OFE Summit 2012 Conclusions

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This year’s OFE Summit focused on the power of openness and collaboration to promote innovation in Europe. We asked ourselves two questions: What are the opportunities of open innovation? And how can we create a policy framework that takes full advantage of those opportunities?

The first session of the morning challenged the view that “Open” is always better. Peter Strickx of Belgian Fedict pointed out that openness is not an end in itself, but he added that it is a prerequisite to sharing and collaborating in the public sector. Joel Lambilotte, an open source entrepreneur described a project of sharing and collaboration between Belgian municipalities. He said it was successful but current public procurement rules and practices made it extremely complex – a useful reminder of the need to get policies right. Meanwhile Andy Updegrove, a lawyer and expert on standards and open source pointed out that openness is a value that we cannot afford to neglect, even in times of economic difficulty.

Mitchell Baker, Chair of the Mozilla foundation, gave an inspiring keynote speech, tolling us that true innovation is hard and requires persistence. She talked about the danger of controlling the process, of getting into the habit of asking for permission to innovate. And citing Mozilla's experience she said that true innovation forces you to depart from the mainstream.

In her third consecutive appearance at an OFE Summit Commission Vice President Neelie Kroes was on the same page. She told attendees of her wish to support “truly open, disruptive innovation in ICT”. She announced that she wants to dedicate 5% of Horizon 2020 funds earmarked for ICT to the creation of an open, agile, responsive funding instrument, which she described as “an experiment to support creativity and innovation”.

Jochen Friedrich reported from the OpenForum Academy Fellows conference which was held the day before the Summit in Brussels. Discussions centred on the effects of openness on innovation and the economy, as well as the wider societal implications of openness. The proceedings have been published at: http://openforumacademy.org/library/ofa-research/first-conference-proceedingsA4.pdf/view

Tomas Ulin of Oracle presented the success story of MySQL, and made the point that this was an innovative company that started in Europe but ultimately received the funding it needed to grow from US investors. Bart Becks, co-founder and CEO of SonicAngel made concrete suggestions for how we can help innovative European companies to become international businesses, including a coherent regulatory framework to allow for Pan-European crowd-funding.

A worrying picture was presented by Alma Swan from the Scholarly Publishing & Academic Resources Coalition (SPARC). The link between innovative enterprises and public research institutes is weak, she said. Can open access to scholarly works help ensure that public investment in research translates into innovation that benefits our economy? Not everyone agrees. Chris Taggart, ceo of Open Corporates pointed to a divergence of opinion in his area of expertise: open data. The amount of public data being made open and accessible is growing but so is the amount that remains stubbornly closed, particularly data concerning corporations. Glyn Moody concluded that while there have been gains for openness, these have been matched by threats to it.

The mission of OpenForum Europe has always been to promote open, competitive choice for IT users. As long as changes in technology and in the marketplace spark new forms of lock-in we still
have work to do. We look forward to seeing you at forthcoming briefings and at next year's OFE Summit 2013.