

***Oldenburg Declaration of the
16th German Congress on Crime Prevention***

by

**GERMAN CONGRESS ON CRIME PREVENTION AND
CONFERENCE PARTNERS**

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German Congress on Crime Prevention and Conference Partners

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New Worlds of Media – Challenges for the Prevention of Crime?

New media worlds – these refer to digital worlds that have been existence since the turn of the century and have fundamentally changed both social life and the life of each individual. The new - digital – media, primarily the Internet and mobile phones, have in the meantime become commonplace, and one can no longer imagine life without them.

In 2010, virtually 50 million people, or 70% of the German-speaking population from the age of 14 and older were online; 100% of the younger age groups ranging from 14 to 29 years surf on the Internet, and this market is also completely satiated with regard to mobile phones. It is especially the older generations that are not online, whereat the “digital trench” is currently at about 65 years of age.

The **Internet**, which is the basic medium of the digitalised world, has evolved to become a universal and multi-functional communication medium for information and entertainment, providing us with texts, (moving) images and sounds. Never before has one single medium attained such a high rate of dissemination in such a short space of time of not even quite two decades.

Without a doubt, the new digital media do offer many positive fields of application, but they also entail problematic areas, risks and dangers, right up to criminality. Hence, the digital media also provide challenges in the field of crime prevention.

For this reason, the 16th German Congress on Crime Prevention has made the new worlds of media its topic of focus. On the basis of the expertise elaborated by Dr. Wiebke Steffen “New Worlds of Media – Challenges for the Prevention of Crime?” the German Congress on Crime Prevention and its conference partners, the DBH-Bildungswerk (Educational Society), Landespräventionsrat Niedersachsen (LPR) (State Prevention Council of Lower Saxony), Polizeiliche Kriminalprävention der Länder und des Bundes (Police Crime Prevention of the States and the Federation), (ProPK), Präventionsrat Oldenburg (Prevention Council Oldenburg) (PRO), Stiftung Deutsches Forum für Kriminalprävention (Foundation German Forum for the Prevention of Crime) (DFK), and WEISSER RING, have issued the following “**Oldenburg Declaration**”.

The “digital revolution” not only harbours great potential, it also entails dangers and risks

As is the case in the analogue world, infringement of laws, violations of rules, right up to criminal acts, also occur in the digital world. In principle, all the dangers of

criminality which exist outside of the Internet are now in the Internet too. In addition, the internet makes possible or even encourages certain problematic modes of conduct that are detrimental in one way or another. Moreover, such conduct can gain in explosiveness due to the framework conditions typical of the Internet.

Particularly noteworthy in this regard are, e.g. the capacity for automation as well as the disappearance of spatial barriers; the anonymity; the rapid dissemination of the contents; the ability to copy and proliferate information, as well as the (permanent) storage thereof (“the Internet doesn’t forget”).

All in all, the potential for danger and damage, as made possible by cyber-crime, is high and what is more, it is clearly on the rise. This is even further facilitated by the fact that the perpetrators rapidly adapt to the technical conditions and display enormous innovative capacity.

The German Congress on Crime Prevention emphatically urges that the Internet not be allowed to become a sphere in which there are no laws. A balance has to be found between the right to freedom of information and opinion on the one hand, and the justified protection of the rights of users on the other. Especially as there is a large economic and political interest in participating in the utilisation of digital media and providing free unimpeded access to the Internet, the internet users must be able to rely on the fact that the constitutional state will establish the framework conditions that ensure the privacy and integrity of IT-based systems.

Independently of this, as in the past, everything possible must be undertaken to educate the internet users – and this includes all user groups – about the possible repercussions of increasing online crime. In this regard, there is a particular need to inform them about identity theft. In addition, it is important to further sensitize them regarding the risks and provide them with sensible protective measures. Due to the limited efficiency of (safety-relevant) technical approaches and countermeasures – especially in terms of time considerations – human behaviour, as an important criminogenic factor, has to be considered and placed at the centre of focus, in conjunction with delinquency on the Internet.

Very little sound knowledge regarding the risk and perils of digital media

The warnings issued regarding the virtually unrestricted inducements and possibilities offered by the Internet, especially in respect of its inappropriate use, stand in stark contrast to the actual knowledge about the risks and dangers associated with the Internet. On the one hand, this possibly is due to the large proportion of unreported cases, which might be even larger than that of “analogue” crime. On the other hand, however, this also is due to the novelty of numerous perils, in the sense of a general – or also specific, possibly age-specific – threat, as well as the rapid development of the digital media and the speedy changes in usage and user behaviour.

Numerous media offers have been on the “market” for too short a time to assess their medium- or even long-term effects. There are no extensive, representative criminological studies or long-term panel and longitudinal investigative studies. The emotional intensity of the debate is entirely disproportionate to actual knowledge about the risks and their possible (lasting) effects.

The German Congress on Crime Prevention considers it extremely important to conduct extensive, broadly-based and representative criminological studies as well as long-term panel and longitudinal investigative studies. An evidence-based criminal policy requires a sufficiently reliable statistical basis, which urgently has to be created. In so doing, it has to be ascertained whether the investigation of new media does not also necessitate the development of new (empirical) methods and approaches.

The Internet attracts a high level of attention as a risk-factor for adolescents

In the perception of the general public, the Internet poses a particularly great threat for adolescents. These risks principally include their extreme carelessness in dealing with personal information, the impacts of violence-related content and in particular the effect of violent computer games on their own behavioural patterns. Furthermore, risks are also seen in excessive media consumption, right up to computer addiction; confrontation with pornography and sexual harassment, politically motivated crime and extremism, cyber-mobbing and cyber-bullying, as well as the infringements of personality rights and copyright.

However, to date, there still is hardly any reliable information on how many adolescents actually have already come into contact with problematic contents, and which impacts these contents have had on them (or also could possibly have on them), or how frequently and how long the young adults display risky, excessively careless or even criminally-relevant behaviour.

In the course of the “digital-media risk discussion”, the German Congress on Crime Prevention expressly warns against repeating the pitfalls and arguments of “conventional” medial and criminal-political discussions regarding juvenile delinquency and endangerment of youth. It would be wrong to assume that the problems with digital media are primarily to be found among “young adults”, to regard young adults as having fewer standards and acting more unscrupulously than the adult generation or to fear that “they could stay the way they are now”.

The German Congress on Crime Prevention expressly points out that the majority of young adults obviously do know how to deal with the computer and also do find the balance between computer and other activities – as is the case in the analogue world, too, where most of the adolescents are generally able to face the challenges posed, without any particularly conspicuous behaviour and are successful at finding their way in the world (Wiesbaden Declaration of the 12th German Congress on Crime Prevention).

*For the **German Congress on Crime Prevention**, there is no reason to assume that “digital” juvenile delinquency and the endangerment of youth are subject to different pre-conditions and regularities than “analogue” juvenile delinquency. That is why juvenile delinquency should be regarded and evaluated with a sense of proportion in both the cyber and analogue worlds.*

*Regardless of the aforementioned, the **German Congress on Crime Prevention** does deem it necessary to address the general public’s concerns about the media competence of the younger generation, as well as the fears regarding the risks and dangers on the Internet and the mistrust toward the younger generation’s “digital” behaviour.*

There is an urgent need to conduct long-term criminological surveys pertaining to the media and communication behaviour of young adults. In so doing, particular attention has to be paid to the “motives for using the Internet” and “individual perceptual processes”.

Crime prevention in the digital world: empowering people, creating protective mechanisms

Assuming the premise that the decisive – constitutive - feature for the prevention of crime is also given in the digital world; that there is a clear understanding on what is to be considered “permitted and not-permitted” or “desirable and non-desirable”; assuming that the digital world does not claim to be a law-free zone, then crime prevention can pursue the following three primary strategies in order to prevent or mitigate the potential dangers and risks: crime prevention by means of statutory and (safety-relevant) technical arrangement, measures and recommendations; crime prevention by means of protecting minors in the media; and crime prevention by means of media competence.

*Even though the internet users and their behavioural patterns are of vital importance for the effect and effectivity of crime prevention efforts and measures, the **German Congress on Crime Prevention** expressly demands that crime prevention efforts be strengthened by means of statutory as well as technical measures for security and recommendations, and not minimised. Both politics and the economy must be aware of their responsibility for protecting the users, their trust in the security of the network, and their personality rights and data, and act accordingly. The government has the task of protecting the Internet as a free and liberal medium; the citizens have to be able to rely on the fact that the constitutional state will establish the framework conditions that will guarantee the privacy and integrity of IT-based systems. In particular, the efforts of the police for crime prevention are to be extended and strengthened, with the objectives of improving the security of users in handling the new media; informing them of the dangers and criminal offences, and cooperating with other actors working in this field.*

*As a basic principle, the **German Congress on Crime Prevention** does deem the existing German statutory stipulations for the protection of minors in the media to be sufficient for protecting them against problematic content, particularly in light of the fact that the influence of many parents on the media behaviour of their children is declining or, perhaps more exactly, quite a number of parents are tending to give up the efforts of controlling this, as they do not have the knowledge to deal with new media.*

*This is another reason why the **German Congress on Crime Prevention** considers it necessary to further improve the conditions for risk management in the protection of minors.*

*The **German Congress on Crime Prevention** welcomes all efforts aimed at further improving the media competence of all users of digital media, so that they can utilise the opportunities these media offer, yet at the same time avoid the potential pitfalls. With regard to the media competence of children and adolescents, the **German Congress on Crime Prevention** demands that the world should also respect their manner of using the media and their mode of expressing themselves within this media, and it should be acknowledged that by no means are they helpless in dealing with this media and do need the freedom that this digital world can offer them. Regardless of this, they also need support. As it cannot be assumed that this support can be provided by the parents in all cases, it is especially the schools that need to take on this task of imparting media competence. The German Congress on Crime Prevention demands that schools and teachers be educated accordingly, so that they can accompany the process of integrating the digital media into the everyday life at school in an evaluating manner.*

With regard to the challenges for crime prevention, the 16th German Congress on Crime Prevention refers to the discussions of the 12th, 13th, 14th and 15th German Congresses on Crime Prevention, the demands and appeals of the “Wiesbaden Declaration”, the “Leipzig Declaration“, the “Hanover Declaration” as well as the “Berlin Declaration”

Their topicality and urgency still remain undiminished to this very day.

Oldenburg, 31 May 2011

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