Founding Declaration of Commons & Code e. V.

European Think-and-Do-Tank for digitalisation for the common good

Who we are

The digital and physical worlds are inextricably intertwined. Policy for this new reality must be more than the mere digitalisation of outdated processes. It must actively shape the reality of people's lives—democratically, sustainably and in the European spirit.

As a network of technology experts, municipal practitioners, policy makers and dedicated citizens, we translate between the worlds of technology and politics.

We don't just develop concepts, we implement them—hence 'think-and-do'. We see ourselves as progressive bridge builders: We translate between technology and policy in order to develop concrete, local solutions from European visions that strengthen democratic participation and enable sustainable transformation.

We think European, act local—and stand for a digital future that overcomes platform capitalism and realises digital sovereignty for all.

Our Vision

Digital policy is more than digitalisation—it is the conscious shaping of a reality in which analogue and digital worlds interact symbiotically. **We understand digital policy as a comprehensive transformation policy**: as democracy, human rights, security, climate, European and social policy at the same time.

Our guiding principle: **Digital Commons ('commons') and Open Technologies ('code') are the foundation of a democratic, sovereign, sustainable and inclusive society.**

Commons & Code stands for a digital transformation that:

- **Decentralises power** instead of concentrating it in a few tech companies

- **Promotes climate neutrality** instead of wasting resources

- **Enables democratic participation** instead of manipulation and surveillance

- **Realises European values**—especially where politics is closest to the people: in the municipalities.

We are shaping a digital society that is open, free, fair, inclusive, sustainable and European sovereign.

The challenge: between big tech and government failure

The digital transformation poses immense challenges for local authorities in particular—**while at the same time anti-democratic forces and platform capitalism are threatening our democracy**. We are observing critical system failures:

Politics without regard for reality: Strategies are designed that take neither technical feasibility nor democratic participation into account.

Technology without political understanding: Technical sham solutions are developed that ignore social and democratic needs.

Dependent administrations: Federal, state and local governments are driven into dependency on multinational corporations, while European open source alternatives remain unused.

Isolated municipalities: Cities and municipalities are constantly reinventing the wheel because there is a lack of dialogue about proven solutions.

Successful progressive approaches from other European countries—from Estonia's cyber-resilient digital infrastructure to Barcelona's participatory budgeting and Amsterdam's algorithm register—remain unutilised, while authoritarian surveillance technologies are uncritically adopted.

Our Approach: Build bridges, implement locally

Commons & Code closes these gaps through well-founded translation and implementation work, which is divided into four fields of action:

1. **Networking:** We organise dialogue and exchange between municipal stakeholders, civil society and technology experts.

2. **Analyse:** We systematically identify and evaluate what works in Europe. Which digital tools strengthen local democracy? How can we achieve citizen-friendly digital administration?

3. **Customise:** We translate these European best practices into the German context. We use them to develop holistic, customisable strategy frameworks that are specifically tailored to the needs of local authorities. In addition, we support local authorities in strategically utilising and shaping the complex requirements and opportunities of European digital policy.

4. **Realisation:** We support the practical implementation after the strategy has been developed. We develop concrete roadmaps, support the selection of open source solutions and work with local authorities to identify potential funding programmes (national and European) to facilitate financial implementation. We also empower local stakeholders to take the digital transformation into their own hands.

Our Principles: Commons & Code

Our name speaks for itself:

Commons: We are committed to the **digital commons**. This means: open source software for administrations, open data for more transparency, free access to knowledge and the strengthening of digital civil rights. Technology must serve people, not the other way round.

Code: We believe in the power of well-crafted code—be it software or legal code. We bring the technical expertise to create robust, secure and sustainable solutions that work in municipal practice. We bring technical expertise to create robust, secure, democratic and climate-friendly solutions.

Our fields of work

Municipal digital strategies: Development of **open-source-based models** for various municipal sizes and **liberation from vendor lock-in**.

Digital sovereignty: Systematic development of European digital infrastructures to overcome dependence on US and Chinese tech corporations.

Democratic AI governance: Development of **participatory governance frameworks** for the transparent, climate-friendly and **fundamental rights-compliant use of AI** in the public sector.

Digital democracy 2.0: Radically strengthening citizen participation through innovative digital tools—from liquid democracy **to algorithm-audited participation platforms.**

Resilient digitalisation: Development of strategies for **secure, sustainable IT infrastructures** and **green coding practices** in public administration.

Anti-surveillance & fundamental rights: Active resistance against surveillance capitalism and development of **privacy-by-design alternatives.**

Our Values

Digital justice: Digitalisation must reduce inequality, not increase it—and open up equal opportunities for everyone to participate.

Climate justice: Every digital solution must be designed to be climate-neutral and technologies that actively contribute to the energy transition, environmental protection and resource conservation must be promoted.

Targeted transformation: We focus on using digital means to address the root causes in order to bring about real measurable change instead of getting lost in superficial tech-solutionism.

European integration: We support the deepening of European cooperation as a necessary basis for defending common democratic, ecological and social values in the digital space and finding effective answers to global challenges.

Progressive openness: Our association is open to all who share democratic, ecological and social values—we are non-partisan and progressive, though not neutral in our values.

Transformative pragmatism: We do not develop utopian concepts for the drawer, but radical but realisable strategies for systemic change.

Participate

Commons & Code thrives on the commitment of its members and partners. We are looking for:

Local politicians and administrative staff who want real digitalisation instead of sham modernisation;

Technology experts with social responsibility who want to develop ethical code for the common good;

Civil society actors who promote fundamental digital rights and climate justice;

European thinkers who want to act locally and take global responsibility.

We invite everyone who not only wants to discuss pro-European, democratic and evidence-based digital policy, but also wants to shape it—locally, European and future-orientated.

Closing remarks

We, the founding members of Commons & Code e. V., have joined forces to shape the digital future actively, responsibly and for the common good.

Our goal: to shape the digital world from the human perspective, to anchor it in local municipalities and to connect it across Europe.

Together. Digitally. European.

Commons & Code e.V. – Association for digitalisation for the common good with municipal impact and a European perspective.

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