

Conferences, colleges and new colleagues (a brief summer wrap-up)

September 1, 2014

A summer like a garden party

Its September and its raining outside and I'm back here. However, the lasts months' weather wouldn't be a very convincing excuse for not adding to this blog for almost 4 months. Let me try this one: I was quite busy and every time I could get hold of some ideas in my mind I suddenly slipped into something new, exciting and distracting. It was a summer like a garden party. Once you finished this glass of Pimm's with your old friends from school, you turn around and run straight into this acquaintance you haven't seen since several years. No time to think about your school friends' stories. Just too curious what happens to this one. Bring it on, bring it on.

And then you wake up, suddenly its September and it rains. Well... what happened?

Conferences

At the very beginning of my PhD I wondered how the more senior researchers manage to track down all these interesting conferences. How did they come across these events early enough to submit for the CfP? After this first summer of conferences I knew: Once you attended one of these events you bring five fresh CfPs and two hands full of new mailing lists back home. I quickly stopped worrying about the conference flow. Shortly after my last blog post in early May I went to [Ephemera Conference](#) at Copenhagen Business School to present some work on impact investing as post-growth finance. As I learned, Ephemera is a collective of predominantly young researchers promoting critical and rather left-leaning research in the social sciences and humanities. I liked the conference and decided to work on a submission for their upcoming special issue on the 'post-growth economy'. Only two weeks later I packed my bags to head of to CeDEM at Danube University in Krems to present some ideas from my M.Sc. work and to explore the research community around open government and related issues. What I especially liked about the conference was the variety of international guests. In 2015 I will have the pleasure to co-chair the track on "Open Data, Transparency and Open Innovation" ([CfP](#)). Last week then I was able to present my PhD research project ideas at the [OpenSym Doctoral Symposium](#), together with other young scholars working on different aspects of digital openness.

Colleges

I arrived in Cambridge at suicide Sunday. The academic year had just ended and faded into a week full of Pimm's, garden parties and summer balls. There can definitely be worse times to visit friends in the UK. Just for a night I stayed at Darwin College, which is postgraduate-only and rather new compared to some of the other colleges in town. From my time in St. Andrews, I was used to the pompous yet mystic architecture of these traditional British academic institutions, which is so incredibly different to most of the German universities I've seen so far. What was new to me, however, was this direct feeling of absolute elitism and social stratification. [St. Andrews clearly struggles](#) with its questionable reputation for including not enough students from deprived areas, however what is perceived different in Cambridge (judged from my very brief stint) is the way the university actively supports the formation of an upper-class and socially demarcating habitus. At weekly formal dinners, students in their evening dress are served by non-academic people of the same age. The colleges employ staff

to clean the students private rooms and to do their laundry. At Cambridge, students are not allowed to take up a side job, as they should focus solely on their academic work or one of the many charitable, educative or recreational university societies. Don't get me wrong, my time there was obviously way too short to make a proper judgement, however I think this is a good place to store my impressions before they fade. After Cambridge I spent almost a week in Oxford to visit friends, who were just about to finish their degrees. At this time of the year the procedural part was quite similar: it was may week and there were garden parties and invitations to go for a round of punting all over the place. A tradition I experienced here and I didn't come across in Cambridge was the act of "[trashing](#)" (which is a more extended version of the watery "[soaking](#)" of St Andrewsians): After your last exam, your friends line up in front of the hall and once you leave the building coat you with confetti, foam, sparkling wine and whatever else they can find. One of the relieved students even officially started his well deserved holiday break when a fresh trout hit his face.

Colleagues

In early July I started working as an intern for the [Open Knowledge Foundation Germany](#) as part of my PhD research. The deal: I support them for around three months part-time on a voluntary basis. In return I get access to their documents and documentation, can stay with them at the office to collect some ethnographic data about the organization, and eventually conduct interviews with the team. When I outlines my PhD project I pretty much had this setup in mind and was very happy when the OKF Germany team agreed to host me for a while. My time at the OKF Germany started with the annual OKFest, the worlds largest conference on open knowledge, which took place in Berlin this year. Since then just tried to help out at the office with smaller tasks, that do not directly interfere with the processes I'm investigating. As an example I condensed the last three annual reports and converted them into an [OKF Germany timeline](#) using the OKF-software TimeMapper. Currently I'm supporting the team of "[Jugend hackt](#)", a youth hackathon, which brings together around 130 teenagers to develop civic technology over the course of a weekend.