UNIVERSITY OF AMSTERDAM

UvA-DARE (Digital Academic Repository)

Money Talks? Report on the one-day symposium on the impact of corporate funding on information law research

Bodó, B.; von Schwichow, H.; Appelman, N.

Publication date
2020

Document Version
Final published version

License
CC BY-SA

Link to publication

Citation for published version (APA):
Bodó, B., von Schwichow, H., & Appelman, N. (2020). *Money Talks? Report on the one-day symposium on the impact of corporate funding on information law research*. (Amsterdam Law School Legal Studies Research Papers; No. 2020-16), (Institute for Information Law Research Papers; No. 2020-02). Universiteit van Amsterdam, Instituut voor Informatierecht. https://papers.ssrn.com/sol3/papers.cfm?abstract_id=3593350

General rights
It is not permitted to download or to forward/distribute the text or part of it without the consent of the author(s) and/or copyright holder(s), other than for strictly personal, individual use, unless the work is under an open content license (like Creative Commons).

Disclaimer/Complaints regulations
If you believe that digital publication of certain material infringes any of your rights or (privacy) interests, please let the Library know, stating your reasons. In case of a legitimate complaint, the Library will make the material inaccessible and/or remove it from the website. Please Ask the Library: https://uba.uva.nl/en/contact, or a letter to: Library of the University of Amsterdam, Secretariat, P.O. Box 19185, 1000 GD Amsterdam, The Netherlands. You will be contacted as soon as possible.

UvA-DARE is a service provided by the library of the University of Amsterdam (https://dare.uva.nl)

Download date:05 Sept 2026

MONEY TALKS?

the impact of corporate funding on information law research

EUROPEAN HUB
OF THE GLOBAL NETWORK OF
INTERNET AND SOCIETY
RESEARCH CENTERS

IViR

Instituut voor Informatierecht
Institute for Information Law

Authors: Balázs Bodó, Helene von Schwichow, Naomi Appelman

Suggested Citation: Bodó, B., von Schwichow, H, Appelman, N (2020). "Money Talks? Report on the one day symposium on the impact of corporate funding on information law research". Amsterdam: Institute for Information Law; Berlin: European Hub of the NoC.

The original program of the symposium, on which this report is based, can be found at:

https://www.ivir.nl/program-money-talks-the-impact-of-corporate-funding-on-information-law-and-policy-research

The program committee of the symposium was: Dr. Balázs Bodó, Prof. Dr. Mireille van Eechoud, Prof Dr. Nico Van Eijk, Sarah Eskens, Prof. Dr. Natali Helberger, Prof. Dr. Joris van Hoboken, Prof. Dr. Bernt Hugenholtz

Institute for Information Law
University of Amsterdam
www.ivir.nl

European Hub of the NoC
c/o Alexander von Humboldt Institute for Internet and Society gGmbH
noc-europeanhub.net

This work is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution-ShareAlike 4.0 International License.

Summary

Corporate funding is a contentious issue in information law and policy research. In the fall of 2019, the Institute of Information Law at the University of Amsterdam, and the European Hub of the Network of Centers invited academic research institutions, as well as junior and senior scholars to reflect on the issues around corporate influence on research through money, data, infrastructure, access. The discussion arrived at a number of important conclusions:

- The discussion on funding must include data, infrastructure deals, and other forms of indirect funding
- Sometimes corporate funding is the only way to get access to critical resources
- Transparency is a must, but not a silver bullet to deal with funding
- It is difficult to set up universal *a priori* norms of which type of funding is acceptable in which situations,
- Academia may need new institutional solutions to review funding, and manage the potential risks of funders taking over the agenda, research bias, and reputational harms
- Public funding bodies are part of the problem as much of the solution.

The rapid, but consequential shifts in the digital landscape in terms of technological innovation, dominant economic actors, power relations, social, political structures, transform the environment of academic research which aims to address the legal and policy issues around those changes. More and more issues, such as content moderation, intermediary liability, digital advertising, algorithmic discrimination, the accountability of AI systems are framed as regulatory dilemmas. As a result, legal research is both in growing demand, and has gained visibility, and significance. As the future rules of the information society are shaping up in the discussions led, or at least prominently shaped by information law research, the temptation to influence it also increases. Research institutions must acknowledge the shifting landscape and the growing stakes.

Challenges at that scale require more than individual integrity: there is a need for institutional solutions that on the one hand can actively assess, and mitigate the potential harms in each individual case, and on the other hand, is able to actively shape the funding landscape, and the norms around funding.

Introduction

The Institute for Information Law[1] at the University of Amsterdam, and the European Hub of Network of Centers[2] organized the Money talks? event[3] in October, 2019, to discuss the impact of corporate funding in information society related legal research.

The ethical issues raised by the presence of corporate funding have been prominent in other disciplines, like life sciences, or climate research for quite a long time. In response to the growing global dominance of just a handful of mostly US, digital corporations (the so called GAFAM[4]) not just in their respective markets, but also in academic funding, we decided to bring together researchers and institutions in the information law domain to critically evaluate our current approaches to how we deal with corporate money in and around our work. It is clear that while there are complicated questions around corporate funding, we do not have a consensus on the norms, rules, institutional procedures, which would help us navigate the ethical, financial, trust and power issues that come with corporate collaborations.

On the one hand, collaboration with industry partners carries many benefits, as it gives access to financial resources, data, expertise, real world applications, influence, or key fora and personnel. Oftentimes, it is close to impossible to conduct research around certain topics, such as AI, without entering into industry collaborations. Public funders also started to prioritize research collaborations and public-private partnerships. Corporate funding sometimes supplements missing public resources, sometimes complements limited budgets, so for example events can be more inclusive, or affordable.

On the other hand, such collaborations come with a number of potential costs and risks. Corporate funders may want to influence the research agenda; prioritize certain topics at the expense of others; or may even want to directly influence results. Research funding is used to generate academic evidence around or support for partisan policy objectives. Conference funding is often believed to serve as a way to whitewash the brand and reputation of businesses with ethically disputable practices.

However, the efforts of corporate entities to inject themselves into the process of scholarly research and academic discourse is merely the sign of a larger challenge the academic community must address. We are living in times in which the future rules of the information society are being negotiated and consolidated. The stakes are high regarding who gets a say in setting the rules, and what forms these rules will take. There are high stakes struggles going on in the information law domain to shape how political and economic power, social structures, cultural practices, access to key information society resources, from hardware, via IP, to data is organized. This struggle takes place in many domains, and academia is one of them. Business competitors, states, various stakeholders and interest groups struggle to consolidate their power over the future of information society, and this struggle also takes place in and over academia: the very bodies of researchers and research institutions.

Funding, whether that be public, non-profit, or for-profit private is political. The tech sector, the biggest source of our private funding has entered an era where it both creates and struggles to solve complex ethical, legal challenges, and this affects everyone, including academics. Researchers under authoritarian regimes are trying to maintain their independence and integrity against their own governments. Individual scientists and research institutions may fall victim to corporate or political struggles above their heads, their own desire for fame, power, or money, as well as public perceptions. To illustrate the complexity of challenges, consider, for example the case

[1] https://www.ivir.nl/

[2] https://noc-europeanhub.net/

[3] https://www.ivir.nl/program-money-talks-the-impact-of-corporate-funding-on-information-law-and-policy-research/

[4] Google, Apple, Facebook, Amazon and Microsoft

where an NGO published a list of scholars who accepted money from Google.[5] The report highlights some who haven't been transparent about accepting corporate funding, but also inaccurately accuses many researchers. As it later turned out, the NGO was funded by Oracle, and the report was part of a larger effort to steer public opinion in relation to a US lawsuit between the two firms. Elsewhere, some researchers raise concerns about the funding by corporations whose technology is used by democratically elected governments' law enforcement, military or intelligence agencies to pursue politically highly contentious policies, while others are glad to join the ranks of these companies, and take their research private.

The discussion that led to the Money talks? event started in 2018, at the Amsterdam Privacy Conference[6], when a number of researchers raised concerns about Palantir's sponsorship of the event[7]. At that time there was only limited time and space to discuss the issue, and the debate mostly focused on the ethical assessment of the company, and where to draw the line in accepting the money and presence of corporations with contentious practices. Almost a year later, it has become clear that the issue of private funding needs to be subjected to rigorous scrutiny, as most of the major funders in the domain already engage in, or can be expected to be associated with questionable practices at some point. This situation forces the research community to move beyond the question of whether funding from this or that corporation is acceptable, and the discussions on where to draw the line of cooperation. If we acknowledge that all corporate funding can, and will be subjected to rightful critique, if we realize that public funding often suffers from similar problems, especially in authoritarian countries, and if we acknowledge that non-profit private funding is not immune either from politically charged attacks, we have to find ways to protect the academic community from the potential harms that may come with the different forms of external funding.

The aim of the event was to discuss what the information law and policy research community can do to deal with, and hopefully neutralize the proven and potentially corrosive effects of corporate funding, and in more general, deal with the fact that we need to preserve our trustworthiness, public standing and integrity in the midst of a power struggle, where we are not, and cannot be neutral observers.

We hoped to realize this aim through methods of well-established academic processes. We launched a Call for Papers, hoping that there are ample academic studies, empirical observations, and theoretical discussions of the topic. While there was an overwhelmingly positive initial response to the call, at the end of the day we only received a limited number of submissions. This in itself is noteworthy, and suggests that we lack focused scholarly attention to one of the most important components of the scholarly infrastructure.[8]

To make up for the gaps in the submissions, the organizing committee proposed two additional topics to discuss: funders' priorities, and institutional best practices. To address the first, we invited representatives from the main funding sources: the officials of the University of Amsterdam, Dutch and European public funders, the for-profit and nonprofit private funders so their individual priorities, practices, policies could be discussed in relation to each other. Different funding streams deeply affect each other, sometimes they compete with, sometimes they complement each other, and even if there is little direct interaction, public funders should be aware of the funding policies of private entities. Since the event was part of the European Hub of the Network of Centers, global network of internet and society research centers, we also wanted to provide time and space to discuss the funding issue from an institutional perspective, to collect different approaches, and work towards a compilation of best

[5] https://www.googletransparencyproject.org/
[6] https://www.apc2018.com/
[7] https://fundingmatters.tech/
[8] It is especially worrisome that we received no submissions that discussed the state's meddling with research and science in authoritarian countries, despite the fact that from Turkey via Russia to Hungary it is clear that the walls of the ivory tower have disappeared, and academia is as exposed to the will of authoritarian regimes as, for example, the press.

practices. To facilitate constructive discussion we decided to switch the open academic symposium format to a closed meeting under the Chatham house rule.

The way the event turned out reflected the complexities of the topic. We had around 30 participants from more than 17 different research institutions. We had three academic papers presented, we had four funders present from the private sector, from the university, from the European Research Council. The discussions, which we outline below, were addressing crucial issues in a very productive manner. On the other hand, we also had a last minute cancellation of a panel, because panel members felt uncomfortable with the presence of a particular corporate funder in the room, and the change of rules (from an open event to chatham house rules) between their submission and the actual event. The withdrawal highlights a number of issues: the contentious nature of some of the questions we need to discuss, the differences in which we approach these issues, and also the spectrum of responses we give to the challenges we face. Ultimately, though the withdrawal resulted in important voices to be missing from the debate, their absence also sent a strong signal, and in that sense helped to shape the subsequent discussion.

The most important outcome of the symposium might be the realization that there is no clear path ahead, as we lack consensus on how to deal with private funding. That being said, the event managed to highlight a number of important topics for future discussions:

- **Transparency is a must, but not a silver bullet to deal with corporate funding.** The participants agreed that being very transparent about funding is non-negotiable, but it does not address the reputational costs that may come with accepting funding that is later being politicised.
- **It is difficult to set up a priori norms of which type of funding is acceptable in which situations.** There are substantial institutional differences in the expectations vis-a-vis funders, which yield very different responses to funding. Some institutions reject all corporate funds, others overwhelmingly rely on them. To address these issues the researcher community may need to set up review bodies which can conduct a peer review of funding arrangements in their respective contexts.
- **Funding goes way beyond the issue of accepting money from private entities.** Funding is part of a larger landscape, in which academic research is increasingly reliant on privately provisioned infrastructures (such as Google Scholar, or Elsevier products) to conduct its daily business, and where research and researchers are increasingly privatised, and absorbed into the internal organization of big corporations. The funding discussion should also take into account this wider context of how research is transformed in the long run by corporate presence.
- **Public funding bodies are part of the problem as much of the solution.** Information law research is too important to be left to be dominated by corporate funders. Public funders need to be more active in this domain. However, the current trends, in which the valorization of research is encouraged through public-private cooperation, and a closer involvement of businesses in the research valorization process threatens this domain's ability to differentiate fundamental and applied research. While some topics necessitates the involvement of businesses, in others, such involvement is counterproductive. Public funding in information law and policy research must provide research spaces which can maintain their independence from corporate presence or influence. Yet, current funding policies seem to move in the opposite direction, with higher expectations of economically valuable research, and involvement of private parties.

Academic research on corporate funding

The symposium started with three academic papers on the topic. First, Friso Bostoen (Institute for Consumer, Competition & Market, KU Leuven) gave a talk titled "Corporate funding for academic research into antitrust law and technology" Friso summarized the potential effect funding can have on research. In particular he pointed to biased results; the distortion of the academic debate through its polarization, the distortion of the competition of ideas, and academic lock-in; as well as the negative effects on the perception of research, regarding its impartiality, validity, neutrality, and the stigmatization due to disclosure. Focusing on the possible solutions, the paper then discussed the ASCOLA Declaration of Ethics[9], which also recommends the disclosure of not having anything to disclose; and the recommendations that go beyond disclosure. These include individual practices, such as increased scrutiny of funded research, institutional policies of review and disclosure, or maintaining lists of unacceptable funders; and funders' responsibilities, regarding the independence and disclosure requirements they expect fundees to abide by.

The discussion about the paper mostly focused on the ASCOLA Declaration, its status and its relation to existing EU initiatives. It was noted that the declaration is very researcher directed and does not sufficiently address the role institutions have to play. The discussion then turned to the fundamental question of whether a disclosure type system is sufficient for addressing the problems tied to corporate funding. The effect of negatively perceived funding on individual researchers, and how this can significantly impact careers was discussed. One tentative conclusion was that some types of funding should perhaps just be avoided because disclosure cannot address problems arising from reputational harm. One participant noted that funding often leads to the 'footballisation' of science where funding leads to scholars being sorted into 'teams', where pre-defined agendas, loyalties, and alliances are assumed based on who works with which funder.

Second, Hans Radder (Department of Philosophy, VU University Amsterdam) presented his work on "How to counter the commodification of academic research?" based on his book "From commodification to the common good: Reconstructing science, technology, and society"(University of Pittsburgh Press, 2019). The talk focused on the rise of patents as a way to commodify and privatize publicly funded research results. The paper argued that acquiring patents is incompatible with the (widely accepted) Mertonian codes of scientific conduct, and discussed the patenting policies of universities and funding agencies, and the role they play in the further commodification of academic research. The possibilities of open access patenting and defensive patenting was then discussed as a means to prevent commodification.

Finally, Jake Goldenfein (Cornell Tech) discussed their paper "The Question of Google Scholar"[10]. The talk stressed the importance of other, seemingly less controversial forms of corporate presence in academia, namely the control of key infrastructural elements. The example of Google Scholar (GS) was used to discuss how such a control can have negative, often unnoticed effects on the process, and outcomes of research. For example: there is a large language asymmetry with Google Scholar not properly processing all languages, benefitting English language publications over others. The same applies to disciplines (with a heavy tilt towards computer science), and types of works included in citation indices (such as preprints, manuscripts, and blog posts). The authors argued that GS "shifts, disrupts, undermines, or otherwise alters the conventions and norms of academic work" while it is difficult to understand it's impact, because it is entirely opaque and non-accountable. This loss of control over the assessment systems of academic work is a problem for academic autonomy.

[9] https://ascola.org/content/ascola-declaration-ethics

[10] Goldenfein, Jake and Benthall, Sebastian and Griffin, Daniel S. and Toch, Eran, Private Companies and Scholarly Infrastructure - Google Scholar and Academic Autonomy (October 28, 2019). Available at SSRN: https://ssrn.com/abstract=3476911 or http://dx.doi.org/10.2139/ssrn.3476911

The participants agreed that Google Scholar exercises an immense, though mostly invisible influence over the structure and merit system of academia, through it's control and standardization of bibliometrics across geographies, disciplines, and publishing cultures. A young scholar noted that GS conflates very different publication and citation standards across disciplines, putting researchers with low volume publication cultures behind others with lots of co-authored publications released with high frequency. Further, the comparison with other disciplines with different citing cultures can be very intimidating for young scholars that are pitted against each other this way. This possibility of direct comparison also means that GS is often overvalued in interdisciplinary environments, and overused in hiring practices.

Issues around corporate funding

The three presentations were followed by a lengthy discussion, which addressed a number of issues, which, albeit related, seem to require their own solutions.

The limits of disclosure and transparency. There was a general consensus that transparency is necessary but insufficient for addressing the problems surrounding corporate funding of academic research. On the one hand, transparency and disclosure norms help in whitewashing private funders: many of these private funders want to fund research because it lends them and their points credibility. On the other hand, disclosures may taint the name and reputation of researchers in a highly politicized environment, and may lead to categorization, or the assumption of non-independence even if the funder had no influence whatsoever on the outcome of the research. In that context, it is important how the academic community itself responds to disclosures, and to the politicization of funding. Abuse or misinterpretation of disclosures does happen. The Oracle funded Google Transparency project was given as an example for the lack of solidarity among scholars to push back against unfounded allegations, and the unjust smearing of scholarly reputation. Furthermore, disclosure standards do not address the more fundamental point of the perceived trustworthiness and justification of the academic system and the idea that corporate funding might limit critical debate. As such, transparency is not sufficient to manage the potential distrust issues.

This issue has led to another question about whether, and to what extent private funding is unavoidable. Some argued that it makes no sense to conduct research in the abstract into certain technologies, such as AI systems without the involvement of developers and/or companies that apply such systems in their business practices with information law relevance. It was noted that it is very hard to distinguish between fundamental and applied research in the domain of information law, and while many of the research done in this field looks like applied research because of its proximity to practical applications, in fact they are more like fundamental research, where the independence from concrete applications, and business entities should be ensured. The point is also made that law can learn from other fields of research that have experience in dealing with difficult and controversial funding such as pharmaceutical research or climate research. One of these lessons might be that private funding should always be balanced out with other types of funding.

Is the ideal of academic objectivity achievable within the legal scholarship? In relation to the previous point, there was extensive discussion about the possibility to maintain a value-neutral stance in normative research. Senior scholars in the room noted that their information law research is anything but value neutral, and their research activity is in fact driven by well understood, and thoroughly argued values, such as certain fundamental rights. Rather than trying to maintain an illusory neutrality, researchers could publicly "own" their position in the value landscape. This could also help the audiences of their work to assess when, and to what extent their individual position as a researcher coincides with corporate positions in policy debates, which, ideally could

neutralize some of the suspicion about the corporate influence on scientists' value judgements. Such a value disclosure could be independent of, but complement funding disclosures.

The agenda-setting, amplifying and deflecting effect of corporate funding. It was confirmed by multiple participants that some types of research gets funded more easily than other fields. This not only gives undue influence to private funders to shape the scientific agenda, but also creates underfunded pockets of research topics. Many institutional approaches were discussed to spread funding more equally. For example, a domain specific, scientist-run research fund was proposed which could review, gather, and neutralize funding from corporate entities, and distribute funding based on the scientist-set priorities. It was noted though that this is exactly what a tax-based public funding regime does, at least in theory.

Research infrastructures and other forms of indirect funding. While most of the discussion focuses on direct funding and the corresponding direct influence, the participants agreed that more attention should be given to various forms of indirect funding. These forms of influencing range from unspoken norms, dinners, or travel expenses via infrastructure provision to data access. The discussion focused on these latter two. The issue of research infrastructures such as software and hardware infrastructures of access, archiving, citation management, metrics are usually discussed separate from direct funding at, for example, university libraries, or IT departments, while it is clear that their impact on research is huge. Also, funding in the form of access to closed datasets, such as Social Science One[11] also runs parallel to the financial funding discussions, while it is clearly part of the larger funding landscape, and raises the very same issues as the latter. The fact that the infrastructure, data and funding providers are often the very same companies gives these entities unprecedented control over the institutions and processes of knowledge production and distribution.

In conclusion, a rough consensus emerged that a more radical approach to funding is necessary, and that academia should think beyond transparency norms, and should consider institutions and processes that provide ethical review of various forms of funding. Baseline ethical norms could and should be set on what types of funding are acceptable, and these values need to be broadly discussed and communicated. Structural measures such as the creation of an ethical board, rules or guidelines should be considered. The discussion ended with the generally supported point that norms on communication procedural safeguards (such as on transparency and expectations) should be complemented by more structural conditions to preserve academic autonomy for which it is necessary to find common ground on values and practices.

Funders' panel

The afternoon discussion started off with the panel where we invited major public, private and non-profit funders in the information law and policy domain to discuss their funding concerns, priorities, strategies. We reached out to Google, Microsoft, Palantir, the Dutch Science Organization (NWO), the European Research Council (ERC), the Mozilla Foundation, and the Open Society Foundation. Ultimately four funders came and talked about how and why they are involved in the funding of research: the European Research Council Executive Agency, the Open Society Initiative for Europe, Palantir Technologies, and the University of Amsterdam. The panel revolved around two main issues: the funding priorities at the European level, and the rising controversies around private funding, Palantir being at the center of that debate.

[11] https://socialscience.one/

There was much discussion about the political and practical considerations around European research funding. On the one hand, it was noted that the European funding is ultimately demand driven, and money is allocated to those domains where more applications are originated. This also means that information law and policy must be more active in producing high quality applications if it wants to achieve a higher share of the research budget. On the other hand, the expectations regarding the public utility of public funding are shifting. It was noted that the research budget of the EU is competing with other European funding priorities, such as structural funds, and the political debate to defend budgets used the argument of economic competition with the US and China. This means that there is a growing expectation that research will have direct and measurable economic benefits, which points to more intensive academic-business collaborations. There was an intense discussion about whether it is appropriate to frame scientific research in terms of global economic competition, and how an economic race against two very different social, political, cultural systems would affect information law research which, to a considerable extent is rooted in, and hopes to maintain unique European social, political, and cultural values and achievements, such as a strong respect for fundamental human rights, cultural diversity, and liberal democracy.

A significant chunk of the discussion was devoted to the highly charged debate around academic funding by technology companies, which Palantir is central to, notably in privacy research. Its participation is repeatedly and strongly contested by researchers, and events are heavily pressured to reject Palantir Funding. Accepted panelists to the Money Talks? event cancelled their participation partly in response to Palantir being in the room. The counterproductive nature of contentious funding was not lost on the participants, nor was the fact that though Palantir was a heavily challenged funder in the information law domain because of its work in security domains, other, initially more palatable funders also face increasing criticism as a result of their contentious practices. Some research institutions noted that after a thorough ethical review, they decided to reject funding from any and all corporate entities to protect the topic, and the community from any form of actual or presumed, direct or indirect influence. The discussion touched upon the usefulness, possibility, costs and benefits of such puritan approach, but concluded that better institutional approaches and safeguards could make such extreme measures less needed. The idea of an intermediary, researcher-run funding entity, such as discussed above, was considered by various participants as a workable alternative to currently prevalent direct funding of events, research institutions, researchers of studies. In addition, the participants discussed the possibility of more formal sponsorship codes for corporate entities, which would help mitigate some of the risks connected to corporate funding. Several measures to avoid corporate capture were also considered. The point is made that in some cases, especially for small civil society groups operating in difficult circumstances, private funding is necessary as the government funding is non-existent or not sufficient.

Institutional Funding in Europe

The last session of the day was divided into two parts. First the funding model of the Alexander von Humboldt Institute for Internet and Society (HIIG) was presented, then attendees were invited to share and collect experiences with different funding models.

The funding model of the Humboldt Institute. The Alexander von Humboldt Institute for Internet and Society (HIIG) is a research institute funded by private, non-earmarked contributions and third-party funds. HIIG was founded in 2012 by the Humboldt University of Berlin (HU), the Berlin University of the Arts (UdK) and the WZB

Berlin Social Science Center, together with the Hans Bredow Institute for Media Research (HBI) in Hamburg as a partner through an initial donation from Google in the amount of €4.5 million (until 2013). This funding was renewed again in 2014. In addition to the institutional funding by Google, there are a number of grants and third-party funded projects. A detailed breakdown of all annual funding is published in the appendix of HIIG's research report[12].

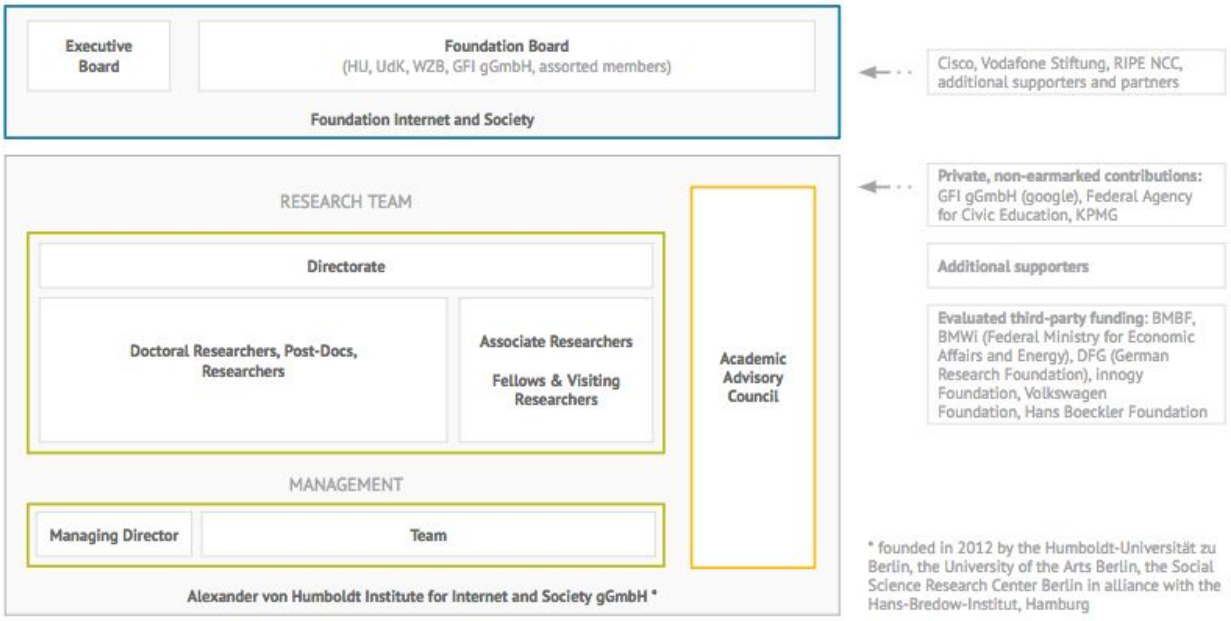
The HIIG is committed to transparency, which is secured by various structural measures:

The guiding principles of the research are academic excellence, societal relevance, independence and openness. Research at HIIG is guided by the "HIIG Guidelines to Ensure Good Scientific Practice", which are based on the recommendations of the German Research Association (DFG). In addition, HIIG has also committed itself to Fundraising Governance Guidelines[13] [in German], which underlie the institute's funding agreements.

All research activities are critically monitored and evaluated by an international Scientific Advisory Board.

The founding institutions are exclusively universities and research institutions. The funding structure and the research work are separated by a division into the non-profit research organisation HIIG gGmbH and non-profit financing organisations GFI gGmbH and Foundation for Internet and Society, see Organisation. This systematic division is also embedded in the articles of association[14].

The HIIG is mainly financed by private, non-earmarked contributions and third-party funds (e.g. ministries, DFG, foundations). Private donations are used to institutionally fund research in the field of Internet and Society. In addition, research partnerships with donors are possible, e.g. by supporting existing funding programmes or projects.



[12] https://www.hiig.de/wp-content/uploads/2020/02/encore2019_report.pdf
[13] https://www.hiig.de/fundraising-governance/
[14] https://www.hiig.de/wp-content/uploads/2018/05/Gesellschaftsvertrag-280115-englisch-articles-of-association.pdf

After the presentation a short discussion follows consisting both of more practical questions such as what will happen after the current funding period and more fundamental questions pertaining to the long term influence of this type of funding model. One aspect that is specifically discussed is the role of public relations in private funding and how the relationship is perceived by and explained to the general public. The point is made that the public opinion with regard to specific private sponsors can change with the time which should be considered an additional risk for private funding.

Lastly, attendees were invited to discuss their experiences with corporate funding or research funding in smaller groups, and bring back the most important points to be discussed in the plenary.

Conclusion

Despite the complexity of the topic, the one day event arrived at a number of important propositions, which then need to be further developed. Some research topics, and institutions may not need corporate funding at all. In some cases, maybe it is possible to find private funders whose values and interests are aligned with those of the research institute, minimising any whitewashing effect. Elaborate legal structures and safeguards such as the ones HIIG implemented to absorb Google funding may sometimes be sufficient to preserve independence, and the reputation of independence. Most probably new, additional institutional fora and practices are necessary to provide ad-hoc peer review of corporate funding, and audits of research independence. It is also possible that new, intermediary institutions need to be established, that are tasked to collect, review, anonymize and distribute corporate funding in the information law domain.

In any case, the participants agreed that it is important to have these discussions on values within research institutions. Any policies institutions decide to create on funding should be explicitly based on these values, and made public for the community and society at large. Additionally, because even with these types of policies researchers can be nudged or influenced, it is important to create a culture of independence within research centres. The penultimate conclusion of the day was that it is important to continue having these types of debates, and it is especially important to have different types of debates both with and without funders present.