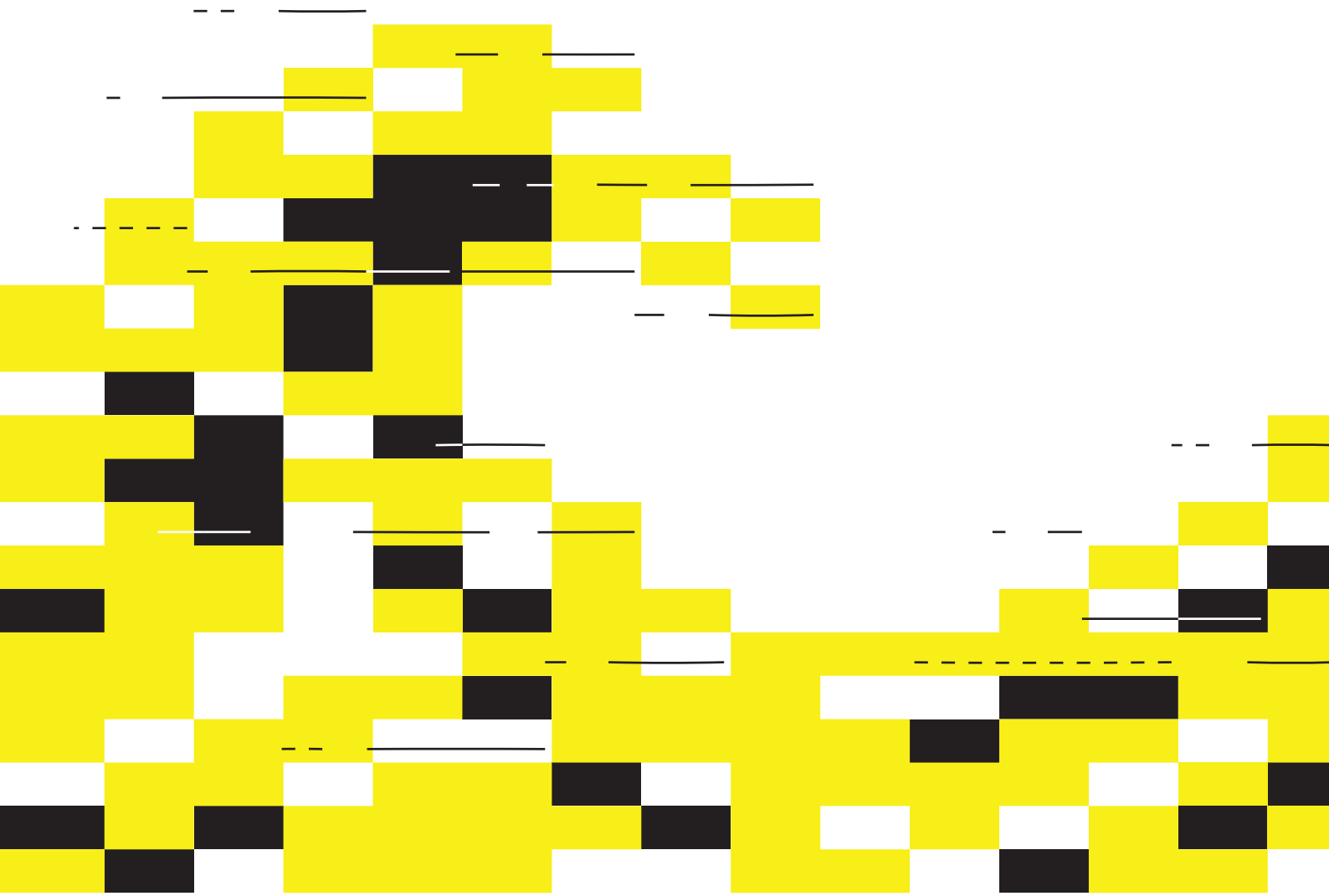
# SHIFTING _TIDES: THE OPEN MOVEMENT AT A TURNING POINT

*Research report based on interviews with digital activists and open movement leaders*



OPEN _FUTURE

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AT OPEN FUTURE, WE HAVE BEEN EXPLORING THE FUTURE OF OPENNESS AND WAYS IN WHICH OPEN ACTIVISTS CAN REDEFINE AND REIMAGINE THEIR GOALS AND STRATEGIES.

WE INTERVIEWED TWENTY LEADERS FROM THE MOVEMENT, WHO TOLD US HOW ITS COURSE IS CHANGING, TOGETHER WITH THE WORLD AROUND IT.

A NEW APPROACH SHOULD ADDRESS THE NEED FOR MAINTENANCE, REVIVED RELEVANCE, NEW VOICES, AND NARRATIVES.

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# INTRODUCTION

# _INTRODUCTION

*At the turn of 2022 and 2023, we conducted a series of interviews with leading voices in the open movement[1]. We spoke with professional activists, who address openness from varied perspectives and work in different fields of open. Some have been engaged in activism for decades, while others are looking at it with a fresh set of eyes. Many of our interviewees lead organizations advancing openness, and we were particularly interested in talking with those who have been exploring new approaches and strategies*

Our research aims to understand the current state of the open movement, as seen through the eyes of people actively involved in its endeavors and leading organizations within the movement. We want to make sense of shared positions and understand whether there are any clear division lines. We are particularly interested in identifying trends that transform the movement and understanding the challenges and needs of activists and organizations as these changes occur. The report signals a shift to what can be best described as a post-copyright approach to openness. However, while our focus is on how the movement is changing, this does not mean that the whole movement is subject to that shift. There still exists a need for copyright advocacy work in the movement, and many organizations maintain the course developed at the outset.  Nonetheless, we hope that they, too, will find this report's insights worth examining.

We also want to understand how and whether the open movement can be perceived as a whole. There have been studies and reports focused on a single field of openness, such as Open Access or Open Data, but relatively few attempts to understand this broader activist space. To fill this gap, we have conducted two parallel studies that offer a view that connects the historical context of the movement's development in the last 20-30 years, the current zeitgeist and technological landscape, and finally the perspective of future challenges. One of them, called Fields of open. Mapping the open movement, is an exploratory mapping of the movement, using network analysis methods and data collected from Twitter. The other one, the one you are currently reading, is a qualitative survey of open movement leaders.

1 Since there is no agreement or clarity on how the movement is defined and so whether it exists as a proper noun, we have made a decision not to capitalize the nouns within the term.

At Open Future, we talk about the future of open and the need to redefine and reimagine some of our goals and activist strategies. We believe that having a perspective that connects the different fields of open activism is valuable.
A shared movement identity and a shared advocacy agenda can make our collective effort stronger. With this study, we aim to see whether this perspective is shared and whether it can form a basis for building a shared movement agenda for the decades to come.

*We are grateful to following people, who were interviewed for this study:* ***Lila Bailey*** *(internet Archive),* ***Carolina Botero*** *(Fundacion Karisma),* ***Justus Dreyling*** *(Communia Association),* ***Claudia Garad*** *(Wikimedia Europe),* ***Jan Gerlach*** *(Wikimedia Foundation),* ***Jennie Halperin*** *(Library Futures),* ***Heather Joseph*** *(SPARC),* ***Julia Kloiber*** *(Superrr Lab),* ***Angela Odour Lungati*** *(Ushahidi),* ***Stefano Maffulli*** *(Open Source Initiative),* ***Ton Roosendaal*** *(Blender),* ***Olivier Schulbaum*** *(Platoniq),* ***Paul Stacey*** *(Open Education Global),* ***Catherine Stihler*** *(Creative Commons),* ***Jeni Tenisson*** *(Connected by Data),* ***Michelle Thorne*** *(Green Web Foundation),* ***Harry Verwayen*** *(Europeana),* ***Emilio Velis*** *(Apropedia), and* ***Stephen Wyber*** *(IFLA).*

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# _SPEAKING WITH OPEN MOVEMENT LEADERS

In December 2022 and January 2023, we conducted 19 in-depth interviews. We aimed to include a broad range of perspectives, coming from different professional experiences, working in different fields of openness, and having different cultural backgrounds. Although our geographical focus was on Europe (where Open Future's work is centered), we also included non-European perspectives.

Our qualitative methodology was designed to surface a variety of views and insights, allowing us to obtain a rich, deep understanding of the open movement. During the analysis of the interviews, we focused on distilling key issues and trends identified by different speakers. Our aim was not only to identify the most popular recurring themes, but also additional issues that we identified as important signals and trends.

In the report, we also provide direct quotes from the interviews, to illustrate these themes and trends. We do so without attributing the quotes to specific interviewees.

This study is a form of action research. As analysts, we are part of the open movement and analyze the results through lenses offered by our own experiences in the movement. We hope that the results will provide a basis for building a shared vision for change.

## *Paths to the open movement*

Most of the interviewees have been involved in the movement for at least 10-15 years. All of them have a long history of supporting openness and the commons, but they come from different career paths and were motivated to join the movement by different factors.

Most of those interviewed said that they became familiar with the open movement through their participation in copyright reform activism and policy. However, some also joined the movement through their involvement in Open Source and Open Hardware activism. Others were introduced to the movement through Open Knowledge, Open Access, Open Education, or Open Data activism. Lastly, community-building work was a starting point for some of them. Some of the interviewees joined the movement through organizations they decided to work for, entering the field without necessarily having an activist background.

# _OPEN ACTIVISM AS A SOCIAL MOVEMENT

Like any collective action, the open movement had multiple beginnings. For activists working with code, their work is rooted in ideas about software freedoms from the 1980s. Open Science also has its roots in the late 20th century. Much of Open Content activism was launched at the turn of the century, with the launch of a range of key projects and organizations such as Creative Commons, Mozilla, Open Knowledge Foundation, or Wikimedia.

As early as 1997, James Boyle advocated for a new approach to intellectual property driven by "a coalition politics of groups unified by common interest perceived in apparently diverse situations[2]." Boyle emphasized the need for politics that protected the public domain and looked to the environmental movement for inspiration. Boyle believed that a purely economic approach was insufficient, and he called for a new movement to create and protect the public domain[3].

Political events and outside pressure served to galvanize activists and to build a sense of a shared social and political movement. The free software movement was founded on a personal protest against intellectual property rules enforced by major software corporations. And Creative Commons was born out of a case in front of the US Supreme Court aimed at defending the public domain.

The history of the movement can be written as a series of collective efforts to shape the regulation of digital technologies and to fight against harmful proposals. Public interest advocacy and activism continue to be key ways of enacting change to this day.

Open movement has one distinguishing characteristic among other social movements: it is productive in a practical sense. Its activists have built a global encyclopedia, shared vast bodies of knowledge, designed electronics in the open, and today are opening up machine learning technologies. Yochai Benkler described this productive character of the open movement through the concept of commons-based peer production, arguing that it is both a form of production and social activism.[4]

2 James Boyle, "A Politics of Intellectual Property: Environmentalism for the Net?," Duke Law Journal 47, no. 1 (1997): 87–116, https://doi.org/10.2307/1372861.

3 CC Legal Database, Eldred v Ashcroft. https://legaldb.creativecommons.org/cases/18/. Accessed 4 May 2023.

4 Yochai Benkler. The Wealth of Networks: How Social Production Transforms Markets and Freedom. Yale University Press, 2006.

# _HOW DO WE DEFINE THE OPEN MOVEMENT?

The movement that is the subject of this study has many names, and "open" itself is a contested term. Some activists prefer to talk about digital commons, free knowledge or software, or access to knowledge.

We recognize these distinctions, especially those that are key to understanding both the movement's purpose and internal lines of division. At the same time, we see a need for a clear definition, and as such, we propose the following working definition:

> *The open movement consists of people, communities, and organizations who (1) contribute to shared resources online that are available for everyone to use and reuse, (2) and/or advocate for non-exclusive access and use of information resources.*

By providing this definition, we do not aim to solve the issue of different ideologies and contested terminologies. Instead, we use it to help us identify who belongs to the movement and what its boundaries are.

In addition, we assume that this movement is divided into multiple "fields of open." Each of them is distinguished by the application of open principles and frameworks to a specific societal space or sector, or to a specific type of resource, such as education or climate data. We assume that activism within these fields can often be considered as movements of their own, with a strong identity and internal coordination. This is especially true for well-developed fields like Open Source, Open Data, or Open Education.

This means that there is often stronger coordination within a field than in the broader movement and among the different fields. There is also often a stronger sense of shared identity, supported by clear goals defined at the level of a single field. This is also true for advocacy work, which often is defined and coordinated within the boundaries of a field and not the broader movement.

# _THE OPEN MOVEMENT, AS SEEN BY ITS LEADERS

*In the previous section, we proposed our analytical definition of the open movement. However, our interviewees see and define the open movement in many different ways — and some of them contest our definition or even the very idea of the open movement.*

Most of the definitions see the movement as a set of relationships or alliances built around a shared set of values.

> *There are all these organizations that* ***share a belief in the value of openness over closeness.*** *There are differences as to how much they weigh that value, among other values — for example, human rights, privacy, or racial justice — as there are also other values that these organizations have. What I call openness, which I think of as essentially access to information, is* ***[the definition] that offers the strongest value alignment among these organizations.***

The interviewees' views on the movement itself share many characteristics of how the social movements are defined in social science — as networks of informal interactions between a plurality of individuals, groups, and/or organizations, engaged in political or cultural conflicts, on the basis of shared collective identities[5]. The set of shared values can be understood as defining a certain sense of identity and one of belonging among movement members.

There is also an acknowledgment of the fact that one can participate in the open movement by practicing openness or commoning — for example, creating and sharing resources in the open. Therefore, the movement can also be understood simply in terms of relationships built between people, as a social network that connects activists, or people that practice commoning.

> ***Is it a network? Is it a movement? Is it a community? It's really all of those things.*** *(…) I think movement is similar in the sense that it includes* ***everyone who's engaged in open activity.*** *But at the individual level, if they're openly sharing their research or their photos or whatever it is, they are themselves personally engaged in the open movement.*

5 Mario Diani, "The Concept of Social Movement," The Sociological Review 40, no. 1 (February 1, 1992): 1–25, https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-954X.1992.tb02943.x.

> *The open movement is more **like a vibe, a mindset**. And movements are just **a series of relationships.***

As mentioned previously, we started our research project with the assumption that there is an open movement, which we can define, and whose boundaries we can trace. Through the interviews, we learned that there is little collective sense of such a movement. Most of our interviewees described it as a much looser, lighter structure.

> *The open movement is for me a very loose term. Yes, there is a movement towards open, but it is made up of a collection of disparate movements, **There is no single, overarching open movement that we can point to.** There is some overlap, some collaboration, and interplay, but no shared end goal.*
>
> *I see a series of entities within a large, very loose, directional movement. **Rather than a clearly defined open movement where you can point and say: here are the leaders**, here's what they each do towards the shared goal.*

This lightweight structure of alliances is both an advantage and a challenge. On the one hand, it gives the movement the potential to shift tactically. It allows for flexibility in forming new coalitions around shared interests that can change over time. It also leaves space for many perspectives and approaches. Some interviewees described this as a movement that lacks a leader:

> *There's **no one leader** of a broader open movement.*
>
> *Maybe if it does [exist], **it's unconscious**.*
> *It kind of happens without much coordination.*

On the other hand, this type of structure might be a liability if one is seeking well-defined, shared goals and a clear path towards achieving them.

> *It's **a very diverse group** that does not always have a common goal, or at least not the same one.*
>
> *I've always felt there was not one movement with one view on things. I think **openness has been a driver for many, but there are many different takes** on what that is and what it should be.*

> *We [as the movement] definitely **share public interest values**, but we fight our own individual fights, **do not have space to discuss how we come together, and build power.***

Finally, some of our interviewees questioned whether the open movement — understood as a broader activist network with a shared identity — exists at all. Among the key reasons were those related to the vagueness of the term "open" itself.

> *If it's not well defined, then people don't actually know that they could belong to the movement, **so I don't think it exists**, I am skeptical about the use of the brand.*
>
> *Do you want to brand yourself for your own community and for your own groups? Or do you want to have a name that resonates with your audience externally? **I don't think anybody understands this brand outside of our circles. I think there's too much insiderism.** I'm skeptical of this having any traction with people who are not part of it.*

For some, the distinctions between the different fields of open are too great to consider in terms of one movement. Beyond a general alignment on values, there are too many differences to consider them part of a single entity. It is also hard to identify structures or institutions that steward this movement as a whole. Such institutions exist at the level of particular fields, especially those more developed ones.

> ***There are different speeds** in this larger community, some that have reached very important achievements, like Open Access for example, whereas there are others that [are] moving more slowly, or might even never become very important. Also because **the idea of openness might be something that is not at the core of what they are doing**, even if they share some values.*
>
> ***There isn't an organization, or a place where many organizations connect, where coordination of actions could take place**. Where people would be brought together to discuss key issues — something like a yearly conference about all the issues related to openness. I can compare this with the environmental movement. The organizations are also splintered, but there are institutions that put everything under one large umbrella that has a worldwide focus. I don't think there is an equivalent for the open movement yet.*

There is also a shared sense that open activism could be better defined as being part of other movements, aligned with other values, or even seen largely as means to some other end. We will return to these ideas in the **next section.**

# 2

# THE TURNING POINT

# _THE MOVEMENT AT A TURNING POINT

*In the previous part, we described the collective sense of the open movement as a loose network, tied together by value alignment. In this part, we want to show how the movement is shifting. Our interviewees have been observing changes, and argue for further change. We analyze these shifts in four categories: the people, the zeitgeist, the world, and the sustainability of the open movement.*

## *The people of the open movement*

A movement consists of a plurality of individuals, groups, and/or organizations. Their cultural background, their skills, their perspective, and their generational differences shape what the movement is, what drives it, and what it can achieve.

It seems that at the moment, the open movement leaders are predominantly people who either have been involved in its creation or have joined the movement over a decade ago. Among these, there is often a sense that the movement has changed a lot since they joined it a decade or two ago — and that some of the original energy fueling the movement is gone by now.

> *You had all these artists and authors say "we want people to remix." And that made it feel really exciting and also felt global; it really felt like we were having these conversations with lawyers in India and land defenders in Brazil, and it felt cohesive. That was a really exciting time. It was sometime around 2007. And another thing about that time was that it was cool. There were the musicians, there were the pirates, and there was this feeling of avant-garde and newness.*

There are also those interviewees who joined the movement by taking a position in one of the organizations of the movement. In these cases, their first interaction with the movement might be more recent, while the organizations themselves have been involved for much longer.

## *Where is the next generation?*

During the interviews, many people raised the question of a generational gap within the open community. Some interviewees feel that the perspective of the new generation needs to be added to the conversation. They see the open move-

ment as being defined by the perspectives, needs, and ideas of a certain generation that largely recalls the early days of the internet, which was two decades ago or more.

As time has passed, the perspective of this group has come to define the movement. The movement gains strength from these people, who have experience, have advanced in their professional careers, and have access to wide networks. However, without new voices, perspectives, and leaders, the movement risks stagnation and the potential to lose relevance for new generations.

> ***The open movement, as it stands just now, is aging.*** *There's a new generation of people that needs to be brought through. And some people don't want to give up that power. As much as I want a new generation to be advocates, we need to really invest in that.* ***I'd give them the chance to flourish and to succeed in ways where we've maybe not succeeded in the past*** *because we haven't been as coordinated as we could [have been] or haven't brought more mainstream people along in the journey.*

There is no clear diagnosis of the extent to which this situation is a consequence of exclusionary practices and lack of space for the voices of the new generation to be heard, or if it's due to a lack of interest in the movement's actions and goals among members of the new generations.

## *Reaching beyond the open activists*

When discussing ways of defining the open movement, we noted that there are two aspects to its activism: advocacy and the production of open resources. The former is more ideologically driven, and movement leaders and key activists usually fit into this category. However, our interviewees pointed out that for the movement to be more relevant and enter the mainstream, it needs to move beyond this relatively narrow group and find ways of communicating with others who don't necessarily ideologically support openness but could still benefit from it.

> *When thinking about the ladder of engagement that we have,* ***we need to have a whole set of varied paths, not just those that are ideologically aligned, "evangelical" about openness****. You need to bring a whole suite of people along with you on the journey, and that's a challenge. That's hard because you got to go out and you got to talk to people — also to those with whom you have not talked before.*
>
> *The open movement has for a long time been very focused on knowledge as an end in itself. This is one of the key causes why it has failed*

*to bring up the attention of people out there. We need to ask,* ***who are we serving, and how [do] we bring the knowledge to them.***

There is a sense that this need of building connections, described by some as intersectional, is related to the challenges of movement membership. New connections — beyond the boundaries of what is traditionally perceived as the open movement — could bring in new, younger activists. And in turn, they could bring to the movement new ways of thinking about the movement and its goals. There is also a hope that, thanks to them, the movement can tap again into a spontaneous, organic energy that was characteristic of its early days.

*How do we bring in those people who are younger, and with a high level of enthusiasm? And who is able to imagine another internet?*

This need for expansion extends beyond just the younger generation. It seems crucial for the movement to be more inclusive of individuals from diverse backgrounds and social classes, similar to other successful social movements.

*All of our communities will be irrelevant, as long as we do not engage other voices, and other people to become part of a bigger movement.*

# _THE CURRENT ZEITGEIST OF THE OPEN MOVEMENT

Being involved in the movement for a long time, the interviewees have been observing the trajectories of change — both in the movement itself and the world around them. Many of them pointed to external and internal challenges that are the result of changes in dominant ideas and beliefs of a given time: the zeitgeist.

The changing zeitgeist has directly impacted the word "open" itself and the ideals that it has been representing. Today, we face a digital reality in which the term "open" is losing some of its positive meaning, as it is seen as vulnerable to processes of domination and centralization of power. The broader context is that of an ongoing, global challenge to open societies and democratic values.

> *One big topic that we have to grapple with is **the shrinking of open spaces around the world.** More and more countries are becoming authoritarian. How do we work there? How do we support people there? **Authoritarianism, largely defined, is a key challenge.***

These processes influence the mindset that shapes the movement and can be traced by observing changes in the language that is being used. There is a shift away from, or beyond, the term "open" as it becomes replaced with other terms, such as: free, democratic, universal access, better sharing, digital commons, etc.

> *Today we talk **about taking care of ourselves, making sure that the economy is democratic, that knowledge is shareable.** And then we explain that this is called openness, and that you need open licenses. But we used to talk the other way around: if you are not open, you are not part of us. Sometimes, I had the impression that **we were the talibans of openness.***

## *From openness to a pro-democratic movement*

Many of our interviewees, and their organizations, have in recent years decided to revisit the idea of openness, which existed at the heart of their work. Some of them realized that openness is not a goal in itself, but a means to an end. Others felt that there are bigger societal challenges that can be tackled, based on the principle of openness. Others felt simply that the term "open" is no longer as engaging as before. In many cases, the search for a new approach has led activists to redefine their work in terms of democratization: of knowledge, of access, or even simply of societies.

*Our 2020-2025 strategy asks the question: What is the purpose of change that our organization was looking for? Why do you want access to knowledge? Why do you want openness? And then our conclusion was that* ***this is our way of pursuing the values of democracy and democratization.***

*We suddenly realized, after 10 years, that* ***we were essentially talking about democratic infrastructure or infrastructure for preserving democracy.*** *So we've realized that openness is the best way to do democratic innovation. Now, our main goal is to create more social wealth, based on the conviction that culture and openness are the vehicle for democracy.*

*Maybe we just need to forget about naming it the open movement,* ***because now what's needed more is a democratic movement.***

## *The paradox of open*

The transformation of the internet, and the whole networked information ecosystem, has resulted in what we have called the *paradox of open*[6]. The "open revolution" that many within the open movement imagined and hoped for turned out not to be the path that the development of the internet followed, especially in the last decade.

Today, we are confronted with a handful of platform intermediaries controlling the sharing and exchange of resources online. With this change, the context for open production and sharing changes. And the new, closed ecosystems are often built on top of open resources. A critical take on openness, shared by some activists, perceives it as vulnerable to these power grabs. Some even see open approaches as facilitating this shift towards greater control and centralization of power.

*The biggest issue that the open movement needs to solve* ***has to do with alternatives to platformization.*** *So that the distribution, the ownership, the caretaking, and also the value creation is not being monopolized. Because of this,* ***it is not enough to just ask: are these resources open?*** *Because those big, commercial organizations soak up data and content and*

6 See the whole article: Paul Keller and Alek Tarkowski, "The Paradox of Open," Open Future, March 5, 2021, https://openfuture.pubpub.org/pub/paradox-of-open/release/1.

*monopolize the value created. And dealing with this challenge requires a deep understanding of the logic of this new space.*

Awareness of this issue, seen as a challenge to openness, has led some of our interviewees to a reframing of the goals of their activism. As with a turn towards democratization, this perspective sees openness as aligned with a broader social struggle.

*There is a broader perspective that I will call "people over profit," in shorthand. We need a huge social movement to* ***counterweight the market forces that have dominated the internet****, from a technical standpoint, from a regulatory standpoint, and from a social standpoint.*

*You can use openness as a way to break up those powers, by either building alternatives or by pushing for transparency and accountability.* ***I'm mostly interested in using openness to disrupt power*** *and to redistribute it for more just and sustainable purposes.*

## *Decolonizing the movement*

Many of the interviewed leaders expressed a need to critically reflect on what the movement has achieved. A decolonized perspective is often mentioned as a way to do this. It brings to the forefront issues such as the very origins of the idea of openness as a Western concept, the protection of traditional knowledge, the well-being of communities, and the questions of who has the resources, tools, and skills to exploit openly accessible resources and for whose benefit.

*It is easy from a position of privilege to think that openness is a good thing. Because you're not losing, you have a lot of power that you don't have. So it is not as much of a challenge to be open because you are not so vulnerable anyway. And I think that leads to a lot of why the open community and the open movement tends to be a set of privileged people arguing for it, when I think that* ***we should be listening a bit more to some people who are more marginalized and less privileged.***

*I think the open movement also probably has to go through its own* ***decolonization process.***

*There are times when* ***openness is harmful*** *to an individual or to a community.*

# _THE WORLD AROUND THE OPEN MOVEMENT

The movement is also shaped by the world around it, as it undergoes social, economic, political, or technological changes. As many initiatives and organizations have now existed for two decades (or more), the context in which they operate has changed in the meantime. The interviewees have, in particular, highlighted the climate crisis and technological change as external factors that impact the movement.

> *I think [our focus] has changed.* ***But not because we wanted it to change but because the world around us has changed.*** *We often don't get to choose what we work on, right? (...) Beyond that, I think there are also opportunities for us to broaden our scope. Think of disinformation, right, as a huge topic in the context of democratic decision-making, education, and digital skills, but also an intermediary liability, right?*
>
> *There is a bigger crisis than copyright these days. Climate change, social polarization, political violence. So you could say,* ***open movement, you look so small these days****. How can we make the open movement really involved in fighting some of these different causes?*

In this section, we are highlighting voices that speak about the need to reorient open activism around new causes and to connect with other forms of activism and other movements. These voices usually do not immediately question the traditional goals of open advocacy. But rather see a movement that builds on this expertise and achieves greater complexity.

> *Everybody is looking at web3, or blockchain, or AI. But we still have not solved the problem of millions of scientific articles that are still locked behind paywalls.*

## *Tackling new challenges*

Over time, some organizations have shifted their strategies, while others are constantly following the original goals and approaches. Yet overall there is a sense that the open movement needs to recognize the new challenges in order to stay relevant. But there is also uncertainty about whether new challenges can be addressed through open approaches.

Many interviewees mentioned the climate emergency as the greatest social challenge.

> ***Any work that anybody does, at this point, has to be climate-focused.*** *There's no way around it; this is a crisis.*

The environmental crisis brings attention to ways that the principle of openness can support work on environmental sustainability. And vice versa, some have posed questions about the sustainability of open approaches, systems, and infrastructures.

> *As the open movement,* ***we haven't done enough to talk about shifting power when it comes to the drivers of the climate crisis.*** *This is one of the key issues of our time. And the open movement doesn't have a strongly formulated response or presence around the climate crisis.*

Another often-mentioned challenge is misinformation, together with issues such as social polarization, or the spread of fake news. This is an example of a goal that is a natural fit for this movement, taking into account its work on building open, commons-based ecosystems. At the same time, it requires goals to be reframed and broadening the scope of work to cover issues not addressed previously.

> *I am really interested in how openness can help create spaces for critical thinking. The next goal for openness has to be enabling better conversations.* ***Finding ways to know what the truth is.***

Finally, some threats are related to the changing technological landscape. We mentioned, in the previous part, the challenge of platformization. The development of AI systems is another trend that requires a response from open advocates.

> *The only big threat that I can see to the concepts related to Open Source is coming from AI.* ***A large part of the overall definition of openness becomes fuzzy when it comes to AI.*** *It cannot be understood within the current paradigms. And we don't have a shared view or shared understanding of what that entails.*
>
> *Ten years ago, the key to copyright reform was free trade agreements, which is no longer the case. (...) The idea to upgrade the copyright laws to include exceptions and limitations is there and it will continue to be the case. But probably now,* ***artificial intelligence*** *national policies will be the place to discuss copyright reforms, for instance.* ***So it's changed; the topics change.***

## *Using open methods to solve new problems*

The need to consider new social challenges is often approached with trepidation — it is not clear to what extent the movement can find a renewed focus and sense of purpose. Yet there is also a sense of opportunity to apply tested methods in new contexts. This is mentioned in the context of shifting professional priorities and areas of focus. Those with activist backgrounds in particular seem to be inclined to look for ways in which the open movement can contribute to other causes.

> *I'm interested in things like collective liberation and* ***ecological sustainability.*** *So using open to shift power towards those things.*

Such shifts allow activists and their organizations to stay relevant in a rapidly changing reality. But it requires building connections with other forms of activism and explaining to them the value of openness.

> *It would be good to have more clarity on what the open movement is contributing, today, to other movements.* ***Especially that there is a lot of accumulated expertise.*** *When I talk, for example, to climate activists, they are really excited about what openness can achieve.*
>
> ***The open movement will fail if people do not see that Open Knowledge is a tool for solving the pressing issues of today.*** *For example, openness can help fight climate change. But environmental organizations do not see this, and don't treat the open movement as a partner in solving this problem.*

## *The value of the movement's prior experience*

With new causes attracting the attention of the members of the open movement, the experience gained from working with open approaches turns out to be valuable in other fields of activism. There is interest in exploring the potential of knowledge-sharing and advocacy practices in intersectional approaches and looking for cross-cutting priorities along with other movements.

> *So maybe, I guess, the o****pen movement being more in service to these other movements*** *would personally read [as] really energizing for me, rather than like serving our movement as an end of itself.*
>
> *We could probably have more* ***intentional bridges built across movements.***
>
> *So for example, one recent conversation was about how the* ***climate movement*** *actually talks about not just current harms,*

*but future projected harms, and how that's been a really useful legal tool in getting rights and things passed to protect the environment and future generations. And that concept would totally work in kind of the open digital rights space — talking about future harms, preventing future harm. So (...) those kinds of cross-movement, strategic conversations would be really great.*

## *From a copyright-centered perspective towards a broader look at other challenges*

Most of the organizations that identify with the open movement have roots in copyright activism. And while copyright regulation remains an unresolved issue, some feel the initial cause of the open movement has lost its relevance in the face of new contemporary challenges.

Thus there is a split among the activists. For many, advocacy around copyright and intellectual property is still pertinent. Others feel that there are more urgent issues to be addressed by this movement, requiring a broader perspective than before.

*It doesn't feel to me like* ***looking narrowly at copyright law is the most effective or most impressive area of work.*** *There's still a lot to do. But for me, copyright activism is not the only space for action.*

*I think the trajectory is just* ***widening****. (...) Of course, we're trying to do more work, but it's just impossible to be in every conversation on every topic.*

*Yeah, the shift reflects what we talked about earlier: 10 years ago, there was one advocacy position, which is Open Access. Public Domain, Open Access.* ***And now that has become broader.*** *Becoming all of that plus:* ***diversity and inclusion, data sovereignty, decentralization. What do the commons look like?*** *So, broader.*

*The problems that we were tackling a few years ago still exist; Albeit they present themselves in different forms. We still have human rights [violations], COVID has come in and exacerbated some existing inequalities.* ***Yeah, one thing that has changed is the technology landscape.***

We signaled above a sense that open activists need to connect with other movements and identify new goals for their activism. But the people that we talked with did not express a need to pivot away from open activism. Rather, they aim to redefine their strategies and chart ones that are a continuation of open activism, even if the goals, narratives, and methods are very different from those used 20 years ago. This is how one leader describes a new strategy for the organization:

> *Our main focus is on privacy and surveillance, access, and misinformation. We also hope to work on climate issues, because no one else is working on that. We also consider platformization, and emerging technologies like web3. At the same time, we try to avoid giving into the hype — for example, what some call "blockchain overdrive."* ***Those are our main topics.***

For some, this broader perspective could imply adopting methods that are traditionally not defined as open, as long as they help reach the strategic goals.

> *It could be that* ***we can enable things through something that isn't just openness.*** *Or that openness isn't enough to meet those ends. So we should ask, what other kinds of routes and approaches could help us meet those same ends — in the current reality, taking into account the way that technology works today, and the new generations that have different ways of working with each other?*

## _THE SUSTAINABILITY OF THE OPEN MOVEMENT

Our interviewees describe the open movement as having reached a certain level of maturity, and thus requiring maintenance in order to be sustainable. The phase of organic, sometimes uncontrolled movement growth is over. Now is the time to be more deliberate about shaping the movement and also acknowledging some of the internal challenges that it faces. There is an expressed need to verify the movement's organizational structures, pay more attention to including multivocal perspectives, and take responsibility for potential past misconduct.

### *Taking care of the movement by revisiting the past*

Those who voice the need to repair the movement express a sense of care for the future of the movement. Critically revisiting the past seems like an inevitable step for the movement to move forward, attract new members, and stay relevant.

As in every structure, giving up power and sharing leadership is difficult — both for those in power and for the overall structures themselves. The voices of the young generation are not the only ones that the interviewees point out as miss-

ing. If the movement is largely defined by the people who shape it, then it is dominated by the perspective of the West and the Global North and by that of professional activists and knowledge elites — oftentimes with all the privileges and resources that come with it.

This lack of diversity is connected with the previously described zeitgeist of the movement but, in this case, is more of a structural issue. It is also at the root of the calls for maintenance and repair within the movement.

> *I think there are also some challenges around entryways into the open movement, that are really driven by the culture within different communities. I had a look at some really concerning statistics around some of the challenges for people either joining open communities or even remaining in open communities just because of either bullying or harassment. (...) At times, as much as we're* ***an open movement, it's a cool kid club. And there's almost a sense of gatekeeping, to some extent.***
>
> *I think that there would also be challenges and questions about the nature of the community and the movement:* ***who is involved and who isn't involved, and why.***

Paying greater attention to movement diversity and equity is for some connected with the need to build new connections with new audiences and other movements and causes.

> ***It is easy from a position of privilege to think that openness is a good thing.*** *Because you're not losing, you have a lot of power. So it is not as much of a challenge to be open, because you are not so vulnerable anyway. We should be listening a bit more to people who are more marginalized and less privileged and ask them how we should change the way in which we talk and think about openness.*
>
> *Intersectionality is something we need to take into account while revising our models. And this goes beyond only gender equality. It is a new mindset for us, and* ***we ask ourselves, how do you apply intersectionality*** *to data collecting, to data research, for example.*

## *The need for support and solidarity*

Our interviewees often said that it is crucial to connect, coordinate, and collaborate, not just as a matter of effectiveness — but also of solidarity. Supporting each other, pooling limited resources, or aligning on shared goals is crucial for the movement's sustainability. Especially since a large part of the movement is made up of small organizations or even individuals with limited capacities.

*One general challenge for this whole movement has been* ***the decision whether we should bundle efforts and energy and work towards goals that we can agree on.*** *Where we are right now is loose coordination and everybody does their own thing. It is a product of external pressures, and just the way we work. And maybe there's lots of small wins that can be had like that. But* ***there is more potential in working together towards three to four things that serve all of us.*** *A clear, intentional decision is a big thing that we are missing.*

The structure of the movement — as a loose network of mainly small actors — is both the reason why such collaboration is needed, and also a factor that can significantly hamper it. Underfunded organizations that often hit their capacity limits find it hard to conduct the extra work necessary to, for example, develop a shared strategic agenda.

*We are under-resourced, with so many of us fighting alone against something huge, and* ***we can't take our eye off that ball.*** *There's no bandwidth for anybody to spend the time doing things like strategic retreats, imagining the future, or even coalition building. Because everybody's terrified to take their eye off of a particular ball.*

*But if we don't work more closely together, it feels very much all the time that we're competing for the same pots of money, when actually,* ***we need to actually be much more coordinated.***

There are also fears that block our ability to work together. Overcoming them requires not just shared strategies, but also a shift in attitudes among the key leaders of the movement.

***The elephant in the room is the concern over turf, over territory.*** *There's inherent fear in our movement that anytime we try to tighten together and talk about a single movement, people feel like it's a zero sum game and some organization is going to win and tell my organization what to do, and other organizations are somehow going to lose.*

There is also a role that larger, more resourced organizations should play in the name of such solidarity. They need to have a sense of responsibility for other organizations and individuals.

*I think there has to be a much more mature conversation with some of the leaders about* ***where there can be more working together, particularly those that have funding and those that don't.*** *I also think that real leadership isn't about just you. Real leadership is about what's best for the broader good.*

Finally, there are good practices, and past experiences that have helped the movement in the past deal with the issues of decolonization, and global diversity.

> *Our remit was always focused on making policy progress in the US, Yet one of the things that we deliberately didn't do was to just focus on the US, to the exclusion of paying attention to what was happening in the rest of the world. And* ***we were always watching places where other people were being successful in moving the needle.*** *Without this, we would never be where we are today in the US*

## *Funders and the sustainability of funding*

Funders and the funding that they provide are a key factor in ensuring the movement's sustainability. Lack of sufficient funding has been raised as a challenge for the movement from the start. What our interviewees add is that there's a positive role that funders can play, by structuring their support in a way that encourages collaboration, instead of hindering it.

> *One of the key things I've learned is that you can have all the missions in the world, but if you don't have the money behind it to execute them, then it's all rather moot. And what I see in the open movement just now is there's a lot of different actors, but not the funding to fund all that they want to do.*
>
> *The problem is, frankly, there is no funding. And everybody's tired, and everybody's working so hard on the things that they're doing, and other priorities kind of always take precedence. There's going to be some urgent thing that distracts us. And also, their funders won't let them spend time elsewhere.*

# 3

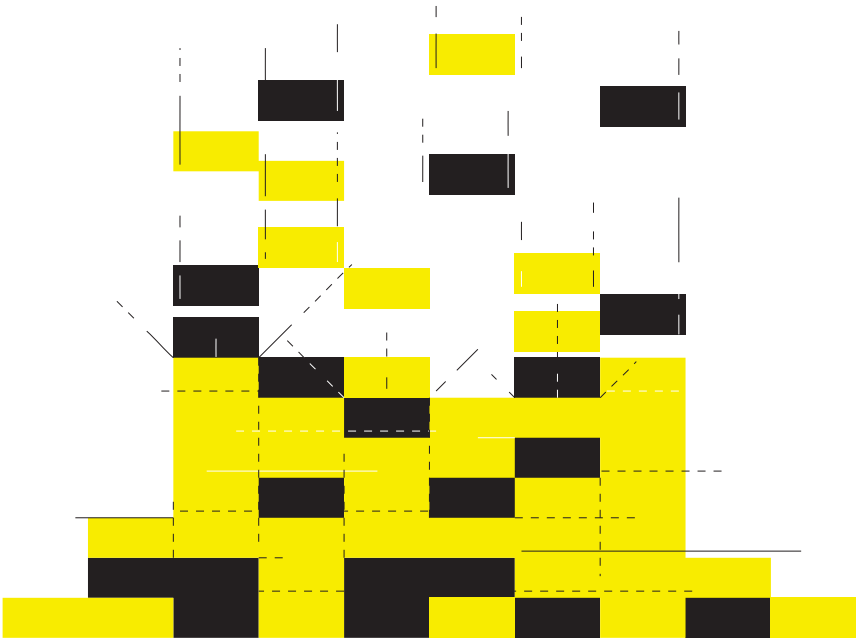
# THE NEED FOR CHANGE

# _THE NEED FOR CHANGE

*In the previous section, we described the movement as one that's in a moment of change. We showed factors that are both internal and external to the movement. Many of these should be collectively addressed by the movement.*

## *Need for new voices:*

There is a need to open up the movement to the younger generations. This would prove the movement's relevance in the current zeitgeist and help create a new vision, fueled by new perspectives. This also entails being more inclusive and reaching out to marginalized groups. Bringing new voices to the table requires dealing with power dynamics and addressing such concerns as diversity, decolonization, and intersectionality.

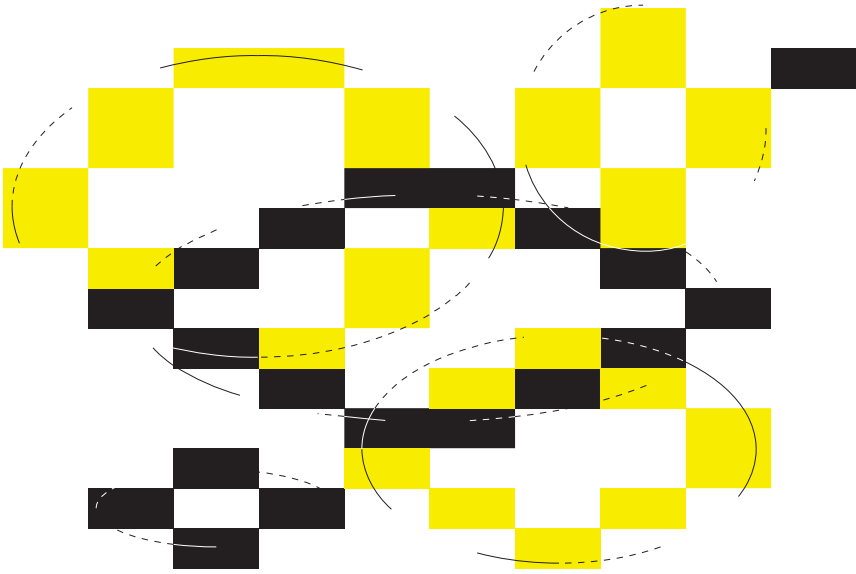


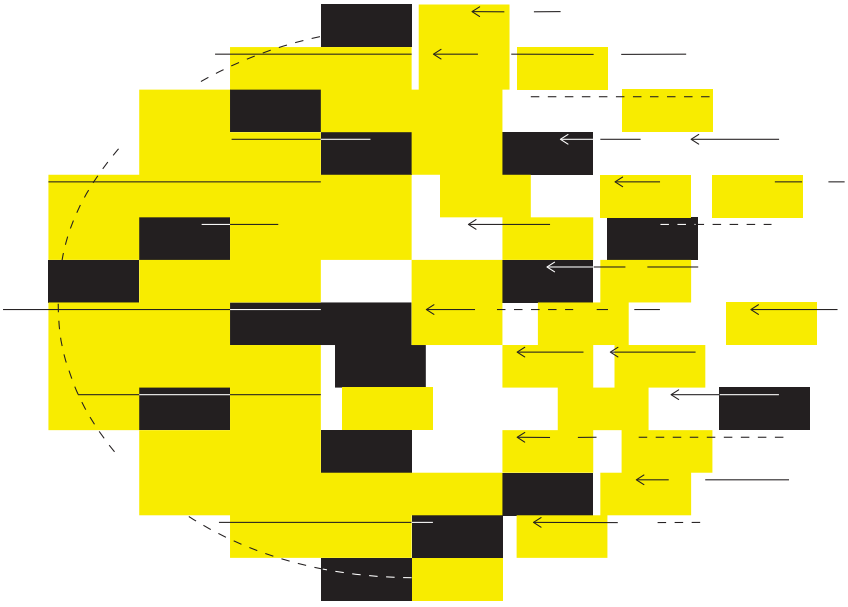
## *Need for new narratives:*

There is a need to reimagine and reframe openness in light of the current challenges. While the underlying principles and values are still powerful, "openness" as a narrative is increasingly seen as insufficient. It is seen either as too narrow as a basis for activism, too vague, or simply as a concept that is by now contested. New narratives can be built around other concepts, like the commons, or even democracy — while retaining the core values of the movement.

## *Need for relevance:*

There is a need, in the face of new challenges, to revisit the goals of open activism, to connect with other forms of activism, and to participate in solving the greatest challenges of current times. This requires balancing the need for a distinct focus of activism with the need to expand beyond the original goals, defined in terms of copyright activism. As a result, openness could be seen even more strongly as a means to an end, with open approaches serving as strong tools for attaining varied social goals.



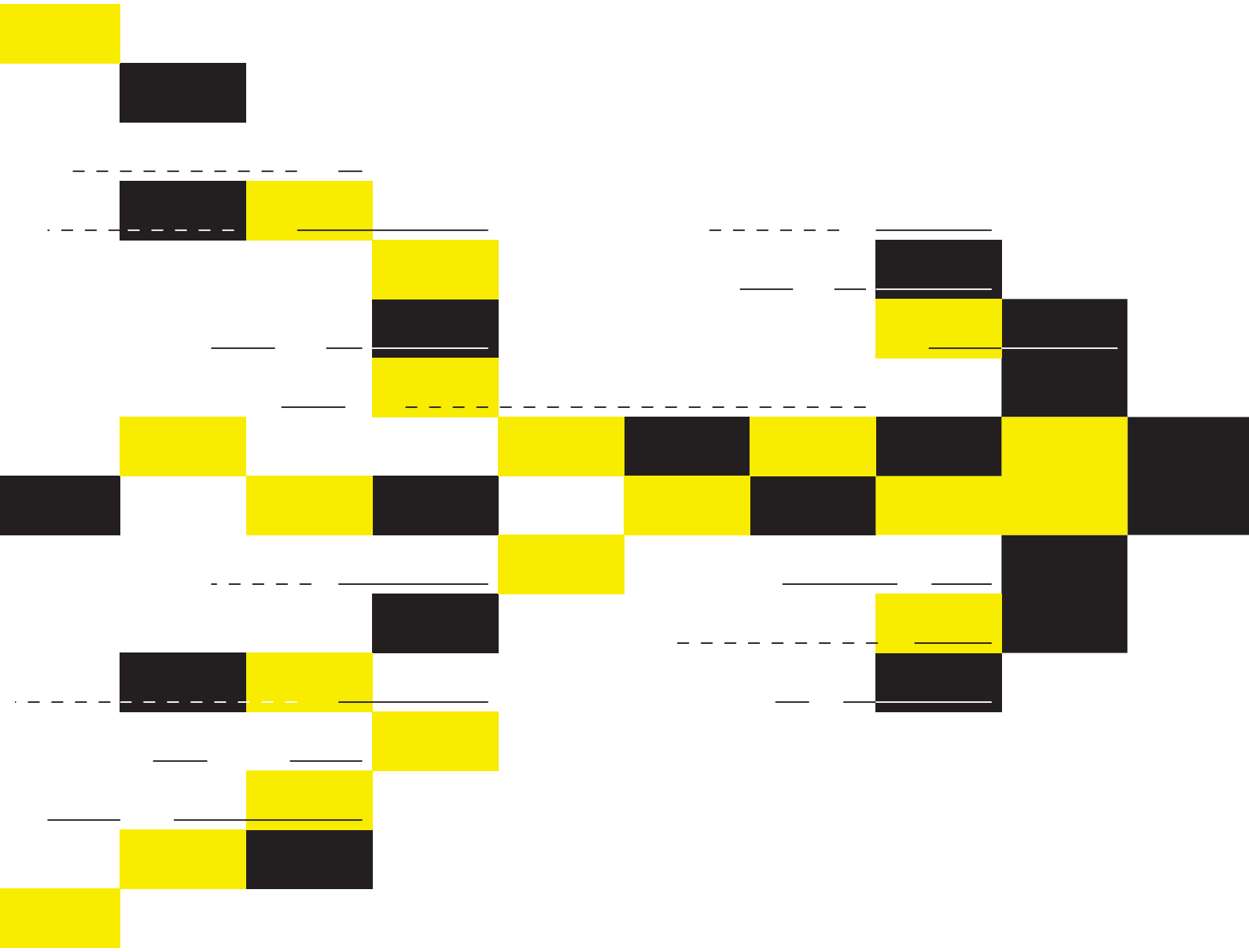


## *Need for maintenance:*

There is a need to shape and steward the movement in a more intentional way. There is tension between two competing visions of the movement organization: a loose, organic network, and a more defined structure for collective action. A maintained movement would be a greater whole that helps its members to identify goals, plan their involvement and think strategically about how they can contribute to the shared cause. This also entails a process of repair, and critically revisiting the movement's past.

# _WAYS FORWARD

*In our interviews, two ways of addressing the above-mentioned needs resonate especially strongly: the need for a shared agenda, and the related need for collective advocacy.*



## *A shared agenda*

Our interviewees tend to see the open movement not as an organized structure, but rather as a loose network. For some, the movement is a network of personal relationships, rather than organizations aligned around shared goals.

Many of those interviewed mentioned ongoing efforts to reframe openness, to develop new tactics, or even set new goals of open activism. This is work that they often do alone, at the level of a single organization or personal practice. There is a need for these explorations to be broader, meaning "movement-wide." Yet our interviewees observe a lack of initiatives and structures that could sustain such broader conversations.

> *We need to be looking 5-10 years down the line. And we need to be building a vision.* ***Because if we don't have that imagination, it can be really hard*** *just fighting to make the status quo a little bit better.*

The belief in the potential of the movement is accompanied by expectations of greater collaboration. Although the loose network structure seems convenient for many, it might not be the most efficient in terms of maximizing the possible impact of the movement that is desired by some.

> *If we want to really make an impact, then the organizations, at the organization level,* ***need to collaborate and work together*** *and do things that they can't do on their own — that can only be done in partnership with others.*
>
> *This movement faces a decision:* ***whether we should bundle efforts and energy and work towards a subset of possible goals that we can agree on, or whether we should just loosely coordinate****, with each of us doing their own thing. And I think where we are right now is loose coordination.* ***Maybe there's lots of small wins that can be had like that. But I think there's more potential in saying we work towards these three, four things that serve all of us.*** *That is something that's missing — a clear, intentional decision, and mutual understanding.*

Our interviewees point out a repeating set of needs related to a shared agenda: issues that the movement should be addressing, connections and broader coalitions that it should engage in, and narratives that reframe the idea of openness. What seems to be missing is a call to action to the activist networks.

In the loose and informal structures that characterize the open movement today, there is no clear answer to the question of who should voice this call. The movement is, after all, without leaders or decision-making mechanisms. Therefore, a way forward would be to establish a process or structure that would allow a shared agenda to emerge among willing organizations and activists.

*For me personally, these are the big unanswered questions. If we want to speak with one voice, if we want to be an impactful movement,* ***we need to find better ways in organizing our joint action.***

***We need an infrastructure for working together across different organizations.*** *And we need to be building a vision. Because if we don't have that imagination, it can be really hard; [we're] just only going to be fighting over making the status quo a little bit better.*

Such a shared agenda and structures for cooperation are a necessity for many of our interviewees. On one hand, they allow us to more effectively use limited resources. On the other hand, even the largest organizations feel that they are not strong enough to be heard on their own to positively impact the public debate.

***And I do firmly believe there needs to be consolidation in the open sector.*** *If we don't work more closely together, it feels very much all the time that we're competing for the same pots of money, when actually, we need to actually be much more coordinated.*

*We find it most useful when we are in a coalition. It's rare that our voice matters alone. But when we can speak with a larger group* ***we're sometimes listened to, and sometimes we're heard.***

Collaboration is also needed to make sense of the changing reality. The need to adjust to a changing reality has been a recurring theme in our conversations. While some of the leaders highlighted their efforts to do so, there is an overall sense that this remains a challenge for the movement. That it lacks, as a whole, means to do so.

*We need to address what's coming next, even though we don't know what it is. And that puts us in a position of weakness. For example, the best explainers for web3 issues come from Goldman Sachs. So for us not to know what's next has put us at a distinct disadvantage.*

## *Advocacy as a driver for collective action*

When discussing opportunities for collective action, our interviewees highlighted advocacy work. There is also a sense that advocacy work is distinct from other types of activism in that it is inherently political. Advocacy work allows for some of the most powerful changes to occur, thanks to collective action. It is also a way for the movement to be proactive.

> *Over the course of the last five years, we realized that we really need to be playing offense.* ***We need to have an affirmative vision. We cannot just be fighting to defend the status quo.*** *Otherwise, compromises will always be edging us towards more control, restrictions, monetization, lockdown.*

Advocacy does not involve the entire movement. Simply put, many activists are not interested in advocacy work, policy-making, or legal battles. There is, therefore, a sense that specific ways of collaboration are needed for shared advocacy to happen — that go beyond the loose couplings typical of the movement today.

> *If we want to connect different parts of open communities, then a set of shared values, aligning on those values is very important. But* ***if we want to advance our agenda and show results, then it would be better to work on shared goals****, on what we want to achieve.*
>
> *These are the big unanswered questions:* ***Do we want to speak with one voice, do we want to be impactful?*** *Then we need to find better ways of organizing our joint action.*

There is a symbiotic relationship between those who are involved in advocacy and the broader movement around them. The latter offers the opportunity for wider collective action, when the need arises. This is one more factor that makes advocacy campaign-driven.

> ***It is the specific campaigns that create the movement for a certain time.*** *And then we need to restructure and regroup. So I'm not sure whether there is a monolithic open movement, but I rather think of it as flowing and changing. And the campaign topic determines who is involved.*

The need for cooperation is also due to the growing complexity of policies that activists are trying to influence. Without cooperation, even the largest organizations struggle to find the capacity, as the range of regulatory issues that need to be taken into consideration continues to increase. This is related to the shifts we defined earlier and the need to pay attention to issues beyond the original, copyright-related focus of activism.

*There is a feeling that* ***the scope of the movement is changing, or we feel that it needs to change.*** *Personally, I think that it needs to. It's not just about openness anymore. It's also about GDPR compliance, digital rights, sovereignty, and so forth. It's a broader package of issues that are now becoming the frontier that we need to fight for.*

***The trajectory is just widening; we're in many conversations.*** *It used to be that we were having trouble getting into conversations and getting onto coalition letters. And now we need to try to focus. And very often I have to say, "this is super important, but we don't have the capacity to work on it."*

During our conversations, we have identified shared advocacy work as a powerful way to move forward. This involves intentionally building upon the strengths of the movement and charting a path for stronger connections and greater impact.

# _THE INTERVIEW SCENARIO

Welcome & introduction by the moderator.

## *Part 1: Current positions + ambitions*

Key questions (we might want to add some questions that drill down into specific issues of interest to us).

**1.** Please tell us about yourself and your experiences and history of working to support openness.

**2.** Please tell us about your organization/initiative. What is your mission, and how does it relate to the idea of openness?

**2.1.** How do you understand openness, if you had to define it?

**2.2.** Do you use the term "openness" directly? Is there another term that you prefer?

**2.3.** What is/are your motivation/s to be involved in supporting openness?

## *Part 2: What the movement should be doing*

*[If the interviewee uses the term "open movement" while answering the previous questions, you can jump straight to the 3.1 below; in the fragments highlighted in pink, you should use the term the interviewee uses when describing the movement.]*

**3.** With whom do you work on openness outside your organization? Who are your allies? Is it a defined group/community/movement?

**3.1.** Looking at this [space / movement] as it developed over the years, what is your general sense of the state of the [movement]?

**3.2.** Do you identify more strongly with a specific cause (here you can mention the field of open to which we assign a given person / organization) or simply with a [network/community] in general?

**3.3.** Are there other networks/communities/movements that you identify with? Can you tell us more about these networks/communities/movements?

**3.4.** At Open Future, we talk about the open movement. Do you agree that such a movement exists? If yes, how do you understand it? If not, what is the reason? Do you identify as part of this movement?

**4.** Let's imagine that we are organizing a strategic retreat for members of this movement.

**4.1.** What would be the key questions to ask?

**4.2.** What are the challenges that the movement (or if you don't want to use the term, your network, or community of organizations) is addressing or should address?

## *Part 3: Advocacy agenda*

**5.** We would like to learn in particular about your advocacy agenda.

**5.1.** What are you focusing on in your current advocacy work?

**5.2.** Are there any collective strategies/recommendations/positions/coalitions that shape your advocacy? In particular, we are interested in any such efforts at collective strategy-making that you are leading.

**5.3.** Has your advocacy focus shifted over the years; do you see a trajectory of change? Or rather a long-term focus on issues that you defined at some point in the past?

**5.4.** What files/issues have you been focusing on in the last few years?

**5.5.** Looking into the future, into the next 5-10 years, are there any new issues that either recently became a focus of your interest, or do you have a plan to engage with them soon?

Follow up:
Please share any relevant documents: strategies, advocacy positions, etc.

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This research was conducted by Open Future in collaboration with Centrum Cyfrowe, in the fall of 2022 with the aim of enhancing our understanding of the open movement. The report was written by Alek Tarkowski, Aleksandra Janus, and Zuzanna Warso. The research was conducted by Maria (Maja) Drabczyk and Zuzanna Ciesielska-Janik.

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**Open Future** is a European think tank that develops new approaches to an open internet that maximize societal benefits of shared data, knowledge, and culture.

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**Centrum Cyfrowe** supports openness and engagement in the digital world. Together with experts and practitioners open to change, it creates space for new ideas, skills, and tools development. It strives to ensure that the social interest is always in the first place in the relationship between humans and technology.

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