

# An Open Web Index for Europe!

Concept for Safeguarding and Developing the Digital Infrastructure in Europe

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Submitted by

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*FREELY ACCESSIBLE KNOWLEDGE IS THE SOURCE OF CONTINUOUS COMPETITION,  
INNOVATION AND ENTREPRENEURSHIP ON THE ONE HAND AND PERSONAL FREE-  
DOM AND FREEDOM OF EXPRESSION ON THE OTHER HAND.*

*THE OPEN WEB INDEX IS THE REQUIREMENT FOR IT!*

Prof. Dirk Lewandowski, University of Applied Sciences Hamburg

# 1 THE OPEN WEB INDEX IN BRIEF

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The Open Web Index (hereinafter referred to as OWI) is an approach aimed to hold society accountable for a digital infrastructure in Europe and enhance the infrastructure to create a foundation for an open digital society from within Europe.

The OWI meets two requirements:

- The political claim of a liberal Europe based on an open digital infrastructure.
- The objective to promote a highly innovative startup and entrepreneurial culture in Europe.

Search engines and the underlying web indices are all currently privately owned. And, they are all located outside of Europe. An Open Web Index, in contrast, creates a new and open digital infrastructure for a variety of competing services to build on. On the one hand, these are familiar services like search engines and related developments (meta trading platforms, aggregation services, trend analyses etc.), but can also be entirely new services whose properties and added value we are not yet able to see.

It is a feature of almost any new infrastructure that it is impossible to predict what will be developed on it – an infrastructure which is free for use, however, creates the potential for disruptive innovative leaps. When the infrastructure “internet” was created, no one thought of Google or Facebook.

Building a web index will require a 7-year development phase. During this setup phase, all other issues (organizational institution, legal form) will be clarified, the necessary infrastructural decisions taken, and the Open Web Index will capture and make available the documents of the Latin language area. For the development and operation of the Open Web Index, an institute will be established and responsibility will be on the public. Part of this institute will be a “European Center of Search Excellence” which will provide significant contributions to the debate on fundamental questions, standards and indices.

The Open Web Index considers itself part of the European Digital Agenda. A 7-year initial funding of about € 125 million is required for the setup phase; the funds will be provided by public sources.

## 1.1 WHAT DOES AN OPEN WEB INDEX REPRESENT?

The Open Web Index can simply be compared with a public library. It contains all published knowledge. In Germany’s national library, for instance, all texts published in Germany are collected, registered in the directory and made available to the public.

The Open Web Index is organized in a similar way. The index collects, presents all content of relevant websites and makes it available. The OWI makes all content accessible openly, comparable with a public library. Search engine operators, database providers, other digital services providers, businesses and civil society organizations access content via their services. The Open Web Index is a public infrastructure which can be used flexibly in a changing world.

A variety of different services can build on a web index and generate added value. The most common examples of services based on a web index are search engines. Therefore, the following text primarily refers to search engines.

## **1.2 WHY DO WE NEED AN OPEN WEB INDEX?**

There are only four important web indices in the world: Google, Bing/Yahoo/Microsoft, Baidu (China), and Yandex (Russia). Europe, one of the most important economic regions, lacks access to knowledge and has no digital infrastructure. This situation endangers the civil liberties of European countries and the independency of the European economy and slows down the innovative capacity of the emerging European digital startup culture.

We think that the Open Web Index is urgently required for the following reasons:

- Safeguarding of the critical infrastructure
- Restoration of the informational sovereignty of Europe
- Stimulation of competition in “internet search”
- Stimulation of the European startup and internet economy
- Development of business models beyond the concept of “data for information”

### **1.2.1 Safeguarding of the critical infrastructure**

The Open Web Index is part of a critical infrastructure: only content which is found on the internet is available in emergencies. The difficult negotiations between the European Commission and Google demonstrate that it is time for Europe to have an independent digital infrastructure even under difficult circumstances. The following principle applies: in a situation of crisis the only infrastructure which is secure is the one which is subject to one’s own jurisdiction.

### **1.2.2 Restoration of the informational sovereignty of Europa**

Discussions about civil rights, informational self-determination, data protection and the right to privacy in digital society differ in various cultural areas. But, despite all differences between European countries: The European identity differs from the Chinese, Russian, and even from the American way of handling data protection and privacy. The establishment of civil rights on the internet depends on whether the legal view can be enforced. It requires the existence of a basic digital infrastructure. The concept of the Open Web Index corresponds with the features typical for the internet-based “platform economy”. It provides a digital infrastructure service within its own jurisdiction, but leaves it to businesses to compete for the best solution and enter into permanent competition for innovation.

Informational sovereignty can only be achieved on the basis of a powerful network infrastructure.

### 1.2.3 Stimulation of competition in “internet search”

The use of only one single search engine narrows the concepts of searching and retrieving information on the internet. Each presentation of search results is an (algorithmic) interpretation of web content – while many interpretations are possible, the use of just one search engine narrows the opportunities to one single interpretation. The open web index helps avoid the danger of a so-called filter bubble.

Search applications for the worldwide web can only be built on the basis of a comprehensive and updated web index. New concepts like the semantic indexing of the entire web and “data-saving concepts” for search or approaches for the disclosure of the identity driven by users on the internet require an openly designed network infrastructure; the core is an open system for the indexing of knowledge available on the internet.

### 1.2.4 Stimulation of the European startup and internet economy

The restriction of access rights to currently available search engine APIs is increasingly turning out to be a major obstacle for an open and diverse network society (economy, research, civil society). Open access to the interfaces of this index enables the implementation of new and promising concepts beyond the narrowed view of an internet economy with increasingly rigid oligopolies.

### 1.2.5 Development of business models beyond the concept of “data for information”

Popular services like Google and Facebook are not free; instead, they apply the concept of “data for information”. Data represent the collection of information about the preferences and behavior of users, and the exploitation of data in the interest of the company. The information imbalance between a few globally operating internet companies and citizens who have been reduced to being internet users for a long time now is reduced. The development of alternative services which are not based on the “voluntary compulsory” disclosure of information is long overdue in a democratic society - and requires the appropriate information basis.

## **1.3 HOW IS THE OPEN WEB INDEX DESIGNED?**

The Open Web Index is a key element, if not the foundation for the European Digital Agenda. It avoids the mistakes of the past of competing with business solutions based on the dynamics and euphoria of the capital markets. It reflects the core values of civilian democratic societies in the era of knowledge society: freely accessible knowledge is the source of innovation, freedom, freedom of opinion, and renewed competition and entrepreneurship.

The organizational institution for the Open Web Index recognizes the need to work rapidly and flexibly and considers the necessary integration of technological expertise, proper management and the involvement of key stakeholders. These facts will lead to the ultimate type of organizational institution.

## **1.4 WHAT ARE THE NEXT STEPS IN THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE OPEN WEB INDEX?**

We think that a period of seven years is required for the completion of an Open Web Index concept (including model-like operation).

## 1.5 WHAT ARE THE COSTS FOR THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE OPEN WEB INDEX?

The necessary costs will finally be identified during the implementation phase. The following issues have to be considered:

- How can basic/infrastructure services be separated from add-ons/additional services?
- Which technological services are necessary in the long run to avoid misuse of access/SPAM) etc.?
- Which forms of basic processing of content should the OWI provide?
- Which crawling services are to be delivered centrally? Which ones can be decentrally supplied?
- How should a research structure be designed to become an “Open European Center of Search Excellence”?

An annual financial volume in the (low) three-digit million range is required for the 7-year initial funding phase. The opportunities for partial refinancing through usage fees paid by commercial users is part of the consideration.

## 1.6 WHO ARE THE ORGANIZATIONAL INSTITUTIONS OF THE OPEN WEB INDEX INITIATIVE?

The Open Web Index initiative is supported by

Institution	Contact	Link
SUMA-EV	Dr. Wolfgang Sander Beuermann	<a href="http://suma-ev.de">http://suma-ev.de</a>
University of Applied Sciences Hamburg (HAW), Faculty Design, Media, Information	Prof. Dr. Dirk Lewandowski	<a href="http://www.searchstudies.org/dirk">http://www.searchstudies.org/dirk</a>

## 1.7 WHERE CAN ADDITIONAL INFORMATION BE ACCESSED?

Additional information:

What	Where
Manifest “Open Web Index“	<a href="http://openwebindex.eu/">http://openwebindex.eu/</a>
Documentation SUMA-EV Congress	<a href="http://searchstudies.org/de/suma2015.html">http://searchstudies.org/de/suma2015.html</a>
SUMA-EV	<a href="http://suma-ev.de/">http://suma-ev.de/</a>
MetaGer, secure German meta search engine	<a href="https://metager.de/">https://metager.de/</a>