

Collectivise the Internet : Three years to Ruffle the Feathers of Surveillance Capitalism

If the major issue in the digital world is systemic (a system called *Surveillance Capitalism*), then the answer cannot be limited to » individual degoogleizing initiatives ». Our new roadmap *Collectivise the Internet / Convivialise the Internet* is all out on providing digital tools for non-profit organizations and collectives that work for the common good and the good of the Commons.

Let us tell you this story...

This article was published in French in October 2022 as part of the launch of Framasoft's new roadmap Collectivise the Internet / Convivialise the Internet.



Collectivise, convivialise - Illustration by David Revoy - License: CC-BY 4.0

Emancipating Ourselves from Googles' Industrial Animal Farmland

At Framasoft, we learn by doing. With every new campaign, with every new three-year roadmap, we try to apply lessons from the past. And every time, we discover more about our own misconceptions, our mistakes and ways forward to fix them.

During the **Degooglez The Internet campaign** (2014-2017), we have learned that, although our small association could not degooglez the whole planet, there is still a great deal of people who show interest in web-based tools that respect their values and integrity. Providing Free and open-source services to as many people as possible ensures a large-scale deployment, even if that means risking focusing the demand and expectations on us. During this time period, we also initiated the **alternative hosting collective CHATONS** (an acronym that also means « kitties », in French), so that other hosts could join us in this adventure.

Then, we started the **Contributopia roadmap (2017-2020)**, in which we contributed to many collective, popular and federated project, thereby meeting like-minded contributors, with whom we share the common values of sharing, fairness, caring, and emancipation, free and open-source software (FOSS) values that attracted us. We've come to realize, walking down this path, gathering and relating, that digital choices are societal choices, and that the choices made by FANGs are the pillars of a system: surveillance capitalism.



« Quit planet GAFAM NATU BATX » Illustration by David Revoy - License: CC-By 4.0

Entire books are merely attempting to **define what surveillance capitalism is**, so what we are sharing here is just a rough summary of what it actually is. Surveillance capitalism is **a system that transforms collective behaviours into data sets by prioritizing profit and power above all. The aim is to sell prediction and manipulation of our future behaviours, generally as commercial, cultural or electoral propaganda. In order to do so, some mega corporations try to establish monopolies on digital tools that maximize the acquisition and monopoly on our attention.**

Simply put, surveillance capitalism creates industrial data farms, where we are the cattle. On the one hand, we are force-fed with attention mush (enriched with ads), and, on the other, part of our lives and our social behaviours are snatched from us to be resold to prosperous buyers at premium price.

That is why, at Framasoft, we have developed **tools designed away from the values pushed by this system. Among the solutions we developed are**

PeerTube, a video platform software, and Mobilizon, a group and events management system. However, these tools require an entire group of people managing, maintaining, drafting and ensuring its editorial policy, and moderating: many small organizations do not have the human resources to handle this in-house.

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Requiring digital tools that do not give goose bumps

From 2019 to 2022, we also ran the Déframasoftware Internet action plan. We closed several projects which were underused or available through other trusted « CHATONS » hosts. This allowed us to save some energy for future projects, to reinforce our will to take care of our organization by avoiding unreasonable growth or restructuring that would disrupt our collective and the way it operates - which has made us pretty effective so far! - but especially to promote the decentralization of ethical digital tools.

Between 2020 and 2022, right in the middle of a global pandemic that confirmed our general dependency on online services, we intensified our efforts in maintaining our actions. Incidentally, **we revised our plans for « Let's deframasoftize »** and chose to maintain some of the tools we intended to restrain or close: Framalistses, Framagit, Framateam, Framacalc.... We made that choice because we could see little to no other alternatives, and we did not want to let so many people down.

During this period of forced isolation, a pressing need began to be voiced more and more:

I am willing to 'degoogle-ize' myself, but I need someone to assist me, who can be here, in person to help me throughout this transition.



Emancip'Asso - Illustration by David Revoy - License: CC-By 4.0

We have been hearing this need for this kind of human, tangible support for a while, and this is not unexpected. One of the mechanisms of capitalism is to individualize (« the customer is always right ») so as to better isolate and place the responsibility on each of us. For example, the information that we name « **personal data** » is neither personal nor data: it is more accurately the digital harvesting of our lives linked to those of others. Those are our **social behaviours**.

Conversely, if so many organizations, federations, etc. are so efficient in their task for the common good (whether they help us discover knitting or fight climate inaction), it is precisely because they rest on the enjoyment of being and doing together, on the joy of meeting and exchanging, on **the human warmth we find in the collective**.

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Ducking out the slump thanks to conviviality

The future Big Tech is designing for us is one where humans are being:

* isolated - so that connections between humans rely solely upon their tools

- * exploited - so that more and more tools are being created for us to consume
- * singled out - so that no collective action is put in place that challenges their methods
- * dependent - on their system of absolute monopoly
- * greedy - so our lack of money can be weaponized against us
- * competing - to pit us against each other and justify the rise of their elite class

This future that surveillance capitalism is designing for us as we speak, is neither engaging nor sustainable.. It treats both people and the Earth as a liability and will lead us straight to destruction.

On the other hand, trying to step out of our comfortable FOSS-enthusiasts' bubble to try and reach out to other communities that are changing the world, has proved to be not as desorienting as we might have thought. We found that oftentime we shared the same utopias and the same definition of society: one based on contributing.



ECHO Network - Illustration by David Revoy - License: CC-By 4.0

These « Contributopians » share the same dream as us: a future where humans are proud, autonomous, emancipated, knowledgeable, sharing and helpful to each other... a future where digital tools are under control, transparent, user-friendly and enhance the emancipation of human beings.

Thus, let's summarize the lessons learned from our previous endeavours:

- **We did not yet have tools that fit the needs of the small organizations and associations** that do so much with so little, but most of all with a lot of good will.
- We are aware of the risk of **remaining isolated, singled out in our « small, individual 'degoogleization' initiatives »** against a whole system that can only be faced effectively through collective action.
- We can see how crucial it is **to put humans back at the center, the need for human presence and kindness** when assisting others throughout their transition towards ethical digital practises.
- We have been able to confirm that **a good number** of associations and organizations from civil society which are working for the commons **share with us these common values**.

These patrons/champions of a « society of contribution » work hard to make our common dreams a reality.

Long story short: it's high time we degoogleized the Contributopians!

(... those who wish to be, of course. We have never forced anyone to do anything, and we won't start now!)

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Finding warmth with the jolly fellows

The four long-term actions we introduced in the article « Convivialise the Internet » □(Framaspace, Émancip'Asso, ECHO Network, Peer.tube) all serve the same purpose: **to equip organizations with online tools that fit their values**.

These four projects rely on the strength of the collective while also taking into account the known constraints and limits that associations face. **Kindness alone cannot magically and miraculously provide people with knowledge**, time and means to train to use Nextcloud, PeerTube and other ethical tools.



Peer.Tube - Illustration by David Revoy - License: CC-By 4.0

Similarly, the 39 members that compose Framasoft (10 of whom are employees) cannot spawn everywhere to personally train each and every new organization that wants to use, let's say Framaspace, especially as that number could rise - with the help of your generous donations - up to thousands of organizations within 3 years!

That is why **all of these projects are both about building a sense of community** through shared spaces and some time allocated to community-building activities and sharing practices, challenges, etc., and providing support via coaching, improvements tailored for specific needs, and learning content to help people to be more autonomous and master the different tools, etc. Going blindly ahead with preconceived notions and a “we know best what works best for you” kind of attitude does not seem to be the most suitable — let alone humane — approach.

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Let's steer our ship into a virtuous circle

We want to be efficient, so we want our tools to actually be used. Our goal is thus to make our tools useful - yeah, because designing tools that are actually useful is what disruptive innovation is all about, to make Tech for good that is community-owned and still very much online!)

We are thus planning **not to plan everything, except time and space dedicated to your feedback**. We also want to be available to tackle issues we might face on each of the actions that we feel ready to take. In other words, if we already plan to develop new features, create tutorials, host webinars and draft learning content, **we do not want to predefine everything upfront, so as to save some time to help our users, our main target**.



Frama.space - Illustration by David Revoy - License: CC-By 4.0

This is the **virtuous circle** that we defined over the course of our various experimentations and that best fits our workflow:

1. Launch a first draft of our project, *although*

imperfect

It's OK if the paint is still fresh, or if it's still a rough sketch. It's absolutely OK too to start with a very small target audience. We have 3 years ahead of us to improve all that, and we have time and resources in store to do so.

For example, while we hope to provide millions of organizations with Framaspace within 3 years, it will be a good start to offer it to 200-300 organizations by the end of 2022!

2. Take users' feedback into account

The Frama.space forum, the PeerTube community the study programs on ECHO Network and the comments received on Emancip'Asso are all important resources to gather feedback on our tools. It'd be too easy to lock ourselves in an echo chamber and avoid the reality of those who are actually fighting on the battlefield. We go as far as considering the creation of an Observatory of Practices and Free Open-Source Digital Experiences, basing ourselves on the organizations that make up the Frama.space user community. Codename: OPEN-L. Stay tuned for that... And let's hope we manage to set it up!

3. Improve our solutions step by step

Our goal is to improve each of those actions over time. This could be done by creating documentation and pedagogical tools, moderating and facilitating user communities, working on the ergonomics or on new features to be developed. We want to keep total freedom to improve each action depending on the feedback we get from users.

4. Link humans to tools, and to other humans

Here's another important, yet often overlooked aspect: connections. Such a shame, considering that the Web is, by definition, designed to connect people, ideas and things. This step can take many forms. It may mean taking the time to introduce our users to the new improvements brought about by each of our actions. It may also mean broadening our user community for any given project. Finally, it may mean taking advantage of having organizations share a common tool by sharing with them, offering them and informing them on what their

fellows are doing.

Additionally, it will take some journaling: to summarize experiences, the lessons learned, to gather the relevant resources... and share all of that with the community. Whatever the form, this connecting step is when we take the time to reflect, to review our actions so as to better start a new virtuous circle and launch a better version of the project.

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We ain't no quacks. Please support us!

Ain't gonna beat around the bush: Collectivise the Internet / Convivialise the Internet □□ is a roadmap with a clear political purpose, in the sense that it shall **contribute to changing the world** (if only one byte at a time).

After eight years spent observing and informing the public on the future that Big Tech is already materializing for us day by day and the political choices that they are forcing on our societies, it feels more and more crucial to keep one corner of the Web free from their influence.

Such is « also » our role, because **these new actions do not and will not replace the ones we are already conducting**. All the 'degoogleized » software already available to everyone, the development of PeerTube and Mobilizon, the FOSS collective CHATONS, the common cultural resources... All of these projects are still ongoing and will still require more work over the upcoming three years.



Quack-quack - Illustration by David Revoy - License: CC-By 4.0

If you agree with our set goals and strategy, if the actions that we are currently undertaking seem important to you, then we would like to remind you that **Framasoft is exclusively funded by... You.** It is only your kind contributions, eligible to a 66% tax cut for French taxpayers, that allow us to keep going in total independence.

If you can (as we are well aware that our current times are particularly harsh), and if you wish to, please support us.

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This page has been translated from French to English by Framalang volunteers: Bastien, Bromind, Ellébore (proofreading), Goofy, GPSqueek, Mathilde (proofreading), Stan, Susy