The Alan Turing Institute

databri-X – datathon
a brief history of governance

Jon Crowcroft, 27.5.25

Localisation: physical v. legal

- Databox/hat/personal data stores

  - Databox principles (human data interaction) at Aarhus 2015

  - Lots of examples (Solid, Bluesky PDS, (Matrix, Mastodon), Estonian digital citizen, EU, open wallet etc)

- Data lakes and data trusts

  - Alternatively, legislate/jurisdictional limits (not just GDPR)

  - Enforcement depends, and tends to be reactive where PDS proactive

Trustworthiness

- **Key management**

  - Who creates & stores keys

- **Exfiltration detection and redress**

  - Spotting bad actors can be hard – maybe inference

- **redress?**

  - Ostracism was a thing in medieval society☹

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Reflections on Distrusting Decentralization

- ## Why trust CryptoBros?

  - Don't trust anyone. Unsurprisingly, we shouldn't trust them – toxic eco-systems

- ## Why trust Real Decentralized (aka community) networks?

  - There is no "thing" - trust in decentralized systems is a social construct.

- ## Can you trust a commons (to persist?)

  - Ostrim wrote 8 useful rules for such a society to last (also antonidadis& martignoni)

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Usability

- Federation v. Decentralisation

  FL is not decentralised

- Coordination

  But FL or DL both need coordination which is hard.

- Flower et al

  FL platforms need to somewhat decentralise for scale anyhow ☺

License models (and Governance)

– Both software and governance can be licenses

> You want multiple implementations (c.f. IETF)

– BSD v. GPL

> For profit tend (but not 100%) avoid GPL – so why not just mit/bsd/ etc?

– Free Ride v. No Ride?

> For profit sometimes take it and run (can give evidence☹) interfer with dual governance model

Towards Governance 2.0

– Whereby public infrastructure

   Somehow, the Internet exists – why did that work?

– Wherefore profit/non-profit

   They didn't just fence and steal the commons. They stole your personal data..

– Sustainability

   Retaking and Retaining decentralised ownership is going to be hard☺

Governance 2.0 Challenges

– Asymmetric Power

   Hyperscalers are larger than countries/regulators; capture is almost total

– Asymmetric Expertise

–   Without the expertise how is the lay person supposed to even understand..

– Asymmetry of Motive

   As the Ais increase in agency, even their owners/keepers will cease to comprehend☺

Governance 2.0 is a Wicked Problem

– Unpredictable growth rates

   Bluesky AT Protocol use, for example

– Adversaries

–   at state actor scale..

– Political

–   e.g. just look at Open Wallet Foundation & Global Digital Collaboration

Questions?