

How is the advent of the Internet changing relationships between artists and audiences? The project attempts to address this question by concentrating on music which, while being one of the most widely consumed products of cultural industries, is at the same time among the most vulnerable to the violation of intellectual property rights (copyrights).

The relationship between artists, record labels and listeners has changed dramatically over the past 15 years. The advent of the Internet and digitalization has made the exchange of music on a listener-to-listener basis easier than ever before. This has generated extraordinary threats to the recording industry, but it has also opened new possibilities for innovative companies and individuals. On the one hand, new technologies have resulted in the unprecedented growth of music piracy. According to the industry, this is the main reason for falling record sales. On the other hand, several new channels of record promotion and distribution have emerged, as have completely new methods of listeners' participation in the processes of production, dissemination and consumption of music.

The main aim of the project is to understand the functioning of the free music scene, paying special attention to systems of rewards within this scene and the proportions of "gift economy" and "market economy" that it entails. The existence of the free music scene, which due to economic constraints was hardly possible prior to the advent of the Internet, can be treated as one of results of the advent of the new communication technologies.

The proposed research project addresses current debates taking place in communication and media studies. One of the deeply disputed topics in media studies is whether the advent of new communication technologies has democratized the production and distribution of cultural works, or whether it has rather just slightly rearranged power relations between the major players, leaving the essence of the system intact. The influence of the Internet and digitalization also sparks controversies among artists. For example, musicians express opinions varying from "The internet has facilitated the most direct and efficient, compact relationship ever between band and audience" (Albini, 2014) to "The internet will suck all creative content out of the world" (Byrne, 2013). Although it seems unlikely that any definitive answer will be attained anytime soon, understanding how virtual music scenes work can help bring us bit closer to such an answer.