Study about the impact of open source software and hardware on technological independence, competitiveness and innovation in the EU economy

This study aims to investigate the economic impact of Open Source Software and Hardware on the EU economy.

Open Source is increasingly used in digital technologies. This required an in-depth analysis of its current role, position and potential for the European economy. Open Source Software (OSS) has become mainstream across all sectors of the software industry over the past decade. Conversely, the level of maturity of Open Source Hardware (OSH) currently appears far lower. However, the business ecosystem for OSH is developing fast. If OSH is to follow the same development as OSS, it could constitute a cornerstone of the future Internet of Things (IoT), the future of computing and the digital transformation of the European industry at the end of the digital decade.

The objective of the study was to investigate and quantify the economic impact of OSS and OSH on the European economy. The study also identified strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and challenges of open source in relevant ICT policies, such as cybersecurity, artificial intelligence (AI), digitising European industry, the connected car, high performance computing, big data, distributed ledger technologies, and more.

Economic evidence of the footprint of open source in the EU has been collected. A list of policy options to maximize the benefit of open source supporting a competitive EU software and hardware industry, which in turn supports the twin environmental and digital transformation of the EU economy is also proposed.

There are clear signals from investors on the huge value and potential of open source. Policies to maximize the return in Europe of this value may be required. In the short-term, the findings of the study will be used as a basis for policy options in many digital areas. In the long-term, the findings can be used for a new open source policy focused on the EU economy as a whole.

The main breakthrough of the study is the identification of open source as a public good. This shows a change of paradigm from the previous irreconcilable difference between closed and open source, and points to a new era in which digital businesses are built using open source assets. This information is essential to develop policy actions in the field. The study also values the economic impact of open source commitments on the EU economy.

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