

Towards a European Network for Copyright in support of Education and Science (ENCES)

Berlin, Nov 15th 2008

There is currently no organized group representing European interests in furthering a science- and education-friendly copyright. One way to change this situation is by developing an EU-wide network of organizations and individuals in science and education who share the view that knowledge in science and culture in general is a socially valuable construct which should not be fully privatized (as private property) but rather should stay in the commons as common property.

Let us remember that the primary objective of copyright is to promote the progress of science, education, and culture as part of the commons. The private appropriation of knowledge, in particular in science, education and culture, has never been considered a means in itself but is only justified when it serves fundamental rights, such as freedom of expression and the right to education. These rights are crucially dependent on access to published knowledge under fair conditions. Access to knowledge is a fundamental right in open information societies and a fortiori for science and education, where it is indispensable.

Why is there a need for an interest group, for a European network in support of a science- and education-friendly copyright? Is copyright still an appropriate means for achieving public goals in education and science? Should we not rather turn to open access, an initiative which stems from science itself and is on its way to becoming the dominant scientific publishing model, making possible free access to knowledge for all, for a solution to the current access crisis?

Currently regulation via copyright is more a disabling than an enabling tool for science and education. For this reason it is essential that we work towards a better balance between private and common/public property rights in the foreseeable future. Let us consider, for instance, making copyright a means to protect science and culture as common properties and giving commercial exploiters license rights which will not hamper free access to knowledge.

To this purpose we believe that there is a need for coordinating existing European interest groups and initiatives working towards a copyright in the public interest. The voice of science and education will only be heard if and when it is legitimized by as many science organizations and individual scientists as possible.

This legitimization cannot be achieved by the members of the Berlin workshop in Nov 2008 alone. But the Berlin workshop can be a first step towards ENCES, a European Network for Copyright in favor of Education and Science which can provide a platform for organizations and individuals working towards a new commons-based understanding of copyright. ENCES can be a means both for concrete lobbying work at the EU level and for supporting comparable national efforts in EU member countries.

What is really needed is a fundamental change, a paradigm shift in the way all aspects of the production, dissemination, and usage of knowledge and information are organized in the information society. ENCES can be a platform for the development of a commons-based understanding of knowledge and culture.

The participants of the Workshop "Copyright Regulation in Europe – An Enabling or Disabling Factor for Science Communication" – Berlin Nov. 14-15th 2008