

Barcelona Charter for Free Culture is Released

Historic statement by commoners takes the offensive against regressive Internet policies

By [David Bollier](#)



A huge international coalition has come together to campaign for respect for the civil rights of citizens and artists in the digital era. Yesterday, the *Charter of the Culture Forum of Barcelona for Innovation, Creativity and Access to Knowledge* was released by more than 100 representatives from 20 different countries who had met in Barcelona from October 30 to November 1. The Charter is a landmark statement about rights of commoners to freedom of expression, access to culture and knowledge, privacy, cyber-security and Net Neutrality, among other concerns.

The Charter was spurred by the growing ambitions of the culture industries and the European Parliament and national parliaments to assert greater control over the Internet, expand copyright and patent rights, criminalize copying and sharing (often mis-characterized as “piracy”) and in other ways stifle the expansion of free culture.

Participants at the Free Culture Forum celebrate at the OxCars, an event to honor innovative Spanish content on the Web.

This Charter, which invites citizens to use it in their own campaigns in legislatures and other policy arenas, will be presented to more than 1,000 political institutions and governments, including the World Intellectual Property Organization, the Obama Administration, the European Commission and many national governments. Some of these organizations have already shown an interest in listening to the demands. Representatives of the European Commission and official observers from the Brazilian Ministry of Culture, among others, were present during the approval of the Charter.

The Barcelona Charter campaign will make a particular appeal to the Spanish government, which has made the regulation of the digital environment one of the flagship items in its upcoming presidency of the European Union. In 10 days the Charter will be delivered personally to “la infanta Cristina,” the daughter of the king of Spain.

The full text of the Barcelona Charter can be read [here](#) . Below is the Introduction, which sets forth the broad, animating principles of the Charter. I was particularly pleased to see the strong affirmation of the commons, in paragraph 5 below. Videos of the Free Culture Forum can be seen [here](#). And here is [my previous blog post](#) on the Forum and [my remarks at the Forum](#).

The Charter of the Culture Forum of Barcelona for Innovation, Creativity and Access to Knowledge

We are in the midst of a revolution in the way that knowledge and culture are created, accessed and transformed. Citizens, artists and consumers are no longer powerless and isolated in the face of the

content-providing industries: now individuals across many different spheres collaborate, participate and decide. Digital technology has bridged the gap, allowing ideas and knowledge to flow. It has done away with many of the geographic and technological barriers to sharing. It has provided new educational tools and stimulated new possibilities for forms of social, economic and political organization. This revolution is comparable to the far reaching changes brought about as a result of the printing press.

In spite of these transformations, the entertainment industry, most communications service providers governments and international bodies still base the sources of their advantages and profits on control of content and tools and on managing scarcity. This leads to restrictions on citizens' rights to education, access to information, culture, science and technology; freedom of expression; inviolability of communications and privacy. They put the protection of private interests above the public interest, holding back the development of society in general.

Today's institutions, industries, structures or conventions will not survive into the future unless they adapt to these changes. Some, however, will alter and refine their methods in response to the new realities. And we need to take account of this.

Political and economic implications of free culture

Free culture (as in "freedom", not as "for free") dramatically enlarges the spaces for civic engagement. It expands the range of individuals and groups able to contribute to public debates. It is therefore strengthening democracy at a time of crisis, just when stronger forms of democracy are urgently needed. Free culture is a precondition for freedom of expression, itself an essential pre-requisite of democracy. It helps to reduce the digital divide, thus enabling the democratic potential of the new technologies to be realized.

Free culture opens up the possibility of new models for citizen engagement in the provision of public goods and services. These are based on a 'commons' approach. 'Governing of the commons' refers to negotiated rules and boundaries for managing the collective production and stewardship of and access to, shared resources. Governing of the commons honors participation, inclusion, transparency, equal access, and long-term sustainability. We recognize the commons as a distinctive and desirable form of governing. It is not necessarily linked to the state or other conventional political institutions and demonstrates that civil society today is a potent force.

We recognize that this social economy, in addition to the private market, is an important source of value. The new commons revitalised through the digital technology (amongst other factors) enlarges what constitutes "the economy". At present governments give considerable support to the private market economy; we urge them to give the same extensive support that they give to the private market to the commons. All that the commons needs to prosper is a level playing field.

The current financial crisis has shown the severe limits of market fundamentalism. The devastating social and economic consequences of the financial collapse also demonstrates that uncontrolled markets guided only by competition and self-interest pose a threat to civilization. The philosophy of Free Culture, a legacy of the Free/libre and Open Source Software movement, is the empirical proof that a new kind of ethics and a new way of doing business are possible. It has already created a new and workable form of production, based on crafts or trades, where the author-producer doesn't lose control of the production process and doesn't need the mediation of big monopolies. This form of production is based on autonomous initiative in solidarity with others, on exchange according to each person's abilities and opportunities, on the democratisation of knowledge, education and the means of production and on a fair distribution of earnings according to the work carried out.

We declare our concern for the well-being of artists, researchers, authors or other creative producers. In

this Charter we propose a number of possibilities for collectively rewarding creation and innovation. Free/libre and Open Source Software, Wikipedia, and many other examples show that the model of Free culture can sustain innovation and that knowledge monopolies are not necessary to produce knowledge goods. In cultural production, what is sustainable depends to a significant extent on the type of 'product' (the costs of a film for example, are different from those of an online collaborative encyclopedia). Projects and initiatives based on free culture principles use a variety of ways of achieving sustainability beyond the voluntary economy. Some of these forms are consolidated. Some are still experimental. A widespread principle is that of combining several sources of finance. This has the added benefit of guaranteeing independence.

Community-driven social economy models are already providing a number of increasingly viable options for sustaining cultural production. These include: non-monetary donations and exchange (I.e. gift, time banking and barter); Direct financing (I.e.: Subscriptions and donations); Shared capital (I.e.: Matching Funds, Cooperatives of producers, interfinancing / social economy, P2P Banking, Coining virtual Money, Crowd funding, Open Capital, Community based investment cooperatives and Consumer Coops); Foundations guaranteeing infrastructure for the projects; Public funding (I.e.: basic incomes, grants, awards, subsidies, public contracts and commissions); Private funding (I.e.: venture investment, shares, private patronage, business investment infrastructure pools); commercial activities (including goods and services) and combination of P2P distribution and low cost streaming. The combination of these options is increasingly viable both for independent creators and industry. We do not support the way that commercial enterprises use volunteer labor as a strategy for making profits from collectively and voluntarily generated value. We also believe that conglomerates should not be allowed to dominate a substantial part of any section of the market.

The digital era holds the historic promise of increasing justice and of being rewarding for all.

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