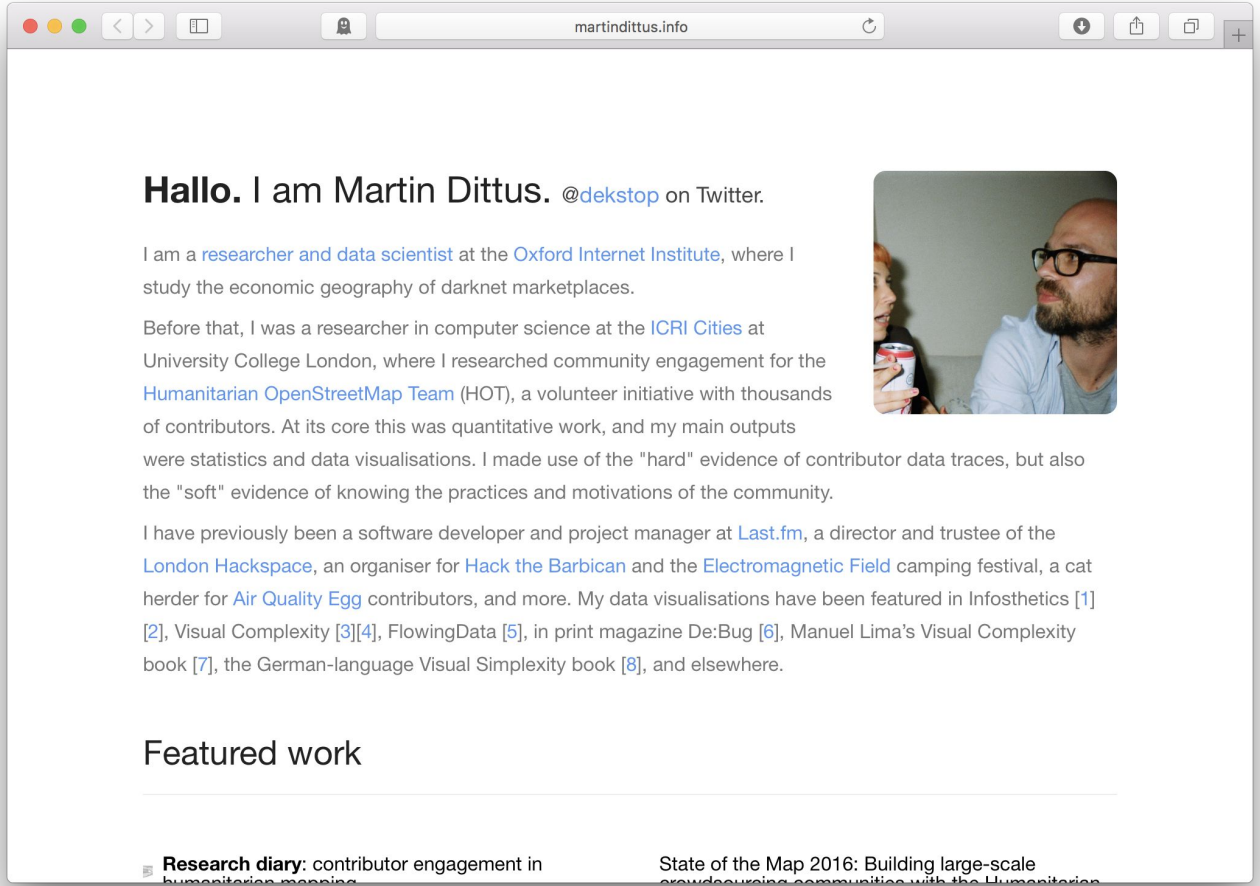

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Information geography: seeking to understand an increasingly digital world

In traditional geography, people and places are defined by their **physical locations** and **properties**.

Yet our lives and the places we live in are increasingly digital, and people and places are increasingly defined by their **virtual attributes** and **digital shadows**.

Graham, Zook, Boulton (2013). Augmented Reality in Urban Places: contested content and the duplicity of code.

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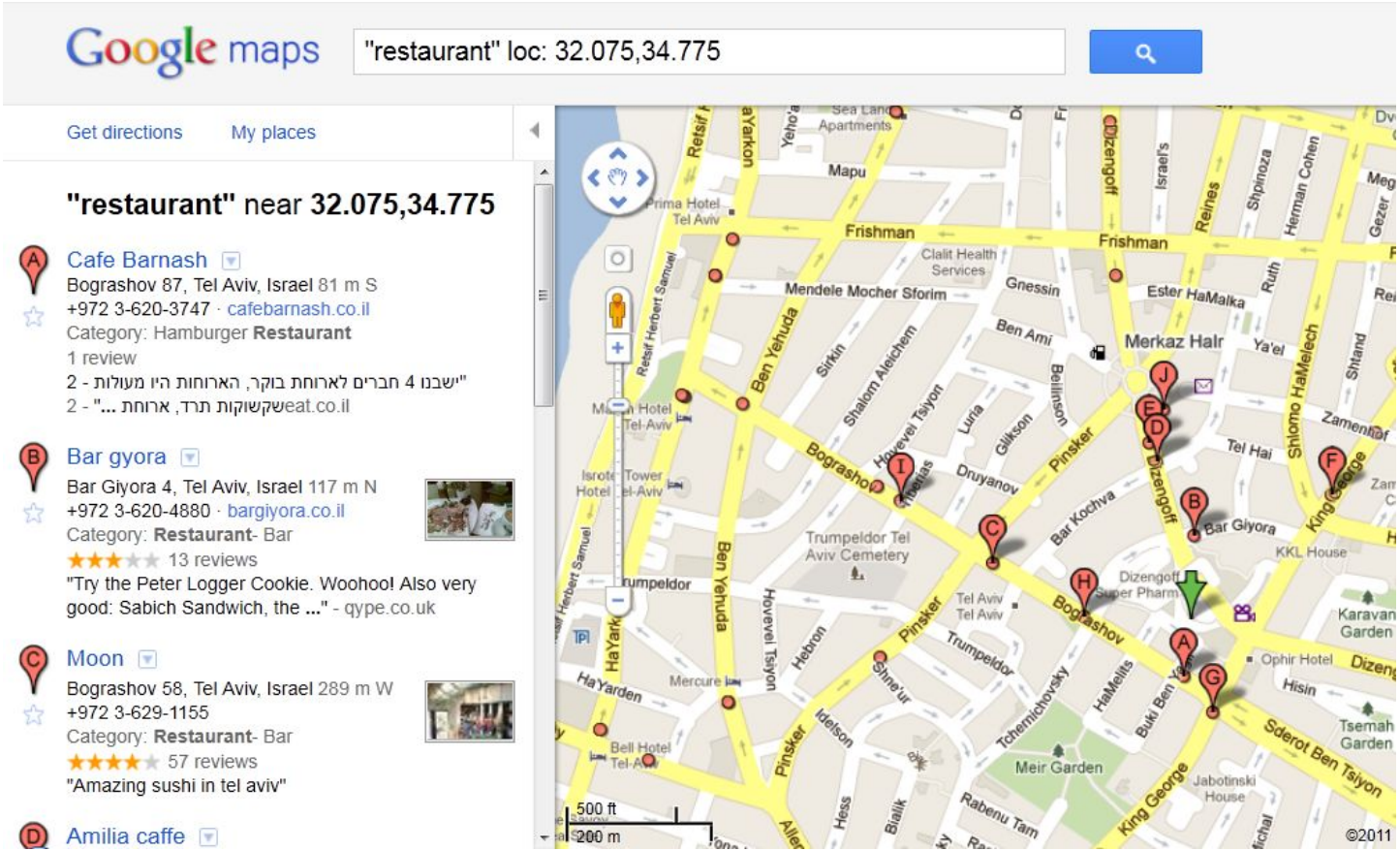

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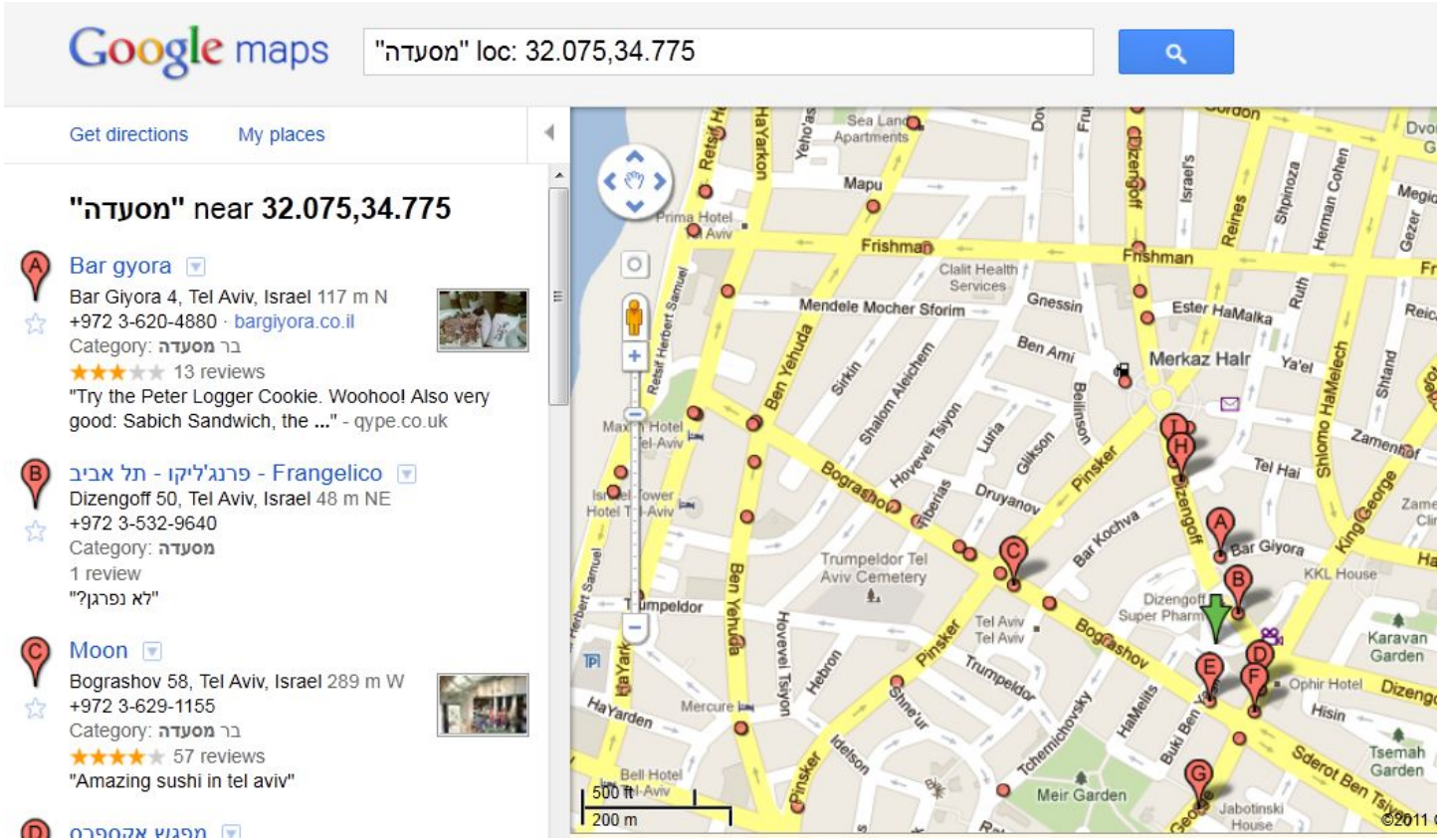

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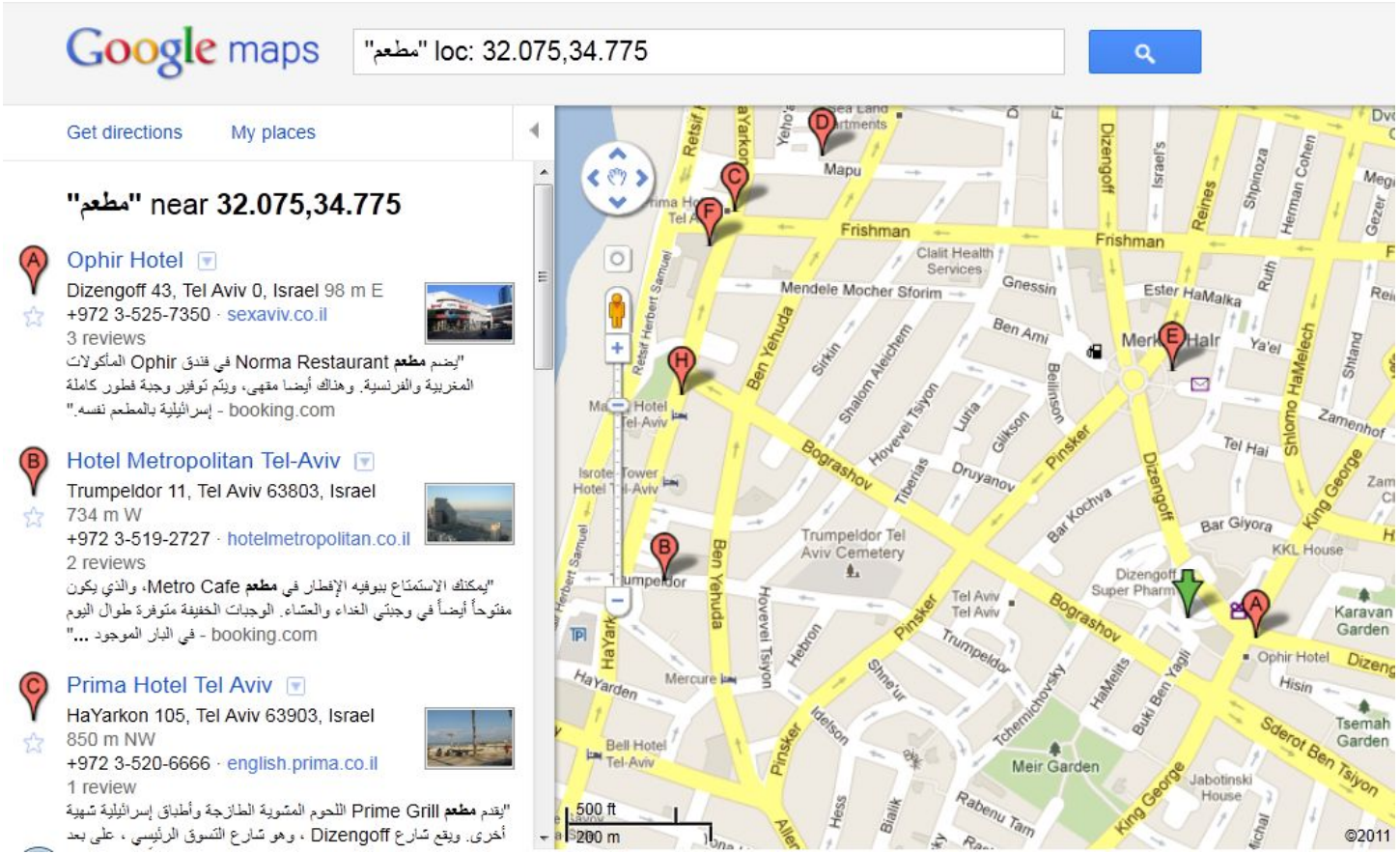

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Who **owns**, **controls**, **shapes**, and **has access to** those augmented and hybrid digital/physical layers of place?

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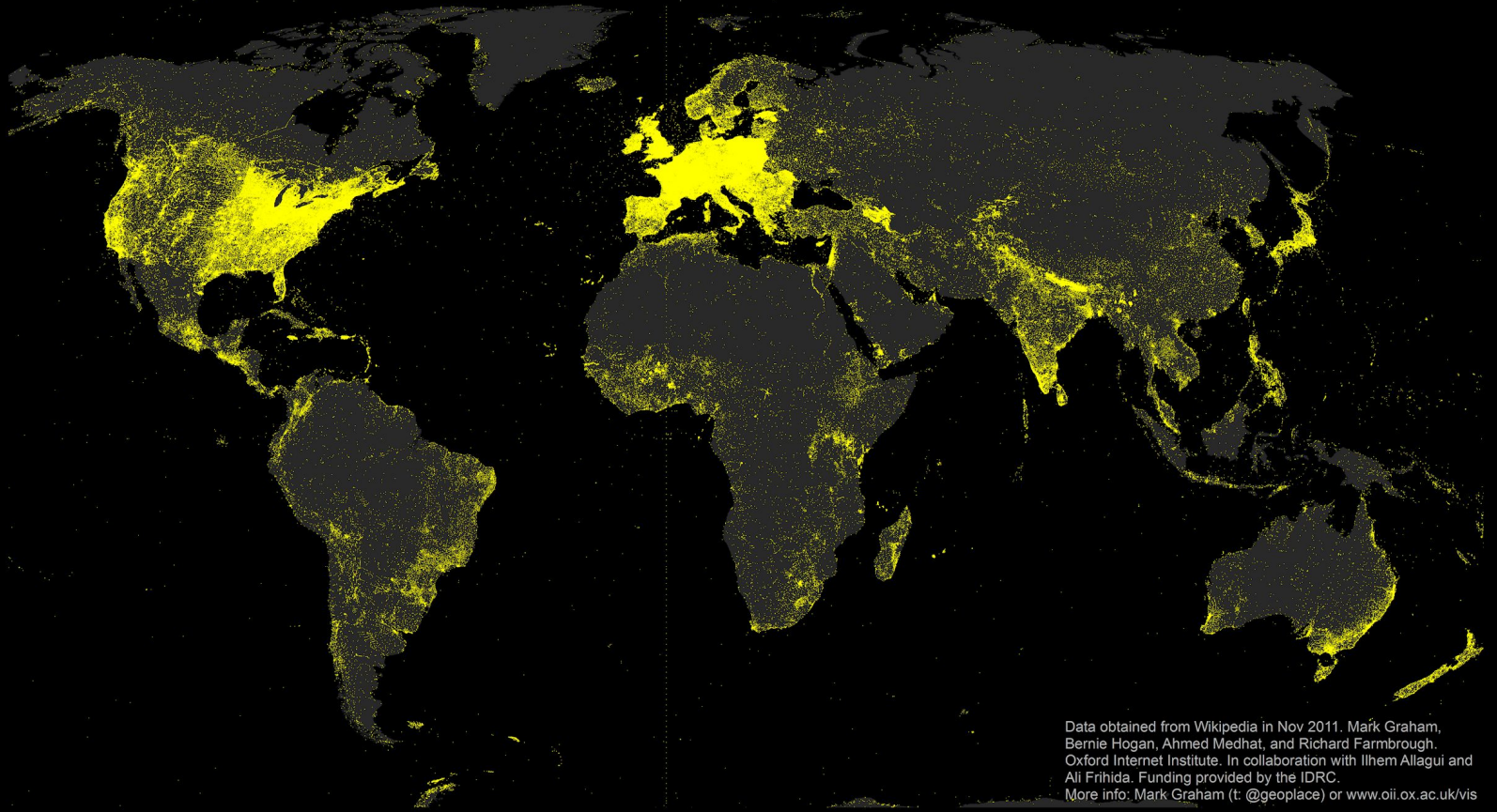
Geotagged Articles in English Wikipedia



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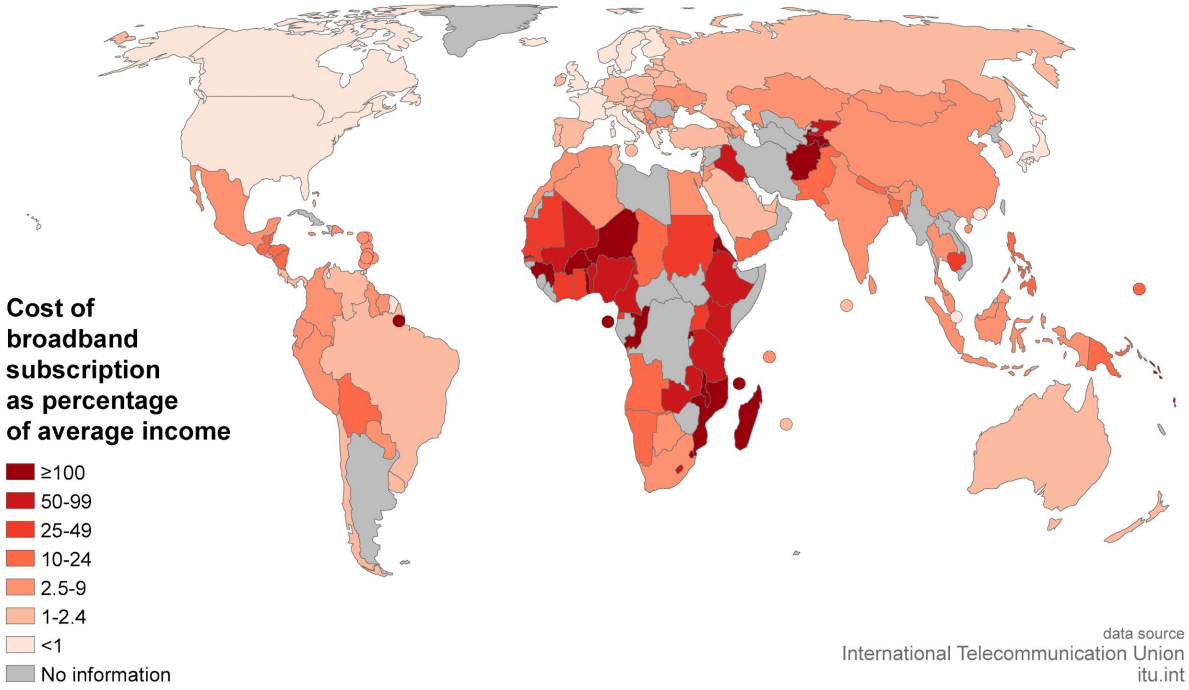
Local participation requires *connectivity*



The cost of broadband subscriptions relative to the gross national income per capita, in 2013.

Graham et al. (2015), "Towards a Study of Information Geographies: (im)mutable Augmentations and a Mapping of the Geographies of Information."

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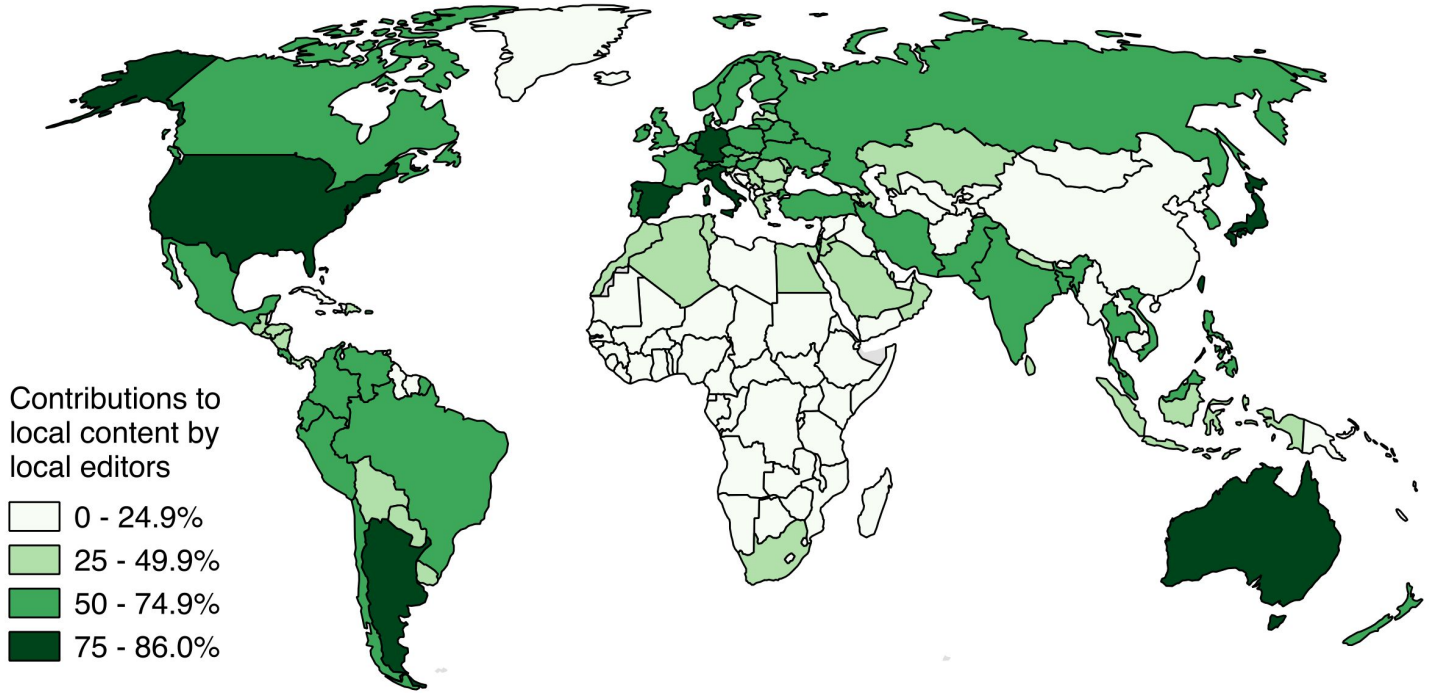
Building the capacity to tell your own story



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Not just imbalance, but **inequity**.

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Knowledge equity on Wikipedia

"We will strive to counteract **structural inequalities** to ensure a **just representation** of knowledge and people in the Wikimedia movement."

Knowledge equity: Knowledge and communities that have been left out by structures of power and privilege

We will strive to counteract structural inequalities to ensure a just representation of knowledge and people in the Wikimedia movement. We will notably aim to reduce or eliminate the gender gap in our movement. Our decisions about products and programs will be based on a fair distribution of resources. Our structures and governance will rely on the equitable participation of people across our movement. We will extend the Wikimedia presence globally, with a special focus on under-served communities, like indigenous peoples of industrialized nations, and regions of the world, such as Asia, Africa, the Middle East, and Latin America.

We will welcome people from every background to build strong and diverse communities.

We will create a culture of hospitality where contributing is enjoyable and rewarding. We will support anyone who wants to contribute in good faith. We will practice respectful collaboration and healthy debate. We will welcome people into our movement from a wide variety of backgrounds, across language, geography, ethnicity, income, education, gender identity, sexual orientation, religion, age, and more. The definition of community will include the many roles we play to advance free and open knowledge, from editors to donors, to organizers, and beyond.

We will break down the social, political, and technical barriers preventing people from accessing and contributing to knowledge.

We will work to ensure that free knowledge is available wherever there are people. We will stand against censorship, control, and misinformation. We will defend the privacy of our users and contributors. We will cultivate an environment where anyone can contribute safely, free of harassment and prejudice. We will be a leading advocate and partner for increasing the creation, curation, and dissemination in free and open knowledge.

https://meta.wikimedia.org/wiki/Strategy/Wikimedia_movement/2017/Direction

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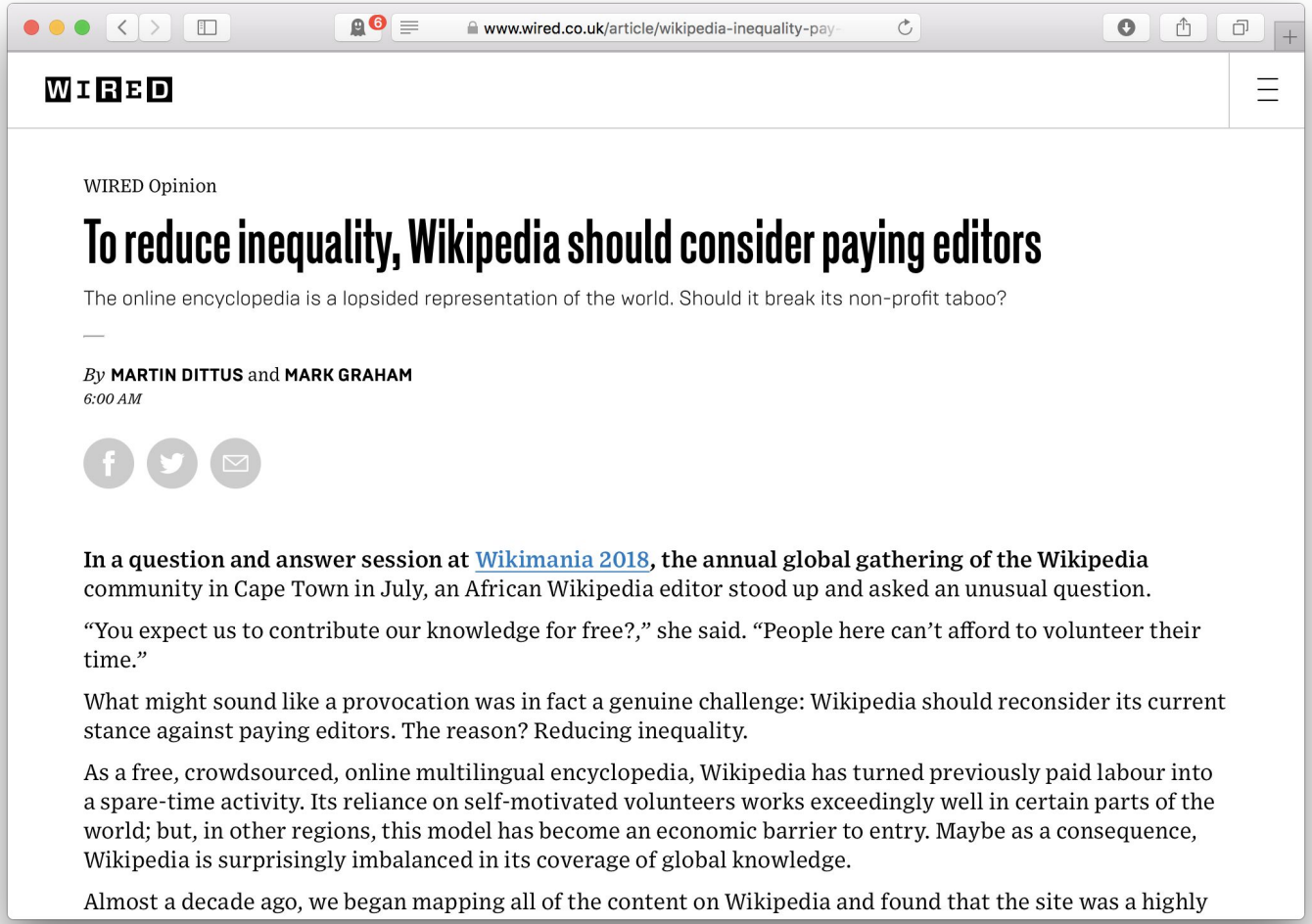

www.wired.co.uk/article/wikipedia-inequality-pay

WIRED

WIRED Opinion

To reduce inequality, Wikipedia should consider paying editors

The online encyclopedia is a lopsided representation of the world. Should it break its non-profit taboo?

—

By **MARTIN DITTUS** and **MARK GRAHAM**
6:00 AM

In a question and answer session at Wikimania 2018, the annual global gathering of the Wikipedia community in Cape Town in July, an African Wikipedia editor stood up and asked an unusual question.

"You expect us to contribute our knowledge for free?," she said. "People here can't afford to volunteer their time."

What might sound like a provocation was in fact a genuine challenge: Wikipedia should reconsider its current stance against paying editors. The reason? Reducing inequality.

As a free, crowdsourced, online multilingual encyclopedia, Wikipedia has turned previously paid labour into a spare-time activity. Its reliance on self-motivated volunteers works exceedingly well in certain parts of the world; but, in other regions, this model has become an economic barrier to entry. Maybe as a consequence, Wikipedia is surprisingly imbalanced in its coverage of global knowledge.

Almost a decade ago, we began mapping all of the content on Wikipedia and found that the site was a highly

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Unequal power of articulation & influence

Technology design often involves an **assumption of universality**: that one approach, designed by one organisation, will be sufficient to address all cases. Vs the concept of the **pluriversal** in decolonial theory: to allow for multiple entangled articulations to coexist, to emphasise those situated at the margins (Mignoli 2011).

Design is further shaped by forms of **cultural hegemony**: contribution processes are informed by a specific cultural (Western) context, others need to adapt (Irani et al. 2010).

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Complex technology: **inequitable by design**

Sociotechnical systems are often **intransparent** in their workings, and **designed by an expert elite**. This in inherently inequitable.

To counteract this, we should ask that **human oversight** always remains a central part of such systems. We should demand that **outcomes are legible to and interpretable by people affected** by algorithmic processes.

One might call this an “unblackboxing” of these systems.

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Seven conceptions of ***social justice***

David M. Smith (1994), “Geography and Social Justice”:

- **Egalitarianism**: equal distribution of wealth and power
- **Utilitarianism**: the greater good for the greatest number
- **Libertarianism**: value of the individual over the state
- **Contractarianism**: explicit agreements based on subjective preferences
- **Marxism**: rewarding the full value of an individual’s contribution
- **Communitarianism**: shared practices and values over individual or state interest
- **Feminism**: addressing power imbalances between groups

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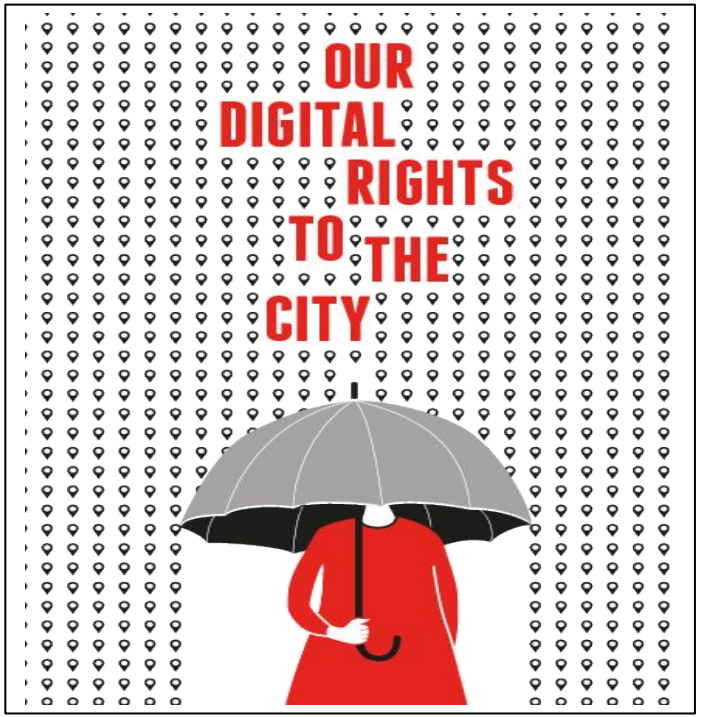
Digital rights to the city

Data justice, as analogous to **spatial justice**:

Data impacts how we **perceive**, **move through**, and **use** space.



Joe Shaw and Mark Graham (eds.): Our Digital Rights to the City. Meatspace Press 2017
https://meatspacepress.org/our-digital-rights-to-the-city/

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“AI”, “blockchain”, novel tech as

catalysts for **thought**

rather than effective solutions

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The blockchain is a lie

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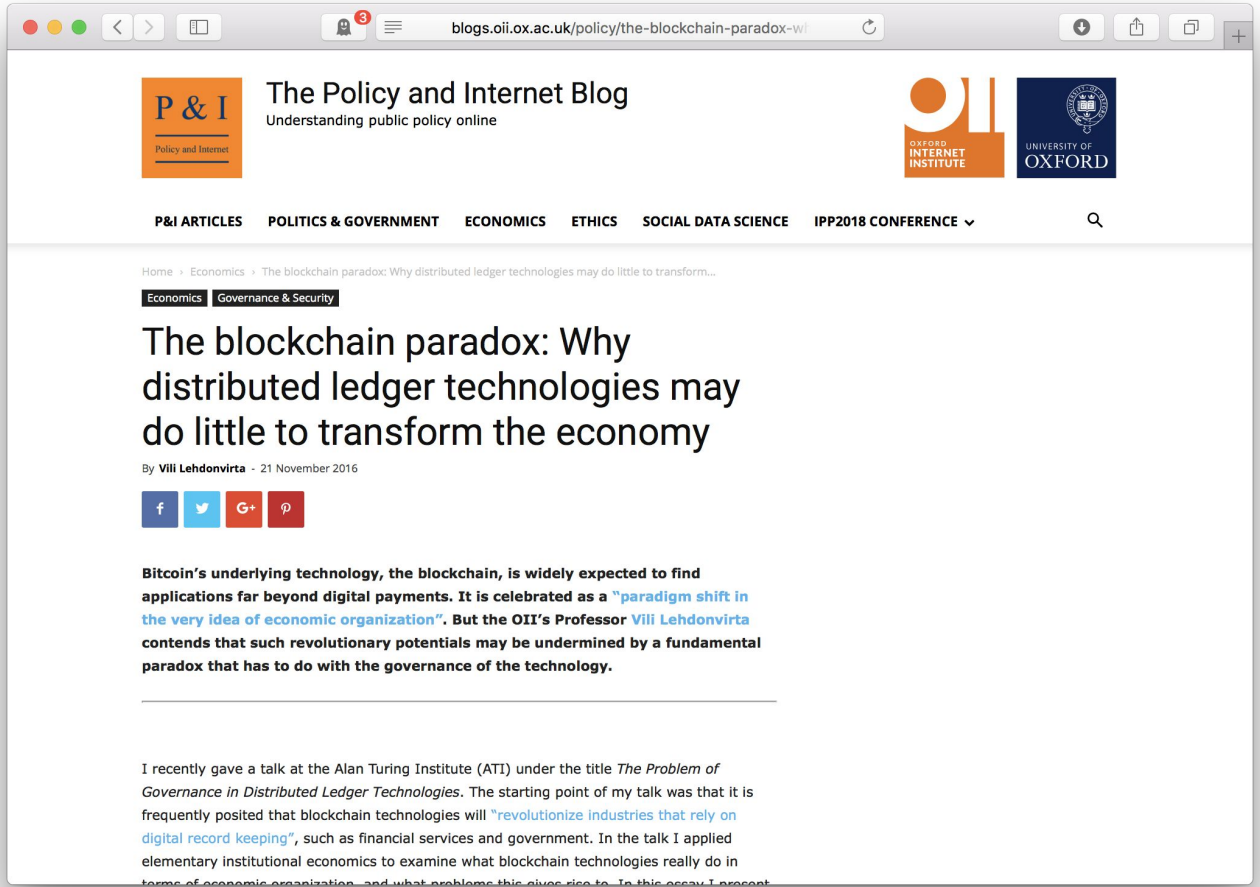
blogs.oii.ox.ac.uk/policy/the-blockchain-paradox-wl
The Policy and Internet Blog
Understanding public policy online
P&I ARTICLES
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Home › Economics › The blockchain paradox: Why distributed ledger technologies may do little to transform...
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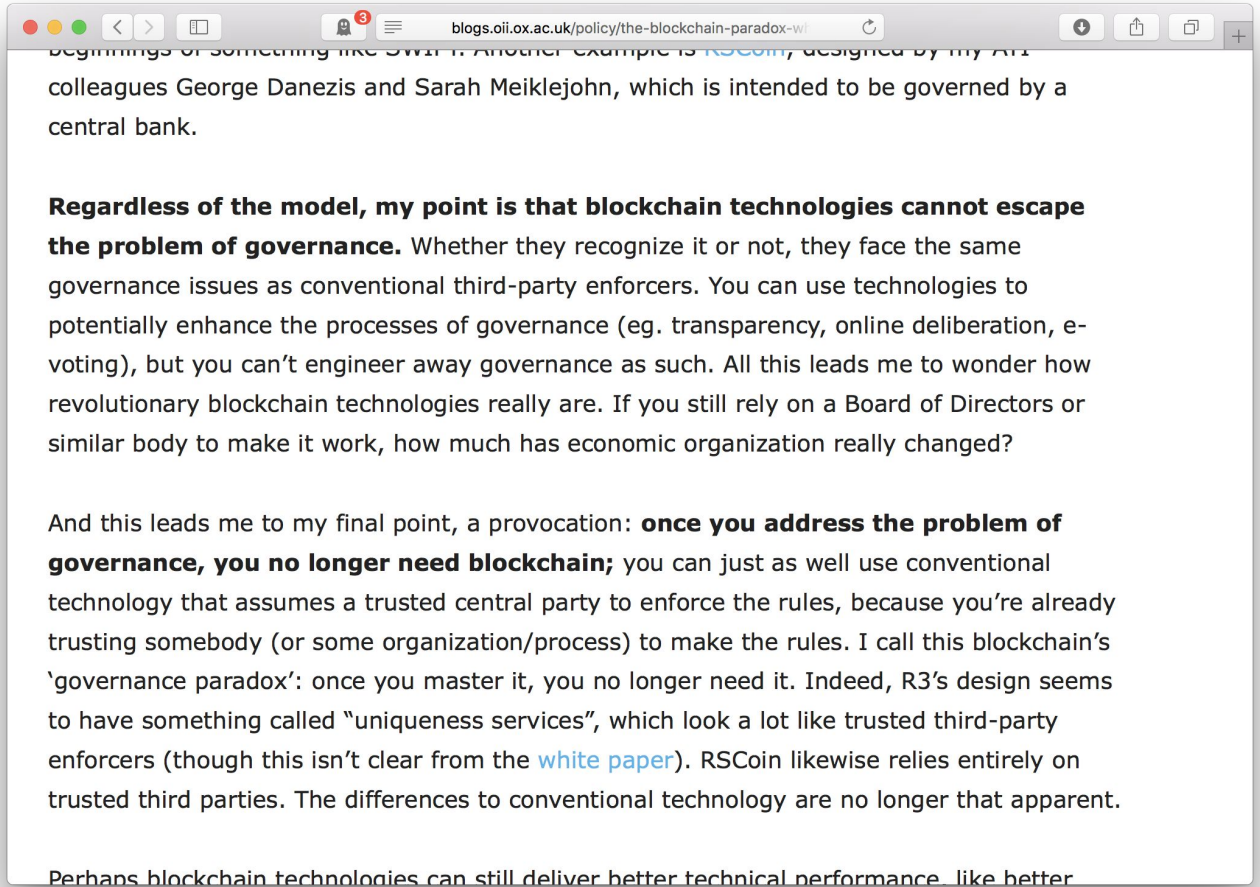
The blockchain paradox: Why distributed ledger technologies may do little to transform the economy
By Vili Lehdonvirta - 21 November 2016
Bitcoin's underlying technology, the blockchain, is widely expected to find applications far beyond digital payments. It is celebrated as a "paradigm shift in the very idea of economic organization". But the OII's Professor Vili Lehdonvirta contends that such revolutionary potentials may be undermined by a fundamental paradox that has to do with the governance of the technology.
I recently gave a talk at the Alan Turing Institute (ATI) under the title The Problem of Governance in Distributed Ledger Technologies. The starting point of my talk was that it is frequently posited that blockchain technologies will "revolutionize industries that rely on digital record keeping", such as financial services and government. In the talk I applied elementary institutional economics to examine what blockchain technologies really do in



beginnings of something like SWIFT. Another example is RSCoin, designed by my ATI colleagues George Danezis and Sarah Meiklejohn, which is intended to be governed by a central bank.

Regardless of the model, my point is that blockchain technologies cannot escape the problem of governance. Whether they recognize it or not, they face the same governance issues as conventional third-party enforcers. You can use technologies to potentially enhance the processes of governance (eg. transparency, online deliberation, e-voting), but you can't engineer away governance as such. All this leads me to wonder how revolutionary blockchain technologies really are. If you still rely on a Board of Directors or similar body to make it work, how much has economic organization really changed?

And this leads me to my final point, a provocation: **once you address the problem of governance, you no longer need blockchain;** you can just as well use conventional technology that assumes a trusted central party to enforce the rules, because you're already trusting somebody (or some organization/process) to make the rules. I call this blockchain's 'governance paradox': once you master it, you no longer need it. Indeed, R3's design seems to have something called "uniqueness services", which look a lot like trusted third-party enforcers (though this isn't clear from the white paper). RSCoin likewise relies entirely on trusted third parties. The differences to conventional technology are no longer that apparent.

Perhaps blockchain technologies can still deliver better technical performance, like better

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www.oii.ox.ac.uk/blog/anticipating-blockchain-for

Oxford Internet Institute | 0 | + New | Hi, Martin Dittus

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Blog

Anticipating Blockchain for Development: Data, Power and the Future

Author
Margie Cheesman

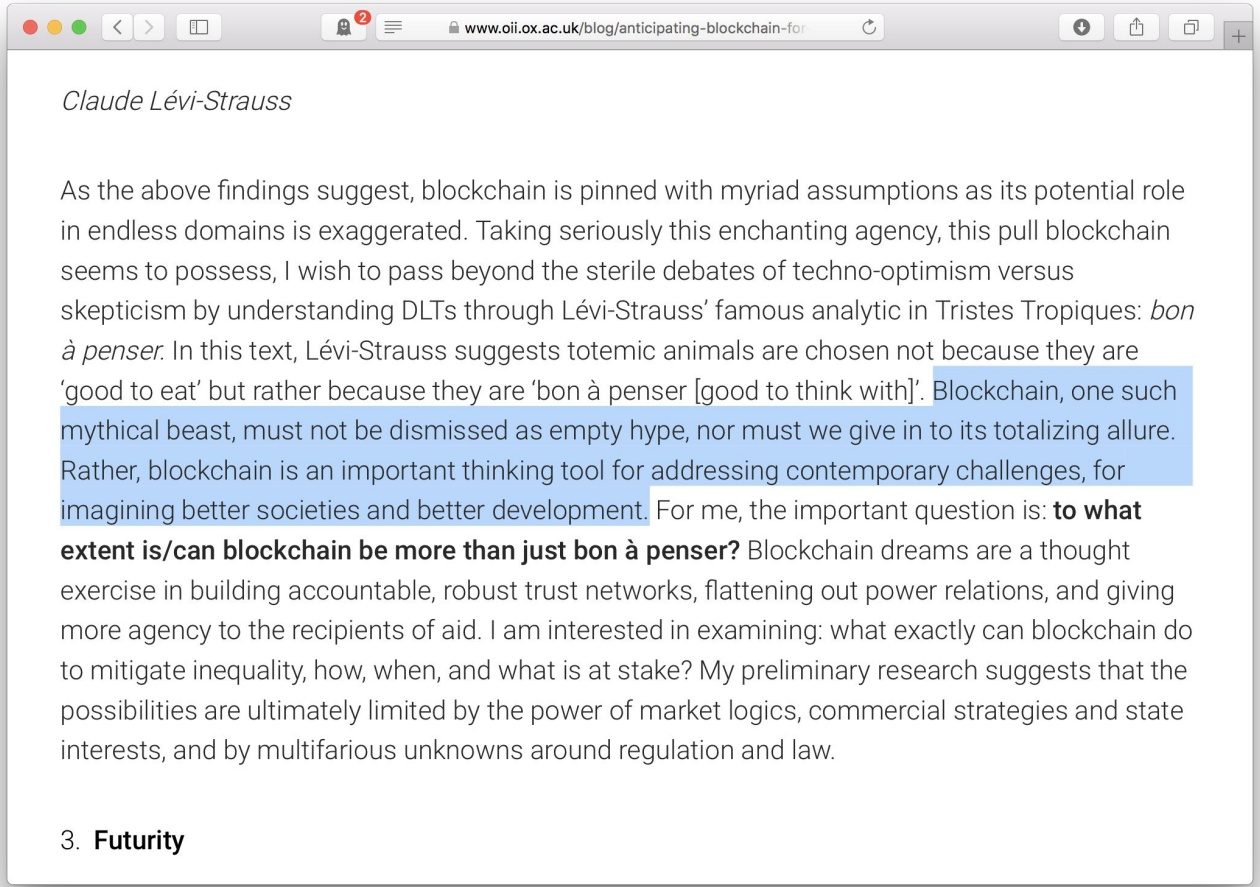
Posted
20 November 2017

Tags
anthropology, blockchain, data, Development, DLT, futures, ICTD, Information Geography and Inequality, oiifeatured, participation, power

In this post, Margie Cheesman, the CII group's new anthropologist, tells us about her background research and doctoral interests, which are at the intersection of digital infrastructures and international development.

Can blockchains and other distributed ledger technologies deliver significant social good? Or will they have disastrous consequences for humanity? Or – perhaps more likely – neither?

At the United Nations in New York in early 2016, I was at the opening conference for 'ID2020'. Representatives from international governments, NGOs and tech companies heralded distributed ledger technology (DLT) as the silver bullet for realising part of the UN's Sustainable Development Goal 16.9 by providing legal, biometric, digital, legal identity for everyone in the world, starting with birth registration. 'Blockchain' would thus be a way to solve the world's woes from human trafficking to electoral corruption, from tax evasion to social and economic exclusion to gender inequality.



Claude Lévi-Strauss

As the above findings suggest, blockchain is pinned with myriad assumptions as its potential role in endless domains is exaggerated. Taking seriously this enchanting agency, this pull blockchain seems to possess, I wish to pass beyond the sterile debates of techno-optimism versus skepticism by understanding DLTs through Lévi-Strauss' famous analytic in Tristes Tropiques: *bon à penser.* In this text, Lévi-Strauss suggests totemic animals are chosen not because they are 'good to eat' but rather because they are 'bon à penser [good to think with]'. Blockchain, one such mythical beast, must not be dismissed as empty hype, nor must we give in to its totalizing allure. Rather, blockchain is an important thinking tool for addressing contemporary challenges, for imagining better societies and better development. For me, the important question is: **to what extent is/can blockchain be more than just bon à penser?** Blockchain dreams are a thought exercise in building accountable, robust trust networks, flattening out power relations, and giving more agency to the recipients of aid. I am interested in examining: what exactly can blockchain do to mitigate inequality, how, when, and what is at stake? My preliminary research suggests that the possibilities are ultimately limited by the power of market logics, commercial strategies and state interests, and by multifarious unknowns around regulation and law.

3. **Futurity**

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People's surprising fascination with AI and blockchains reveals their curiosities/hopes/fears about **systems change**

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Thank you!

Martin Dittus, @dekstop

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