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The Commons Approach: Re-opening AI for the Public Good

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WEIZENBAUM INSTITUT / CHANGE HUB

The Problem: *(amongst others)* The Capture of AI

AI runs on public knowledge, but its control is increasingly private.

What Open Science and the Digital Commons Already Offer….

Open Science Area	Core Practice / Principle	Analogue in the AI Open Space	Current Limitations / Gaps
Open Access Publications	Free access to publications	Technical reports, blogs, discussion, …	Many AI publications lack reproducibility; key details omitted
Open Data	FAIR data sharing in trusted repositories, metadata curation	Open datasets (LAION, Common Crawl), Data Papers,	Training data often undisclosed; legal/ethical constraints; dataset opacity
Open Code	Code openly available under F and OSI licenses	Open-weight models, open inference code, Hugging Face-style sharing, Model Cards,…	"Openwashing"; missing training code; partial releases
Open Methods / Protocols	Transparent methods, preregistration, protocols	Training recipes, hyperparameters, evaluation pipelines	Rarely fully shared; compute makes reproduction hard
Open Infrastructure	Public repositories, archives, long-term stewardship	Model hubs, dataset hubs, open evaluation platforms	Mostly run by private companies; sustainability unclear
Open Evaluation	Transparent reviewing and validation, open peer review	Open benchmarking results, Community model evaluations, red-teaming, public benchmarks	Evaluations fragmented; dominated by industry resources
Citizen Science / Public Engagement	Co-creation with society	Participatory AI design, community dataset stewardship	Still marginal; little structural support
Open Educational Resources	Freely accessible teaching materials	AI ethics curricula, model playgrounds for learning	Often tied to corporate platforms; uneven access
Open Governance / Open Policies	Community-driven standards, transparent policymaking	Open licenses for models/data; community governance experiments	No stable governance frameworks; power asymmetries remain
Open Licenses	Clear legal terms enabling reuse, modification, sharing (e.g. CC, MIT, GPL)	Emerging AI licenses for models, datasets, and weights (e.g. OpenRAIL, ML-specific CC variants, meta-model licenses)	Licensing often unclear or incomplete; training data rarely licensed; violations hard to enforce; risk of openwashing; legal uncertainty around model outputs

AI that takes from the commons must also be built for the commons.

Call to ACTION – the Weizenbaum Papers

- Create collaborative knowledge spaces
- Build competencies in AI and data literacy
- Strengthen open, interoperable AI infrastructures
- Develop participatory governance models
- Enhance cooperation across sectors
- Promote digital sovereignty
- Secure long-term funding for shared infrastructures for the commons

- https://www.weizenbaum-library.de/handle/id/951 (10.34669/WI.DP/51)
- https://www.weizenbaum-library.de/handle/id/950 (10.34669/WI.PP/15)

The democratic futures of AI depend on the networks that sustain the commons.

Digital Humanism should strengthen these networks and will grow stronger by doing so.

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