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MISSION FUTURE @ Ars Electronica

The Initiative to Create Tomorrow's Economy

Not only has Ars Electronica established itself over the years as computer culture's ultimate hotspot; whoever's able to decode this festival also discovers plenty of indications of how the economy will function in the future. And, right now, we're heading for a sharing economy. *MISSION FUTURE @ Ars Electronica* reveals the extent to which this trend has already become a reality. What began at the 2007 Ars Electronica Festival as *TheFutureTour* has now become a movement advocating the economy of tomorrow. This initiative is the brainchild of TheFuture-Kitchen innovation agency and Cscout, a trend consulting firm doing business worldwide. Its mission is to support businesspeople, political leaders and the media in bringing about much-needed change.

Thema 2008: We're open How open minds & open industries are shaping the world

Linux and Wikipedia have long since attained the status of classics, but they're not the only ones. Projects like Android (Google), Java (Sun Microsystems), Open Moco, Open Design and Open Cola show what's afoot here. Swarm intelligence practised in the real world isn't just the privilege of start-ups. More and more major players are committed to this principle. Sun Microsystems, for example. The axiom of this Silicon Valley heavyweight is clear and simple: Share. With this principle and its Java as open-source software, Sun boosts innovative technologies for everything from cellphones to satellites. This enterprise has proclaimed the dawn of the Participation Age, established communities like SystemHeroes, and pretty much dispenses with advertising—since just about everybody from the junior programmer to the CEO blogs anyway. Sun can even afford a Chief Gaming Officer whose responsibilities include events in virtual worlds.

But traditional companies as well are opening up and going new ways—for instance, the cooperation between Nike and Apple that's morphing the ipod into the Running Coach. Red Bull has been defining itself as a content provider of late, installing its presence on the world's craziest playgrounds—the sporty type and the cultural variety too. BMW aims to spearhead the environmental movement with its Club of Pioneers. And Mini transforms the buyer upon request into the co-designer of his/her own car.

But the sharing economy isn't primarily a matter of new products, new business models and new technologies. These develop because people with open minds determine what happens and increasingly live an open life. For many—at least the “digital bohemians who lead an existence beyond the realm of fixed employment” (Friebe & Lobo)—respect in the community is the more valuable currency.

Business is being redefined. Consumers are becoming co-designers of companies and products (Mini, Peugeot, Nokia et al.)—if they can even be called that anymore. As an American Internet firm puts it: “The creatives, formerly known as consumers.” This new openness has been generating a boom in ideas that are being implemented at unprecedented speed. After all, venture capital, media and markets crave what's new. Intellectual property and the patent system have to be redefined now that crowds are jointly advancing projects and can make a good living from them. “What little I read I write myself,” said Karl Kraus, a writer of truly massive productivity. This principle now applies to the next generation: the little bit of TV programming I need I shoot myself, and the few products I need I make in my own fabricator. We have to start getting used to the fact that, on the basis of this principle, 23-year-olds are suddenly becoming self-made billionaires. For instance, *Facebook* founder Mark Zuckerberg. Sharing is king. Whoever shares, wins.

On the one hand, *Mission Future* is presenting practitioners of the sharing economy from brand-name corporations, especially those like SAP, Vodafone and Austrian Airlines that work together with the Ars Electronica Futurelab. On the other hand, this is a chance to hear from startups that are already giving the big boys a run for their money. Visionaries and creative masterminds will elaborate on the trends of greatest significance for tomorrow and run down the most vibrant and relevant projects and ideas emerging right now.

Mission Future itself is totally committed to the open source principle: the people who take part also give part. The boundaries between expert and listener are permeable. Elements like FutureSlam and Business Speed Dating: One-on-One in One Minute guarantee rapid exchange of knowledge with the mandate of carrying on the effort beyond *Mission Future* to develop and bring to fruition pioneering projects in accordance with the open source principle.

Translated from German by Mel Greenwald.