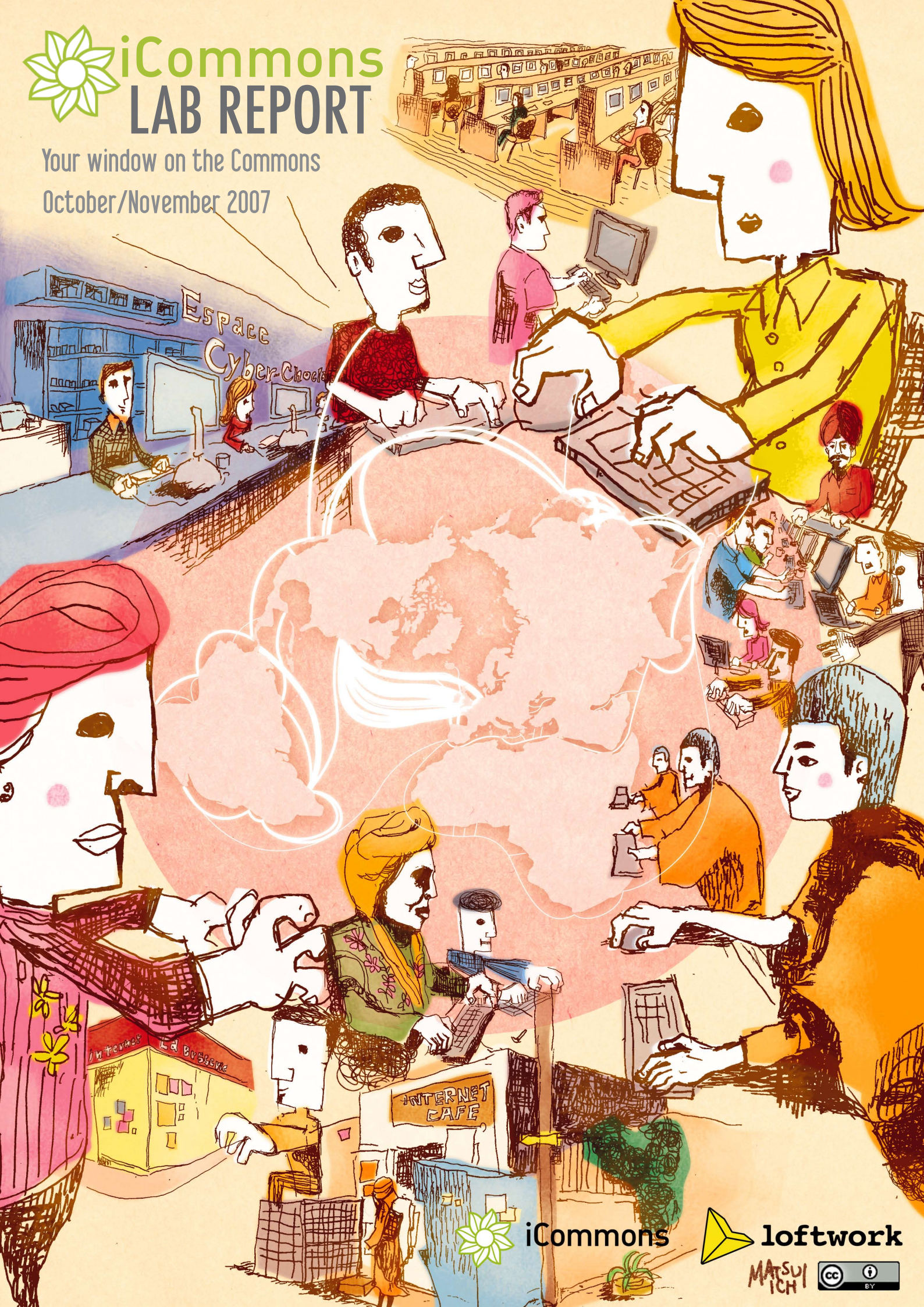


# iCommons LAB REPORT

Your window on the Commons

October/November 2007



iCommons



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# From JHB with love...

Dear global commoners

We had a jam-packed month at the iCommons office yet again!

Last week we hosted Jimmy Wales, Founder of Wikipedia and iCommons board member for a number of activities to launch the Wikipedia Academies in Africa in collaboration with the Wikimedia Foundation. Frank Schulenburg of Wikipedia Germany, Ndesnajo Macha, dubbed the 'Father of Swahili Wikipedia' and Ian Gilfillan (a.k.a. Greenman), a local Cape-Tonian Wikipedian, all visited us in Johannesburg to start this exciting project to help students and faculty in universities throughout Africa learn how to use Wikipedia to share and build African knowledge and culture.

On Saturday morning, the team gathered at CIDA City Campus in Johannesburg to start the Academy. CIDA is a very special university because it is the first free university in South Africa, and was started as a humble project by the visionary Taddy Blecher who was at our event to welcome us.

Although Zulu and Xhosa were the most widely spoken languages among the students whom we were working with to show how to edit local language Wikipedias, we had students from at least six of South Africa's official languages at the workshop. They were really excited to learn how easy it was to share knowledge of their cultures – not only easy, but empowering too.

The next day, we heard from a bunch of Afrikaans Wikipedians about their hopes for building Afrikaans Wikipedia, and about some of the challenges and successes during the six years of their existence. Laurens Cloete, one of the stars of Afrikaans Wikipedia, talked about the need to build the community of contributors, and about how to help out in growing smaller South African Wikipedia language communities – as he did last weekend.

Our final event for the week was a new event that we've launched in South Africa called 'The Innovation Series' where we are partnering with local business and media to discuss new 'sharing' approaches to Web 2.0. Jimmy Wales was a hit with the 130 people who attended the event, and did a great deal to spread the word about the Wikipedia Academies.

In terms of iCommons' strategy, last



Top and Middle: Jimmy Wales with Academy participants and with Ndesnajo Macha, father of Swahili Wikipedia, pics by Jimmy Wales, CC BY-SA 3.0. Bottom: Jimmy Wales speaks at the Innovation Series event, pic by matthewbuckland on flickr.com, CC BY-NC-SA 2.0

week's events were the start of a closer relationship with a community who we see as a major stakeholder in the global commons arena. We're thrilled to have co-sponsored the event with the Wikimedia Foundation and are looking forward to further partnerships with them in the future.

That's it from me. If you're in the Bay Area around the 30th of November, please let me know (we're having a party... AGAIN!) I'll also be speaking at the i4d film festival in Malaysia on the 9th of December if anyone is going to GK3 and wants to get together for a drink or two.

Best wishes,

**Heather**

heather@icommons.org

## Content

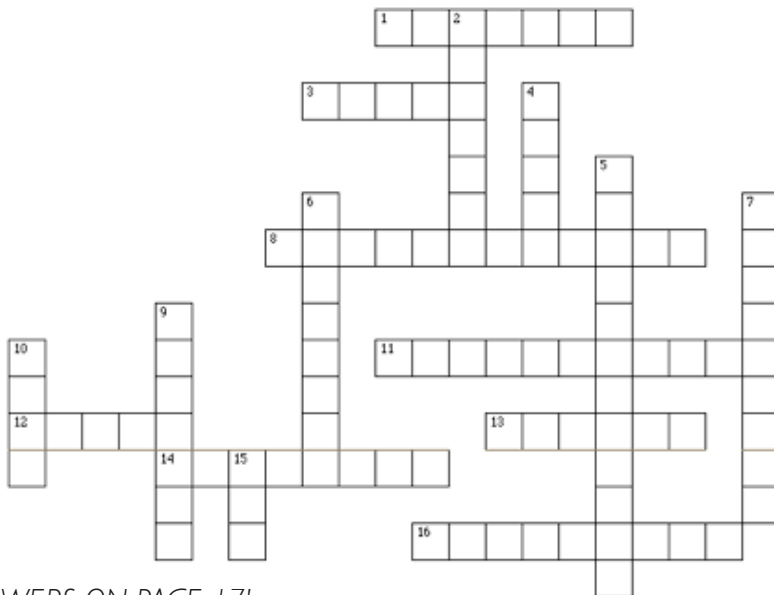
- 3 Ask Gogo**  
Gogo created an iCommons crossword this month, so test your iCommons knowledge now!
- 4 How Al Qaeda is using open source models to outsmart its enemies**
- 5 The growth of Arab Commons**  
Anas Tawileh gives us an update.
- 6-8 Commons Spaces**  
The Local Context Global Commons team from South Africa and Brazil take at how people access the Internet through cafes and in public spaces.
- 9-11 Focus on the Commons**  
A broad selection of articles: one focusing on the commons in India, the other on social networking sites, and one on how we can find order in chaos. The shared message: how do we make the commons truly inclusive and accessible to all?
- 12 A few old lessons (and some new ones) for Open Education in India**  
A reflection on a nation obsessively engrossed in the merit-acquisition business and some lessons on making education more equal to all.
- 13 Commons Toolkit: tips for running your own heritage digitising event**  
The iCommons teams share their experiences from an event they organised for the South African national public holiday, Heritage Day.
- 15 Commoner profile: a word or two with lexicographer Erin Mckean**  
Open your eyes to the fun new world of words as Daniela Faris did when she chatted to Erin about the future of online dictionaries.
- 16 Facebook is a nuisance but it does not 'steal' your content**  
Our legal columnist, Tobias Schonwetter discusses his ambivalent relationship with Facebook.

# Gogo's iCommons crossword

*get your brain in a twist...*



Although Gogo loves the commons community with all her heart, she sometimes finds herself emotionally weighed down by all the problems that the community turn to her with; burning issues such as: Why hasn't anyone voted for my article? Why can't I use all-rights-reserved images on the website? Is it really wrong for men to wear ladies underwear to the office? So Gogo decided that she needed to take some time out to recharge her batteries. She shutdown her computer, unplugged her dial-up connection and went to make a cup of tea. This month, instead of being inspired by Gogo's pearls of wisdom, you're encouraged to try a little brain teaser by yourself.



ANSWERS ON PAGE 17!

## ACROSS

- 1 Future iCommons Summit host city that means 'important river flowing through a plain'
- 3 Surname of the guy who led the Artists in Residence programme at the 2007 summit
- 8 City where iCommons head office is located in South Africa
- 11 The organisation that took their name from one of Lessig's books
- 12 The acronym for open source software includes another word for 'free' that many people omit
- 13 The iCommons logo is a ...
- 14 The company commissioned to create the beautiful iCommons Lab Report covers
- 16 Website with the payoff line: We're not evil

## DOWN

- 2 Open source animal
- 4 Surname of the administrator of the OER Case Study education node
- 5 South Africa's first open source astronaut
- 6 The Cory who is about to publish 'Little Brother'
- 7 Jimmy has recently been in SA to launch these
- 9 Low income residential areas in Brazil
- 10 2008 Summit month, which you should mark in your diaries
- 15 The law school that iCommons chairperson works at in Brazil

## Node reports: an update on iCommons community projects this month

### Media/events by Kerryn McKay

The [Wikipedia Academy: South Africa](#) node, which started out as a really good idea, turned into one really great event! It is rewarding to see how the objectives of this project were met. The objective was to: increase participation in South African languages other than English by running Wikipedia Academy workshops to teach people how to edit Wikipedia. On Saturday, 10 November, around 30 students from the CIDA City Campus got together in their computer labs to learn from Jimmy Wales and the Wikipedia and iCommons volunteer crew. This was the first ever Wikipedia Academy in South Africa, and it will be interesting to see recorded on the node the event management, logistics and outcomes for future academies and volunteers.

### Education by Kerryn McKay

Are we talking to each other? Perusing the education nodes I'm struck by the similarity and congruency of a few projects and their objectives within this node.

These projects have, on average, around two participants each; one administrator and one other. Furthermore, these harmonious ideas are, for the most part, simply that: a stated idea and objective and not much else. My question is, are people, within the same community, really

talking to one another to find common ground? The node space is the ideal space for project administrators to support one another through collaboration: to pool their ideas and resources and practically apply these to a workable project.

My challenge to project administrators of the following nodes is: take a stroll through the education node, you might find a valuable ally! [Free Textbooks](#), [OER Case Study Project](#), [The Open Content Teachers'](#) node and [Peer-to-Peer University](#).

### Science/Research by Rebecca Kahn

Shame on the Business Nodes, where nothing has happened since the last node report! The science geeks are outpacing you - two new nodes have appeared in the last month, and they're kicking.

[AcaWiki](#) is the first one, a very exciting node which aims to make academic research both physically and intellectually accessible to the general public, and to provide a space for both researchers and the general public to interact with each other.

The second is Open Access Publishers, which is a node which aims to provide information for academics, researchers and regular folks on Open Access publishers of scientific scholarly literature. The node features listings of two publishers already,

and will build on this as more members join the node.

### Culture by Daniela Faris

There are no new nodes in the culture category on [icommons.org](#) this month, and not many new developments in existing nodes either. Like Kerryn has encouraged the education node administrators to communicate, I'd like to do the same with culture node administrators. But I'd also like to encourage all node administrators to stop by the [icommons.org version 2.0](#) node to give us feedback on how to improve nodes for the future. Nodes are all about community, so making them as user-friendly as possible is a must, and can only be done with your input!

### Policy/law by Paul Jacobson

There are no new policy nodes this month, but if you'd like to get involved there are some great nodes waiting for participants! Take a look at the [Registered Commons](#) node, that's all about giving professional users or companies who want to use or remix CC works, reliable information on the licence and the creators of those works. And check out the [Document Format policy](#) node, which has been set up to develop a policy to guide the adoption of document formats both generally and by iCommons for its various purposes.

# How al Qaeda is using open source models to outsmart its enemies

by Amy Heydenrech

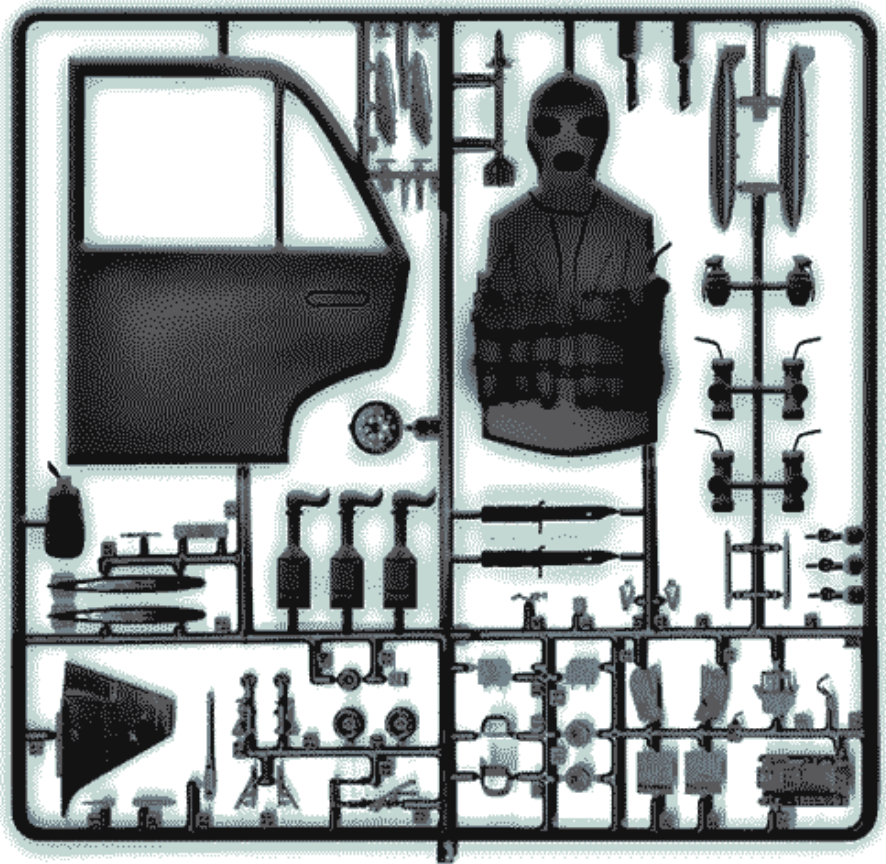
When one thinks of terrorist insurgents, the image of young cyber-experts hunched over laptops hardly springs to mind. Not surprisingly, the perception of terrorists has often been more rugged. The global imagination's terrorist is shrouded and hidden in caves scattered along the far-flung tundra of Middle Eastern borders. His suspected training camps can be traced and monitored using Google Earth. The origins of his weaponry can be tracked. In essence, the accepted conception of a terrorist is a tangible one.

However, an increased prevalence of personal computer ownership and availability of Internet access has irrevocably altered our notions of global security. A burgeoning online world has not only made it easier to communicate across borders, but has enabled parties to collaborate on anything from software to social organisations to create an ever changing, ever improving organic product. The al Qaeda terrorist insurgency is a case in point. Facilitated by a global digital revolution, this group is changing the face of terrorist acts at a pace that leaves the United States and its allies gasping in its wake.

## Applying the digital revolution to terrorism

The United States Department of Defense defines terrorism as, "the unlawful use of -or threatened use of - force or violence against individuals or property to coerce or intimidate governments and societies, often to achieve political, religious or ideological objectives." Al Qaeda, an international alliance of militant Sunni jihadist organisations, is a case in point.

Bearing the objectives of ending foreign influence in Muslim countries and creating a new Islamic caliphate, al Qaeda's affiliates have instigated attacks on various targets. The most widely reported attack is most probably the September 11 attacks in New York and Washington DC. Following these attacks, the United States government launched a broad military and intelligence campaign known as the 'War on Terrorism,' with the stated aim of dismantling al Qaeda and capturing its operatives. This campaign includes various military, political and legal actions taken ostensibly to curb the spread of terrorism. The U.S.'s belief that al Qaeda is a direct security threat to its nation state is not only justified by the September 11 attacks. The U.S. government website reports that al Qaeda leaders issued a statement in February 1998 under the banner of 'The World Islamic Front for Jihad Against the Jews and Crusaders,' saying it was the duty



Al Qaeda has earned the title of first guerrilla movement to move to cyber space, pic by Mushon on flickr.com, CC BY-NC-SA 2.0

of all Muslims to kill U.S. citizens, civilian and military, and their allies everywhere.

Currently, there are innate problems with this 'War on Terrorism' policy. Owing to its amorphous, all-encompassing target, the campaign itself is controversial. In addition to this, Al Qaeda's size and its structure of semi-autonomous cells makes the degree

The outcome of this migration to the Internet has been an uprising of young code-writing jihadists who collaborate to replicate the training, communication, planning and preaching facilities...

of responsibility for certain attacks difficult to establish. Physical counter-terror efforts have forced al Qaeda to find refuge in the online world. This increasing online presence of the group has made counter terror policy even more difficult.

Osama bin Laden's biographer Hamid Mir documents how, in November 2001 as the Taliban collapsed and al Qaeda lost its Afghan sanctuary, he witnessed countless al Qaeda members carrying laptop computers as they prepared to scatter into exile. This earned the group the lofty title of being the first guerrilla

movement in history to migrate from physical space to cyberspace.

The outcome of this migration to the Internet has been an uprising of young code-writing jihadists who collaborate to replicate the training, communication, planning and preaching facilities they lost in Afghanistan with countless new locations on the Internet. This is not dissimilar to any other social organisation on the Internet.

This means that, apart from its ideology and clandestine nature, the Jihadist cyber world is little different in structure from digital communities of role-playing games or eBay coin collectors. Continuous online contact binds dispersed individuals into sturdy communities. People who might never have met one another in the past are able to connect and communicate, and this allows for the flow of powerful ideas.

## Taking it a step further: Applying open source software theory to terrorism.

Former Air Force counter terrorist John Robb extends the globalist online rhetoric to the application of open source software development as a metaphor to describe the development of online terrorist cells. His description is dependent on the interpretation of open source being a set of principles and practices that promote



This 'bazaar of violence' functions similarly to the loose framework one witnesses in open source software development. Relatively small terrorist groups and insurgencies collaborate in a global forum to share ideas and join forces in the interests of growing and improving the efficacy of the group.

access to the design and production of goods and knowledge. Although the term is usually applied to the source code of software that is available to the general public, the spirit of the concept is that relaxed or even non-existent intellectual property restrictions allow users to create software content through individual effort or through collaboration. Not only a blueprint, but also an idea can be optimised and enhanced through the collaboration of users the world over.

In the case of software development, quite large groups are able to participate in the development of a software product. Low barriers to entry and high innovation rates mean that the complexity of the software tends to reach higher levels than if it were in the hands of one developer.

He argues that in the case of Iraq, similar levels of innovation can be seen that are brought about by similar fragmented groups and participants in the struggle. This 'bazaar of violence' functions similarly to the loose framework one witnesses in open source software development. Relatively small terrorist groups and insurgencies collaborate in a global forum to share ideas and join forces in the interests of growing and improving the efficacy of the group.

This can also function within an economic context. Robb explains, "Insurgency groups that are attacking don't necessarily all come out of the same group. Typically there is a financier; who hires a bomb maker, to make a bomb; a spotter to find the right location; an implanter who implantes the device; and a trigger team to detonate the device at a particular point." All these contractors work on an ad hoc basis for a single attack, and then disperse immediately after the attack. This effectively decreases the chances of being caught by law enforcement authorities.

### Fighting a new war: what the U.S is doing about it

Through chat rooms, online tutorials, customised news sites, online terrorist cells, jihadi-specific web browsers and online propaganda, al Qaeda has successfully utilised the Internet to form communities and share ideologies beyond the confines of physical space. Whereas this would ordinarily be seen as a positive catalyst for democratic correspondence, the prospect of terrorists using this network to their advantage has driven fear into the U.S, which is evident in their change in policy since the September 11 attacks.

In the face of such a mass of harmful content over such a broad and uncontrolled

space, the U.S has reacted by forming organisations to monitor the content. Any attempts to arrest offending webmasters have been largely thwarted and if they have been successful, it has been owed more to luck than successful Internet policy.

It seems that the U.S has chosen to focus its policy-making on more manageable tasks. In this case, this has been the formation of policy to prepare the state in the event of a 'cyber-attack,' which can be interpreted as a direct attack on the country's infrastructure using online means such as computer viruses. The policy-making has assumed an organic open source framework similar to that of the al Qaeda online structure, in the way that it attempts to integrate as many businesses and individuals into the monitoring and preparation of a 'cyber-attack' as possible. This effort is dwarfed, however, in comparison to al Qaeda's overwhelming grassroots support of its propaganda and ideologies.

It seems that it is in this ideological function that al Qaeda's power lies. Experts suggest that future U.S. policy will have to involve a closer monitoring of the ideological component of the al Qaeda in the same manner that it keeps tabs on terrorists in the real world, as this is where the most logical threat to the nation state lies.

This will require a realignment of U.S. intelligence and law enforcement agencies, which lag behind terrorist organisations in adopting information technologies. However, at present, senior counter terrorism officials refuse to even pay lip service to the need for such reforms.

Ultimately, the U.S.'s conception of what constitutes the boundaries of the state has been dislodged. This is because a globalised online world that does not fall within any sovereign boundaries is essentially anarchic. There is no over-arching power overseeing what is exchanged and developed online. The control is seized from past hegemonic powers such as states and global conglomerates and rather placed in the hands of individuals. Usually, this rise of individuality and online social cooperation is seen as a positive development. However, the online proliferation of al Qaeda has illustrated how such developments can allow for the dispersion and fertilisation of ill intentions. And interestingly enough, although it may possess the arsenal, the manpower and intelligence to face a physical insurgency, this online insurgency has left the United States and its allies lagging two steps behind their enemies.

## The Growth of Arab Commons

by *Anas Tawileh*

Ten months after its official launch, a quick reflection may shed some light on the Arab Commons project and its growth over the year. Arab Commons went live on 1 January 2007 with the ambitious aim of promoting the development of open content in the Arabic language and to educate creative workers in the Arab world about the philosophy of Creative Commons and the benefits they can reap by making their intellectual and creative works available under CC licences.

Arab Commons intends to build a directory of Arabic works that are released under any of the Creative Commons licences. For this purpose, the website provides an easy to use interface to search or browse published works. The website also offers "information packs" that provide a simplified explanation of Creative Commons, the different CC licences, how they can be used and their advantages, written completely in Arabic.

After ten months, Arab Commons' directory contains 11 full text books, seven poetry books, 46 art works, one magazine, one podcast and 11 articles. This may seem to be modest growth for a language that is spoken by more than 200 million people all over the world, but the picture is a little bit more promising if viewed in the light of the very slow growth of digital Arabic content on the Internet as a whole. Moreover, considering the completely voluntary nature of the project, these figures qualify as a plausible achievement.

On the outreach and media side, the project was able to attract considerably high attention. It was featured in several leading print newspapers and online blogs in the Arab world, and several speakers dedicated a slide or two of their presentations in different conferences and workshops to introduce Arab Commons. This is probably one of the project's strengths that can be built upon in the coming month to accelerate its growth.

Lastly, it seems that Arab intellectuals and creative workers, once they have their works digitised, are quite receptive to the ideas of the commons. What is still needed, however, is to convince them to cross the digital chasm.

Additionally, I believe that the focus should shift towards combining the promotion of Creative Commons in the Arab world with the larger objective of increasing the development of digital content in the Arabic language. It is in this regard that Arab Commons intends to join forces with other initiatives in the region to improve both the quality and quantity of Arabic digital content. The message is clear: let's develop more Arabic content, but even better - let's develop more "open" Arabic content.



Rocinha favela from the sky: depicting the social-economic divide, pic by SantaRosa from flickr.com, CC BY 2.0

## Welcome to My Lan-House: A New Wave of Digital Inclusion in Brazil

by Paula Martini, FGV

The majority of Brazilians who access the Internet today do so through lan-houses. LAN stands for "Local Area Network", i.e., computers assembled together to allow people to play multi-player games. Popular in Asia, in places like Korea, and previously existing only in the rich neighbourhoods of Brazil, they have now become a phenomenon proliferating in poor communities, especially the favelas.

A quick stroll around Rocinha, one of the biggest favelas in the world, will allow one to count around 130 lan-houses. And lan-house owners usually have no complaints about their business. Charging from US\$ 0.40 to \$ 1.50 for each hour surfing the web (or playing online games), their shops are full of customers. And the demand is actually larger than the installed capacity. In Fortaleza, a city in Northeast Brazil, there is a street where lan-houses stand side by side, each one belonging to a different owner. When questioned whether such door-to-door competition is not a problem, they say it is not. If the owner

had more money, they would invest in more computers, since the demand seems to be unlimited.

For a long time the lan-house phenomenon was noted only by anthropologists and social scientists. However, the lan-houses are now showing up in recent statistics. Research published by the Brazilian Internet Steering Committee (CGI.br) showed that 48,08% of the people from classes D and E who access the Internet do that from commercial places like lan-houses – this social-economic classifying criteria takes into account the household's education level and the ownership of a series of domestic utensils, then relates this data to a point system. The sum reached by each household is associated with a specific social-economic class, ranging from A to E.

### Happy Birthday at the LAN!

The Brazilian lan-house phenomenon is in part a side effect of a federal government programme called "computers for all". The programme, rather than taking a patronising approach of simply distributing computers to poor people, rather created credit lines that would allow low-income

families to purchase computers paying small installments every month for a few years (something like US\$25 per month).

The result was an entrepreneurship fever, in which small-time entrepreneurs would buy a handful of computers, and open a shop for people to play games. Soon, they would contract a broadband connection, and resell it through their computers, in both cases charging by the hour. Economist Fábio Sá Earp, a professor at Federal University in Rio de Janeiro, who was one of the first to analyse the phenomenon, says: "We attach to the idea of a young person going to a lan-house just for playing. But the point is: a process of appropriation of digital technology is in course. From the moment in which a poor 10-year old child accesses the web after school in order to update his/her blog or MySpace page, watch and share YouTube videos, download MP3 songs and chat via instant messenger, he/she is doing exactly the same thing that a middle class 10 year-old child that lives in Sao Paulo or New York does."

To understand the symbolic space occupied by lan-houses in Brazil, one



“This is a great popular entrepreneurship movement spreading all over Brazil, but authorities have been doing nothing to encourage it.”

can note a recent trend: many of the lan-houses now offer a special area for children’s birthday parties. Birthdays, which were once celebrated in Brazil in places like McDonald’s, are now migrating towards lan-houses. The host invites some friends and then provides free access for all of his guests. Party bustle is guaranteed – forget common sense: lan-houses are places of intense sociability, and have been occupying an important place in the life of the favelas. It is common to hear mothers say that they prefer their kids to be in the lan-house than wandering the streets with nothing to do.

### Economics, citizenship and public policies

The most interesting aspect of the lan-house phenomenon is that there is a clear potential for them to become a place for citizenship, e-government services, and even education. The lan-house owners mention that, in the morning, there are fewer people using the computers, since kids are at school. At the same time, community members always ask the owners for training courses, for instance, if there is someone who could teach them to use the computer. That makes one wonder whether some sort of public initiative could be promoted to explore this potential. Naturally, this should be a non-intrusive programme, which would not disturb their business model, especially because lan-houses are self-sustainable businesses.

Also, it is easy to see that public service potential is already emerging from the lan-houses. For instance, many of them offer services such as payment of utility bills, annual renewal of taxpayer enrollment (which might take a few months if you don’t have a computer in Brazil, and only a few minutes if you do), and even support to customers wanting to write resumes or to seek employment online. These services, already offered by many lan-houses, each cost around US\$ 0.50 to \$1.50, and include the assistance of the lan-house owner in each task.

Antonio Cabral, a professor at the Center for Technology and Society at the FGV Law School in Rio de Janeiro, emphasises this aspect of the phenomenon:

“This is a great popular entrepreneurship movement spreading all over Brazil, but authorities have been doing nothing to encourage it. On the contrary, a few city governments are passing laws restricting their usage. Lan-houses should in the least be left alone, because they’re promoting digital inclusion in the country without anybody’s help.”



Listen to an interview with Antonio Cabral, a professor at the FGV Law School, who elaborates on this topic.

# Open access in South Africa – not always as easy as it seems

by Rebecca Kahn

Unlike the realities in Brazil and the Korea, where thousands of people around the country connect to each other online using LAN houses or Open cafés, in South Africa, Internet cafés are still few and far between. Many tourists even struggle to find a café where they can check their mail while visiting the country – wireless hot spots in coffee shops and airports are more common.

There are many reasons for this, none of which are new to people discussing ICT development in South Africa. First, and probably most importantly in the case of Internet cafes and LAN houses. According to research by the Organisation for Economic Co-Operation and Development (OECD), the cost of a standard four Mbps ADSL connection in South Africa with a three GB usage limit costs over R500 a month, which is more than double the average cost of uncapped ADSL or cable connection in other members of the OECD.

Theft of the copper wires that are used to create network connections is also a huge problem in the previously disadvantaged areas in South Africa, both rural and urban. Hundreds of kilos of copper wire are stolen every month, which leaves subscribers without telephone or Internet access. Theft of equipment and hardware is another stumbling block to bringing Internet access to previously disadvantaged areas.

But it’s not all doom and gloom. There are a few pockets of really exciting activity and advocacy taking place around the country, and one of these is the Open Café in Potchefstroom, a small university town in the north-west of the country. We spoke to Anna Dani, the open source queen of the North-West province, about the challenges and rewards of running an open project in South Africa.

### How did Open Café come into being? Did you have to fund the projects yourselves, or was there input from donors and the community?

We started experimenting with ideas long ago – in 2002. We registered a domain (potchnet.co.za) and dedicated office space and time for the creation of a help desk that would provide people with guidance and tips on using computers and the Internet. We were not quite sure who would be interested and for a long time we had very few clients. All we wanted to do was be there and support people who get stuck with using computers. We wanted to provide support both online and offline.

In 2003 we decided to submit a proposal for the setup of an open source Internet café to the Shuttleworth Foundation. The proposal was accepted and we received seed capital from the Foundation that helped us with buying all the workstations,

all the hardware, and also to organise an official launch – for which we invited people from local schools and universities, members of local government and local businessmen.

Apart from this seed capital – all our projects are funded entirely by us through our software development company, Reedflute Software Solutions.

The café functions as an Internet café which also generates some funds.

### What community does Open Café serve?

Though Potchefstroom is a small town – our clients come from all walks of life – from the local universities, local high schools, primary schools, local businesses, local NGOs, sportsmen and women from all over the world, all the local townships – everyone has a different question to ask.



The Open Café in Potchefstroom (top) and scenes from Software Freedom Day at the Open Café in 2006 (below). All pics: szavannasa from flickr.com, CC BY 2.0

**Could you give an example of one or two of the projects you've run? Are they all educationally focused, or do you do advocacy and software development work as well?**

The idea of the café is really just to provide a space where people can come up with ideas. We try to help them with starting their projects and give them tips on how to run the projects once they started. Our main focus is open source advocacy, we spend time introducing people to Linux and open source software - this forms a basis for all other activities in the café which might have an educational focus, and sometimes the focus is on artists.

The café itself is the main project - to maintain and run it needs skills and patience. The café is there for people as an Internet café where you can do all the tasks you'd do in any other Internet café.

The café is also there to introduce people to open source software, we don't have Windows in the café, everything runs on Ubuntu Linux, faxing, scanning, music, and everything else is runs using Linux. This way people can test Linux and if they like it they can take CDs and try it at home or come to our open days and we can help them install it and answer any questions they might have.

We also have a Freedom Toaster, which makes it possible to distribute open source software more easily. Another project we are busy with is called Art Market Online - which is a support system for artists from all over the world. We work with a small group of artists, many of them from different parts of Africa. We help them use the Internet in various ways to connect with their audiences, market their works, set up their own blogs, and to publish books. We also spend time explaining to them about Creative Commons licences. Everything we do as part of this art project

is done using open source software and we try to use open content materials whenever possible.

**Are all your machines running open platforms?**

Yes all work is done on Ubuntu Linux, using programs like OpenOffice, Gimp, Firefox etc.

**What do you see as being Open Café's mandate within the community?**

The official list is:

- a) Developing successful open source users through peer-to-peer training.
- b) Development of general IT related technical skills with ongoing mentorship and support.
- c) Distribution of open source software via the Internet café.
- d) Introducing everyone to the open source project model and encourage everyone to start and run their own open source style projects
- e) Installation of open source based computer laboratories at schools
- f) Involving the public and university students in the setup of open source based school laboratories
- g) Introducing the local audience to the online databases of freely available courseware, lesson plans, books, music and other material licensed under Creative Commons licences
- h) Train everyone to be able to choose the appropriate Creative Commons licence for their works and add them to these online databases.

**The Open Café model seems to be the most logical one for South Africa, where access to hardware and the web is limited and prohibitively expensive. And yet, somehow, there don't seem to be than many Open Cafés in the**

**country. What do you think may be the challenges or difficulties faced by communities who want to start their own cafés?**

Starting and maintaining a café is quite challenging - since most people are still not familiar at all with Linux. Even if you have the software and hardware it takes lots of patience to make sure everything works when you want it to work. Having an effective support system is crucial and is normally not possible to get access to. We are a small initiative - our main objective is to make sure the cafe functions and serves as an example - we are busy finding ways to make it possible for others to set up their cafés - so far it has been a problem to find people who have the time, energy and the willingness to tackle all the challenges one faces daily to make sure we are always online, and to make sure all hardware is in working condition.

**If you had limitless funding, what would your vision be for Open Cafés in South Africa?**

The ultimate aim for this project is to have cafes within walking distance - or as close as possible to most in the communities and serve as an Internet café and a type of community center where people share projects, skills, ideas, network on a daily basis. In a way the café is meant to be an offline version of the net, providing a venue for networking and sharing just like one does with blogs, and with the Wikipedia, CCmixter, Sourceforge, Facebook, communities.

It is also meant to become a digital library with the help of the Freedom Toaster where all content is based on the community's needs.

Each café would be different and would always evolve and change based on the projects it is running, the audience it has.

## The iCommons Auction - Going, Going, Gone...

You'd better have your cash and your bidding instincts ready, because the iCommons auction has launched and runs till 14 December 2007. This innovative auction is made up of paraphernalia from some of the world's leading Internet figures. There's a huge array of items, from Lawrence Lessig's coat to pre-prints of Cory Doctorow's forthcoming, to-be-CC-licensed novel, Little Brother; #13 of only 20 plush versions of Firefox

Japan's mascot, Fox-keh; and four of Indian intellectual property expert Lawrence Liang's favourite Bollywood films: this auction is a celebration of free culture from around the world from those who make it and build it every day. All the proceeds of the auction will go to developing and sustaining iCommons' global projects. We're starting with these three very special items, so start rummaging through your pockets and looking for change under the couch.



For more information on these items go to: <http://icommons.org/auction>  
To bid on any of these items, please follow the links from the auction page.



# Accessing the Commons

## A Hypothetical from the Indian Context

by Allison Fish



Despite its ubiquity and apparent familiarity, particularly to my anticipated audience, the commons is a multi-faceted concept that is difficult to define. In part, this difficulty stems from a mismatch between theory and practice. On the one hand, from an activist perspective, the idealised commons is a romanticised space accessible to interested parties who also manage this resource through either democratic or consensus decision-making processes. On the other hand, everyday experiences demonstrate the struggles required to implement this ideal. In many cases management strategies are not inclusive and intended users often have difficulty in obtaining access. Thus, in practice, an individual's ability to negotiate participation and access often requires a specialised skill set. This skill set, in terms of the information commons both as a resource pool and a movement for social justice, might include the opportunity and ability to use communication technologies, such as the Internet, and literacy in at least one scholarly language, if not English.

Furthermore, the survey already accomplished in the Local Context/Global Commons project demonstrates the incredible variety that not only exists between different information-as-common-resource management systems, but also within any particular community of users. This variety, that in many senses deserves to be celebrated, also comes with its own drawbacks that must be addressed. For example, differences between commons users can serve to exclude certain members of society, such as the illiterate, from participation in and adequate access to the commons. Compounding this problem is the fact that it is often the already disenfranchised who are the excluded. One function of this article series, from my perspective, is to unpack the relationship between commons theory and reality through a contextualisation of specific instances of the commons. In doing this, the hope is to enlarge upon the future promise of this sharing technique. As a caveat – this contribution intends to prompt a preliminary discussion of, not resolution to, the complexity of the information commons through an analysis of the local Indian context.

...while improving access is (slowly) increasing for most excluded populations, it appears that there is a generation for whom such efforts will be to late.

Though the term "local context" implies some degree of uniformity - across space, through time, or amongst community members - I would argue that the Indian situation, specifically with respect to theorising the emergent information commons, offers a significant problematic. Simply put, despite being one of the "local contexts" for this node and acknowledging the development of an Indian national identity since late colonial times, it is important to note that the country contains great cultural diversity and social complexity. India's population presently numbers 1.12 billion, of which seventy percent live in rural areas and thirty percent live in urban areas. While there are two national languages, Hindi and English, there are sixteen other official languages of state communication many of which are associated with a unique system of writing. While literacy rates hover around 60% nationally, this figure varies considerably by the individual's state of residence (e.g., in Kerala, a state in the southern India, literacy is ~90%, whereas, in Bihar the rate is ~45%) and gender (in Bihar male literacy is ~61% and female literacy is ~35%). Additionally, literacy rates tend to be higher in urban areas. I argue that the significance that these statistics have for both the local, but especially the global, information commons is in terms of the participation and direct access of certain members of Indian society. For example, the typical rural middle-aged woman has had limited access to education, will tend to be illiterate, and though she may speak multiple languages fluently it might be in dialects that are not widely understood outside of the local district. Thus, this typical individual is without the skill set necessary for participation in the information commons. Additionally, the

The old and the new, who is being left behind? Top to bottom pics by mysticmusings, CC BY-NC-SA 2.0, mckaysavage, CC BY 2.0, Listen Up! CC BY-NC-SA 2.0, and SriHarsha PVSS, CC BY-NC-SA 2.0. All from flickr.com



building of the skill set necessary for such a population to access the information commons proposes enormous difficulties. Moreover, many might argue that this segment of society might not be interested in participation in the information commons, given the precedence of other concerns. However, I would argue that opting out of access simply from lack of familiarity and exposure does not constitute an adequate excuse for dismissing the participation of a significant portion of society. Thus, means must be taken to encourage participation at every level. However, and here is the rub, while improving access is (slowly) increasing for most excluded populations, it appears that there is a generation for whom such efforts will be too late. A generation of people such as the average, middle-aged, rural Indian woman upon whom the door to the information commons will close.

In his forthcoming book, *Red Tape: Corruption, Inscription, and Governmentality in India* (Duke University Press, 2008), Akhil Gupta focuses on the economic development within Indian society in the sixty years since the state won its independence from British colonialism. Gupta grapples with the question of why, in six decades, the Indian nation, which operates as a development state, has been unable to eradicate extreme poverty. He notes that though poverty rates have fallen in the past three decades approximately one quarter of the Indian population still lives in conditions that can be described as inhumane and in violation of basic human rights to food, medicine, shelter, and other necessary resources. In analysing the development projects sponsored by the state, Gupta notes that most resources are directed towards enhancing possibilities for coming generations, while abandoning older generations. As he discusses this phenomenon Gupta grapples with the question of what it means for the state, particularly a development state, to abandon an entire class of its citizens, equal members of Indian society, and how such a decision comes about.

Taking for granted the idea that the information commons is a diffuse social movement promotes general social justice and development and that this means it welcomes broad participation both at the global and the local level. The question this article means to ask is very similar to the one that Gupta asks in *Red Tape*. In India, and throughout the rest of the world, are we leaving a generation or a social class outside of not only the movement, but also its benefits, and, if so, how do we make our peace with this fact and acknowledge those that are left behind?

# Commons 2.0?

by Paul Jacobson

When I think about the concept of the "commons", I think about a marketplace of ideas and content being exchanged by willing (and often passionate) participants. The emphasis is on collaboration and the use of shared resources. There are sometimes rainbows and tie-dye involved in my daydreams of the commons. It is all very Woodstock and conducive to a culture of true sharing and meaningful exchanges of content and ideas.

The realisation of this dream, this ideal (in one form or another), is one of the purposes of Creative Commons and its partner in the sublime, iCommons. To a large extent achieving this goal is dependent on the form of media in question and the rights that attach to those media. No discussion about the commons is really complete without a discussion about the 'Tragedy of the Commons', which is described as follows on the Creative Commons site:

*"The 'tragedy of the commons' is the familiar notion that widespread public use of a commons leads to its inevitable depletion. But some resources, once created, cannot be depleted. In the words of Thomas Jefferson, 'He who receives an idea from me, receives instruction himself without lessening mine; as he who lights his taper at mine receives light without darkening me.' An idea is not diminished when more people use it. Creative Commons aspires to cultivate a commons in which people can feel free to reuse not only ideas, but also words, images, and music without asking permission - because permission has already been granted to everyone."*

Some of the concepts associated with the commons would seem to include open access, less restrictive (or no) licensing conditions on content made available and a collaborative spirit, if not a strong sense of community and the common good. As I mentioned above, lots of tie-dye. In this article I would like to toss some thoughts about social networks into the air and see what sticks to the ceiling.

Recent developments on the web slipped into my thought processes when I was considering how to approach this topic and I found myself thinking about social networks as facilitators of the commons. Social networks like Facebook, MySpace and their younger cousin, Plaxo Pulse, are heavily populated by users who share their content and thoughts with each other daily. Used appropriately, they could become the newest and most effective platforms for the commons on the web today. Going further, the digital nature of the content available on web-based social networks would likely circumvent the 'Tragedy of the Commons'.

Digital content could be reproduced almost endlessly with no discernible loss of quality and the sheer numbers make social networks a real candidate for the next iteration of the commons as a marketplace.

One of the features of the social web in the form of a social network (or social network infrastructure) that facilitates the commons must be that the network be openly accessible so that the broadest possible cross section of the broader community of users can access and make meaningful use of the service concerned. This would obviously rule out paid services and while it would seem to fit well with free social networks on the web, the question is "what about the unwired members of the community?"

If the more disadvantaged members of our community cannot share our experience of fast access to the web, they face an almost invisible bar to complete access to and participation in these social networks and to the content available on those platforms.

This issue has as much to do with universal access to broadband Internet access as it has to do with the accessibility of the service itself. The absence of Internet access renders these services inaccessible to the members of the community who can't access the Internet and in South Africa this represents the vast majority of the population. The percentage of people who can access the Internet through a broadband service is even smaller.

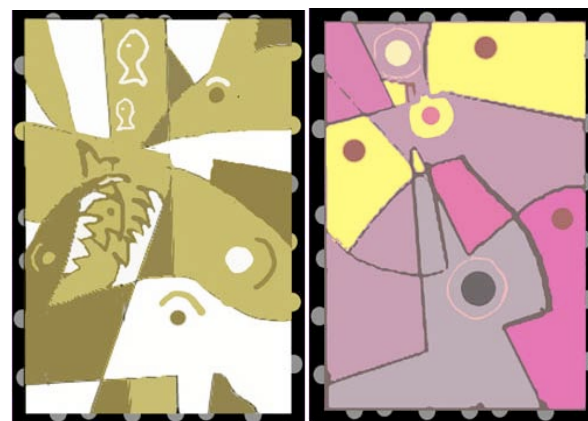
Leaving aside the issue of access to the Internet and therefore the tool to access social networks, the next question is how those social networks handle content flowing into and out of them. This is where a movement known as the Open Social Web comes into play and advocates mobility and control of your personal information, your ideas and your content. A social network that subscribes to Open Social Web principles facilitates users' ability to move their information, ideas and content into the social network concerned and out, if so desired, while ensuring that personal information entrusted to the service is protected from unauthorised disclosure.

In contrast, a "closed" social network either restricts who may become a member and what can be done with information, ideas and content introduced to the system. These sorts of services make it particularly difficult to export your data from the service in a format that facilitates easy import into another service. It may also be difficult, if not impossible, to export information such as your friends' list,



# The dice painting analogy for emerging ideas in the Commons

by Judy Breck



We tell each other that order really does emerge from chaos, that when we network a lot of pieces that don't seem to belong to each other and the pieces form a pattern, the whole becomes more than the sum of the parts. A commons is a kind of chaos, and what unites us is the conviction that the whole is more than the sum of the parts - that useful, meaningful patterns emerge. If these ideas are true, there ought to be a way to illustrate it. Right? How can we show order arising out of chaos? How can we look right at it? One answer is to use rolling dice to enter the random world, and then see what, if anything, emerges.

As I have been experiencing and thinking about the order, chaos and emergence of meaning in the new digital virtual world, I have seen interesting echoes of some of what I learned when I was doing a lot of reading and studying of aesthetics a couple of decades ago. Back then I created an exercise for myself of painting with dice. The roll of dice would decide where I would draw a line and in what direction. When I had created some shapes in this manner, more rolls of the dice would decide a colour for each shape that had formed. Once my universe (the space within the frame drawn on a piece of paper) was filled, I would look at it carefully to see what had emerged.

You can see two paintings on the top right, that emerged from my dice painting days, or look [at this webpage](#) which is based on a book I wrote in 2002 that included a discussion on the subject. In the description of the rules, you will see that I refer to the "swamp" from which the meaning of the painting arises. My blog GoldenSwamp.com is named for this concept — like a commons, a swampy place is something from which meaning can emerge by connecting parts that float openly within it. When the connecting happens in environments like these, the whole becomes more than the sum of the parts.

At this point, you have decided I am either being silly or profound. Either way, I think you will enjoy playing with this animation at <http://goldenswamp.com/expression/dicePaintingAnimation.html>.

As you play the animation, what you are watching is emergence for sure. Pieces arise in a blank space. Then colours are added into what begins as an all-white square. Each piece of the shape is a new small something. Each new piece of colour is one among many. Everything is miscellaneous - which is the title of David Weinberger's fast-selling new book about the virtual world: *Everything Is*

*Miscellaneous, The Power of the New Digital Disorder* (Times Books, 2007). This excellent book gives the background of how we humans have organised knowledge in the past and tells us why we must do this differently in the future because everything is now miscellaneous. Differently in what way? Well, the digital world is a commons, or more messily, a swamp. But the messiness is a good thing because it means openness.

I suggest that spending some time with the dice painting animation will show you that order can indeed arise out of the chaos of a miscellaneous bunch of shapes and colors. In the case of the animation, a harlequin emerges - not by my planning; the dice did it. If you get your own dice, piece of paper, pencil and colours, you can emerge with your own meaning. Just follow my rules or make up your own. After you have made your lines and put colour in your shapes, look carefully and you will see something - a bird, a fish, a martian, or some other complete surprise. When something begins to emerge, help it along with a dot to form an eye, or by adding an ear - whatever the mirror of the emergent being reflects in your mind.

The writing I do these days on my blogs and on [icommons.org](http://icommons.org) is about opening educational resources. This article is on that subject too. For us to make the most of opening education into the commons, we should make sure everything is miscellaneous. To accomplish that, everything must be open. One of the reasons a painting - or any work of art - is such a compelling analogy for order out of chaos is that something that is not open cannot be included in what emerges. By definition, every part of an artifact belongs and contributes to the expression of its meaning. For emerging ideas in the commons, the pieces that are not open are effectively not there and cannot add to the meaning. Opening educational resources in the commons is what allows knowledge to be formed, ideas to emerge and understanding to be shared.

So many social networks! pic by mattkeefe on flickr.com, CC BY 2.0

## Other Profiles [Edit](#)

- [Facebook Profile](#)
- [MySpace Profile](#)
- [Pownce Profile](#)
- [Twitter Profile](#)
- [Upcoming Profile](#)
- [YouTube Profile](#)
- [LinkedIn Profile](#)
- [Digg Profile](#)
- [Pandora Profile](#)
- [del.icio.us Profile](#)
- [Last.fm Profile](#)
- [Flickr Profile](#)

your personal preferences and habits and more.

Where a social network is like a walled garden with only specific entry/exits points available for users, it hardly supports truly open access to the content concerned and that means that the goal of a digital commons on the social web is further away than we may like. Some believe Facebook is an example of such a service whereas Google's new initiative, OpenSocial, seems to have been designed with the goal of facilitating open access and the creation of a digital commons across some of the most popular sites on the web today. It seems that both of these services/initiatives are really matters of degree and contributions towards what may emerge as a truly open social network that is completely open and facilitates the free flow of ideas and content.

The issue of meaningful access to the Internet remains an important component of this particular discussion. The emphasis is not just on access to the Internet but also on access to the same sorts of connections that are commonly in use by other members of the community. If the more disadvantaged members of our community cannot share our experience of fast access to the web, they face an almost invisible bar to complete access to and participation in these social networks and to the content available on those platforms.

While meriting an entire discussion in itself, it is worth mentioning that content licensing plays a tremendously important role in this debate on the commons. Content under copyright is simply not accessible in ways that would benefit the commons while content released into the public domain are perfect for the commons. In between these two extremes stand the six Creative Commons licences, which facilitate this sort of sharing in varying degrees.

It would take a convergence of a number of considerations to create a truly open social network and a web-based expression of the dream of the commons on the web. These considerations range from meaningful access to the Internet (and the social networks concerned) to unrestricted access to the networks concerned and, finally, the terms on which the content may be shared. If this convergence takes place, we could be looking at the commons 2.0, a commons for the web and a truly effective tool for the sharing of content and ideas for all to participate.

In Amartya Sen's "Development as Freedom" hypothesis, the removal of substantial "unfreedoms" is seen as intrinsic, rather than merely instrumental to the process of development. Different freedoms are observed to be mutually constitutive, for instance social and cultural freedoms – including educational opportunities – inevitably lead to greater economic freedom. The challenge before the state given this hypothesis is to provide maximal affordable access to educational resources to the greatest number of its citizens.

Since, in India, the financial means needed to organise the physical infrastructure of higher education is scarce, the criteria of "merit" is frequently resorted to as an arbiter that distinguishes students to whom higher education will be made available, from those excluded.

In urban India, on normal days, we are a nation obsessively engrossed in the merit-acquisition business. [Results.nic.in](http://Results.nic.in), the official website delivering examination results online claims to have received 40

million "hits" in 2006 – an average of about 100,000 a day. In March this year, 16 Class IX students in a government school in Shimla (aged between 13-15 years) studied "for 108 hours at a stretch, with little food and no sleep, for a place in the record books." Whether they succeeded in this crackpot scheme is not reported. A blurb on the website of Brilliant Tutorials – a popular distance examination coaching institution – boasts that "every year, well over 60,000 boys and girls join Brilliant and, at any point in time, there are at least 100,000 students pursuing various careers."

A casual consumption of these facts – reflective as they are of the media's fetish for ranks and figures – might easily lead one to imagine us as a nation on the march, making definite collective strides towards knowledge super-powerdom, riding upon the shoulders of the merit of our super-educated youth.

A glimpse at actual statistics on the reception of mass education in India however, casts an ominous shadow upon such celebratory visions. Reports of staggering numbers of applicants (as many as 170,000 to the Indian Institute of Management last year) seeking admission into universities every year must be squared with data that indicates that 90 percent of students who ever enroll in schools will drop out before completing their secondary education. Up to 27 percent of students between the age of 5 to 25 have never enrolled.

When one hears of 8,000 students being selected from up to three hundred thousand students attempting the entrance test to the Indian Institute of Technology (IIT) each year, one must also ponder at the extent to which differential access to expensive private coaching will determine the prospects of candidates. (The proportion of urban students between the age of 5 to 24 attending private coaching is more than twice the proportion of their rural counterparts. Note that this refers to a comparison of the proportion of students in urban and rural India, not their actual numbers.) The average annual cost of private coaching per student between ages 5 to 24 in rural areas is as high as 82 percent of the average total amount spent per rural student annually.

If boasts on websites can be believed, at least 52 out of the 57 students, a full 91 percent of students admitted in the Open Category into the National Law School of India University in 2006 were students who had received coaching at prices ranging from Rs. 4,000 to Rs. 20,000 (\$100 to

technological knowledge existing in most parts of India, where those excluded from the upper-caste, English-speaking bastions of the cyber-elite learn their tools."

Current statistics reveal that as little (or as many) as 40 to 60 million Indians are active users of the Internet. Viewed as a percentage of the population this is a meagre 4 to 6 per cent. However, this is close to the total number of graduates in India (48.7 million) and is adding users at a much higher rate than the number of new graduates every year (2.5 million). This hints at a degree of techno-literacy higher than figures of actual literacy would permit. A recent survey indicates that the Internet boom in India has been led not by the metros but smaller and non-metro towns where the number of Internet users has risen 69 times and 33 times respectively since 2000. According to the report "more than 60% of information seekers look for general information on the net and 45% look for educational information"

So whilst older forms of access barriers persist, the Internet remains a potential resource for self-learners who are "merited" out of formal channels of education. Yochai Benkler in the *Wealth of Networks* points out the "co-ordinate" benefits of access to the Internet – a search on Google delivers an "information product" that is not made possible by co-operation between various sites, but rather their simple co-ordinate existence. Without doing much more, by virtue of their mere existence on the Internet, open educational resources significantly enrich the information environment that we inhabit.

3) Access to educational resources at the lower and primary education levels in India is not impaired because of copyright restrictions. A study by Oxfam on the costs of education in India reveals that expenditure on school uniforms are the highest component of this cost. This is because for years, school textbook production has been a state-conducted or regulated activity and almost ubiquitously, textbooks till the high school level are either affordably cheap or free. However, this says nothing about the content of these textbooks, which in some instances are either inaccurate or unimaginative or prejudiced. It is here that the Open Textbooks model of peer-produced materials could make an invaluable contribution, not by seeking to replace the textbook, but by making alternate resources available to be drawn upon by students and teachers alike.

4) The contemporary model of the university as a nucleus of centralised, hierarchically organised information production, that also sells accreditation has been under attack for some time. This is evident from some of the findings displayed in the video shown [here](#). The Open Education movement would do well to learn from these criticisms and to try not to be an electronic substitute of the University, but rather employ the several affordances of the Internet in the service of alternate education models.

by Prashant Iyengar

## A few old lessons (and some new ones) for Open Education IN INDIA



Picture by focus2capture on flickr.com, CC BY-NC-ND 2.0

\$500) per year. By contrast, the average annual expenditure on general education per reporting student of age 5 to 24 years in rural areas was Rs. 576 (\$15). Ninety-five per cent of the population in rural areas spends no more than Rs. 500 every month.

The above contrasts should not, however, detract from the conclusion that in India merit is mass produced. Quite the contrary, the contrasts above confirm that like most goods in industrial societies, merit in India is unequally distributed.

From this lengthy preamble, I'd like to jump straight to the relatively short "lessons" that I'd promised in the title.

1) The development of the networked information economy and the widespread diffusion of information technology give rise to new opportunities for learning. But, as Geert Lovink reminds us, "Open Access only exists for those who have made it to the machine and are literate enough to login". To that extent, "celebrations of inclusion" by the open access movement appear as so much "rhetoric that hides actual existing exclusion mechanisms".

2) The persistence of traditional exclusion mechanisms notwithstanding, we may be encouraged by an anecdote that Ravi Sundaram recounts in his *Recycling Modernity* about Selvam, a lower-caste typist who learnt programming by "devouring used manuals, and simply asking around". What Sundaram describes is a "world of informal



# Hints and tips for running your own heritage digitising event

by Daniela Faris

On 23 September, the day before South Africa's national public holiday, Heritage Day, iCommons organised an event to celebrate the diversity of our people's backgrounds and cultures.

The aim was simple – to build an online repository of South African culture and heritage – as lived in the day-to-day lives of ordinary South Africans, to be added to the growing collection of indigenous content on Wikimedia Commons.

We set up a stand at our local mall, and asked the South African public to bring us their photos depicting their culture, heritage and traditions so that we could digitise them and upload them to WikiMedia Commons as a way to illustrate South African-related Wikipedia articles.

We asked people to contribute audio memories of their lives in South Africa, as a way to preserve their precious stories for the future. We had a wonderful team of volunteers who wrote some of the WikiMedia Commons uploads into Xhosa, Zulu and Sotho, and translated some of the audio memories too.

The results: 18 WikiMedia uploads, 15 audio interviews and 380 Flickr photos! We heard some amazing stories that reflected the diversity of our country: about practising Zulu traditions in the city of Jozi, about the history of a Johannesburg street in 1950 that is now a bustling business centre, and about the adjustments of a Dutch immigrant family in South Africa.

We thought that you, as members of the iCommons community might be keen to run a similar event in your part of the world. So, we gathered together an easy to use 'hints and tips' article based on our experiences.

Note that the usual procedures of budgeting, fundraising and marketing are not discussed in this article. This is not a step-by-step outline to recreate the event. We preferred to highlight some of the issues, processes and ideas specific to this project that worked well for us and would be most beneficial to you.

## Define your goals up front

The adage is considered true for good reason, but interestingly the iHeritage project raised a few surprising issues that were thrashed out at the iCommons office in the run up to the event.

We started with deciding which online uploading service to use. After some back-and-forth discussion we decided that our main priority was to make the contributions useable and relevant – there is no use going through the motions to end up with a stack of scanned photos to be stored away neatly and never used again.

The result was a 'two-pronged' approach. Allow people to upload to Flickr, and tag their content as 'iheritage'. The benefit of this approach is that the many people who already have their photos on Flickr can simply re-tag their pictures to be part of this initiative. The other option was to upload the content to WikiMedia Commons, which is easy to use, compatible with open licences, and most importantly – gave the newly scanned heritage donations a valuable purpose: to illustrate Wikipedia articles about South Africa.

The next issue to tackle was the matter of licensing. A question that was raised was: will the South African public, who have probably never heard of Creative Commons licences, be willing to donate their precious images freely? Should we be prescriptive as to how 'openly' they should licence their work by asking that only CC Attribution and Share-Alike licences be accepted? But as one participant said, "I don't want to see my grandfather's face on biscuit tins, billboards or fridge magnets." We debated the pros and cons of these issues – such as how the Share-Alike licence often wards off rampant commercial use. In the end a middle ground was found: all content uploaded to WikiMedia Commons would be CC BY or CC BY-SA, while the uploads to Flickr could choose from any of



Top: The iCommons team, who worked to organise this event. Front, from left: Kerryn, Heather, Rebecca and Daniela. Back: Wendy and Paul. Missing from this picture is JC. Below: Wendy was on scanner duty during the day. Photos by Neil Kirby, CC BY 2.0

the Creative Commons licences available.

## Online vs. 'real world'

Thanks to the power of the Internet this initiative can include more than just the people who attend the event. Try to do an online marketing campaign that highlights how people can scan their photos at home, and submit them through online upload services. Writing clear instructions on how to do this is key - take a look at [this great 'how-to' on uploading to WikiMedia Commons](#).

## Find the right spot

Try to find a public space that is central and has heavy foot traffic – this will ensure that you will tweak people's interest as they walk by, and you can

be easily found by those who are bringing their contributions to you. We chose the Rosebank Mall on a busy Sunday morning, in a spot next to a coffee shop and on the way to the local supermarket – perfect!

When sourcing a space for the event, remember that you'll need an Internet connection and tons of plug points.

## Scanning

Beg, borrow or steal a high quality scanner for this event. Your usual office scanner will work, but will not produce high-resolution copies that are best for reproduction and sharing down the line. We borrowed a scanner from Lawgistics, a company that provides high resolution scans and document conversions to the legal community in South Africa. Ask around for a scanner from

similar companies in your country, or ask your library, school, post office or stationery provider to donate one for the event.

### Get Wikimedia Commons set up

A wonderful iCommons volunteer and self-proclaimed “wikimedian”, Brianna Laugher took an interest in the project and set up this [great upload space](#) on Wikimedia Commons specifically for the iHeritage event. This was immensely useful for uploading content in a central and easy-to-use space. If you are planning on running a similar event be sure to contact your friendly neighbourhood Wikimedia Commons enthusiast to help you out!

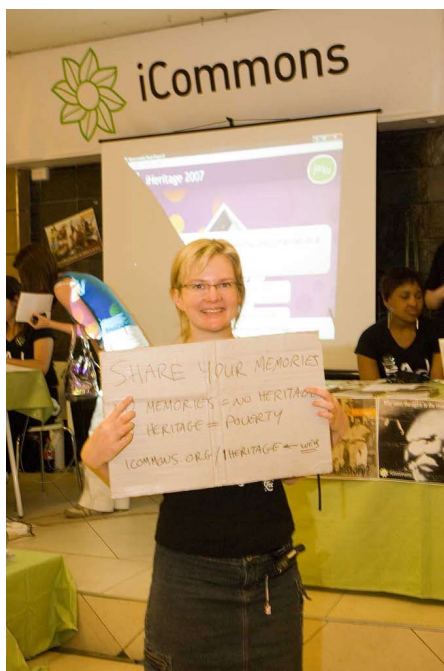
### Involve the legal eagles

No matter how switched on the public is to Creative Commons and the issues of copyright, it would probably be best to get your legal advisor to draw up a consent form to make sure that people are aware of the implications of releasing their content under a CC licence. To make sure that people were 100% informed we published the human-readable CC code on the consent form, and provided an additional copy of the code for them to take home too.

### Attract attention

On the big day, make your scanning and uploading station look attractive. We hung an iCommons banner, covered the table in bright tablecloths, made eye-catching posters and set up a screen to display our efforts to spectators.

We used a content aggregation application called Jaiku to track our online uploading progress through the day. Jaiku made a flash application available for the event, which we projected onto a screen behind us. This was a funky and animated way to show the photos as they were being uploaded. Even better, people could send messages into the channel, which the iHeritage team used to great effect. We kept passers-by updated on what was being said in the audio message that were being recorded, and the background to the



Heather made a sign to draw passers-by to participate in the event. Picture by Neil Kirby, CC BY 2.0

photos that were being uploaded, as they happened.

The posters were also visually stimulating and asked questions like: “Who owns the rights to the images of our heroes?” and “How can we use Wikipedia to write our own history?” We hoped these would spark some thoughts or emotions on why digitally preserving our heritage and sharing our culture is so important. See the posters on [Flickr.com](#), and feel free to reproduce or remix them.

Both the posters and the Jaiku projection were hugely successful – people slowed their pace as they walked past to read the questions and the messages, and some even stopped to find out more and engage in discussions on the topics.

And if all else fails, making a ‘human’ billboard (see photo above!) is cheap, easy and effective!

### Incentivise or die!

We struck a deal with the owner of the

coffee shop right next door to our scanning station: they would offer a free cup of coffee to every person who contributed to the project! Great for them (extra people who were probably going to order a slice of cake with that cuppa!), and great for us (an added incentive for people to contribute!) You may want to negotiate similar deals with the restaurants or businesses near your scanning station.

### Get a production line going

We recommend planning a ‘production line’ for dealing with contributions on the day. As there was an informal feel to our event that encouraged movement and interaction with the public, it wasn’t necessary for the volunteers to stick to their stations throughout the day, though at least one person was available to fulfil each step in the process at any time. However, defining a process for dealing with the material is an important part of making the whole day a success, especially for moments when a host of people arrive at once to have their photos scanned or audio memories recorded.

We had two people available to greet contributors as they arrived, to explain the project and process, and to get them to sign the legal release form. Then we assigned one person each to manning the scanner and audio recordings, and three pairs of uploaders and translators working together on writing and translating captions. The time consuming work of editing audio recordings was only completed and made available online, a few days after the event.

After a day full of chatting to fascinating people, listening to South Africa’s authentic stories of past and present, of WikiMedia highs and projector woes, we learnt a great deal, and set the wheels in motion to expand this collection of freely-licensed cultural content. We hope to do this again, with better knowledge from our first attempt, and we hope you have great success too. If you’re going to be running a Heritage content sprint in your part of the world, be sure to let us know so we can compare notes!

## Lessons learned

While the event was a success, we could have ironed out a few hitches. Here’s what you can do to make the day run smoothly!

### Don’t underestimate the popularity of audio recordings

We only assigned one person to record interviews, but she was inundated the whole day! The audio recordings were very popular because anyone could be involved – they didn’t need to come prepared. Try to assign a few people to this task.

Try to explain the term ‘heritage’ to make it as inclusive and familiar to as many people as possible. Interestingly, some people replied to our request saying: “Me? I don’t have a heritage!”

### Test your equipment before you set up

When we started to set up we realised our hired projector wasn’t working. We managed to borrow another projector from a friend, but this did delay the start of the event.



While gathering research for my interview with lexicographer Erin McKean, I had a sudden, humbling realisation. I take words for granted in a big way. Now that I've confessed, you should think about it too - how often do you race through texts in order to come to terms with its overarching message, without appreciating the choice of words that the writer selected to make his or her meaning known exactly the way it was meant to be? Or when you are writing do you really consider the vast range of words you could use to be that much more erudite?

My moment of enlightenment led me to start thinking of all the many-syllabled words I could have used to more impressively form this article's introductory paragraph. I was stopped in my tracks when I was suddenly overwhelmed with a mild panic attack and had to engage in pranayama exercises. I have similar feelings when spending too much time in a library, or wondering around the web for too long: so much knowledge - so little time! Although in this case I was word-stricken.

After calming down, I decided to embrace the vast universe of words and found myself distracted by Googling the meanings of the most fascinating words I could find, while proceeding on a 20 minute tangent to try find the longest word in the English dictionary. For your information, it turns out that this depends on the definition of what constitutes an English word, though I think the most convincing one is 'pseudopseudohypoparathyroidism' - the longest non-coined word in a major dictionary. (Now try saying it five times fast!)

Let's say Erin McKean opened up a world of weird and wonderful words for me. Which makes sense because she's Chief Consulting Editor for American Dictionaries for Oxford University Press, and the author of the aptly titled *Weird and Wonderful Words*, *More Weird and Wonderful Words*, *Totally Weird and Wonderful Words*, and a book on words of love from around the world, *That's Amore*.

Ethan Zuckerman, in his post about her address at Pop! Tech 2006 said, "People assume they're [lexicographers are] the cross between the stereotype of librarians and stern nuns: grammar thugs who will tell you you're mispronouncing 'nausea' and then tell you to wash your hands." Well, Erin, who has been referred to as "the queen and rock star among lexicographers" is not that type of girl.

For one, Erin is a self-proclaimed geek who runs two very cool blogs called [Dictionary Evangelist](#) and [Dress-a-Day](#), and she guest blogs on various sites too. She is a member of the Advisory Board of the Wikimedia Foundation, and has great ideas about how the Internet is changing the way that lexicographers do their jobs, and how we use dictionaries online. She gave an informative talk at TED in March this year on the topic - [check it out!](#)



Picture of Erin from Wikimedia Commons under a GNU Free Documentation Licence

## Commoner Profile: A word or two with lexicographer Erin McKean

*Open your eyes to the fun new world of words, as **Daniela Faris** did when she chatted to Erin about the future of online dictionaries.*

In her address at TED, she spoke about how the Internet is speeding up the process of compiling dictionaries, but it hasn't changed the original, static design of online dictionary pages. While Wiktionary, a collaborative project to create a free multilingual dictionary, is one of the most popular wikis on the web, with 566,815 entries in 401 languages - according to her vision there seems to be a whole world of opportunities for making dictionaries even more user friendly in the dynamic world of the Internet.

I was really interested to delve deeper into this issue and find out more about how digital technology will affect the way we use, create and access dictionaries in the future. I chatted with Erin to learn more about herself, about her 'sci-fi' dictionary of the future and how we can make her dictionary dreams come true.

**Question: Imagine that it's the year 2027. What format do dictionaries come in, how and when are they used, what bonus features do they have to make words more meaningful, and do lexicographers still have jobs?**

Answer: Well, as it's my vision of the future, I'd like to think that lexicographers would still have jobs... But in 2027, I think

that dictionaries will be ambient. They'll be built into everything - every book you buy, every gadget you carry - and they'll give you word answers whenever and in whatever format you like. So if you're reading a book and come across a word you don't know, you'll perform some minimal gesture and see the word's meaning, etymology, pronunciation, and then a list of the other places that word's been used, both by the author you're reading and other people.

You'll also see statistics: how frequent is the word? And maybe even other information, such as words that are related, words that people using this word use or avoid, etc. You'll be able to leave your own comment about the word, too, for other people to read. Basically, you could get any kind of lexical information you could imagine, and it would be customisable, too. You'll be able to add words to your 'life list' automatically - how cool would it be to have a record of every word you've ever read, with frequency statistics? It'd be used for writing, too - you'd be able to set 'reminders' for yourself, so if you used a particular word too often you'd be reminded to switch it up. And as new words were coined you could subscribe to a new-word feed, filtered by subject. I could go on...

"I think we need to start thinking that every word is worthwhile, and figure out how to be more inclusive..."



**Question: With your vision for 2027 in mind, do you think that we are currently starting to move towards realising that vision, and how are we doing this?**

Answer: Whoa! I think we are starting to see interest in this vision, if not yet significant movement, at least if the number of people emailing me can be taken as an acceptable metric...

I do think the wiki-model is very interesting and will be essential to integrate into any new dictionary thinking - what words mean is a shared delusion, after all! The important thing is to come up with a method to show what is fact and what is opinion; both have their place in describing a word but shouldn't be conflated.

To get to the 2027 dictionary I think we need to start thinking that every word is worthwhile, and figure out how to be more inclusive, both theoretically and practically. By 'every word is worthwhile' I don't mean that every word can be used in every situation - I just mean that all words are worthy of the 'dictionary treatment'.

**Question: How did you know that you wanted to work as a lexicographer? What was the defining moment?**

Answer: I've wanted to be a lexicographer since I was eight years old; hardly anyone ever believes this but that's because the story is so unbelievable. When I was eight I read everything that my parents brought into the house (which was hard on them, since if they wanted to read anything unsuitable for an eight-year-old they had to hide it). One day my dad brought home the Wall St. Journal and I read an article about the creation of the Supplement to the Oxford English Dictionary and thought - that's it, that's the job for me.

In fact, that article was so important to me that I saved it! It turned up a few years ago and I scanned it, so if you want to see it yourself, [it's here](#).

**Question: So, to conclude, I bet you get asked what your favourite word is all the time, so I'd like to know what is the most surprising word you ever discovered, and why was it surprising? (I'm thinking surprising as in "Wow, I would never have thought that word belonged with this meaning!")**

Answer: Oh, that's a hard question! Actually, the reverse is more often true - I often find words that couldn't possibly mean anything but what they mean, words like 'yggology', which is the study of palindromes. But I have had people tell me that my favourite word, 'erinaceous' (which means 'like a hedgehog') doesn't seem like me, as I am neither spiky nor shy!

## Facebook is a nuisance ... but it does not "steal" your content!

This month, *iCommons'* resident copyright columnist, **Tobias Schonwetter**, discusses his ambivalent relationship with Facebook.



Personally, I don't like Facebook. And that's put nicely. What once may have started as a useful tool to stay in contact with people over great distances has, in my opinion, become an often imbecile and time-killing application for the exchange of trivialities with a high danger of addiction. Facebook activities cost businesses a lot of money due to the fact that employees can increasingly not withstand the temptation to use Facebook during working hours. In the UK alone, Facebook is currently estimated to set employers back by £30.8 billion (US\$ 63.7 billion) per year. I also strongly believe that Facebook devalues the understanding of real friendship: it is a strange phenomenon when your "friendship" count essentially determines your coolness factor although a closer look reveals that most of these so-called friends do not even deserve to be referred to as acquaintances.

Recent and not so recent conspiracy-fuelled rumours that Facebook was initially started by the CIA as well as the US Department of Defence, and the allegation that Facebook is still used to obtain large amounts of data from its users for these institutions, are far from being proven true - yet, such rumours surely add to the uneasy feeling that I have about Facebook. Against this background, I disapprove of having to agree to the following terms and conditions in order to become a member of Facebook - do you?

*"Facebook may also collect information about you from other sources, such as newspapers, blogs, instant messaging services, and other users of the Facebook service through the operation of the service (eg. photo tags) in order to provide you with more useful information and a more personalised experience. By using Facebook, you are consenting to have your personal data transferred to and processed in the United States."*

In a nutshell, I think that rather than frittering away time playing on Facebook, people should read a good book, work, meet real friends in person (just call them if they are too far away!) or start making the world a better place; in short: get a life! And stop asking me all the time "Are you on Facebook?" - I am not and never will be.

All this said, I have to admit though that an incident on Facebook gave me a

good laugh the other day when my friend Peter\* told me that after a long night out he added "sex" to his list of interests on Facebook. The next morning, he realised that this was probably not the smartest idea and so wisely decided to delete the word again. What he did not take into account was that, as a result, his 100-odd list of "friends" received an automated notification from Facebook similar to the following: "Just to let you know: Peter is not interested in 'sex' anymore!" Well, he obviously had some explaining to do over the next few days, and even the CIA might now be intimately acquainted with his personal life!

There is only one area in which I support Facebook: Copyright Law, the subject of this very column! As an online service provider (OSP), these days Facebook is constantly in danger of being sued and held secondary or contributory liable for copyright infringement taking place on its site by its users. In this respect, I argue vigorously for both a narrow interpretation of the concept of liability and broad and effective exceptions from such liability, often referred to as safe-harbour provisions. I also regret the recent and far-reaching renunciation of liability-limiting principles which were developed by the US Supreme Court in the famous *Betamax* decision (464 U.S. 417 (1984)). The Supreme Court stated in its decision in 1984 that "[t]he sale of copying equipment, like the sale of other articles of commerce, does not constitute contributory infringement if the product is widely used for legitimate, unobjectionable purposes, or, indeed, is merely capable of substantial non-infringing uses". However, in the online environment, the mere enabling of direct copyright infringement seems to be increasingly sufficient in a growing number of countries to trigger secondary liability,



despite the fact that a tool, like Facebook, is indeed capable of, and in fact used for, substantial non-infringing uses. The issue of OSP liability has been widely discussed and I do not want to further contribute to the debate at this point.

What I do want to address, however, is the increasingly heated debate over another clause in Facebook's terms and conditions. The clause in question reads as follows:

*"By posting User Content to any part of the Site, you automatically grant, and you represent and warrant that you have the right to grant, to the Company an irrevocable, perpetual, non-exclusive, transferable, fully paid, worldwide license (with the right to sublicense) to use, copy, publicly perform, publicly display, reformat, translate, excerpt (in whole or in part) and distribute such User Content for any purpose on or in connection with the Site or the promotion thereof, to prepare derivative works of, or incorporate into other works, such User Content, and to grant and authorize sublicenses of the foregoing. You may remove your User Content from the Site at any time. If you choose to remove your User Content, the license granted above will automatically expire, however you acknowledge that the*

*Company may retain archived copies of your User Content."*

This clause has provoked a number of people to accuse Facebook of stealing content, while others wrote legal nonsense like "it's good to be aware that your photos become the property of Facebook when they're on the site." In fact, the clause simply states that Facebook has the right to use all the content you upload for a variety of reasons until the content is removed by the user. So, what's the big deal? Without a doubt, there are some OSPs that I expect to be a little bit more discreet with my data – such as banking websites. But Facebook? C'mon. Surely, nobody really wants Facebook to advertise its services widely with his or her drunk pictures from the last "Prom Gone Wrong" party. But if you do not want certain things to be seen by others just don't upload them onto the Internet in general, or onto Facebook in particular. You might argue that Facebook is only a semi-open network and that content is therefore not meant to be shown to anybody who is not within your network of friends. But, quite frankly, this argument strikes me as fairly short-sighted and naïve. More importantly even, the clause did not appear out of the blue but was already there when you clicked the button

saying that you agree to Facebook's terms and conditions .

From my point of view, iCommons contributor Steve Foerster has elsewhere pointed to the only surprising oddity of the above clause. This is that despite the fact that no one has, of course, the right to grant the required licence pertaining to public domain works or most CC-licensed works created by someone else, the clause stipulates that "you represent and warrant that you have the right to grant" such licence. In this respect only, something is not quite right here and the clause clearly needs to be revised.

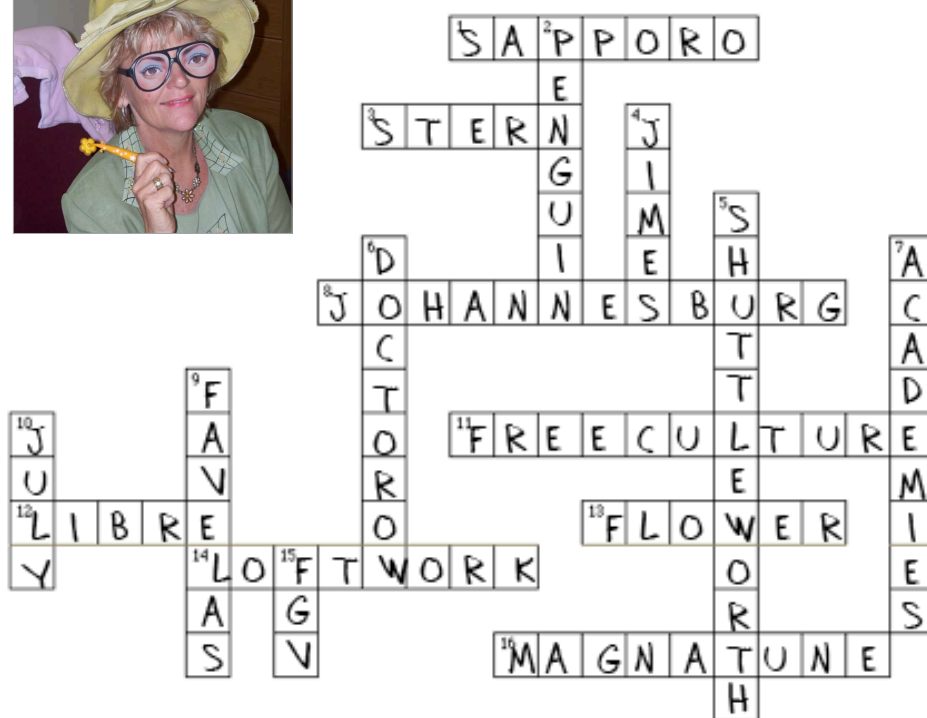
So after all, to me Facebook remains a nuisance on the one hand, and an incomprehensible cult on the other - a cult that I do not intend to join. However, from an objective legal perspective, it is noteworthy that Facebook is indeed deserving of protection and that not all recent accusations are justified.

And by the way: If you want to follow my advice and read a good book instead of spending your precious time on Facebook, I have just started reading Cory Doctorow's *Down And Out In The Magic Kingdom* and so far it is a really cool read! At least cooler than, say, 300 Facebook friends; I promise.

\* name changed

# Gogo's iCommons crossword

## ANSWERS



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