



The European Thematic Network on the Digital Public Domain
<http://communia-project.eu>

The COMMUNIA Thematic Network aims at becoming a European point of reference for theoretical analysis and strategic policy discussion of existing and emerging issues concerning the public domain in the digital environment.

Funded by the European Commission within the *eContentplus* framework, the 3-years long project expects to provide policy guidelines that will help each stakeholder involved - public and private, from the local to the European and global level.

Coordinated by the Politecnico of Torino's *NEXA Research Center for Internet and Society*, the COMMUNIA Network includes 36 organisations - universities, consumer bodies, libraries, archives, SMEs - from Member States of the European Union and plans to build strategic relationships with other non-European countries, such as the United States and Brazil, in which similar policy discussions are currently underway.

In order to achieve its goals the COMMUNIA Network will:

- organize 9 open workshops and 3 International conferences;
 - design, implement and maintain a web-based portal; - disseminate proceedings of all the workshops and conferences;
 - pending a viability analysis, publish the first two issues of a theme-specific academic journal;
 - produce and disseminate a map of existing and prospective European competence centres on the public domain and a "best practices" guide;
 - produce an enlargement and sustainability strategy;
 - produce and disseminate a final strategic report.
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In order to take full advantage of the Internet development, the COMMUNIA project is addressing a variety of technology, economic and social issues related to **the role of the digital public domain** in allowing new business models to emerge (encouraging, rather than restricting, reproduction/dissemination of information-based goods) and to produce growth, jobs across the EU; and ensuring a wide and proper "access to information" for all EU citizens on all relevant matters, including (but not limited to) participation in decision-making processes, information on environmental and health issues, integration of different cultures and their histories.

The COMMUNIA activities are also covering alternative licensing frameworks (including, but not limited to, Creative Commons licenses), open access to scientific publications and research results, management of works whose authors are unknown (i.e. orphan works).

Our overall goal is to create an **on-going, open discussion** between all relevant stakeholders and the public sphere in addressing the complex relationship between technological innovation and today's mass usage of digital technologies.

Thanks to the widespread use of the Internet, **everybody is welcome** to join this discussion, thus expanding and sharing the public understanding of the role of technology in shaping the present and future of our digital commons.

Website: <<http://communia-project.eu>>

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The **First COMMUNIA Workshop** in Torino, Italy (18/01/2008), under the title *Technology and the Public Domain*, was a small big success – both in terms of participation (more than 100 attendees from many EU countries, and even from overseas) and as a great occasion to fire up the discussion.

In his welcome address, Juan Carlos De Martin (COMMUNIA Coordinator) pointed out the need to question the neutrality of technology. Especially with today's mass usage of digital technologies, any scientist "must carefully weight the consequences of his/her ideas or inventions". Even further, is **up to the general public** to ponder and discuss the effect of technology on our society as a whole.

The keynote speech by Rishab Ghosh (University of Maastricht) was mostly focused on the need to protect and foster open standard in the research community worldwide. "Our technology future will be based on **collaborative, open projects** of such large scale that global policies and regulations will become more flexible to meet the needs of every stakeholder involved."

The workshop also underlined to need for a legal, clear, and **positive definition for the public domain**, in order to better protect and foster it. Also important is the "economic abundance" that the knowledge commons could potentially create, thus unleashing a large, shared wave of innovation worldwide.

Most presentations and papers are freely available on the COMMUNIA website: <http://communia-project.eu>



The **Second Workshop - Ethical Public Domain: Debate of Questionable Practices** – was held in Vilnius (Lithuania) on 31/03, with a vigorous audience participation enhanced by a live chat and video-streaming.

The **First International Conference** (30/06 and 01/07/2008 in Louvain-La-Neuve, Belgium) addressed a variety of issues related to the *Assessment of economic and social impact of digital public domain throughout Europe*.

With over 120 attendees from all over Europe (and even someone from the United States and Brazil), the Conference covered the impact of **public domain initiatives** in the fields of public sector information, libraries, archives, scientific research and creative works in Europe. The many presentation and panel topics included the need to implement specific institutional arrangements for creating worldwide 'pools' of research commons, description of the potentialities for actual creative collaborations within the academic world, and how to overcome the digital divide still evident today within many branches of the scientific community.



The conference drew upon extensive information on **open access practices** that is available, although often in an informal manner, within major networks and stakeholders in Europe.

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