WHAT IS FREE/LIBRE SOFTWARE?

We use digital technology every day to obtain information, exchange, communicate, buy, etc. These actions, whether private or public, are processed by computers, whatever their shape: laptops, Internet servers, mobile phones, tablets, game consoles, Internet boxes, etc. To carry out these actions, these machines use software that handles our data. It is thus important to know who writes the software, who manages it, and for which purpose. While not everyone has the capacity to write software or understand how it works, we all have the possibility to decide whom we trust.

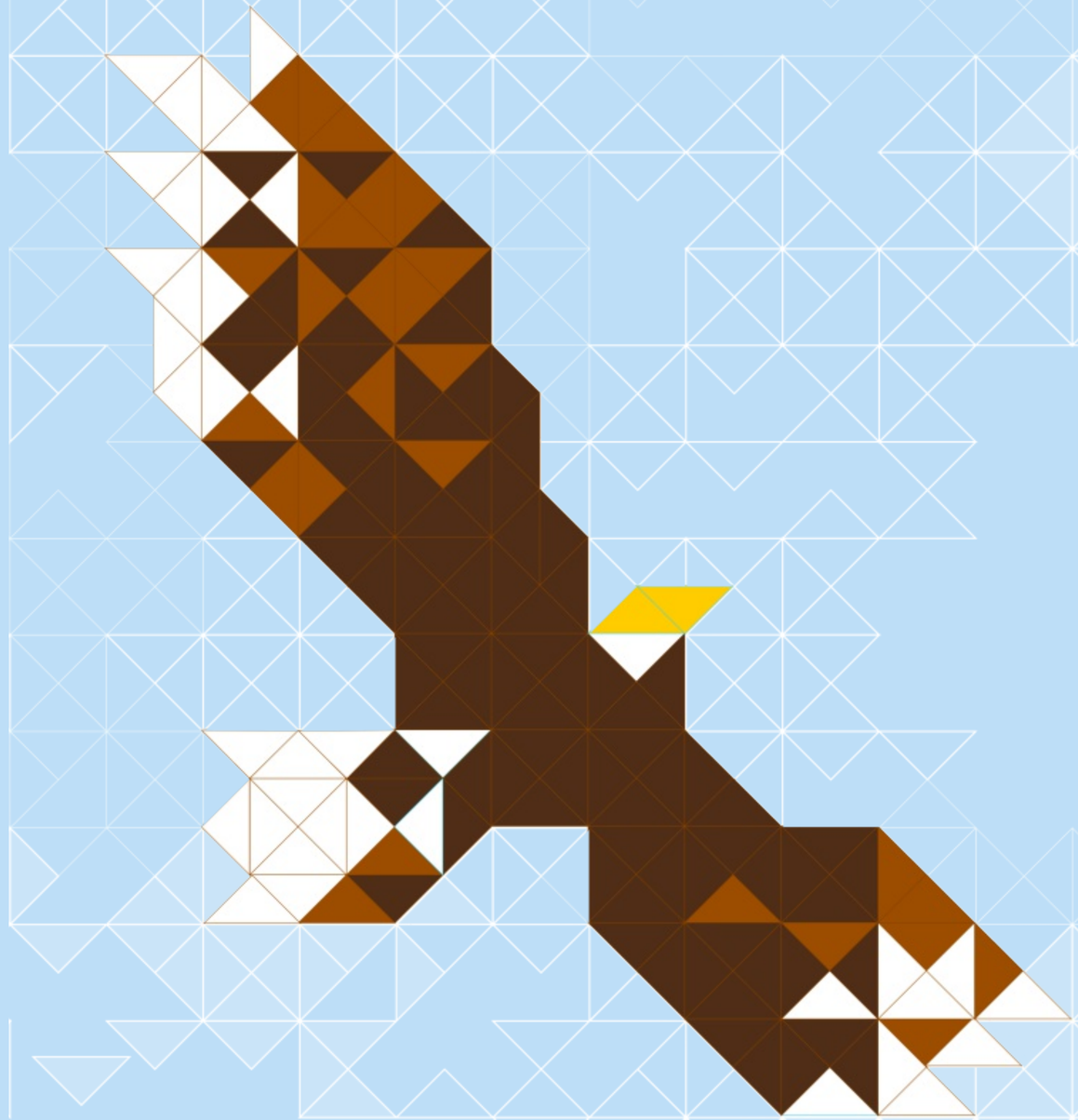
[Please note that “Free Software” refers to freedom, not price. This is why we use the term “Free/Libre Software”.]

FREE/LIBRE SOFTWARE AND ITS FOUR FREEDOMS

Even nowadays, most software that is distributed through classical channels is proprietary, meaning that its license includes usage restrictions. On the contrary, software is called “Free/libre Software” when it explicitly grants, through its license, the freedoms to run it without any restrictions, as well as the freedom to study how it works, copy it, modify it, and redistribute it. What makes these four freedoms possible is access to the software's source code—its “recipe”.

LEARN MORE

By choosing Free/libre Software, not only do you have the opportunity to enjoy these four freedoms, but you are also joining large communities of users and developers who share the same goals and respect your freedom. By deciding to install Free/Libre Software (which is often also gratis) on your digital devices, you are helping to share and improve programs that are available to absolutely everyone.



WHAT IS AT STAKE
WITH FREE SOFTWARE

The idea of Free Software was formalised in the early eighties. Today, the movement that was initiated by a few academics has become a social phenomenon in its own right. Every day, millions of users (individuals, nonprofits and NGOs, businesses, local governments, public administrations, etc.) enjoy the four freedoms that come with Free Software: the freedom to use, study, modify, and redistribute it.

THE SOCIAL STAKES

Since it is developed in an open manner, it is not tainted by commercial traps, spyware or user lock-in. Free Software has been initiating a major cooperative project. It is a tool for digital inclusion. As it is distributed with its recipe, you can study how it works, reuse it, and share it. Collaborative development methods via the Internet allow for easy transfer of skills, and ensure the widest possible dissemination. With Free Software you control your computing; it doesn't control you.

THE ECONOMIC STAKES

Free Software provides more independence and better control of maintenance and internal development costs. It is thus quite appropriate for a dynamic and competitive economy. The number of companies that use Free Software is constantly increasing worldwide. Since Free Software is available to everyone, it encourages innovation by allowing new actors to start a business at low cost. Since it is protected from the monopolies of large proprietary companies, it makes creative and autonomous development policies easier to implement.

THE STRATEGIC STAKES

Since it is unencumbered by either usage restrictions or license costs, Free Software allows public administrations and policy makers to retain control of their own data. Thus, for a number of years now, both in State and local governments, entire branches of information systems have been switching to Free Software. In a world where surveillance is generalized, Free Software is an essential tool for protecting and perpetuating your data (files, photos, videos, etc.)

www.libreexpo.org

FREE/LIBRE SOFTWARE IN DAILY LIFE

SOFTWARE PRODUCTS FOR EVERY NEED

There are free programs for every use, as well as free complete operating systems to easily replace Microsoft Windows or MacOS, including for low-end computers considered obsolete by proprietary systems. Some programs, such as Firefox and VLC, are well known, but there are many more to be discovered. Since free programs for general use are most of the time gratis, you are able to test them, learn how to use new ones, create, express yourself, and build new skills without restrictions.

TRUSTWORTHY SOFTWARE

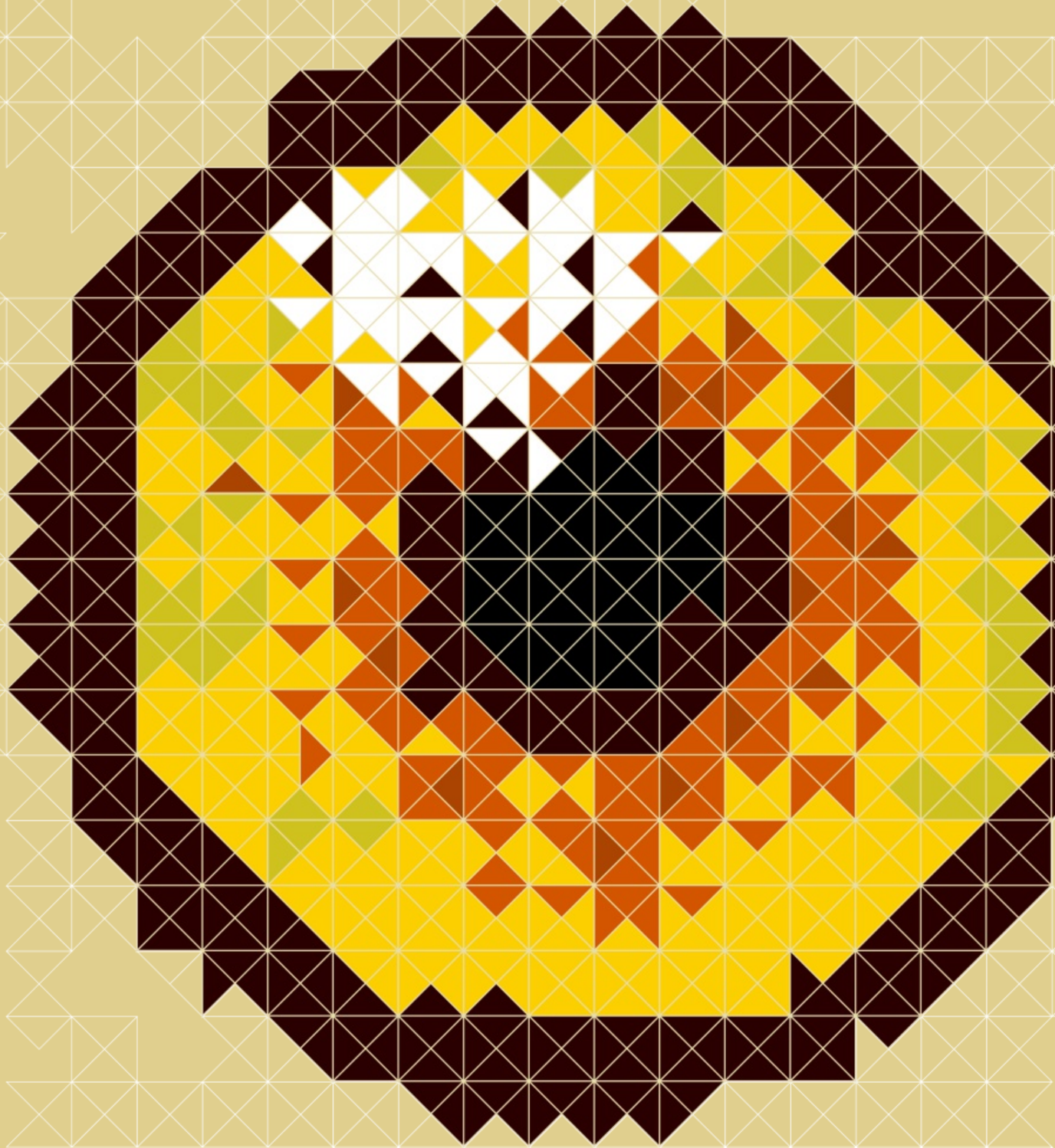
Because it is not under the control of multinational corporations, Free Software doesn't aim to control its users. You can therefore install it without fearing parasite programs that spy on us and lock us in. Choosing a free operating system means enjoying virus-free computing, without ads or abusive terms of sale, without extra costs, and without any requirement to create an account with a provider. Since free program focus on whatever their main function is, they are light, efficient, and to the point.

PRIVACY-PROTECTING SOFTWARE

The PRISM scandal and the French surveillance bill taught us that States exercise massive surveillance. Most of the ISPs exercise a surveillance of their own for commercial purposes, and they have been known to collaborate with the NSA (the US National Security Agency). Free Software enables us to keep our data and communications secure. Free Software is what Edward Snowden used to leak the NSA documents without being spotted. He was trusting them because access to the source code of these programs allows verification.

There are also free programs that can be installed on servers for Internet access: websites, webmails, social networks, self-hosting, etc. Some nonprofits or companies provide these kinds of services, which are run with greater transparency, and follow a policy of not spying on users. This practice is in line with the ethics of Free Software. There is still some way to go in order to reach the same quality of service as with proprietary software, but the point of Free Software is to allow users and developers to collaborate towards building the kind of computing we want, while refusing any compromises that threaten our privacy and freedoms.

OPEN FORMATS
TO SEE THINGS CLEARLY



TO COMMUNICATE WITHOUT RESTRICTIONS

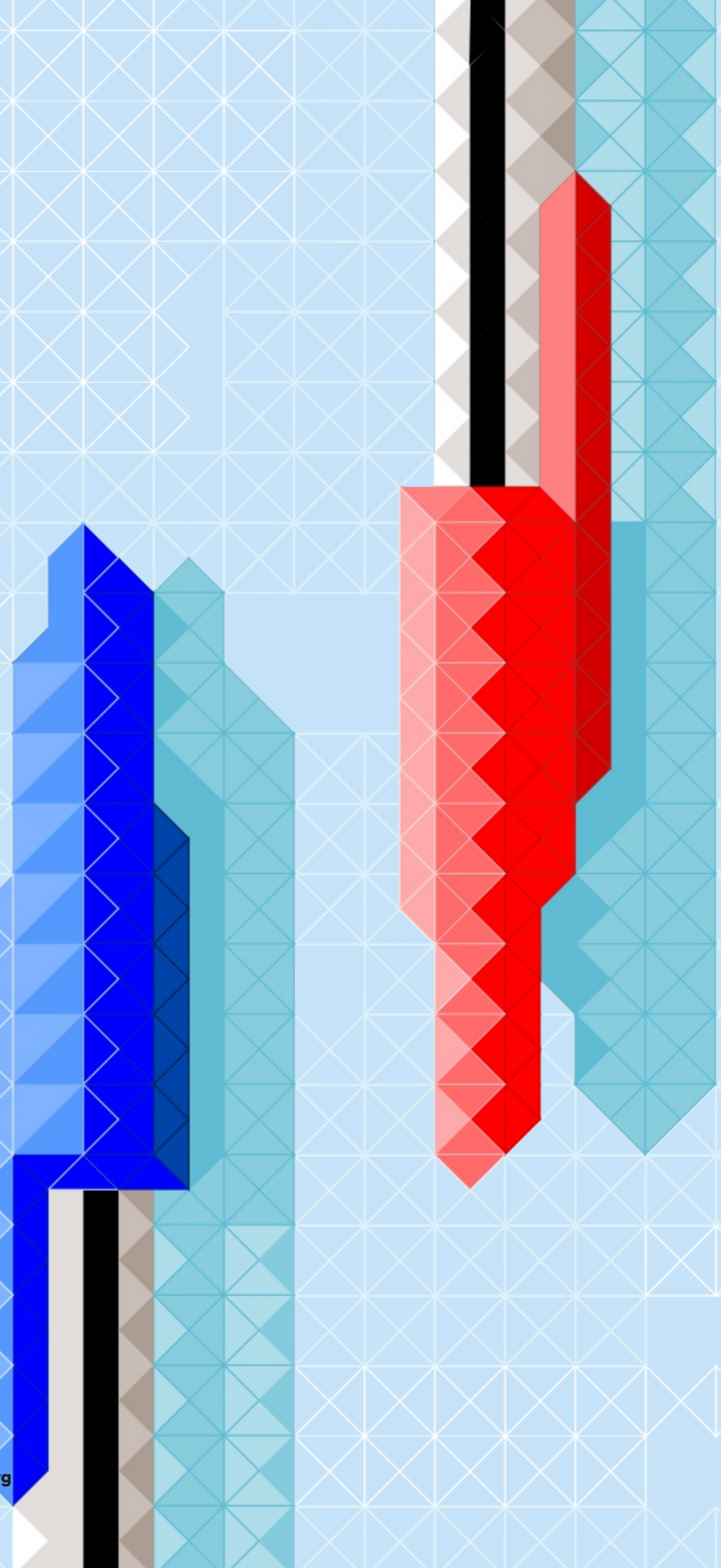
Interoperability is a complicated term, though it refers to a simple and common-sense idea. Everyone must be able to choose the software product that is most appropriate for them to exchange information, and modify it as the need arises. Proprietary IT reveals its “depriving” aspect when it willingly uses file formats that are incompatible with other solutions. This strategy, familiar for office software, makes it possible to subjugate users. Demanding interoperability is freeing oneself in order to communicate freely.

OPENNESS TO FOSTER ACCESSIBILITY

Just as the source code of a Free Software program, which is available, gains from being disseminated, so does the structure of a file format or communication protocol. This enables anyone to integrate these files or communication tools into their own IT solutions, and modify them to suit their needs. Open formats are especially useful in the field of accessibility. They make adapting IT solutions to the needs of users with disabilities easier. With Free Software, IT adapts to human beings, and not the other way around.

SUSTAINABLE DATA

IT is everywhere, and now serves as a repository for a large part of our cultural and family heritage. But IT is evolving fast. Will we still be able to access our photos, videos, and other data, in a few years' time and even beyond? If a file format is closed, it is very complicated to access its contents without seeking help from the publisher, if the latter is still around. Choosing open and interoperable formats today makes our exchanges more fluid, and also ensures continued access to our data in the future.



THE ADVANTAGES OF FREE SOFTWARE IN EDUCATION

TEACHING IT AS A SCHOOL SUBJECT IN ITS OWN RIGHT

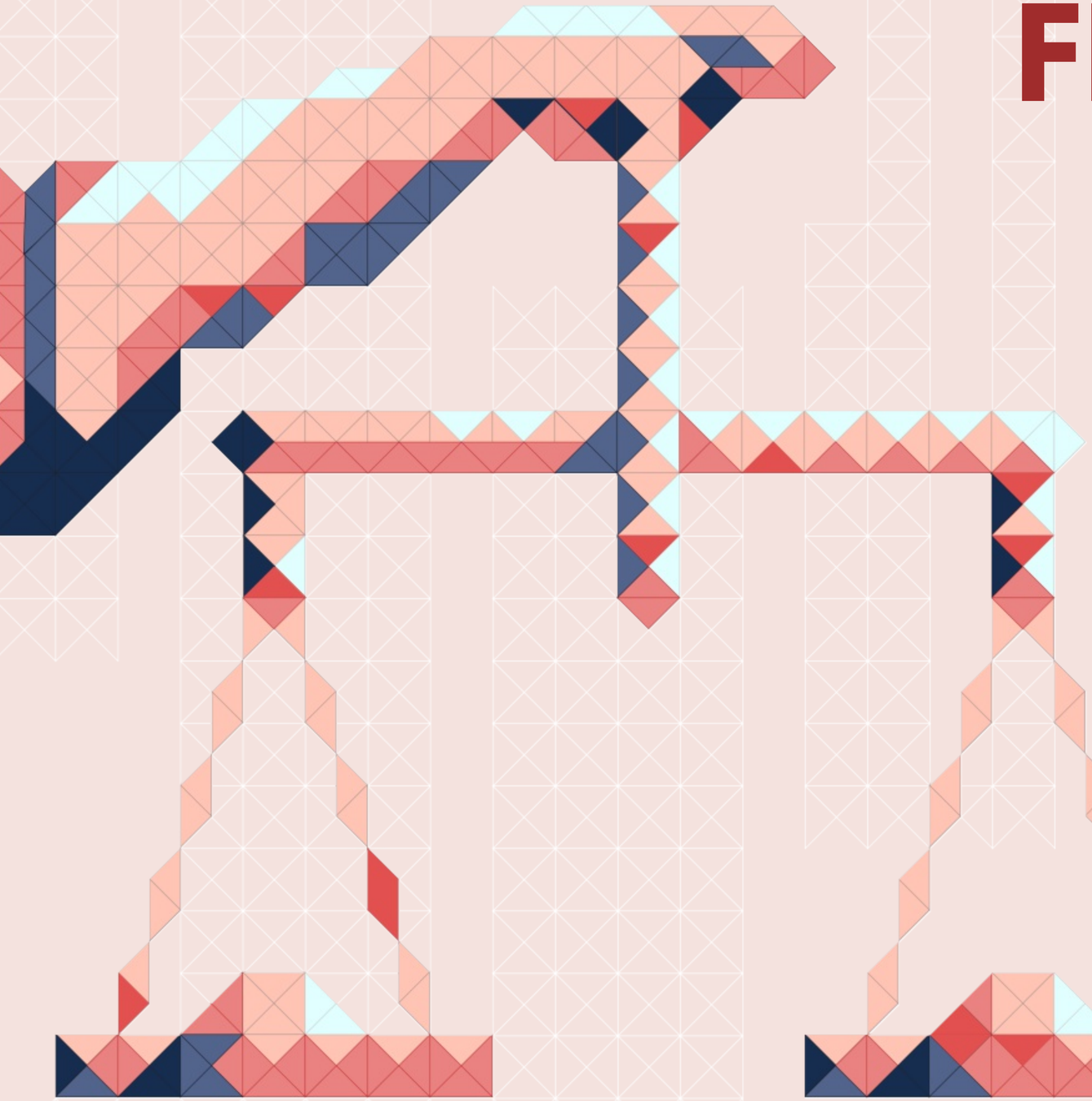
For far too long, IT has been viewed within the French National Education system as a practical skill, and has been reduced to mere user's training. Of course, not all students aspire to a career in computing, yet it is essential that each one get some understanding of the mechanisms and of what is at stake, in order to be able to claim the digital world for him- or herself rather than being subjected to it. IT should be taught as a school subject in its own right, providing students with the capacity to understand, and adapt to the different situations they will encounter in their personal and professional lives. Free Software is the only one that fully allows this, precisely because it is open and can be studied, modified, and shared.

ACCESSING THE SOURCE CODE TO UNDERSTAND

Free Software and open formats have a full role to play in education, since the latter is not supposed to favour this or that provider of proprietary solutions. Under the cover of preparing students for the software products they will encounter in their professional life, current practices reinforce monopolies, and persist in transmitting ready-made recipes rather than teaching self-sufficiency. Yet office automation is, by far, not the only IT system one encounters in professional life, and everyone will need to adapt to technological changes throughout their career.

SHARING EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES

Using open formats and licensing educational resources under a free license enables everyone to share and improve those resources, thereby contributing to the development of a more ethical education. Free Software can be distributed without restriction, thus allowing teachers to find more resources, and create their own educational materials, like, for instance, the Sesamath worksheets, the result of an exemplary collaborative effort by math teachers and published under a free license.



FREE LICENSES

THE LEGAL FRAMEWORK OF FREE SOFTWARE

A MATTER OF COPYRIGHT

In compliance with international law, software is covered by copyright. This is the basis on which licenses are able to guarantee Free Software's four freedoms to everybody. There are several Free Software licenses, depending on the context in which they're used, the goals, and the type of software. The identity of a free program is thus defined by its Free Software license. The latter specifies the rights and duties of each party. Legally, they are based on copyright and aim to reverse its principle: authorise rather than restrict.

COPYLEFT

Among the Free Software licenses, some are said to be copyleft. The principle of copyleft is to give everybody the possibility to use a free work while ensuring that the freedoms that its license provides are preserved. Beyond the four freedoms of Free Software, the copyleft licenses require keeping the same license in case the work is redistributed, whether or not it has been modified. This type of license enables real sharing of creation and knowledge, and ensures that cultural works will remain free. The aim of copyleft licenses is to enrich the common trove of works that are available to all—a trove to which everyone can add, but from which no one may subtract.

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BEYOND
FREE SOFTWARE
WIKIPEDIA, OPENSTREETMAP...

FREE SOFTWARE AS A MODEL

Building together, sharing, is as natural in the field of knowledge as it is in IT. Nowadays, there are free licenses for art, public data, free hardware, etc. Wikipedia, the collaborative encyclopedia, is no doubt the most spectacular project derived from the Free Software principles. Also worth mentioning is OpenStreetMap, which is flourishing in the field of cartography. There is a host of such projects, including digitization of public domain works, databases for audio, images, educational resources, etc.

LICENSES AND SOURCES

In 2000, some French artists and lawyers wrote the Free Art License for this very purpose. In 2002, it's the Creative Commons licenses that were published. Creative Commons provide variable-geometry licenses, some of which are indeed free in the usual Free Software sense, while others, which prohibit derivative works or commercial use, are said to be free-distribution licenses, although they do not follow the Free Software principles. The Free Software logic is sometimes misunderstood, or even scorned.

A NOVEL PARADIGM

Whether in IT or elsewhere, the principles of Free Software have created a grassroots movement that has been spreading for thirty years. These principles make it possible to combine individual and collective efforts in innovative and efficient ways. They give everyone, whether individuals, communities, nonprofits or businesses, the opportunity to act and to do. They greatly simplify the deal, as compared with the traditional property-and-restrictions model. In short, they are a powerful lever for adapting our world to the challenges ahead.

April
promouvoir et défendre
le logiciel libre

ABOUT APRIL AND LIBREEXPO (EXPOLIBRE IN FRENCH)

April is the main no-profit promoting and defending Free Software in the French-speaking world. Established in 1996, April brings together several thousand individual members and a few hundred organisations (businesses, nonprofits, local governments, educational institutions).

Through the work of its volunteers and permanent staff, April is able to carry out a number of different campaigns to defend the freedoms of computer users. You can join April, or support it, by making a donation.

To learn more about April or to learn more on how to contribute, based your skills and the amount of time you're able to donate, visit

www.april.org/en

LibreExpo is a set of posters that introduce the general public to the Free Software philosophy—a movement that has been growing since the early eighties—and explain what free programs are. Its goal is to raise awareness of the social issues that the computing revolution entails.

In keeping with the spirit of Free Software, this exhibition is “free” (as in freedom). We encourage you to download it, and then disseminate, copy, display, or adapt it.

LibreExpo is organized by April's awareness-raising task force, whose objective is the production, inventory, and improvement of free software communication resources, in order to increase public awareness of what is at stake.

To learn more about LibreExpo, visit

www.libreexpo.org

TOGETHER, LET'S KEEP ON PROMOTING AND DEFENDING FREE COMPUTING.