



# Ubiquitous Commons

the Commons in the age of ubiquitous technologies

## What is it

The **Ubiquitous Commons** is an *international research effort* dedicated to understanding the transformation of data, information and knowledge in the age of ubiquitous technologies.

On the one hand it is dedicated to gaining *critical understandings* of the social, anthropological, psychological, aesthetic, political mutations which are coming about – and which will be in the near future – with the hyper-interconnectivity among human beings, their bodies, objects and places, and with the possibilities for massive data and information collection practices which are made possible through the usage of ubiquitous technologies, both from a critical and constructive point of view.

On the other hand, it is dedicated to *creating tools and practices* through which citizens, institutions, organizations, enterprises, researchers and other stakeholders can enact shared, participatory and ethical processes in which all subjects become actively engaged in defining how the data and information they produce (through their bodies, expressions, movements, actions, gestures...) are used, making sure that their rights are protected and that ethical initiatives for science, civic action, social organization and coordination become possible and desirable.

Ubiquitous Commons acts in ways which are completely **interdisciplinary**, moving across scientific

and humanistic research, arts and design, institutional and economic action, activism and advocacy, urban studies and rural innovation, through education processes, research, development, near future design scenarios and aesthetic actions which are intended to broaden the perception of "possibility" for both people and organizations, in constructive, enabling the formation of novel points of view and possibilities.

## Partners

Currently, Ubiquitous Commons is a wide shared effort engaging research institutions, administrations, activist groups, artistic and cultural organizations all over the world.

Among them are: **Art is Open Source** (IT); **Human Ecosystems** (UK); the **Foundation for P2P Alternatives** (NL); **"La Sapienza" University of Rome** (IT); **ISIA Design Florence** (IT); **"La Statale" University of Milan** (IT); **Bruno Kessler Foundation** (IT); **il Sole24Ore** (IT); **LUISS University** (IT); **Transmediale Festival** (DE); **Medialab Prado** (ES); **Google Cultural Institute Paris** (FR); **University of Edinburgh** (UK); **the Conference** (SE); **McGill University** (CA); **York University** (CA); **Yale University** (USA); **Polytechnic University of Miami** (USA); **Stanford School of Business** (USA); **Creative Commons** (USA); **Eisenhower Fellowships** (USA); **TED Conferences** (USA); **Open Knowledge Foundation** (UK); **Universidade Sao Paulo** (BR); **Universidade Metodista** (BR); **Furtherfield** (UK); **University of Seoul** (KR); **SESC** (BR); the city administrations of **Rome, Trento, Turin, Sao Paulo, Montreal, Toronto; Anonymous.**

Partners are currently contributing, according to their skills and capabilities, to: research on Jurisprudence, Technology, Humanities, Anthropology, Privacy, Management, Systems Theory, Communication Sciences, Aesthetics, Cognitive Studies, Psychology, Urban Design, Architecture, IoT, Social Networks, Linguistics, Computational Sociology, Cultural Analytics and more; technological development; application development; design; participatory design practices and events; aesthetics and perceptive development processes through design and arts; public actions through arts and design; education processes in schools, citizen groups, institutions; communication and dissemination activities.

## Philosophy

In these years we, as human beings and as members of local, global and trans-local societies, are living yet another step in our social and political mutations.

From the notion of the Information, Communication and Knowledge Society we are moving onward to embracing the Network Society.

*In the Network Society Information and Knowledge are produced and experienced ubiquitously.*

Services like Google, Facebook and Twitter create a knowledge/information, identity and information/updates ecosystem which is spread across devices and modalities which interact with what we know about the world and its inhabitants, and also transform the ways in which we experience places, locations, events, monuments, tourist locations, restaurants, venues and more.

Messaging applications reach us ubiquitously. Imagine running in a park, within nature, and receiving an important message from the office: the park instantly – if temporarily – disappears, replaced by an ubiquitous office, from which we interact with colleagues and co-workers.

Devices, sensors, gadgets and wearable technologies (and, soon, prosthetics and bodily add-ons and plugins) interconnect our bodies, emotions, medical conditions, movements, feelings and more to the

network, exposing them on social networks, sharing them with services of the most varied kinds and more.

The Internet of Things, CCTV cameras, security and surveillance schemes, algorithms and processes of various types provide even more ways in which information and knowledge are generated with every one of our gestures, movements, clicks.

This condition is far from being transparent and clearly understandable.

The information we produce – whether we realize it or not, whether with an explicit click or by behaving in certain ways which can be algorithmically interpreted – is sold and purchased millions of times without us realizing it. And, most of all, without being able to have our say about it, whether it is to preserve our privacy, to create our own business model or in the desire to be able to determine just how our information is used, as individuals, and as members of a society, culture, organization, nation or else.

The terms of service documents which we sign for when we register to online services are not enough: barely accessible and understandable without professional legal advice, they are also too many and well-placed so that they become just too many to read, or they pose a condition of exclusion from the services which they relate to.

On top of that, these services are of peculiar types. For example Facebook. With its 1.3 billion subscribers and its policy of expansion to provide authentication facilities to millions of websites, apps and other services (even ones in the physical space), it is not a mere web application, but an identity provider and a massive societal connector. Thus, this problem cannot be simply dismissed with banal answers such as “You don’t like what Facebook does with your data? Unsubscribe!”

This scenario is true for multiple types of operators, ranging from social networking, health solutions, finance, retail, communications, media, entertainment, up to the producers of the objects and services we use every day for our life, work, relations, education, and more.

On top of that, the interface politics and policies of these operators dedicate major efforts to the creation of visual, interaction and relational narratives which convey the supposed controllability of the publicness and privateness of these online/offline spaces. These are opaque situations, in which an expectation of controllable publicness and of privateness is created in billions of users which is instantly betrayed, with algorithms and processes systematically abusing these expectations.

On top of that, humanity is delegating the preservation of global visual and textual cultures to private services: we produce images, texts, movements in space, videos, representations of traditions and heritages; we put them onto operators’ servers or in the cloud; they give it back to us with an arbitrary license. We, as a society, remain the authors but lose the possibility to control our culture.

Ubiquitous Information and Knowledge is different from the content which can be handled using, for example, the Creative Commons or other current licensing schemes. It is not about mp3s, JPEGs, GIFs, PDFs, MOVs or other digital formats.

It is about the data, information and knowledge produced by bodies, locations, movements, desires, expectations, cultures, which are created, reproduced and mediated ubiquitously, online/offline, through mobile applications, sensors, cameras, augmented reality, maps, Internet of Things, and more, consciously and unconsciously, and about the ways in which these information and knowledge are used.

Depending on the intents, rights, desires, freedoms and opportunities for individuals, communities, societies, environment and more, it should be possible for all of these subjects to be active, desiring, aware and informed parts of the decisions whether to protect or share these data and information, and on the exact ways in which to do so, whether through licensing, encrypting, paying, openness, or else.

In the end, some part of them should/could/would be protected, some would be shared, some would be shared for specific purposes, and so on, according to the desires, strategies and tactics of multiple individuals, communities, collectivities, societies, organizations, institutions etc.

In order for these type of decisions to be made meaningfully, the availability of a potentially infinite (abundant) Common Resource Pool (CRP) is not enough, as it needs to be supported by the presence of an High Quality Relational Environment (HQRE), as all historical, scientific, technical, technological, anthropological, social, economic and political evidence about the Commons shows us.

Ubiquitous Commons is the commons in the age of Ubiquitous Technologies.

## Objectives

Ubiquitous Commons has multiple principal goals, referring to the different time-frames and to the different types of subjects involved.

### In the short term:

- design the initial version of a legal, technical/technological and philosophical toolkit which allows people and communities to describe and enact the ways in which they wish their data and information to be used, using multiple types of ubiquitous technologies (social networks, smartphones, sensors, cameras, biomedical devices, IoT...);
- conceptualize the “*Commons as a Protocol*” approach, through which Common Resource Pools (CRPs, such as data, information, knowledge, in this case) and the High Quality Relational Environments (HQRE) which are needed to form in order to be able to self-regulate the CRPs, can become a set of usable, interoperable, scalable, multi-modal protocols, which can be used across communities, cultures, times, places, trans-localities;
- experiment on peer-to-peer modalities, technologies, processes, to find interesting, sustainable models which can be used in the Ubiquitous Commons approach;
- disseminate and communicate;
- broaden participation to the shared effort;
- create projects which adopt, use, extend and contribute to the Ubiquitous Commons approach.

### In the medium term:

- extend the technologies and modalities to which the Ubiquitous Commons approach can be applied;
- promote and enact interventions at policy-making level, in order for the Ubiquitous Commons approach can find application, widening its impact and public participation;
- form an innovative, open, public legal entity at international level in order to collect and valorize the efforts which are being performed, and to be able to participate with more impact in political, social, policy discussions.

### In the long term:

- transition the Ubiquitous Commons to new institutional and organizational models which are based on peer-to-peer, ecosystemic governance, and which are able to bring high quality organizational models to communities worldwide, for what concerns the enactment and preservation of their rights, freedoms and collective well-being regarding the ubiquitous production of data, information and knowledge, actively engaging citizens, institutions, organizations, companies and other forms of stakeholders.

Uniting all of these terms is the necessity to create and maintain legal, technical/technological and

philosophical toolkits which will enable:

- citizens and organizations to decide how the data and information they produce should be used;
- protect their rights and ensure accountability, transparency and collaboration;
- ensure the perception of the positive, constructive aspects of ubiquitous information, for environment, sciences, society, civic action, health, freedoms, rights, and enable them through the emergence of shared, desired, active practices;
- bring up an active, performative, positive and constructive public discussion in which all stakeholders are engaged in designing and enacting their own strategies, tactics, designs, tools, practices, initiatives, debates, under the form of a shared, participatory effort.

## First Outcomes

At the time of writing, the Ubiquitous Commons is actively developing:

- the reference framework for the development of legal/technological/philosophical toolkits to enact the practices and processes of the Ubiquitous Commons;
- draft versions of the legal toolkits;
- draft versions for the technological toolkits (for example with the production of web browser plugins which enable to apply the Ubiquitous Commons concepts in easy, accessible, usable ways to social networking activities, as a first proof of concept);
- dissemination and communication actions (such as building websites, writing articles and publications, participating to conferences and public debates, making artistic, design and aesthetic interventions, participating to festivals and fairs, network building and education processes).

## What you can do

There are multiple things which you and your organization can do.

Among those, we would really appreciate if you'd consider:

- **research**; taking active part in the research (legal, technical/technological, philosophical, anthropological, social, political, psychological, design and urban design areas are the ones in which additional help is needed at the moment), through your own projects, or by doing something together;
- **projects**; we actively add Ubiquitous Commons approaches to relevant projects, adding value to them, providing the possibility to engage wide communities across the world, and expanding the meaningfulness and social significance (and impacts) to projects of multiple types; if you're interested in doing a relevant project with Ubiquitous Commons or with one of its partners, you are more than welcome to do so;
- **network**; we are expanding the network; if you want to engage, participate, or know someone who would/could be interested in doing so, we would be more than happy to talk with you;

- **promote**; if you believe the thing we are doing is positive, and that it may bring positive outcomes for human beings, societies, rights and freedoms, please do make it public; we would appreciate it, and could also offer you some support in organizing events, initiatives, happenings or else.

## Contacts

Our main website is: <http://www.ubiquitouscommons.org>

(the current website hosts an early manifesto; the "real" one will be up by the end of February, also displaying some of the initial results)

*Research Coordinator:* Salvatore Iaconesi, [salvatore.iaconesi@artisopensource.net](mailto:salvatore.iaconesi@artisopensource.net)

*Partner Relations:* Oriana Persico, [oriana.persico@gmail.com](mailto:oriana.persico@gmail.com)