

FREE KNOWLEDGE INSTITUTE

Annual Report 2025

A Commitment to Transparency

www.freeknowledge.eu

1. Introduction

2025 was a year of reckoning and renewal for the Free Knowledge Institute. The global context shifted markedly: the explicit alignment of major technology corporations with authoritarian political forces moved from a concern to an observable reality, forcing a new urgency into the work of everyone committed to democratic digital futures.

Against this backdrop, 2025 saw FKI undertake a strategic reorientation: completing a new multi-annual strategic plan and beginning the groundwork for a Democratic Tech Fund, developed together with a small group of founding partner organisations.

"The construction of techno-authoritarian infrastructure is not unstoppable. But it requires us to act collectively, to build the social capacity, the funding structures, and the community networks that can sustain democratic technology at scale." — FKI Strategic Plan 2026–2030

1.1 The Context in 2025

Several concrete events in 2025 crystallised what had until recently remained largely theoretical warnings about digital sovereignty:

- The Trump administration's sanctioning of the International Criminal Court forced Microsoft and Visa/Mastercard to withdraw services from ICC judges — a direct demonstration of the political leverage embedded in technology and financial infrastructure controlled by US corporations.
- Former European Commissioner Thierry Breton was publicly threatened as a warning signal to European leaders considering regulatory action against US technology companies, highlighting the vulnerability of institutional actors to informal coercion.
- Tech moguls Elon Musk, Mark Zuckerberg, Jeff Bezos and others participated in Donald Trump's second inauguration, signalling formal alliances between Silicon Valley and authoritarian political movements.
- Alarm bells about digital sovereignty, security, and collective dependency grew louder across European civil society, media, and institutional settings — creating new openings for the work FKI has been advancing for nearly two decades.

This convergence of events confirmed what FKI had articulated in its published analysis: that BigTech corporations are not neutral infrastructure providers but active participants in reshaping political and economic power, frequently at the expense of democratic institutions and marginalised communities.

2. Strategic Reorientation

In response to this context, 2025 saw FKI undertake its most substantial strategic review in several years. The process drew on the organisation's accumulated experience whilst taking stock of how considerably the situation had changed since FKI's earlier periods of activity.

2.1 Strategic Plan 2026–2030

The centrepiece of this reorientation is the publication of FKI's Multi-annual Strategic Plan 2026–

2030, which analyses FKI's past and present and sets out a renewed framework for its work across the coming five years. The plan identifies four complementary areas of activity:

1. Democratic Tech Fund

A collective, participatory funding platform to aggregate and distribute resources for democratic technology initiatives across European cities and regions. The fund would operate on solidarity-based principles, bringing together civil society organisations, citizens, and aligned institutions around technology infrastructure that serves democratic values.

2. Cooperative and Commons-Based Business Support

Supporting cooperative and commons-based organisations working in free knowledge and democratic technology — facilitating connections between initiatives, contributing to federation building, and helping strengthen the social impact of democratic technology projects.

3. Research, Development, and Pilot Projects

Research and development work in free knowledge and democratic technology practices, including pilot projects that help communities, social movements, and geographic regions experiment with alternative technology models — intended to function both at local level and as part of broader federated networks.

4. Capacity Building and Peer Learning

Mutual learning and education around free knowledge and democratic technology — covering education programmes for civil society and the cooperative-commons economy, critical awareness of the effects of technology concentration, and support for counter-infrastructure initiatives.

The Strategic Plan 2026–2030 is available at: freeknowledge.eu/assets/docs/FKI_strategic_plan_2026-2030.pdf

3. Key Activities in 2025

3.1 Founding the Democratic Tech Fund

The development of the Democratic Tech Fund (DTF) was the defining initiative of the second half of 2025. FKI invested significant time in developing the conceptual outline and a Memorandum of Intentions, supported by background research and a series of introductory materials intended to communicate the fund's rationale and model to potential partners and supporters.

This work was carried out in partnership with three founding organisations, who together constituted a proto Council of Stewards:

Partner	Country / Focus
Commons Network	Netherlands — commons governance and political advocacy
Waag Futurelab	Netherlands — critical technology and public interest design
Fundación Platoniq / Goteo.org	Spain — civic crowdfunding and participatory funding

The proto Council of Stewards was formed with the explicit intention of convening a broader membership and electing a future Council directly from those members — a process that reflects our commitment to democratic governance of the fund itself.

The DTF model is built around Funding Circles in cities and regions: local pools of seed funding combined with crowdfunding campaigns directed at the general public, and supported by matching contributions from municipal and public institutions and philanthropic foundations. The intention is to direct these resources towards democratic technology initiatives that serve community needs.

3.2 Public Communication and Awareness

Alongside its structural work, FKI invested in public communication through a series of analytical articles published on freeknowledge.eu. These articles serve a dual purpose: raising awareness of the systemic threats posed by Big Tech to democratic society, and articulating the alternatives that FKI and its partners are working to build. Articles completed in 2025 include:

- "[The Accelerated Construction of Techno-Authoritarian Infrastructure](#)" — an analysis of ten interconnected mechanisms through which Big Tech is undermining democratic foundations, from extreme wealth concentration and surveillance capitalism to algorithmic killing pipelines and climate denial.
- "[How BigTech Dismantles Democratic Foundations](#)" — a deeper examination of the structural and institutional dimensions of digital power concentration.
- "[Solution Pathways to Regain Digital Sovereignty](#)" — presenting the constructive framework: cooperative clouds, community networks, platform cooperatives, data commons, community AI, and civic technology as concrete pathways forward.
- "[Democratic Technology](#)" — authored by Wouter Tebbens with review by Sophie Bloemen from Commons Network, this article provides case studies of working alternatives, including Social.coop and Decidim, grounding the argument for democratic tech in lived examples.

These articles are accompanied by open-licensed imagery from the Creative Commons #BetterSharing collection (CC BY-SA 4.0), consistent with FKI's longstanding commitment to open knowledge practices.

3.3 Organisational Development

FKI has pursued ANBI (Algemeen Nut Beogende Instelling) status with the Dutch tax authorities, which would formally recognise FKI as a public-benefit organisation and enable tax-deductible giving for Dutch donors — an important step in building a sustainable funding base for the Democratic Tech Fund and FKI's broader activities. Since January 2026 the Dutch tax authorities have granted the FKI this status.

The organisation also undertook a review of its founding bylaws, ensuring that FKI's governance documentation accurately reflects its mission and current operating model.

4. Finance and Governance

In 2025, FKI operated with minimal expenditure. The organisation's activities were principally

volunteer-driven, reflecting the phase of strategic renewal and foundation-laying that characterised the year.

4.1 Financial Transparency

FKI is committed to full financial transparency as a condition of public trust. Detailed financial accounts will be published on the organisation's website, enabling supporters and partners to see clearly how resources are received and deployed.

As the DTF model develops, FKI anticipates moving towards a more diversified income base, drawing on:

- Membership and solidarity contributions from individuals and civil society organisations.
- Institutional grants from aligned philanthropic foundations and public benefit organisations.
- Project-based income from research, facilitation, and capacity-building engagements.
- Matching contributions from municipal and regional governments participating in DTF Funding Circles.

4.2 Governance

FKI is governed by a board of directors responsible for its strategic direction and accountability to its mission. The organisation's governance practices are designed to model the democratic principles it advocates — including participatory decision-making, stakeholder accountability, and transparent reporting.

The formation of the DTF's proto Council of Stewards in 2025, together with the intention to elect future council members democratically from the broader membership, reflects this commitment to networked collaboration and collective governance.

5. Outlook: 2026 and Beyond

2025 was largely a year of groundwork. The strategic plan has been published, the founding partners of the Democratic Tech Fund have been identified, and the conceptual and organisational basis for the fund is in place. The work of 2026 is to take these foundations forward.

The main priorities for the coming year are:

- Formalising the Democratic Tech Fund: completing the Memorandum of Intentions, establishing governance structures, and working towards the first Funding Circles in partner cities and regions.
- Building the network: convening community sessions, engaging civil society organisations and local governments, and widening the circle of organisations involved.
- Continuing the article series: deepening the analytical and advocacy work begun in 2025.
- Pursuing ANBI recognition: completing the application process with the Dutch tax authorities. (Update: achieved early 2026, with backwards compliance since January 2026)

- Establish a minimal level of staffing for a DTF organisation and a minimal division of labour (categories of work) inside the organisation, based on #4.1 revenue model.
- Connecting with European initiatives: looking for alignment with complementary efforts on digital sovereignty, cooperative infrastructure, and platform cooperativism.

"The window for effective community mobilisation and capacity building may be narrower than current institutional timelines allow. The FKI is committed to moving with the urgency this moment demands." — FKI Strategic Plan 2026–2030

Further information about FKI's work is available at www.freeknowledge.eu and an initial website about the and the Democratic Tech Fund is at <https://democratictech.fund/>.

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