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CONSULCON

DAY 3 - 9:30 - Main Stage

A Sovereign Europe: Digital Commons as the backbone of Digital Public Infrastructure

KEYNOTE

SOPHIE BLOEMEN - Commons Network

Session recap

At a glance

Sophie Bloemen, founder and director of Commons Network (an Amsterdam-based 'collaboratory' working on democratic economy and democratic technology), was invited to highlight the 'other side' of CONSUL: its nature as open source technology and a digital commons. She described Europe's deep dependence on private, centralised technologies controlled from abroad and gave recent examples of how this undermines political autonomy. She then explained what digital commons are, why they should be treated as public digital infrastructure, how governments can partner with them, and which European policy developments offer hope.

Key messages

- Europe relies on foreign, mostly US, technologies for an estimated 80 percent of its digital needs, including communication networks, platforms, storage, identity services and the underlying protocols.
- This dependence is no longer only economic: it now directly threatens political autonomy and self-determination.
- Digital commons, resources produced, owned and governed collectively, have democratic practice built in and provide the basis for self-determination, and therefore sovereignty.
- Sovereignty from a commons perspective means people and communities controlling their data and being able to understand, shape and switch technologies, which requires interoperability and data portability.
- Open source projects should be seen not as isolated projects but as building blocks of a public digital infrastructure, like roads and bridges.
- Public-commons partnerships offer an alternative to public-private partnerships. CONSUL, with municipalities partnering with a community-governed platform, is a concrete example.
- Governments can support digital commons through three roles: stimulate, adopt and participate.

Facts, figures and references

- Estimated 80 percent dependence of Europe on foreign technologies. A similar share of European tech spending reportedly goes to the US or China.
- Cases cited: the International Criminal Court losing Microsoft access; the forced shutdown of Autistici/Inventati.
- Policy instruments: EU tech sovereignty package, procurement directive review, Digital Commons EDIC, Germany's Sovereign Tech Agency, openDesk and La Suite numérique.

Takeaways for the community

- CONSUL can position itself explicitly as public digital infrastructure and a digital commons in European policy debates.
- Municipalities using CONSUL are already practising a public-commons partnership and can serve as a model for other domains.
- New EU instruments such as the Digital Commons EDIC are potential allies and funding sources for the CONSUL community.