

6) Veröffentlichungsfähige Zusammenfassung:

NetAffair - The Webproject /netaffair.org/Many ways to begin a story

We are currently witnessing a proliferation of ambitious proposals for a “fresh generation” of computer networking paradigms from various regions of the world. European scientists who have been involved in the field for long enough cannot escape the impression that we may already have faced a similar watershed before. In fact, the scientific contest that is unfolding today between the regions of the world bears clear parallels to a not-so-distant European past. This suggests taking a step back and closely reviewing the history of **networking research** in Europe, starting from the time when telephone circuit switching was the prevalent paradigm.

One side did it all? Well, depends who is talking. We prefer to tell the story that building computer networks involves more than solely one country, one army, one person or one machine. Computer networks interconnect people and machines. Nobody can deny that. The primer hook up while having a conversation, which includes to overcome distances and rigid mindsets. The latter need more than one computer and protocol to talk cross border. But wait, there is more.

In the 1950s the evolving **computer industry** gave out the signal that “five machines are enough” to serve the world. That notion needed to be abandoned by creative thinkers as well as some particular telephone paradigms, which only served **telecommunication monopolies** well. Furthermore, no **politician** would have dared to refill the research funds, if there wasn't the trigger of national pride and cost savings attached to the pot. **Material scientists** were needed to reduce the costs of computer production, and made them shrink from giant machines to tiny assistants. In parallel networking researchers started to think about the “concourse of computers” – to use pre-Internet terminology – and by doing so they made world-wide communication much cheaper. Everything is interwoven: people, science, industry, nations, policy and standardisation. In a nutshell, that's what computer networking is all about – and should not be forgotten.

But there is always something to add. For example, what was the real topic at the coffee tables in Europe at the time? Was it colour TV or the oil crisis in 1973? The Geiger counter for the lady's handbag or the student protests in France, 1968. Was it the diverse political transitions that took place in the USA and the Socialist Republic of Czechoslovakia or was the real hot topic the invention of the mini skirt and the pill? Hard to tell.

What we know for sure is that few cared about the development of packet switching or computer networks, aka Internet up until the 1990s. Instead bureaucrats and economic analysts compared the amount of telephone distribution with the numbers of cars sold, and explained the gaps in technology by counting the numbers of TVs in the households of the USA and the founding members of the EU, the so called “European Six”: France, Italy, West Germany, Luxembourg, Belgium and the Netherlands.