therefore emerged: some actors see their sphere wherever there are societal issues related to a concrete technological concept (e.g. open data and its potential for increased transparency and participation in local communities), while others take action primarily in the context of a particular social issue (e.g. educational equality) and include digital tools and media in their work.

As a result, actors who are confined to specific technical areas are more likely to shift the focus of their work within society. One such example is the association Freifunk mentioned above, a network of numerous local initiatives that set up and operate free radio networks (mainly WLAN, or WiFi) and that also develop open hardware and software for this purpose. While they initially provided WiFi access to neighbourhoods, community centres and even some schools, in 2015-16 some Freifunk initiatives began working more closely with refugee accommodation providers and as a consequence became more involved with the issue of migration.

By contrast, other actors are focused on specific social applications and therefore use and highlight a variety of technological possibilities. The organisation Mediale Pfade is developing a wide array of programmes for digital youth education, ranging from events such as software hackathons to editing educational content for digital media[13] and technical applications (e.g. augmented reality[14]).

Digital Civil Society's target groups are also diverse. An example: The initiative FixMyBerlin uses open maps to encourage a more cycle-friendly transport policy in Berlin. Founded originally as a campaign platform for cycle activism, it also evolved into an open-source and open-data initiative by developing its platform in an open-source format and providing open data on road traffic. Since then, it has also become a service provider for public authorities with the mission to improve communication around transport planning and to design participatory decision-making processes.[15]

The level of impact within Digital Civil Society varies greatly. It ranges from commenting on current developments in their field of action, active policy work and political consultation, research, community and networking activities, education (capacity building), artistic engagement with digital issues, to software development and the provision of digital services.

The degree of organisation within Digital Civil Society varies, too. In Civic Tech, for instance, many projects are developed by individuals and small teams on a volunteer basis and without formal structures. Some of them never transition into formal structures but join larger civil society organisations. One example is the Open Knowledge Foundation Deutschland, under whose umbrella projects such as Meine Stadt Transparent and Kleine Anfragen.de have been implemented.

Below, we present the most important current topics Digital Civil Society engages with and venture a prediction as to which topics will become more relevant for Digital Civil Society in the years to come. High-level categories such as "Access" and "Information" are not to be taken as exclusive but rather serve the purpose of presenting the common goals of movements that focus on different issues.

13 https://medialepfade.org/projekt/aboutblank/
14 https://medialepfade.org/projekt/canvas-city/
15 https://fixmycity.webflow.io/

4.1 CURRENT RELEVANT TOPICS

ACCESS

The corona crisis has shown that **access to the digital sphere** is still an issue. According to the "World-wide Broadband Speed League"[16], one of the largest global surveys on broadband internet, Germany still ranked 42nd in 2020 and with an average download speed of around 42 Mbps is well below the German government's target of 50 Mbps per connection. Besides, for technologies such as IP-based video calls, the limiting factor is not download speed but upload speed, which is significantly lower than the download speed for cable internet, which is popular in Germany. Particularly in rural regions where neither the fibre optic network nor broadband mobile communications such as LTE or 5G have been widely implemented, internet access is not reliable enough for bandwidth-intensive technologies such as those required in the home office or in online learning.

Schools also differ greatly in how well they are prepared for **online learning**. The problems here go beyond internet access speeds: schools lack hardware (servers, terminals), software (school clouds, learning programmes and platforms) and learning content that may be shared digitally.[17] These problems have been raised by educational organisations for a long time. However, Digital Civil Society can only provide limited solutions, e.g. in the area of open-source software (many plugins for Moodle are developed by volunteers and at universities) or open educational content (OER)[18]. While educational content varies country by country depending on its curriculum and is therefore not easily transferable, developments in educational platforms such as Moodle can be internationalised and are being actively promoted by communities worldwide.

Digital Civil Society also addresses other issues relating to access, such as **barrier-free access and inclusion**. Associations such as Sozialhelden e. V. (Social Heroes) are developing digital tools and platforms to expose barriers and demand access rights – access in the physical world[19], access to information[20] and access to representation[21] that people with disabilities have so far been denied.

ACTIVE PARTICIPATION

Digital Civil Society focusses in all areas on opportunities for people to actively shape their environment. This includes helping to shape digital technologies. Numerous volunteer associations and initiatives throughout Germany teach the necessary skills in the use of digital tools and programming. They mainly work on a local level[22] but can also be organised supra-regionally or even worldwide[23]. Some focus on teaching how to use common applications[24] and others on specific programming languages[25].

16 https://www.cable.co.uk/broadband/speed/worldwide-speed-league/
17 https://www.tagesschau.de/inland/digitalisierung-schulen-interview-101.html
18 https://buendnis-freie-bildung.de/
19 https://projekt-elevate.de/
20 https://tvfueralle.de/
21 https://gesellschaftsbilder.de/
22 https://www.fccbonn.de/, https://www.pcfrauen.de/
23 http://railsgirls.com/, https://pyladies.com/
24 https://www.fczb.de/
25 https://berlin.pyladies.com/

Their target groups often include children and young people[26], but also women, who are still underrepresented in the digital sector and even in Digital Civil Society. New services include specific offerings for refugees such as the ReDi School or Kiron University. By contrast, only very few offers are specifically tailored to the needs of the over-65s.[27]

Digital Civil Society is also helping to shape the relationship between people, politics and public administration, in the form of **Civic Tech** and **eGovernment applications**. Civic Tech communities such as Code for Germany are important catalysts for new developments in this area. They test new approaches and digital participation formats and are closely guided by the needs of citizens. Parlamentwatch's platform Abgeordnetenwatch offers citizens a direct line to MPs. The project Meine Stadt Transparent provides citizens with access to information from local council information systems with a focus on design and clarity. Joint projects between civic hacker communities and journalists[28] aim to raise awareness of such projects among the general public. Civic Tech sector projects and prototypes have helped to put issues such as open data and online participation on the political agenda by demonstrating what is possible in these areas. In the meantime, ministries such as the Federal Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs have recognised the value of civic innovation and launched their own programmes, such as the think tank Denkfabrik mentioned previously.[29]

The internet opens up new possibilities for **political participation**. Digital Civil Society recognised this early on: since 2011, the association Liquid Democracy has been developing an open-source platform called Adhocracy[30], which enables large and small organisations to implement targeted, solutions-oriented and sometimes binding participatory processes. At its peak, Adhocracy was used by 600 different organisations for their respective purposes, including local chapters of political parties and civil society organisations from around the world. Although the possibilities of digital participation were tested early on by the Pirate Party in Germany, the country has not become a pioneer in this field. There have been and still are isolated digital participation procedures such as citizens' participatory budgets[31], but progressive and holistic programmes such as those in Barcelona[32] have not been launched in Germany. Digital service units within administrations, like Government Digital Service[33] in the UK or 18f in the USA[34], were also introduced late in Germany. Tech4Germany was not purchased by the federal administration until 2020 and will be expanded into a digital service unit in the years to come.

26 https://coderdojo.com/, https://www.coderdojo-deutschland.de/
27 Cf. https://www.bmfsfj.de/blob/159704/3dab099fb5eb39d9fba72f6810676387/achter-altersbericht-aeltere-menschen-und-digitalisierung-data.pdf
28 https://interaktiv.morgenpost.de/tempelhofer-feld/fallback/
29 https://www.denkfabrik-bmas.de/projekte/civic-innovation-platform
30 https://liqd.net/de/projects/adhocracy/
31 https://www.buergergesellschaft.de/mitentscheiden/handlungsfelder-themen/buergerhaushalt/buergerhaushalte-in-deutschland/
32 https://www.deutschlandfunk.de/wenn-buerger-politik-gestalten-barcelonas-erfolg-mit-der.795.de.html?dram:article_id=471680
33 https://www.gov.uk/government/organisations/government-digital-service/about
34 https://18f.gsa.gov/

SOVEREIGNTY

Germany's landscape of civil society organisations advocating **privacy, data security and data protection** – in other words: digital sovereignty – is virtually unique. The Chaos Computer Club (CCC) was founded as early as in 1981, has been a registered association since 1986 and is thus one of the oldest civil society organisations in the world that campaigns for people's rights in the information society. The CCC has played a pivotal role in ensuring that the term "hacking" has a positive connotation in Germany and now provides experts who are consulted by the federal government and ministries on issues of freedom of information and digital sovereignty. Similarly established organisations such as Digitalcourage and Digitale Gesellschaft complete the landscape. These organisations focus their political work primarily on state and federal politics. The CCC maintains international contacts with other hacker and "Internet Freedom" initiatives through its Chaos Communication Congress, for example, which has been taking place since 1984.

Another group of initiatives teaches **practical skills** on how to protect personal digital systems, personal data and thus one's privacy. Prominent among these is the Cryptoparty initiative, a loosely-organised, global network that organises local events – so-called Cryptoparties – to explain topics such as hard-disk and e-mail encryption, secure internet browsing or privacy-friendly operating systems and provides help with installing the necessary software. Tactical Tech runs activities that have lower barriers to access: they **inform about current technologies** and how they affect people (e.g. The Glass Room) and provide guidance on how individuals can navigate the digital world without being harmed (Digital Detox Kit, Security in a Box).

Digital self-determination also includes volunteer **tech collectives**[35] that operate and provide open digital services. Services include email servers, mailing lists, encrypted mailing lists, appointment booking services, etherpads, chat servers (XMPP) and, more recently, video telephony, for example via Jitsi[36]. Many of these collectives do not have their own legal status, but can accept donations through associations in their community. This is often necessary, as operating servers can incur high costs.

One group of organisations that are part of the Digital Civil Society environment and support them with legal means to assert **their rights in digital space** is relatively new. The Gesellschaft für Freiheitsrechte (Society for Civil Rights), noyb and the Digital Freedom Fund provide this support with strategic litigation. Noyb's work is often GDPR-related and is therefore involved in cases across the EU. This trend is set to continue as an increasing number of national laws are superseded by EU directives (e.g. the anticipated successor to the ePrivacy Regulation, which was abandoned in 2019) in the digital sector.

The issues revolving around digital sovereignty enjoy a special status in Germany. On the one hand, the organisations and initiatives mentioned here have been able to decisively shape the local Digital Civil Society as well as the social and political discourse. On the other hand, recent German history, for instance in East Germany, has demonstrated the impact mass state-run surveillance has on society. Both are likely to have contributed to the fact that Edward Snowden's revelations led to a parliamentary inquiry into the role of the domestic intelligence services in Germany – there is no comparable political reaction to the documented global mass surveillance anywhere in the world. The issue of digital sovereignty is therefore not only deeply anchored in German Digital Civil Society, but is also relevant to society as a whole.

35 https://www.systemli.org, https://www.nadir.org/, https://cryptix.net/, https://so36.net/, https://systemausfall.org/
36 https://jitsi.org/

INFORMATION

Access to knowledge and public data are important foundations for political co-determination, the shaping of society, and therefore for civil society engagement. Organisations such as Wikimedia Deutschland and the Open Knowledge Foundation Deutschland have been campaigning for access to information and knowledge for years.

The topic of **open data** has now entered the political mainstream. For over ten years, however, it was mainly driven by Digital Civil Society. Civil society organisations have created applications such as financial budget visualisations[37] to illustrate the benefits of open data, and have advocated for the topic and its societal importance in position papers and public statements. While countries such as the USA[38] and the UK prioritised the issue at the highest political level already in 2009, Germany, for example, only joined the Open Government Partnership (OGP) in 2016. The OGP is an international initiative in which numerous countries have joined forces to collectively promote the issues of open government and open data. The initiative's supporters are committed, among other things, to developing action plans for more transparency, citizen participation and modernisation of the administrative sector in their respective countries and to carrying out regular review processes. Digital Civil Society organisations such as Transparency International, Stiftung Neue Verantwortung and the Free Software Foundation Europe had campaigned for Germany to join the OGP for years, and, among other things, founded the Open Government Network Germany[39]. Although an Open Data Act is now in place, the work of Digital Civil Society in this area is far from over. The current government in Germany approaches the issue from an economic perspective, which is why data that is conducive to transparency and accountability is often made available only reluctantly.

In addition to Open Data, there is more information that is relevant and of interest to the public. Freedom of information laws are in place to provide access to official and political information. With Frag den Staat (Ask the State), the Open Knowledge Foundation Deutschland has been operating a freedom of information platform for ten years, which handles two thirds of all requests to German authorities. The software behind the platform is open-source and is also used in other countries. Of the 16 federal states in Germany, only twelve have a Freedom of Information Act. Here, too, Digital Civil Society still has much work to do[40]. Many networks with open data and freedom of information initiatives in other European countries are already in place, while numerous countries worldwide have launched similar initiatives or are in the process of doing so. Further international cooperation can help Open Data become more widely known as a means of transparency and responsible action within government institutions, and help Digital Civil Society communities around the world to develop technical solutions for implementing this.

CYBERCULTURE

In the last 20 years, a phenomenon has emerged that we refer to here as cyberculture, even if this term is used with other definitions elsewhere. A set of values has established itself in the digital space, which on the one hand are formative for Digital Civil Society, but on the other hand raise economic and legal questions and even cause conflicts.

This includes the dissolution of the roles of producer and consumer, who are replaced by the "prosumer" (a portmanteau of *producer* and *consumer*). The phenomenon began on platforms such as Myspace and YouTube and is now taken to extremes on Twitch and TikTok. "Prosumers" are users who

37 https://offenerhaushalt.de/
38 https://www.govtech.com/data/What-Obama-Did-for-Tech-Transparency-and-Open-Data.html
39 https://opengovpartnership.de/
40 https://informationsfreiheit.org/woanders/bundeslander/

consume content on digital platforms as well as create their own content. Since communication on these platforms is often highly referential, the content consists to a large extent of existing media content created by others, which is creatively edited and published in a new context. In the artistic field, this leads to continuous clashes with European copyright law, which does not reflect this **right to remix**[41] demanded by the digital sector. Remixed content continues to fall under the original author's copyright. The platforms, which have traditionally applied US copyright law, however, allowed remixing as "fair use". Under the new European copyright law, and in particular Article 13, it will be prohibited to publish content that is protected by copyright in the first place. Just how central the right to remix is was made evident by the many demonstrations that took place throughout Germany prior to the decision on copyright reform in March 2019, most of which were attended by teenagers and young adults.[42] Even though the demonstrations caused a stir, they ultimately did not succeed: in the run-up, they lacked coordination with cyberculture representatives from abroad, media-effective campaigns and joint demands to politicians.

People also do journalistic work by remixing news and research on these platforms. The most prominent example is Rezo[43], whose YouTube video "The Destruction of the CDU"[44] initially caused a sensation in the run-up to the 2019 European elections due to its high click rate, but then shot to fame after he was criticised by politicians. In the aftermath, a debate arose about whether YouTubers should work as journalists, in the course of which their activities as "prosumers" or influencers were portrayed as a hobby. This debate fails to recognise that for many people today their presence on digital platforms is their job and they earn their livelihood this way.

DISINFORMATION & CONSPIRACY MYTHS

Disinformation and fake news are by no means new problems, but the internet and platforms like Facebook make it easier than ever to spread and share false information. In the area of disinformation and conspiracy theories, Digital Civil Society's work is mainly in education and prevention. Organisations such as the Stiftung Neue Verantwortung publish studies such as „Feuerwehr ohne Wasser? – Möglichkeiten und Grenzen des Fact-Checkings als Mittel gegen Desinformation" ("Fighting fire without water? – Possibilities and limits of fact-checking as a means to fight disinformation")[45] or investigate the spread of conspiracy theories via digital services like the messenger service Telegram[46]. Projects from the Civic Tech sector also shed light on the extent of the issue: the Hoaxmap.org project documented the spread of rumours about refugees.

Correctiv, an organisation that promotes and conducts investigative journalism, participates in Facebook's fact-checking project and verifies information and articles shared on the platform[47]. It interlinks original posts on Facebook so that false information is juxtaposed with verified facts and evidence. The major platforms play an important role in combating misinformation. Digital Civil Society on its own has neither the resources nor the means to do this work alone in a world ruled by big tech companies and platforms.

41 An online petition with the same title existed for this purpose: https://rechtaufremix.org/
42 https://www.deutschlandfunk.de/eu-urheberrechtsreform-warum-die-jungen-gegen-artikel-13.1769.de.html?dram:article_id=444359
43 https://de.wikipedia.org/wiki/Rezo
44 https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4Y1lZQsyuSQ
45 https://www.stiftung-nv.de/sites/default/files/grenzen_und_moeglichkeiten_fact_checking.pdf
46 https://www.freiheit.org/desinformation-messengerdienste
47 https://correctiv.org/faktencheck/

ONLINE HATE SPEECH T

The opportunities offered by the internet go hand in hand with its downsides. Hate speech and cyberbullying are two issues in this area. According to a study by the Institut für Demokratie und Zivilgesellschaft (Institute for Democracy and Civil Society), hate speech impairs the freedom of expression online[48] Campact e.V., Das NETTZ, Gesicht zeigen! and Neue deutsche Medienmacher:innen e.V. are active in this area and assist victims of hate speech. The organisation HateAid supports victims of online hate speech, including the Green Party member of parliament Renate Künast[49], with legal assistance and support. HateAid pursues a novel model of helping victims with their legal costs. The non-profit association Juuuport focuses on online counselling by young people for young people.

In 2020, the German government passed a package of laws against hate crimes[50]. The new laws aim to "sustainably shape and financially safeguard" civil society's efforts to strengthen democracy and to counter right-wing extremism, racism and other forms of group-based hatred.

Online hate is an issue that must be addressed holistically: counselling for the victims, prosecution of the perpetrators and prevention and education are just a few of the topics that need to be discussed. Stakeholders from civil society, politics and business must cooperate even more closely to combat the issue systemically. At the same time, care must be taken to ensure that freedom of expression and other fundamental civil rights are not restricted by laws such as the Network Enforcement Act. Since the first draft of the law in 2017, Digital Civil Society has made a significant contribution to ensuring that the fundamental rights of the public remain protected in digital space.[51]

ALGORITHMIC BIAS AND ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE

Digital Civil Society is also engaged in the debate on artificial intelligence or algorithmic decision making systems (ADM). The drivers of the issue include AlgorithmWatch, Stiftung Neue Verantwortung, Ethical Tech Society and the Bertelsmann Foundation's project Ethik der Algorithmen. Civil society is far more sceptical towards the concept of "artificial intelligence" than politics or industry are. Although there are ADM systems currently in use that can have far-reaching impact, science is still far removed from artificial intelligence in the narrow sense of the term.

To involve Digital Civil Society in the discussion on algorithmic systems, it is helpful to refrain from using the buzzword AI or to deconstruct it in the course of the discussion. We assume that Digital Civil Society will continue to engage with the topic in the coming years because of its political significance. To date, most examples and comprehensive studies of discrimination by ADM systems have come from the USA. The challenge for the near future is to collect European examples of discriminatory technologies and to develop from them a discourse that draws on European legal norms, values and case studies and devise our own responses.

48 https://www.demokratie-leben.de/en/
49 https://hateaid.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/08/pressemitteilung-kuenast-20200121.pdf
50 https://www.bundesregierung.de/breg-de/aktuelles/gesetz-gegen-hasskriminalitaet-1722896
51 https://www.amadeu-antonio-stiftung.de/zweite-stellungnahme-zum-zweiten-entwurf-des-erweiterten-netzdg-54567/

4.2 FUTURE TOPICS

We will try to answer the question of which topics will gain in importance on the basis of a variety of factors. Which topics are emerging from the work of Digital Civil Society so far? In which areas will ground-breaking political decisions need to be made in the next few years? Which issues and formats have established themselves in other countries but have not yet been adopted in Germany? It is important to note that Digital Civil Society primarily creates pressure where politics and business do not act quickly enough or do not comply with the demands of civil society. Whether or not Digital Civil Society will have to face up to the issues listed below therefore also depends on other actors.

DIGITAL SOVEREIGNTY

The various aspects of digital sovereignty are so deeply anchored in Digital Civil Society in Germany that it will remain a core topic. One focus here will be the expansion of basic digital services, i.e. access to the internet and to basic digital applications that are indispensable for life in Germany. Here, the question of who owns the underlying digital infrastructure, who operates services (example: Zoom) and who manufactures hardware components will become more important. The debate about 5G technologies provided by the Chinese company Huawei has shown that it is no longer just technical issues of performance, durability and resilience but also geopolitical factors that decide which technologies are chosen.

In an ageing society like Germany's, we will have to address the question of how **accessible** this basic digital service is, and what accessibility requirements must be met by digital services that may be privately owned but provide quasi-public services in order to make digitisation fair. The shift of our working and private lives to the digital world – accelerated by the COVID-19 pandemic – makes a discussion about the usability and accessibility of these services imperative.

LAW AND JUSTICE

The question of justice is also being raised with increasing frequency at the level of software applications. Numerous journalistic investigations, scientific papers and books published in recent years have shown how unjust technology can be. The topic of **algorithmic systems and bias** will continue to be on the agenda for the foreseeable future. We assume, though, that the call for ethics in algorithms will be superseded by specific proposals for solutions regarding which factors need to be taken into account in the creation process of a technology in order to ensure its quality – from a thorough analysis of the underlying data and comprehensive test runs of algorithmic systems to a transparent presentation of where algorithms are used and for what purpose. The City of Amsterdam's AI register provides a first example of what this might look like.[52]

The question of whose law applies on the internet will also be discussed further. The leading tech companies have been applying US law to their international users in the past, but the European Union is now pushing to assert its own version of user rights, such as the Network Enforcement Act (Netz-DG) and the General Data Protection Regulation (DS-GVO) or copyright (cf. 4.1 – Cyberculture). Which laws should apply to whom on the internet will be debated more intensively in the future, and the issue will have far-reaching effects on online interactions and the activities of Digital Civil Society.

52 https://algoritmeregister.amsterdam.nl/en/ai-register/

FEMINISM AND TECHNOLOGY

While Digital Civil Society has been working on issues such as security, data protection and access to knowledge for many years, the intersection with feminism, feminist communities and their values is comparatively new. Internationally, these issues have been discussed for much longer. Initiatives such as feministinternet.org explore what an internet based on values such as justice, diversity and care could look like. In Germany, Motif Institut, Superrr and university-based initiatives are addressing the topic and seeking to establish it in Germany.

Considering and designing technology with feminist values in mind places marginalised groups and their needs at the centre and examines the impact of new technologies on society. Feminist technology design aims to work with diverse groups to influence tech policies and technological development in a positive way. Although Digital Civil Society in Germany addresses aspects such as discrimination by technology, it rarely collaborates with other civil society organisations that offer the skills of people with a migration background, people from socially deprived backgrounds or older people (cf. Section 4.3).

SUSTAINABILITY

The first time the overlapping issue of sustainability and digitalisation was discussed in an interdisciplinary context between science and civil society was at the 2018 conference "Bits und Bäume". The Bits und Bäume network is diverse and indicates that sustainability and environmental organisations increasingly see the digital sphere as a core responsibility as well.[53] The topic will therefore become increasingly important in the years to come. Precisely because sustainability is a systemic challenge for the world, it is essential that this discussion be expanded geographically and that new groups of actors (e.g. indigenous populations, people affected by e-waste, local makers) be able to actively shape the discussion. There is currently a lack of formats that enable continuous discussion and knowledge transfer.

We expect that within the topic of sustainability and digitalisation, aspects such as circular economy, the right to reparability of hardware, firmware and software, open-source and transparent manufacturing processes will gain in importance. The proposed "Blue Angel" eco label for software products[54] can serve to initiate a discussion on transparency and sustainability-promoting certifications.

TRANSHUMANISM

The concept of technologically enhanced humans – e.g. through implants – is not new. In recent years, however, a number of key circumstances have changed, which is why we believe that transhumanism needs to be addressed anew: the technical components for implants are becoming smaller and cheaper. This makes it technically possible to actually implant them in a person, even if usually at one's own risk. So far, very few implants have been approved for use without medical indication. Nevertheless, technical implants are becoming increasingly feasible.

But even with medical indication, implants remain controversial. A prominent example are cochlear implants for the deaf, which can cause enormous stress for the recipient. A couple from Goslar who did not want their deaf toddler to receive a cochlear implant were forced to defend themselves in

53 See a study by the WWF: https://www.wwf.de/fileadmin/user_upload/Studie_Suehlmann-Faul_Rammler_180406_final_pdf_protected.pdf

54 https://www.blauer-engel.de/de/produktwelt/elektrogeraete/ressourcen-und-energieeffiziente-softwareprodukte

court against accusations of child endangerment.[55] The availability of implants can influence how mainstream society values the right to self-determination of people with disabilities. There is an urgent need for a broader platform to discuss the pros and cons of implants and the ethical framework for their use with those affected.

Transhumanism is also highly relevant for an ageing society and an increasing retirement age. How does the economic efficiency mindset behind some augmentations affect the individual's right to self-determination? Do people with augmentations have the right to understand or even change the technologies and algorithms? The software project \\NoIze//[56], for instance, reveals the opportunities offered by open software in implants: people can create their own functionalities (in this case noise filters) adapted to their individual needs. Other examples would be brain pacemakers for people suffering from Parkinson's disease or insulin pumps for diabetics.

For the latter, DIY instructions and open-source apps to monitor insulin levels have been created by those affected.[57] [58] Nonetheless, medical apps from Digital Civil Society remain a marginal phenomenon as the stringent approval requirements mean that they can only be met in cooperation with established corporations.

DIGITAL CIVIC SPACES

Digital Civil Society is facing a particular challenge that will influence its role in the years to come: the fact that it operates in spaces it does not own and that it has little power to influence. Public digital spaces are in private hands – there are no real alternatives to Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, etc. The business models of Facebook and YouTube are particularly problematic, since their algorithms promote disinformation[59] and even radicalisation[60] – they run counter to the values of Digital Civil Society. We are hoping for a dialogue in the near future on what alternative digital Civic Spaces are needed to constructively promote the global networking of Digital Civil Society, and whether this can be achieved with the existing platforms. This goes hand in hand with the question of whether public institutions should be allowed to use commercial digital platforms for their communication and events, or whether they should switch to free alternatives to generate a network effect. We do not consider social media to be the only form of Civic Space, but also include platforms that enable digital education, political co-determination and the self-organisation of civil society.

4.3 WHAT TOPICS HAVE BEEN OMITTED AND WHY?

Digital Civil Society in Germany does not represent all groups of civil society and therefore leaves out some topics that are relevant to society as a whole. The poor representation of people with disabilities, people with a migration background or persons of colour, as well as older people and people in financially precarious living conditions, contributes to the fact that Digital Civil Society often does not sufficiently consider their concerns. Intersectional consideration of discrimination patterns in algorithmic systems is also quite rare in Germany – as it is in Digital Civil Society.

55 https://gehoerlosenzeitung.de/cochlea-implantat-zwang-urteil-goslar/
56 https://pexlab.space/index.php/de/50-selektiver-geraeuschfilter-auf-basis-von-ai
57 https://www.labiotech.eu/diabetes/diy-diabetes-community-artificial-pancreas/
58 https://androidaps.readthedocs.io/en/latest/
59 http://www.ajtmh.org/content/journals/10.4269/ajtmh.20-0812
60 https://arxiv.org/abs/1908.08313

Its approach to challenges and the proposed solutions are therefore often privileged and do not always apply to society as a whole. These are the issues that Digital Civil Society will have to address if it is to be more effective. Here, communication with communities from other countries can help to develop awareness for the demographic imbalance in Digital Society in Germany and to learn from successful groups how this can be remedied. A case in point is the OpenStreetMap communities in various countries that actively encourage girls and young women to form their own mapping teams.[61]

A lack of diversity in all aspects – socio-economic status, migration background, disability, age and gender – is reflected at the leadership level. The civil society sector involves a high proportion of women, but the majority of organisations is headed by men. The organisation Fair Share publishes annual statistics on this issue. 93% of the organisations surveyed are predominantly run by men.[62] It is becoming increasingly evident that digitalisation, due to its high energy and resource consumption, must be included in the discussion on global justice. But it also has the potential to offer solutions for systemic change. The Bits und Bäume conference made this clear. While Digital Civil Society readily discusses these opportunities, little attention is paid to its contribution to climate change and the exploitation of rare-earth elements. These two aspects need to be considered together to a greater extent than is currently the case.

One reason for this unbalanced view may be that international Digital Civil Society networks are predominantly oriented towards the West. They have strong ties with other European countries and North America, but less so with South American, African or Asian countries, although it is precisely the latter that are increasingly shaping the tech sector. Finally, it should be noted that Digital Civil Society is generally critical of the buzzwords and hypes common in the tech industry, particularly block chain technology and artificial intelligence. Digital Civil Society considers these topics to be significantly less relevant than people involved in politics or business do.

61 For instance: https://wiki.openstreetmap.org/wiki/GeoChicas
62 http://fairsharewl.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/04/20-04-09-Ergebnisse-Monitor-2020.pdf

5 WORK PRACTICES, INTERACTION AND COMMUNICATION FORMATS

Digital Civil Society relies on a variety of formats for its work, its interaction with partners and the public, and for participation. These formats are based on common values: **personal responsibility, empowerment, radical openness and opportunities for participation at all levels**. These values are expressed in a number of ways. Routine cooperation is guided by the push-pull principle of an **open way of working**, which is derived from software development (specifically the Git protocol): anyone can take part, start initiatives and move topics forward (push). At the same time, Digital Civil Society organisations regularly seek out feedback from their networks in order to adjust the direction of their work (pull). There are of course organisations that are structured or behave differently and are guided by the top-down principle; however, this rarely leads to effective cooperation with other actors who demand their right to co-determination. It is common practice in Digital Civil Society to consciously **relinquish the prerogative of interpretation** and to promote open dialogue with the varied population groups.

One example of such collaboration is Germany's Open Government Partnership mentioned above, a civil society stakeholder group for open government in which organisations, initiatives and individuals alike can participate. As open as this format may be, the question often remains to what extent politics (as the targeted recipient) should be involved, and whether any such involvement would make the political work of Digital Civil Society more effective. Such involvement rarely happens.

Open working methods also include making the results of the work available to the community. This is where **creative-commons or open-source licences**, alternatives to regular copyright, come in. Although documenting the work is resource-intensive, it is considered a crucial requirement for sustainable work.

Event formats, too, focus on active participation and primarily serve to create space for greater communication, discussion and tangible cooperation. Typical examples are **BarCamps** and **unconferences**. Even large conferences such as re:publica or the Chaos Communication Congress allow for co-creation and view providing these spaces as a key part of their role. The Bits und Bäume conference, too, offered ample space for initiatives from the fields of sustainability, climate protection and Digital Civil Society to present their work, engage in conversation and collaborate.

These occasional events are supplemented by regular work meetings that can be virtual or real and are usually open to new visitors. These include the offerings of the OpenTechSchool, a programming school where beginners and professionals can swap ideas and learn from each other, or the meetings of local Code for Germany groups working on specific applications.

Open events are another unique format that follow a clear pattern but can be organised by anyone. CryptoParties are one example of this; they provide clear guidelines[63] but can otherwise be designed at will.

63 https://www.cryptoparty.in/guiding_principles

Hackathons have their origins in software development but are becoming increasingly popular in civil society, too. The format has reached the mainstream not just since the German government's #WirVsVirus-Hackathon. Hackathons are events that last between one and several days and where software and hardware developers, designers and people with many other areas of expertise design creative solutions and new ideas for solutions to challenges. The challenges are not always of a social nature; large companies also often use the format for marketing or recruitment purposes. Alongside the benefits of rapid innovation and teamwork, the format also has its weaknesses: the resulting developments rarely go beyond the concept or prototype stage. Without a good strategy for sustainability and support beyond the hackathon, its enthusiasm and positive energy quickly fizzle out. Recently, hackathons have been subject to increased criticism as a format for collaboration between Digital Civil Society and politics.[64] [65] [66] The main accusation is that businesses or public administrations use the format to outsource their own responsibilities to volunteers, barely reward their work and do not create any offerings that benefit the volunteers. A good strategy includes, for instance, sustainable networking opportunities, promotion of the projects, and clear management of expectations about what will be done with the results after the hackathon. The Code for Germany community recently published a guide for public administrations that plan to organise hackathons.[67]

Precisely because of their high degree of participation, the events mentioned above focus on opportunities and positive visions of the future. This puts Digital Civil Society in stark contrast with the often dystopian media reporting on technology. Digital Civil Society may share the negative view of the status quo, but it looks beyond the present. It sees itself not only as a watchdog of current developments, but always takes a creative approach and considers itself a pioneer for new ideas.

64 https://blog.k-nut.eu/hackathons-miss-the-point
65 https://stefan.bloggt.es/2020/09/der-antiberblingercontest/
66 https://netzpolitik.org/2020/diversitaet-von-hackathons-wer-ist-das-wir-in-wirvsvirus/
67 https://codefor.de/blog/hackathon-leitfaden/

6 CONCLUSIONS AND OUTLOOK

Digital Civil Society in Germany is part of a culture in which people volunteer with associations and non-profit organisations. Large societies like the Chaos Computer Club or Freifunk depend on the commitment of their volunteer members. The work they do would be difficult to achieve without their commitment. Digital Civil Society in Germany is leading in topics such as IT security and data protection; however, it needs to catch up in other areas such as diversity, intersectionality and international networking.

German Digital Civil Society may be very well networked internally and within its field of expertise, but there is a lack of networking across disciplinary and geographical boundaries. Individual organisations such as the Free Software Foundation Europe or the Civic Tech community Code for Germany are well networked internationally, but they are an exception in Germany's mainstream civil society. Bits und Bäume, the conference that brings together digitalisation and sustainability, is a good example of interdisciplinary cooperation.

The Goethe-Institut has both practical and theoretical knowledge on the issues concerning Digital Civil Society. As international networking is a persistent weakness of Digital Civil Society due to its limited resources, the Goethe-Institut would be a powerful partner. It can collaborate with civil society actors to develop new formats for constructive information exchange with Digital Civil Society in Germany sharing its knowledge, honing its applications and critically questioning its work and goals. It is only such international networked cooperation that can populate the much-cited Global Village with a global civil society.

Information exchange projects like this require partners who are willing to engage with the working methods and open formats of Digital Civil Society and prepared to create the necessary space, while leading by example with their professionalism in international cooperation.

7 REFERENCED ORGANISATIONS AND DIGITAL CIVIL SOCIETY INITIATIVES

Name of organisation or initiative	Topics	Function and format / Level of impact	Region	Weblink
abgeordneten-watch	Transparency, political participation	Platform	Germany, federal states	https://www.abgeordneten-watch.de/
AlgorithmWatch	Artificial intelligence, algorithmic bias	Research, knowledge transfer	Germany	https://algorithmwatch.org/
Arolsen-Archive	Citizen science, digital heritage	Platform	Germany, international	https://arolsen-archives.org/
Bits und Bäume	Digitalisation and sustainability	Events, networks	Germany	https://bits-und-baeume.org/rueckblick/de
Bündnis Freie Bildung	Education, free knowledge	Network	Germany	https://buendnis-freie-bildung.de/
Campact e.V.	Political participation	Platform	Germany	https://www.campact.de/
c-base	Cyberculture, privacy	Community	Berlin	https://c-base.org/
Chaos Communication Congress	Privacy, data protection, data security, digital sovereignty, cyberculture	Event	Germany, international	https://events.ccc.de/congress/
Chaos Computer Club	Privacy, data protection, data security, digital sovereignty	Community, Network	Germany, local	https://www.ccc.de/
Civic Innovation Platform	Artificial intelligence, social innovation	Network, open to all	Germany	https://www.civic-innovation.de/
Code for All	Civic tech, eGovernment, political participation, open data, digital civic spaces	Network	international	https://codeforall.org/
Code for Germany	Civic tech, eGovernment, political participation, open data, digital civic spaces	Community, Network	Germany, local	https://codefor.de/
CoderDojo	Learning to programme, digital literacy	Community, Workshops	international	https://coderdojo.com/
CoderDojo Deutschland	Learning to programme, digital literacy	Community, Workshops	Germany, local	https://www.coderdojo-deutschland.de/
CORRECTIV	Disinformation, digital literacy	Medium, Workshops	Germany	https://correctiv.org/
Cryptix	Access to the digital sphere, privacy, data protection	Tech collective	Internet	https://cryptix.net/
Cryptoparty	Digital literacy, privacy, data protection, data security, digital sovereignty	Community, Network, Workshops	International, local	https://www.cryptoparty.in/

Das NETTZ	Online hate speech, disinformation, digital literacy	Network	Germany	https://www.das-nettz.de/
Das Progressive Zentrum	Social innovation, sustainability	Policy Work, Research	Germany	https://www.progressives-zentrum.org/
Denkfabrik Digitale Arbeitsgesellschaft	Social innovation, artificial intelligence, rights in digital space	Open to all	Germany	https://www.denkfabrik-bmas.de/
Digital Freedom Fund	Rights in digital space	Litigation, support, Network	Europe	https://digitalfreedomfund.org/
Digitalcourage	Privacy, data protection, cyberculture	Campaigns, Policy Work	Germany	https://digitalcourage.de/
Digitale Gesellschaft	Rights in digital space	Policy Work	Germany	https://digitalegesellschaft.de/
Elevate Delta	Barrier-free access, inclusion, open data, Civic tech	Platform	Germany	https://projekt-elevate.de/
Ethical Tech Society	Artificial intelligence, algorithmic bias	Policy Work	Germany	https://www.ethicaltech-society.org/
Ethik der Algorithmen	Artificial intelligence, algorithmic bias	Policy Work, Research	Germany	https://algorithmenethik.de/
Every Name Counts	Citizen science, digital legacy	Platform	International	https://arolsen-archives.org/lernen-mitwirken/ausstellungen-kampagnen/everynamecounts/
Feminist Principles of the Internet	Tech feminism	Campaigns	International	https://feministinternet.org/
FixMyBerlin	Civic tech, open data, road traffic reform	Platform, Policy Work, Service / product	Berlin, Germany	https://fixmyberlin.de/
Frag den Staat	Freedom of information, transparency	Platform, Policy Work, Community	Germany, federal states	https://fragdenstaat.de/
Frauen und neue Medien	Access to the digital sphere, digital literacy, learning to programme	Workshops	Münster	https://www.pcfrauen.de/
FrauenComputer-Club Bonn	Access to the digital sphere, digital literacy, learning to programme	Workshops, Community	Bonn	https://www.fccbonn.de
FrauenComputer-ZentrumBerlin (FCZB)	Access to the digital sphere, digital literacy, learning to programme	Workshops, Community	Berlin	https://www.fczb.de/
Free Software Foundation Europe	Free software	Network, Policy Work	Germany, Europe	https://fsfe.org/index.en.html
Freifunk	Access to the digital sphere, open-source soft- ware, open hardware	Network, Community	Local, Germany	https://freifunk.net/

Fuck off Google	Digital civic spaces, digital sovereignty	Campaigns	Berlin	https://fuckoffgoogle.de/
Gesellschaft für Freiheitsrechte	Rights in digital space	Litigation, Network, Policy Work	Germany	https://freiheitsrechte.org/
Gesellschaftsbilder	Digital representation	Service / product	Germany, international	https://gesellschaftsbilder.de/
Gesicht zeigen!	Online hate speech, anti-racism	Network, Workshops, Policy Work	Germany	https://www.gesichtzeigen.de/
HateAid	Online hate speech, rights in digital space	Platform, service / product, Network, Policy Work	Germany	https://hateaid.org/
Hoaxmap	Disinformation, Civic tech	Platform	Germany	https://hoaxmap.org/
Ich bin kein Virus	Online hate speech, anti-racism	Platform, Network	Germany	https://www.ichbinkeinvirus.org
Innovationsbüro Digitales Leben	Social innovation, Civic tech	Open to all, Events	Germany	https://www.innovationsbuero.net/
iRights Lab	Social innovation, eGovernment	Policy Work, Research	Germany	https://irights-lab.de/
Jugend hackt	Learning to programme, access to the digital sphere	Workshops, Community	Germany, regional, DACH	https://jugendhackt.org/
JUUUPORT	Online hate speech	Workshops, Assistance	Germany	https://www.juuuport.de/
Kiron	Learning to programme, digital education, open knowledge, participation	Workshops, Assistance, Ausbildung	Germany, international	https://kiron.ngo/
kleineAnfragen	Open knowledge, eGovern- ment, Civic tech	Platform	Germany, federal states	https://kleineanfragen.de/
Liquid Democracy	Political participation, Civic tech, free software	Platform, Service / product	Germany, international	https://liqd.net/de/
Luftdaten.info	Civic tech, citizen science, open data, sustainability	Platform, Community, Workshops	Stuttgart, Germany, international	https://luftdaten.info/
Make Amazon pay!	Digital civic spaces, cyberculture	Kampagne	Berlin	https://makeamazonpay.org/
mediale pfade	Digital education, teaching, digital literacy	Community, Workshops	Germany	https://medialepfade.org/
Meine Stadt Transparent	eGovernment, Civic tech, open data, transparency	Platform	Germany, local	https://meine-stadt-transparent.de/
MOTIF Institute for Digital Culture	Tech feminism, artificial intelligence, social innovation	Research, Beratung	Germany	https://motif-institute.com/
Nadir	Access to the digital sphere, privacy	Tech collective	Internet	https://www.nadir.org/

Netzpolitik.org	IT security, privacy, cyberculture, transparency	Medium	Germany	https://netzpolitik.org/
Neue deutsche Medien-macher:innen	Online hate speech, diversity, digital literacy	Network	Germany	https://www.neuemedienmacher.de/
neuland21	Social innovation, digital civic spaces	Research, Assistance	Germany	https://neuland21.de/
Nextcloud	Open-source software	Service / product,	international	https://nextcloud.com/
noyb	Privacy, data protection	Policy Work	Europe	https://noyb.eu/
nr – netzwerk recherche	Open knowledge, open data, transparency, digital literacy	Network	Germany, international	https://netzwerkrecherche.org/
Offener Haushalt	Open data, transparency, Civic tech, eGovernment, participation	Platform	Germany	https://offenerhaushalt.de/
Open Government Partnership	eGovernment, open data, participation	Network, Policy Work	Germany, international	https://www.opengovpartnership.org/
Open Knowledge Foundation Deutschland	Open data, open knowledge, transparency, Civic tech	Community, Policy Work	Germany	https://okfn.de/
Open Street Map Foundation	Open data, open knowledge, participation	Platform, Community	International	https://wiki.osmfoundation.org/
OpenTechSchool	Learning to programme	Community, Network, Assistance	local, international	https://www.opentechschool.org/
Prototype Fund	Open-source, social innovation	Sponsoring, Community, open to all	Germany	https://prototypefund.de/
PyLadies	Learning to programme	Community, Network, Assistance	local, international	https://pyladies.com/
Rails Girls	Learning to programme	Community, Network, Assistance	local, international	http://railsgirls.com/
Recht auf Remix	Cyberculture, sharing	Kampagne	Germany	https://rechtaufremix.org/
ReDI School of Digital Integration	Learning to programme, digital education, open knowledge, participation	Community, Assistance	Germany, international	https://www.redi-school.org/
re:publica	Cyberculture, social innovation, rights in digital space	Event	Berlin	https://re-publica.com/de
SO36	Access to the digital sphere, privacy	Tech collective	Internet	https://so36.net/
Social Entrepre-neurship Netzwerk Deutschland	Social innovation, open source	Network	Germany	https://www.send-ev.de/

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