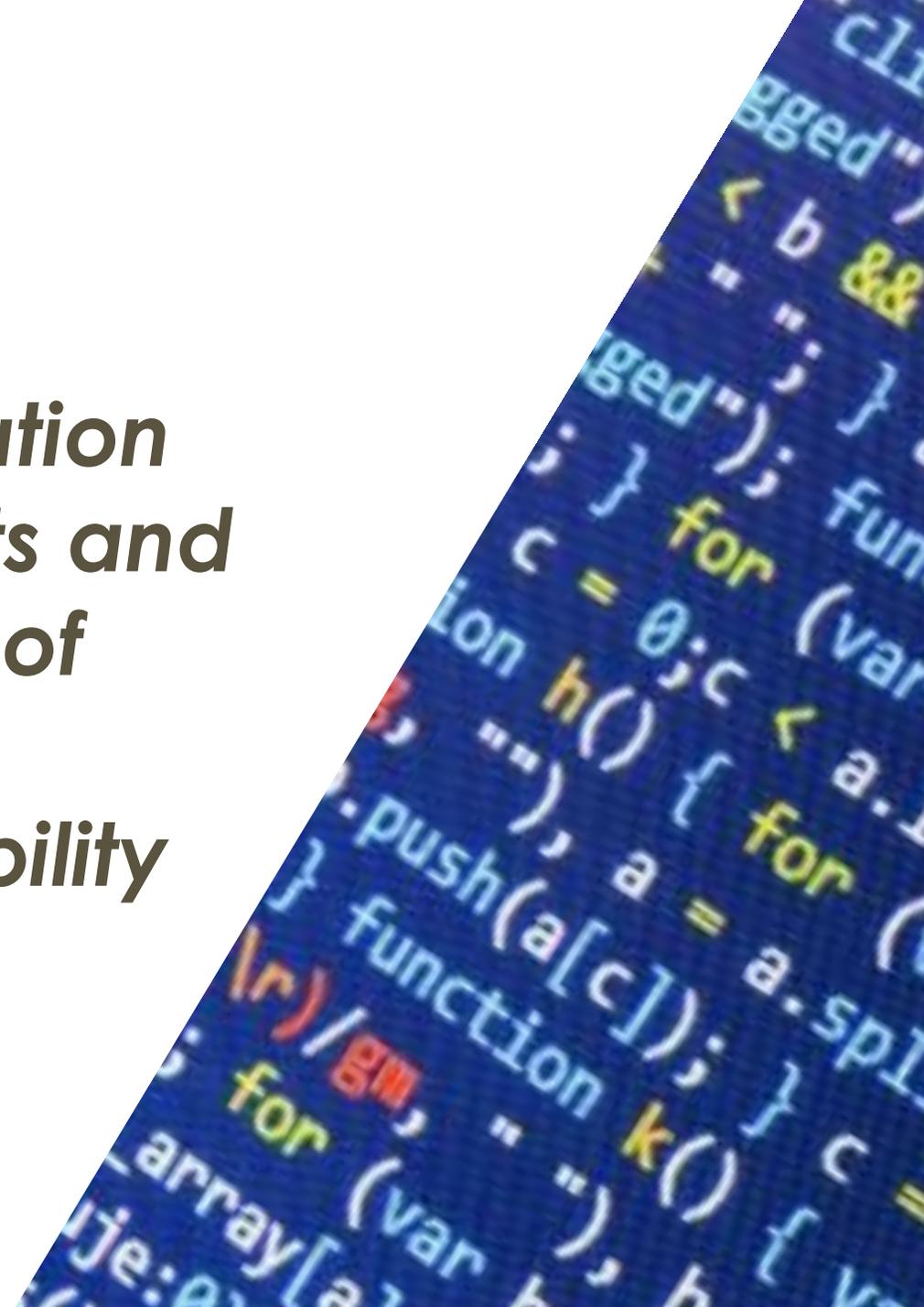


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European University Institute, Conference on  
Understanding and Addressing Digital  
Inequalities, November 20th, 2025

# *Data Liberation Experiments and the Politics of Platform Interoperability*





# Research Questions

RQ1: How the right to data portability can be substantiated in today's oligopolistic platform ecosystem?

RQ2: How can users reclaim agency over the personal and social data they generate within corporate social media?

RQ3: How personal and publicly available social media data can be ethically, legally, and effectively repurposed beyond the platforms where these were originally created?

## Centralized Social Media Platforms

- 'Platform society' (van Dijck, Poell, and de Waal, 2018)
  - 'Surveillance capitalism' (Zuboff, 2019)
  - 'Opinion Power' (Helberger, 2020)
- Constitute the dominant infrastructure of today's attention economy.

# The Fediverse

The Fediverse (a portmanteau of “federated universe”) is a network of independent, interconnected servers that run open-source social networking software and communicate through common protocols.

- Diaspora (2010)
- ActivityPub (2014)
- Mastodon (2016)



## Centralized Social Media VS Decentralized Platforms

<b>Domains</b>	<b>Centralized Social Media</b>	<b>Decentralized platforms and open protocols</b>
<b>Governance</b>	Corporate ownership and unilateral control (terms of service, moderation, APIs).	Federated governance: each instance sets its own rules and policies within a shared protocol.
<b>Infrastructure</b>	Proprietary, centralized servers; closed architectures.	Open-source, federated servers; interoperability via open standards (e.g., ActivityPub).
<b>Data Control</b>	User activity treated as proprietary assets; restricted portability; API lockdown (“APIcalypse”).	Users retain greater autonomy; content and social graphs remain portable across instances.
<b>Business Model</b>	Surveillance capitalism: targeted advertising, policy design for business maximisation, and attention exploitation.	Donation-based, community-driven, or volunteer-supported; absence of systematic advertising.
<b>Interoperability</b>	Actively resisted; portability limited to static exports.	Interoperability by design; cross-instance communication and identity migration possible.
<b>User Agency</b>	Minimal: lock-in effects and limited exit options.	Higher: choice of instance, identity migration, collective governance.
<b>Scalability</b>	High scalability, advanced metadata enrichment, and algorithmic curation.	Limited scalability; lack of central infrastructure for advanced search, moderation, and recommendation.
<b>Examples</b>	Facebook, TikTok, YouTube, Instagram, X (Twitter).	Mastodon, PeerTube, Pixelfed, Lemmy, Mobilizon

# Data Portability

**Data portability** can be defined as *the act of taking one's own data, contacts, and some of one's settings elsewhere, so that a system does not force its users to remain locked-in.*

## → Article 20 GDPR

- *Data Transfer Project* (Google, Meta, Microsoft, and Twitter) sought to establish common APIs for direct, platform-to-platform transfers since 2018, reducing friction in personal-data migration.

- For instance, Google Takeout would give you a zip file of your files on Google Photos, but if you want to share them to PixelFeed, the federated replacement of Instagram, you will lose date, time, comments and description.

→ Data portability cannot translate into genuine user empowerment or market competition without **interoperability**.

# Interoperability

**Interoperability** refers to the ability of new technical tools to work together because they share the same standard.

- Companies fight over the definition of a "standard protocol"
- Interoperability is not only a technical matter, but also a political one
- Corporate social media naturally resist interoperability because their economic model depends on "lock-in"

# Adversarial Interoperability

Why adversarial? Platforms do not want it to happen.

It emerges in political contexts where regulation fails to guarantee real interoperability.

Facebook itself once benefited from adversarial interoperability with MySpace (Doctorow, 2019).

Similar tactics have been adopted not by competitors but by civic technologists and researchers seeking to expose and counter platform power

→ 'adversarial auditing' (Panigutti et al., 2025)

# Defining Data Liberation

*Data liberation is the adversarial acquisition of data from surveillance-capitalist platforms to enable alternative uses.*

- (i) occur primarily when no legitimate or regulated mechanisms for portability and interoperability exist;
- (ii) must not reproduce exploitative models by merely transferring them from the ‘source’ network to the destination;
- (iii) acknowledge and preserve the authorship and provenance of liberated content; and
- (iv) ensure responsible data stewardship and curation, aligning reuse with the contextual norms and interests of the recipient network.

# Data Liberation Initiatives

<b>Data Liberation Initiatives</b>	<b>Example</b>	<b>Data Extracted</b>	<b>Purpose(s)</b>
<b>Cross-platform interoperability bridges (e.g. sociagraphs)</b>	Matrix bridges (to Slack, WhatsApp, etc.); POSSE; Fedifinder; Movetodon; Debirdify; DSNP; Lens Protocol / CyberConnect;	Social graph mapping; identity reconstruction; replication of communities; Cross-posting tools of media content (text, images, videos)	Empowers users to migrate between platforms; reduces lock-in; stimulates competition; strengthens federated ecosystems; Reduces the exclusive value of content for a single platform, ensuring the creator a multi-platform audience and lowering audience lock-in.
<b>Events &amp; civic coordination</b>	Librevents; Mobilizon importers	Event metadata (title, time, location, organiser) scraped from Facebook, re-published in federated networks.	Allows communities to coordinate outside closed platforms sustaining civic life; reduces dependence on incumbents.
<b>Government &amp; institutional communication</b>	Post Preserve; Mnemonic (Syrian Archive); e-Archiving initiatives	Official posts from public institutions' social accounts, stored with metadata; Social media videos, posts, records of abuses	Ensures legal compliance (FOIA, Sunshine laws); maintains institutional accountability; secures public record.

# Data Liberation Initiatives

<b>Public discourse and accountability</b>	Politwoops; Deleted-tweets archives	Tweets (incl. deleted) from elected officials on Twitter/X, to preserve public political speech.	Enables accountability of politicians; supports journalistic scrutiny; strengthens transparency in democratic debate.
	Zuckless News; TikTok Global Observatory	Scraped feeds; personalised recommendations	Improve platforms accountability and uncover potential systemic risks
<b>Digital cultural heritage &amp; web archiving</b>	Internet Archive (Wayback Machine)	Snapshots of websites and social media pages captured over time.	Preserves digital culture for research; ensures reproducibility of knowledge; creates independent civic memory.
	BESOCIAL (Royal Library of Belgium)	Social media posts and metadata harvested, structured into knowledge graphs for preservation.	Safeguards cultural memory; enables reproducibility of social research; supports heritage institutions.

# Data Liberation as Data Resistance

*Civic hacking*

*'Data resistance' allows "infrastructural counter-imagination" (Milan, 2024)*

*Data as a public resource (Napoli, 2019)*

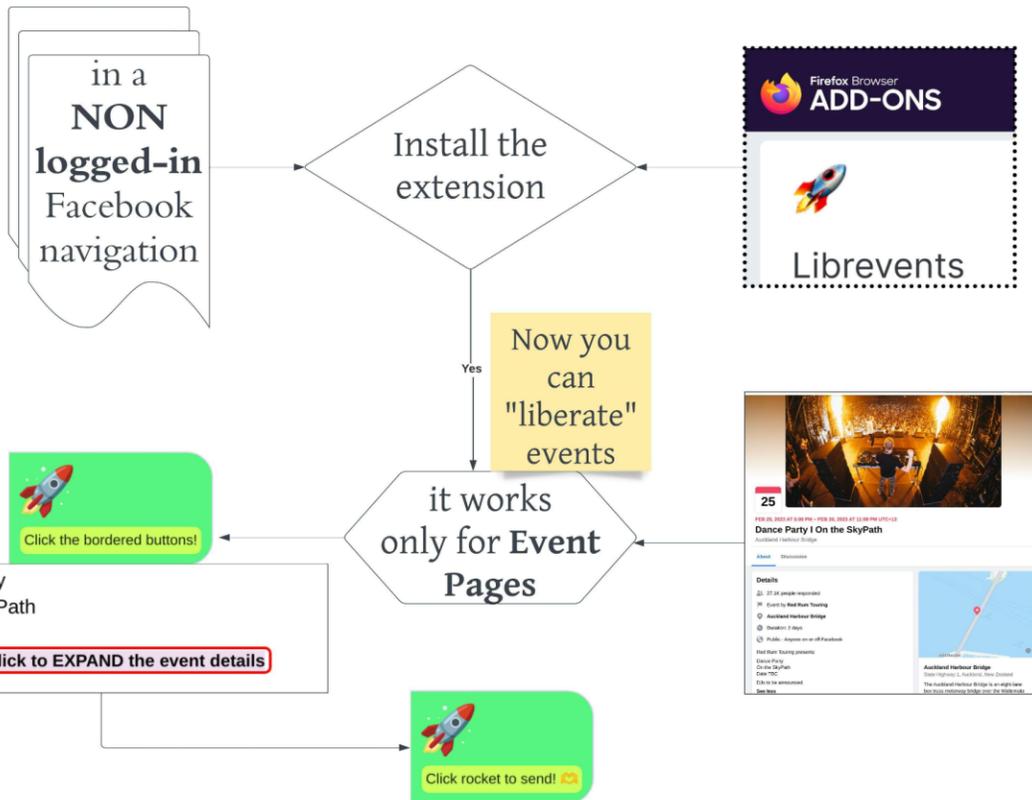
*Data as relational: 'Contextual integrity' (Nissenbaum, 2004)*



"Eat your own dog food"



# Librevents experiment



The interface consists of several components:

- Extension Interface:** A green button with a rocket icon and the text "Click rocket to send!".
- Event Page:** A screenshot of a Facebook event page for "Auckland Marathon 2023" on Saturday, May 13, 2023, at 8:00 AM UTC+12. The event is held at the Auckland Harbour Bridge. The page includes details such as "5 people responded" and "Event by Major Marathons Australia and Live Nation Special Events Aus & Nz".
- Backend:** A database icon labeled "backend" connected to the event page.
- User Interface:** A screenshot of the Librevents user interface, showing a "Your Mobilizon account" section with fields for "Mobilizon" (https://mobilizon.librevents/api), "Login" (mobilibr@mt2015.com), and "Password". It also includes a "Backend server" field (https://librevents) and a "See, Review or Delete the data you sent" section.

# Librevents experiment

The image shows a Facebook event page for "Virtual Tour of the Genealogy Center" on Thursday, December 29, 2022, at 6:30. The event is online and organized by the Genealogy Center. A sidebar on the left lists various event categories, with "Crafts" highlighted. A login overlay is visible in the top right corner, showing fields for Mobilizon URL, login email, password, and backend server. The event details section includes a duration of 1 hour and a public access setting. The event description invites users to join a virtual tour and see resources available for their neighborhood, with a red box highlighting the instruction to click to expand the event details.

facebook

Email or phone

### Events

Search Events

Home

### Categories

- Classics
- Comedy
- Crafts**
- Dance
- Drinks
- Fitness & Workouts
- Foods
- Games
- Gardening
- Health & Medical
- Healthy Living & Self-Care
- Home & Garden
- Music & Audio

version 0.3.4, released 3 days ago

It works only on events page, [like this.](#)

Your Mobilizon account

Mobilizon <https://mobilizon.librevents/api>

Login [mobilibr@mt2015.com](mailto:mobilibr@mt2015.com)

Password ●●●●●●●●

Backend server <https://librevents>

See, Review or Delete the data you sent

[Access the Personal page](#)

External Links

[ABOUT](#) [PRIVACY](#) [CODE](#) [FEDIVERSE](#) [DISAPPEAR](#)

29

Virtual Tour of the Genealogy Center

THURSDAY, DECEMBER 29, 2022 AT 6:30

## Virtual Tour of the Genealogy Center

Online event

Join Event

About Discussion

### Details

1 hr

Event by Genealogy Center

Public · Anyone on or off Facebook

Are you planning to visit The Genealogy Center or just curious about what we have? Join us for a Virtual Tour of The Genealogy Center to see what resources are available for your n... **Please click to EXPAND the event details**

Networking Online

# Librevents experiment

Key words

YAAM

Location

e.g. 10 Rue Jangot

Date

Any day

Type

Any type

Events 0

Groups 1



**YAAM Berlin [unofficial]**  
@yaam\_berlin

This is an inofficial Mobilizon group for events by the venue YAAM. This group is administered by the mobilize.berlin...

11 members or followers

@yaam\_berlin@mobilize.berlin

Search results

All People Hashtags Posts

@vecna  
Edit profile

What's on your mind?

CW EN 500

Toot!

YAAM Berlin [unofficial]  
@yaam\_berlin@mobilize.berlin

Mobilize.berlin Explore

Search

Sign up Log in

://about blank [unofficial] > Events

## ://about blank [unofficial]'s events

### Passed events

Passed events

October 2021

**Deutscher Feiertag - Deutsche Gewaltnacht // About Blank**  
Berlin  
No participants yet

7 OCT

September 2021

**arch 0.5: Flaminia, JacqNoise, Jamaica Suk, Peter Kirn**  
Berlin  
No participants yet

1 SEP

**Occupy, Schulden und Bullshit-Jobs - Ein Abend zum 1. Todestag David Graebers**  
Berlin  
One participant

2 SEP

# Librevents experiment

The screenshot shows a Facebook event page for "Virtual Tour of the Genealogy Center" on Thursday, December 29, 2022, at 6:30. The event is online and public. A login overlay is present, showing fields for Mobilizon account, URL (https://mobilizon.lib.events/api), login (mobilibr@mt2015.com), password, and backend server (https://libr.events). The event details section indicates a 1-hour duration and provides a link to expand event details.

**facebook**

**Events**

**Categories**

- Classics
- Comedy
- Crafts**
- Dance
- Drinks
- Fitness & Workouts
- Foods
- Games
- Gardening
- Health & Medical
- Healthy Living & Self-Care
- Home & Garden
- Music & Audio

**29** Thursday, Dec 29

**Virtual Tour of the Genealogy Center**

THURSDAY, DECEMBER 29, 2022 AT 6:30

Online event

[About](#) [Discussion](#)

**Details**

- 🕒 1 hr
- 🚩 Event by Genealogy Center
- 🌐 Public · Anyone on or off Facebook

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# Enacting Data Liberation: Challenges and Opportunities

Category	Challenge	Description
<b>Technical</b>	Interface Volatility	Changes to Facebook's front-end required scraper update.
	Anti-Scraping Barriers	Rate limiting, CAPTCHAs, and dynamic content loading obstructed extraction.
	Data Quality	Automated imports required costly manual verification.
	Fragmented Conversations	Comment threads between platforms remained unsynchronized.
<b>Ethical</b>	Consent Dilemma	Organizers' uncertainty about mirrored events caused legitimacy concerns.
	Attribution Ambiguity	Users questioned authenticity and ownership of reposted content.
<b>Legal</b>	Terms of Service Conflicts	Automated extraction violated platform contracts though not necessarily law.
	GDPR & Privacy Tensions	Conflicts arise around consent, attribution, and contextual use. Tensions between the right to data portability (Art. 20), the right to erasure (Art. 17), exemptions for journalistic and archival purposes (Art. 85), and archiving in the public interest (Art. 89).
	Interoperability	Data liberation initiatives operate outside formal DMA provisions, exposing unresolved issues regarding consent, identity verification, and privacy.
<b>Governance</b>	Sustainability	Volunteer-based maintenance proved unsustainable long-term.

# Enacting Data Liberation: Challenges and Opportunities

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# Future Prospects

- Switching costs
- Mass migration
- Avenues to reinforce data liberation initiatives in Europe
  - Article 27 DSA
  - Article 80 GDPR



Reversing.Works

A<sub>1</sub> FORENSICS



CMPF

# Thank you!

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