

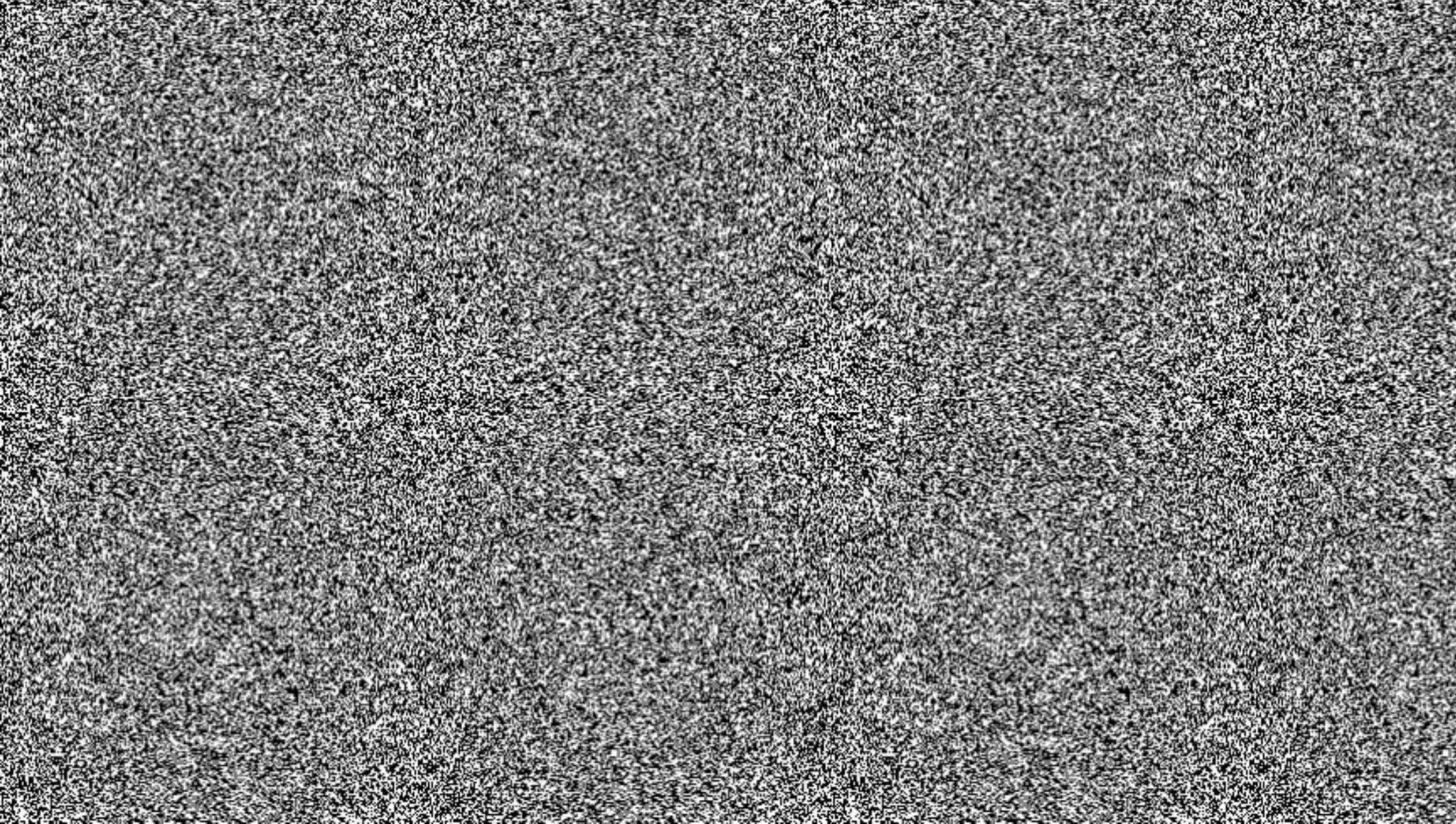
The Commons Conservancy

A Shared Legal entity For FOSS projects

NLUUG Fall Conference, 2019



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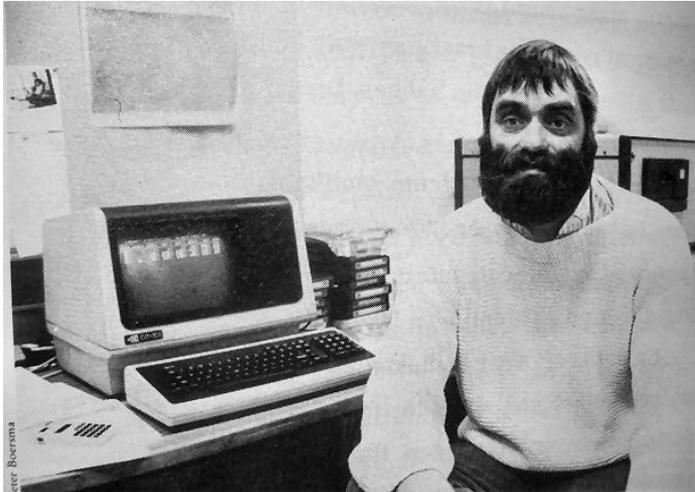




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FLASHBACK TO 1982

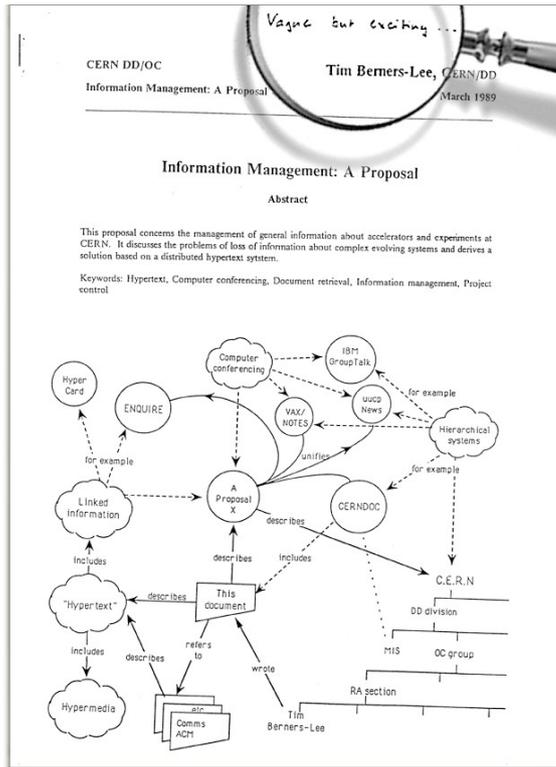
... from the informal circles of what was later to incorporate officially as NLUUG scientists and engineers like **Teus Hagen** and **Jaap Akkerhuis** together started to do grass roots computer networking that pioneered the European internet, together with their friends and counterparts from the European UNIX user groups (like **Peter Collinson** and **Keld Simonsen**).



This is the joint history of **NLnet** and the **EUnet**.



And Thirty YEARS AGO in 1989



- ... Stichting NLnet formally became a legal entity (a foundation), in an effort to scale up the adoption of the early internet in Europe (after 7 years of informal operations)
- ... the world wide web was still a “vague but interesting” proposal inside CERN to manage information
- ... and it caught on



Congratulations

6

and thank you for
30 years of being a GREAT MOM/DAD



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Congratulations

7

and thank you for
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MORE CELEBRATIONS



Est. 1989



Est. 1999



SO ALSO CONGRATULATIONS AS A GRAND-PARENT!

9



Est. 1999

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Summary: a light-Weight solution

10

- [The Commons Conservancy] is a light-weight, 'invisible' infrastructure
 - *Virtual* open source foundations that are otherwise independent
 - Very fast and flexible ('pick your own governance' model)
 - License agnostic (mix of licenses is not a problem)
- Separation of concerns:
 - Safe home for resources and structure for collaborative decision making
 - Financial donations dealt with externally through umbrella MoU with established external public benefit organisation → charitable tax status out of the box





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From the Outside

- Netherlands based foundation
- Established in 2016
- Experienced board with veterans from free software/open source, e-science, internet community and digital heritage



Mission

12

The foundation strives for a ***fair and balanced global information society*** in which individuals can collectively *scrutinise, reconfigure* and *improve* upon the technology and informational resources they depend on; and to make that technology and those resources *secure, reliable, transparent* and *inclusive* and ***to enable human innovation at the widest possible scale***, with the express intention to strengthen the individual in their humanity and to enable them to participate in all facets of modern life – whether *social, cultural, economic, private* etc. – under conditions of their own choosing, and in full understanding of and control over its workings, and all that relates to the beforementioned or could be beneficial to it, all in the broadest sense of the word.



Scaling projects up is hard

13

- An 'embedded' open source project with a closely knit group of collaborators doesn't always turn into a comprehensive, cooperative program supported by a lively ecosystem?

(but at some point all projects have to mature beyond the initial stage – or perish)



Project stage

- predefined lifetime
- ad hoc involvement
- 'pioneering'
 - experimental/pilot
- meet short term needs
 - feature development
 - work in progress

Mature stage

- open ended
- open community
- 'proven technology'
 - production usage
- long term needs
 - solidifying technology
 - software engineering
 - security hardening



One Foundation per Project?

15

- Some serious overhead and responsibility
 - legal/administrative
 - organisational
 - financial
- Steep learning curve for people involved, *on top of* the project responsibilities
- Easy to make mistakes



[The Commons Conservancy]

- An 'organisation hypervisor' that can spawn and support *virtual* open source foundations
- Each Program runs independently from all the others, in near-perfect isolation
- Each Program determines its own 'operating environment' (such as statutes, CLA/FLA, etc) with sane templates/defaults provided, and has full connectivity to the outside (own site, etc)
- Long term vision, should still exist 75 years from now



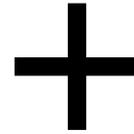
Separation of concerns





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- independent programme governance
- maintain a shared road map
- a neutral, trustworthy vault for shared intangible assets (such as source code)
- advanced legal infrastructure



- professional fund management
- benefit from reputation and tax facilities of existing charitable organisation (established in 1989)

18

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+

- a not-for-profit company (Fiscaal Fondsenwervende Instelling)
- can facilitate and support financial and other legal transactions on behalf of Programmes

• ...



Get rid of the money

- No money = no risk of financial contamination between programmes.
- Donations are handled completely externally
 - Audited, professional financial environment
 - open mechanism invites fresh blood from outside
- Promiscuous: you choose where your money is handled best



Stewardship

- [The Commons Conservancy] is designed to be a very safe place for contributors to keep IP of source code + other assets
 - if so desired
- License agnostic.
 - Limited to Free Software/Open source efforts



STEWARDSHIP

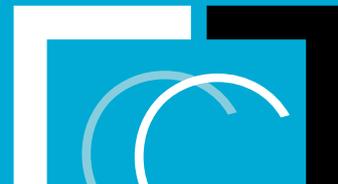
22

- Program may decide/need to add another license on top of an existing license
 - newer version of the current license
 - necessary for inclusion in specific environments (like iTunes)
 - (partially) merging with another free software/open source project with an incompatible license
- Again: up to the Program, may also decide to completely block future license changes or set very specific conditions



And for those looking ahead

- No lock in
 - A Programme is free to go at all times to 'graduate' to a dedicated legal entity (e.g. run its own 'bare metal' organisation)
- Also not financially
 - Feel free to shop around the globe for whomever
 - ... has the best fit with (fiscal?) specifics of donors and community
 - ... delivers the best operational support and value add
 - ... has a custom fit for specific needs



Benefits for Organisational donors

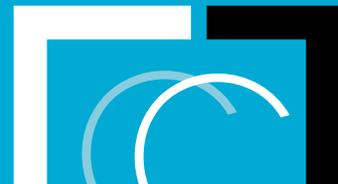
24

- “Do the right thing”, socially responsible contribution
- Efficiently pool resources with others that have an interest in the technology and its goals
 - (public, private, academic, civil society, ..)
- Collective responsibility helps mature roadmaps and community
- No 'end of budget year' issues
 - donations can have a multi-year release span
 - money stays in place until needed, like a Swiss bank account



Benefits (continued)

- Effectiveness guaranteed
 - Donations are made only after achieving the expected results
- Non-commercial stewardship gives users much more guarantees and thus creates greater trust
- For some, partial tax return on their donation
- Built trust through **peer review mechanisms** and full **transparency** instead of bureaucracy
- Designed to allow for diversity



Terms of reference

26

- Open to anyone acting in the public interest
 - Initially focus on professional internet-related projects with some scale
- Constructive, positive and inclusive approach
- Every Program appoints an entry point for Responsible Disclosure and Accessibility issue handling



Terms of reference

27



CrypTech

 Corteza



SoftHSM

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Questions?

Just let us know...

