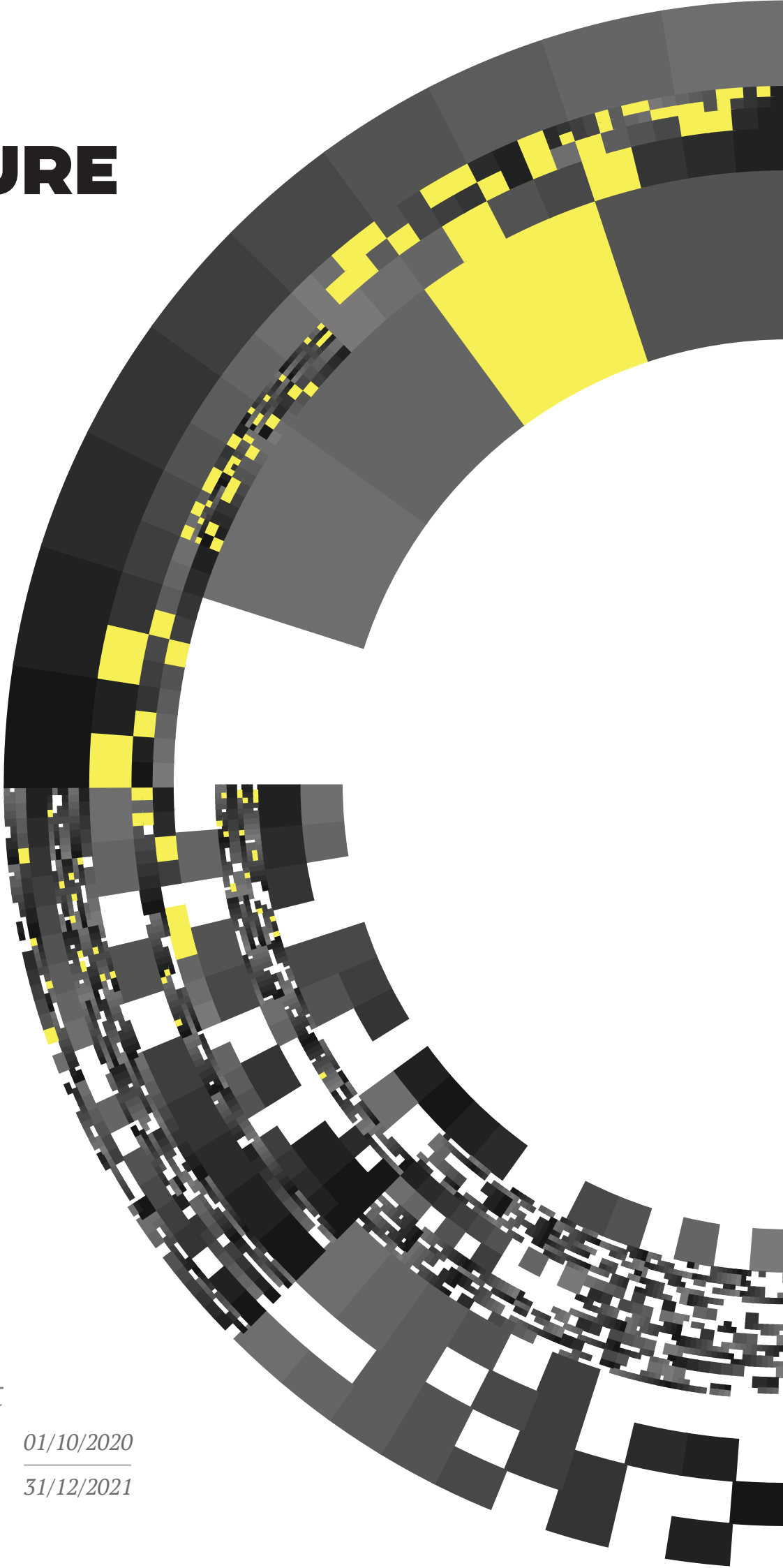# OPEN
_FUTURE

annual report
2021

1. INTRODUCTION

This is the first-ever report of Open Future, written after the first 15 months of operations. Stichting Open Future was incorporated on 23 October 2020 after having received a financial support commitment from the Arcadia Fund for a four-year period.

In this report, we are reporting on the first 15 months of our existence that can roughly be divided into three consecutive phases:

1. A bootstrap phase from October 2020 to January 2021 that was characterised by establishing basic operational capacity and relatively little substantive activities.
2. A development phase from January 2021 to June 2021 during which we publicly launched the organisation, built out the team and refined both our strategic objectives and our operational approach.
3. A subsequent phase of executing against our operational strategy from July 2021 onwards, this phase is ongoing.

Over these initial 15 months of operations we have managed to set up an organisation that is in line with our ambitions, which we presented in the original project proposal. One that provides us with the structure and resources to execute our strategy. While some of the elements — such as our fellowship programme — described in the original project proposal are still missing (or in their infancy), the overall state of the organisation is in line with our expectations.

In terms of organisation development, we have achieved the following milestones during the reporting period:

- **October 2020:** Incorporating the Organisation as a Stichting under Dutch law, with a Supervisory Board consisting of three members.
- **December 2020:** Obtaining a bank account in order to be able to receive and disburse funds.
- **January 2021:** Setting up a financial and payroll administration and appointing a financial controller.
- **February 2021:** Formally hiring the first employee: Paul Keller as Director of Policy. Previously, Paul has been filling the role of a full-time founding director since October 2020 as a contractor.
- **April 2021:** Hiring two additional employees: Kasia Fantoni (Communications officer) and Francesco Vogelezang (Policy researcher). The position of Kasia Fantoni is a shared position, with 50% of her work time allocated to the COMMUNIA association.
- **April 2021:** Setting up as an employer of record in Poland with payroll services provided by a local contractor.
- **May 2021:** Formally hiring Alek Tarkowski as Director of Research under Polish law. Alek has been filling this role from October 2020 to December 2020 in a part-time capacity (0,2 FTE) and since January 2021 on a full-time basis as a contractor.

Open Future has operated fully virtually for the entire reporting period, due to the external conditions caused by the COVID-19 pandemic. This has meant that organisation development, the onboarding of new employees and the development of collaboration methods and processes have taken place almost exclusively online. During the reporting period, we organised three all team in-person meetings (mainly focused on team building and the development of a shared work practice). In addition, we have had 3 meetings of the directors and one in-person board meeting (in addition to two virtual ones).

While the original proposal foresaw an organisation with a physical presence, the existing circumstances have not allowed us to put this objective into practice. While not without challenges for individual team members (who are missing work-related social connections) we do feel that we have formed a high-functioning team that is able to execute our strategy. Furthermore, we have developed effective methods for remote work — both individual and collaborative.

Going forward, we will continue to assess the external conditions and the need for setting up a physical presence. We have been in exploratory talks with the Amsterdam Public Library system to join its Future Library Lab initiative, as that would provide physical office space for Open Future from the Summer of 2022 onwards.

2. OUR STRATEGY

Throughout the year, we have been refining our strategy and aiming to define a set of objectives and coherent actions that build on our guiding principle: to leverage openness in the design and building of systems that maximise the societal benefits of information resources in the networked information economy.

We have been building on the original vision developed for our think tank while refining at the same time our approach with the aim of strengthening our strategy. We have conducted this work through a series of quarterly reviews, based on retrospectives of quarterly work plans.

As a result, we defined four key strategic objectives for our work. All activities that we undertake are directly connected to one of these objectives:

1. Digital Public Space: Our goal is to advance the idea that there should be digital public spaces in the online environment that are governed by a different logic from the commercial internet.
2. Future of Open: Our goal is to develop an updated theory of action for the open movement, aimed at leveraging openness to design and build systems that maximise the societal benefits of information resources in the networked information economy.
3. Data Commons: Our goal is to explore alternative ways of data governance based on the idea of open access commons and to engage in the EU data governance discussion with the aim of advancing these concepts.
4. COMMUNIA: Our goal is to expand the Public Domain and strengthen user rights, through advocacy on copyright law and related policies.

We are working on the first three objectives directly, while work on the fourth objective is undertaken through the COMMUNIA association for the public domain. Open Future is a member of COMMUNIA and one of the core contributors to the work of the association.

For each of the four strategic objectives, we are working to strengthen the strategic advocacy capacity of the open movement. We do this by developing a shared policy agenda, advancing advocacy, conducting research and narrative building.

Our strategy also assumes strong collaborations with other organisations, both through direct partnerships and by establishing networks (broadly understood) of like-minded actors. We see such partnerships and network building as a core strategy that allows us to maximise impact with the resources available to a small organisation.

We understand strategic advocacy as the joint ability of open movement organisations to:

- jointly develop medium and long-term policy objectives
- build narratives in support of these objectives
- identify policy opportunities
- engage with other stakeholders to build support, and to
- advocate for concrete policy proposals.

Based on our strategy and theory of change, we aim to combine ongoing advocacy efforts with the development of long-term narratives and policy proposals.

3. IMPACT

In this section, we provide an overview of the activities that we have undertaken for each of our strategic objectives, during the reporting period. The lists of activities described below are not exhaustive and are meant to highlight those of our activities that we consider to have made the most impact to advance our strategic objectives.

3.1 Future of Open

For this objective, we initially focused on presenting a narrative that will help frame our work as a think tank - we did this with the [Paradox of Open](#) essay. As a next step, we launched the Open Future Sessions, as a network-building effort, on the basis of which we will further develop a shared agenda for the open movement. The Better Internet campaign is for us an important reference point and process to which we are contributing. And through the DCODE consortium, we are exploring new, design-related ways of building narratives around openness (with a focus on data and AI technologies).

- In March, we published an essay titled [The Paradox of Open](#), which frames a key issue that we are exploring: that of power imbalances in relation to open resources.

- In September, we organised a session on the Paradox of Open at the Creative Commons Summit, with representatives of Google and Wikimedia. It was one of the most viewed sessions during the event.
- In September, we launched the Open Future Sessions, monthly meetings of open movement leaders, which connect with the ideas presented in the Paradox of Open essay. This is for us a community-building effort, and means of engaging with key partners in the field. We launched the series with a talk by Brewster Kahle from the Internet Archive, followed up by meetings with representatives of the Wikimedia Enterprise team and with Andrés Arauz, former Minister of Knowledge of Ecuador.
- We have joined the Better Internet network, a loose coalition of organisations working on a progressive agenda, which connects with the advocacy goals of the open movement. For the last several months, we have been exploring ways of engaging in this network, with the aim of furthering our Future of Open agenda in 2022.
- We are part of DCODE, an EU-funded research consortium of key European design schools working on reframing digital design. We are one of its five non-academic partners, and we bring expertise in digital policies and data governance. In 2022, we began establishing collaboration with DCODE researchers, which in 2022 will lead to the creation of a "protototeam", conducting a shared project at the intersection of advocacy and design.
- We also presented our work at IASC Knowledge Commons 2021 Conference, Wikimania, Open Science Fair 2021, Global Congress of Intellectual Property and Public Interest, Internet Commons Forum and Internet Governance Forum.

3.2 Digital Public Space

For this objective, we have invested heavily in network building, in order to develop capacity for shared advocacy work on digital public spaces, at the European level. By the end of the year, the Shared Digital European Public Spaces coalition is formed and ready to work together. In addition, we have invested in research and narrative building that provide input into this advocacy project. We wrote a paper that proposes a new policy frame for digital public spaces, and a report that explores the importance of the principle of interoperability.

- We are one of several organisations that played a key role in launching the Shared Digital European Public Spaces, a coalition of over 30 organisations advocating together for policies that support a digital public space. Paul Keller is part of the core team of the coalition and has played a key role in establishing the rules and working model of the coalition.
- The first campaign of the coalition, coordinated by Paul, was aimed at introducing a digital public spaces principle into the EC Digital Compass Program. Members of the coalition coordinated input into a key EC consultation on the issue.
- We wrote a research paper on a digital public space policy frame, which proposes a set of policies supporting digital public spaces within the scope of the Commission's current "Shaping Europe's Digital Future" strategy. We treat this paper as a theoretical

- underpinning of our digital public space advocacy, and a continuation of work started with the report A Vision for a Shared Digital Europe.
- We wrote a report on "Generative interoperability: Building online public and civic spaces", in collaboration with the Commons Network and with funding from the EC Next Generation Internet program. The report is supported by a series of blogposts based on interviews with interoperability experts. Through this report, we are proposing a broader vision that can underpin policies that further the principle of interoperability. The report will be published in January 2022.
- We have been active in consultations around the "Shaping Europe's Digital Future" strategy and the Digital Compass initiative. A highlight for us was the inclusion of our input–on the need of societal objectives–in EU's long-term digital strategy–in a recent Staff Working Document for the strategy.
- Our advocacy work and research on this strategy led us to collaborate with FEPS, the political think tank of the progressive political groups. We were experts in their 2021 digital strategy workshop and have been publishing together opinions on digital policy issues.
- In November 2021, together with the European Cultural Foundation and NESTA we organised a two-day European Policy Forum on how the EU can policy foster digital European public spaces. This policy forum consisted of round table discussions with policymakers, a public event, and a series of internal meetings of the SDEPS coalition.
- We spoke at the Public Spaces conference in March, Europeana and Portuguese Presidency conference "Towards recovery: digital capacity building in the Cultural Heritage sector" and Dialog Forum organised by the Austrian public broadcaster ORF.

3.3 Data Commons

For this objective, we have focused on direct advocacy on files related to the European Data Strategy. We see them as crucial for the establishment of a European data governance model that supports a data commons approach. We are also filling an advocacy gap, as few open and digital rights organisations focus on these legislative acts. Finally, by engaging on these policy files, we have been developing our policy scan methodology - with our prototype file finalised as the DGA was adopted in December 2021. In addition, we have launched the "AI_Commons" research project, through which we are exploring key challenges to data governance, privacy and openness.

- We have been active in consultations on legislative acts tied to the Data Strategy, the Data Governance Act (DGA) and the Data Act (DA). We are among a few digital rights organisations that are active in this policy space. In the discussions about the data governance act we have been the driving force behind an effort to ensure that the act does not establish new obligations on open access commons projects and platforms. Our advocacy resulted in a number of amendments that clarify that such projects are out of scope, legal certainty for projects like Wikipedia, open data repositories or cultural heritage aggregation platforms.

- We have published two policy briefs. The first analysed the [DGA from a data commons perspective](#), and the second argued [against the introduction of property rights in data](#) into the Data Act proposal.
- We have launched [AI_Commons](#), a research project that explores the issue of reuse of CC-licensed photographs of faces for AI training. We see it as an opportunity for exploring the governance of content that balances openness and privacy. For this project we are collaborating with Adam Harvey, an external research associate.
- Our "AI_Commons" session at the Creative Commons Summit established our position on this topic in the CC community, and we started collaborating with the CC legal team on exploring this issue.
- As part of the "AI_Commons" project, we have created (in collaboration with Selkie research agency) a survey of Flickr users on their attitudes towards sharing, privacy and AI - in order to get empirical evidence for this research activity. The survey will be deployed in January 2022.
- We have been chosen by the Commission as an institutional member of the [Expert Group on AI and Data in Education and Training](#). Alek Tarkowski represents us in this body and focuses on bringing a data governance and digital rights perspective to the debate. We have contributed to an upcoming report on the issue, to be published by the DG EAC.
- We partnered with MyData for their annual event (taking place in Amsterdam in 2021) and organised a [session](#) (also together with [Waag](#)) on data governance and the European Data Strategy.
- We have established our first fellow. Jan Zygmuntowski, Polish economist and activist, will support our work and conduct research on different institutional models for data commons.

3.4 COMMUNIA

For this objective, we have firstly focused on ensuring the sustainability of the association, by developing new funding sources and strengthening coordination and governance. Secondly, we have initiated a review of the COMMUNIA recommendations, which will result in a set of new strategic objectives, shared by key organisations working on copyright reform. Thirdly, we continue to be engaged in ongoing advocacy, focused mainly on the issue of content filtering, and the implementation of the CDSM Directive.

- We have improved COMMUNIA operations this year, by securing new funding (and thus diversifying funding sources) and introducing Kasia Fantoni as coordinator for the team.
- We conducted a review of the outcomes of the CDSM after two years since it was adopted (on the implementation deadline for the Member States) and presented it through a [Eurovision DSM Contest](#) site.
- Paul Keller, together with Felix Reda, has published [a whitepaper with a proposal for a register of public domain works (CommonsDB) inspired by Article 17 CDSM](#). On this basis, we are exploring ways of creating such a register.

- Paul Keller, together with Teresa Nobre has been leading a review of COMMUNIA's policy recommendations, on the occasion of the 10th anniversary of the organisation. The review involves all COMMUNIA members, as well as 40+ academics and experts. In June, we also organised [a 10th anniversary event with a range of international speakers](#).
- Paul Keller is continuing COMMUNIA's EU level work on the implementation of the 2019 CDSM directive. He has coordinated the work of European civil society organisations on the Commission's Article 17 implementation guidance and frequent publications on the state of the implementation discussions in the various Member States and on the EU level. As part of this Paul was the [most read author on the Kluwer Copyright Blog in 2020](#).
- In his capacity as President of the COMMUNIA association, Paul Keller joined a high-level advisory group to Commissioner Thierry Breton connected to a stakeholder dialogue on access to and availability of audiovisual content across the EU. He is also representing COMMUNIA in the stakeholder dialogue.
- Alek Tarkowski participated in the COMMUNIA "Copyright for Education" working group, which in 2021 published the results of a research study ["Remote education during the pandemic"](#).
- We also spoke at the Recreating Europe Conference, RightsCon, Open Education Policy Forum and Europeana 2021 Conference.

Taken together, these activities clearly illustrate that we have been able to bring the approach outlined in the project proposal to life. In our project proposal we had formulated the following ambition for the end of the first year of operations:

> *At the end of the first year of operations we expect that our efforts have resulted in open movement change leaders being engaged in an ongoing conversation about a strategic policy agenda.*

We can identify today three separate conversations that we have either initiated or have had a substantial role in bringing to life. These are: the COMMUNIA new policy objective process (which will deliver a set of strategic objectives in early 2022), the SDEPS coalition, and the Open Future Sessions. In 2022, we will continue these efforts and seek to identify areas of overlap between these processes.

Furthermore, we consider it a good sign that as a relatively young organisation without an established track record we have been regularly invited to speak at and participate in a wide range of events related to the topics of our work. We have counted at least 58 public appearances–ranging from conference keynotes, presentations, panel discussions, workshop contributions to appearances in online and offline media publications–between 1 April 2021 and 31 December 2021.

One aspect that will require additional attention to is the geographical scope of these processes: while both COMMUNIA and SDEPS have a strong focus on Europe, many of the most established Open Movement organisations have their focus in the US and more specifically

Silicon Valley. This has led to a situation where conversations about the future of openness and digital policy making are geographically fractured.

We want to address this by contributing to a global (and in particular "transatlantic" dialog), based on a strong European position on movement strategy and advocacy. In order to be successful, we need to develop a mode of work that reaches beyond our preferred, European scope of activity. We see it as one of the main tasks for 2022 to increase the strategic capacity of open movement in Europe either through capacity building in Europe or through building stronger ties with the US-based organisations.

4. COMMUNICATION

One of our first activities, once we launched the foundation, was to define a communication strategy aligned with our overall strategy. This included designing our brand, defining key target groups, and then creating a content strategy and a workflow for ongoing communication. Our initial brand and communication strategy was developed with the support of TGTH, a strategic consultancy firm.

Our communication strategy relies on the general principle of "communicating with a purpose and not to make noise". The two key target groups for our communication are 1) EU policymakers and stakeholders in European digital policy debates, and 2) digital activists connected with the Open Movement.

4.1 Publishing and dissemination

The primary platform for the external dissemination of our knowledge is our website (www.openfuture.eu), which is based on the WordPress platform and has been developed together with members of the Polish artistic collective panGenerator who have also created our generative logo[1]. We have launched a first version of the website in April 2021 and a second—more comprehensive—version in early December 2021. A final part of the website—the public-facing element of our policy observatory—will be launched in Q1 of 2022.

In addition to our own website we are using pubpub, an open-source, community-led, end-to-end publishing platform for knowledge communities developed by the MIT knowledge futures group to publish long-form texts. The community with our publications can be found at openfuture.pubpub.org.

We have designed a system of standardised products that we can create based on our website, including short opinions, briefs and longer publications. We have published several briefs, including one on the Digital Governance Act, one arguing Against property rights in data and a white paper on a repository of Public Domain works. All Open Future publications are published under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 license.

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[1] The pattern of the circle of our logo is algorithmically generated and exists in infinite variations. Versions of the logo in different formats can be generated at https://www.openfuture.eu/id

We have also been building up our presence in social media, focusing on our monthly Mailchimp newsletter and accounts on Twitter and LinkedIn. We have seen an average audience increase of 15-20% in each quarter of 2021.

4.2 Events and public speaking

We aim to be present at key events related to our activity and key target groups, especially those organised in the Open Movement or concerning European digital policies. We have organised or co-organised sessions at the [Creative Commons Global Summit](), [Wikimania](), the [EU Policy Forum for a Digital Public Space](), [MyData in the Netherlands Conference]() and the [Internet Governance Forum]().

We also consider public speaking to be an important part of our work, and both of our founders have long experience with these kinds of engagements. We have been regularly invited to speak at a wide range of events related to our field of work. In the last nine months, we have counted over 60 public appearances ranging from conference keynotes, presentations, panel discussions, workshop contributions to appearances in online and offline media publications.

5. ORGANISATION AND SUSTAINABILITY

As mentioned in the introduction, Open Future is currently functioning as a fully virtual organisation with staff based in Amsterdam (Director of Policy, Policy Analyst), Warsaw (Director of Strategy) and Rotterdam (Communication Officer) and working remotely from homes. As a result, most of our work is carried out via digital communication tools. These include standard email and collaboration tools (Google Workspace), chat (Slack) and video conferencing (Zoom). Access to these tools is either free (via non-profit partnership programmes of the vendors) or at reduced non profit rates.

5.1 Internal systems and knowledge management

In addition to these standard collaboration tools we have invested in building an internal knowledge management and sharing system and training the team to use this system. This system runs on the Notion platform and provides us with a centralised platform for knowledge capture, analysis, management and storage. In addition, this system is also used to make operational procedures and internal policies available to the distributed team and to collect information relevant for reporting and planning. We use Notion to (among others):

- Track policy files and project progress
- Track engagements with external parties
- Capture meeting notes and share research notes
- Perform network analysis

5.2 Sustainability

We strive to operate Open Future in an environmentally sustainable way. Given the fact that we operate as a virtual organisation there are relatively few emission sources that we can directly attribute to our operations. The most relevant ones are those caused by travel by team members or travel related to events and or other activities that we organise[2]. In order to minimise the amount of CO_2 emissions generated by travel, we have instituted a travel policy that aims to reduce emissions by encouraging rail travel over other forms of transport[3] and that requires us to track and compensate for travel-related CO_2 emissions caused by Open Future.

Since adopting this policy on 01-04-2021, we have caused the following CO_2 emissions[4] by travel undertaken by our team members. The amounts of saved CO_2 accounts for train trips where the duration is longer than 5 hours —and our travel policy would allow air travel—and is calculated as the difference between emissions for train and air travel:

Type	Number of Trips	CO$_2$ emitted (in kg)	CO$_2$ saved (in kg)
Airtravel	6	958	
Rail travel	15	721	1.322
Total	**21**	**1.679**	**1.322**

In addition, the workshops and other events that we have organised for the COMMUNIA new policy objectives process have resulted in the following travel-related CO_2 emissions (both participants and team members):

Type	Number of Trips	CO$_2$ emitted (in kg)	CO$_2$ saved (in kg)
Airtravel	18	9.063	
Rail travel	6	280	1.045
Total	**24**	**9.343**	**1.045**

We have compensated for these 11.022 kg of emissions (and other incidental emissions, that we have not tracked) by purchasing 20 Verified Emission Reductions (saving 20 tonnes of CO_2 emissions) through the Kenya Biogas Programme run by Hivos.

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[2] Another one is emissions related to the products or services that we consume. Wherever possible we are selecting vendors that provide carbon-neutral products or services such as our hosting provider greenhost.

[3] By banning air travel for trips that take 5 hours or less by train and encouraging rail travel by paying for first-class train tickets for trips longer than 300km.

[4] Calculation based on search results returned by http://ecopassenger.org.

6. FINANCIAL

The grant from the Arcadia Fund has enabled us to set up Open Future and it has covered the vast majority of all our expenses during the first 15 months of Operation. Originally the first reporting period was fixed for the period from 1 October 2020 to 30 September 2021. In early September 2021, we decided—after consultation with the project officer at Arcadia—to prolong the first reporting period by an additional 3 months. This prolongation allows us to align the Arcadia reporting periods with the financial year or the Stichting. It also means that we are reporting on a full year of activities since we only started to develop operational activities in January 2021. As a result of the fact that it took us until mid-December 2020 to obtain a bank account we did not develop any substantial operational activities during the last three months of 2020.

As a result of the prolongation, we are reporting against a budget that was drawn up for a period of 12 months. In addition, the overall budget for the organisation was drawn up before the pandemic which means that certain assumptions that underpinned the budget (having a physical office, significant expenses for the organisation of physical events and travel) did not materialise in practice. As a result, our actual spending differs significantly from the spending foreseen in the original budget for year 1. In the following section we will highlight the most important differences between the budget and our actual expenditure.

6.1 Budget vs Actual

The following table provides an overview of the budget versus the actual expenditure for year one. This clearly shows that while in absolute terms we have stayed very close to the original budget there are significant divergences. On the expense side, these are primarily in the personal costs and overhead costs categories. On the income side, these are primarily in the distribution of additional (non-Arcadia) income.

	Year 1 budget (12 months)	Year 1 actual (15 months)
Expenses	**€ 343.044**	**€ 354.130**
Staff costs	€ 209.544	€ 273.837
Activities	€ 84.000	€ 66.765
Overhead	€ 49.500	€ 13.528
Income	**€ 350.000**	**€ 354.130**
Arcadia	€ 250.000	€ 250.000
Open Society Foundations	€ 100.000	€ 50.297
Other	€ 0	€ 53.833