A Retrospect of Blockstack Berlin 2018

As a tech geek and Blockchain enthusiast, I was excited to be invited to participate in the Blockstack 2018 Berlin Conference. There were the usual gaggle of blockchain technorati, panel discussions, and amazing presentations. Conference presenters explored topics touching upon the development of Web 3.0 technology and infrastructure, crypto politics, crypto economics, oh and Cryptokitties.

Some of the many notable presenters, included: Dr. Jutta Steiner, CEO and Co-Founder of Parity Tech, US Government whistleblower Edward Snowden, Blockstack's founders Ryan Shea and Dr. Muneed Ali, Lightning Labs Elizabeth Stark, Albert Wegner of Union Square Ventures, Santiago Siri of Democracy Earth Foundation, Futurist and Technologist George Gilder, and Juan Benet of Filecoin.

Edward Snowden, George Gilder, and other presenters reflected upon the negative consequences of the technology divide created by our current internet architecture and infrastructure. Snowden championed the importance of overcoming crypto tribalism and suggested we all remain skeptical of everyone in a position of power, including himself.

Albert Wenger of Union Square Ventures asked attendees to consider how the Blockchain revolution could, "grow the space of what is possible," and what is possible may not be good for humanity. He proposed that developers take a hard look at the different blockchain use cases they want and don't want to see implemented, such as the proliferation of dark money, deep fake, and then design the technology accordingly.

Wegner urged his audience to consider the idea that privacy is not a value, but rather, a strategy created to protect an individual's rights in our current global society. He said that privacy may not be the most useful strategy in the forthcoming blockchain technology revolution and instead suggested using transparency secured with token holders' secure identities and data was the better option.

The South American political trailblazer Santiago Siri of The Democracy Earth Foundation revealed how cryptocurrency is beginning to disrupt the ties between energy and money, and how this disruption will result in the divorce of nation states and their control over currency. Siri examined the circumstances surrounding the attack on cryptocurrencies in Venezuela and how the Venezuelan government's strategy could be used as a test case for future nation states in attacking blockchain technology and distributive tokenized networks. His presentation concluded with providing ideas on how to defend against such attacks through tokenized voting and developing and using applications to create "soft" democracies to secure our voices and political will.

Technology futurist William Mougayar facilitated the conference's investor panel. Notable guests Brittany Laughlin, Andy Bromberg of CoinList, and Ari Paul of BlockTower Capital chaired it. They reviewed the lessons learned in the funding of new blockchain ventures. The panelists agreed that blockchain technology is in its fourth generation and is currently experiencing an open source "Golden Era" fueled by the advent of Initial Coin Offerings (ICO) funding.

The panel participants stated that the "Golden Age" of blockchain is being fueled by ICOs making protocols more affordable and viable for VC funding than ever before. The rest of the panel discussion focused on the process the panelists used to pick new blockchain technology ventures to invest in. Namely, by evaluating a venture's team, their product, and the market factors that could impact their investment.

During his time at the podium one of the more notable speakers, Prism Labs CEO Adam Breckler, went over the inspiration that fueled his design concepts behind the development of Prism.IO, Prism Labs' Web 3.0 community development platform. Adam shared an important lesson he learned from his experiences working in the tech startup world. He explained how "developing great technology alone is not enough" in furthering the growth in the blockchain industry. Instead, he said:

> *"There is a critical need to design and implement technology focused on community building and that Prism.IO helped to overcome this fundamental obstacle that developers and blockchain entrepreneurs face in creating infrastructure and technology to mature the blockchain space."*

He further drove home the point by sharing a quote by AngelList founder Naval Ravikant:

> *"The top two skills for Blockchain entrepreneurs is technology development and community development."*

The Prism Labs founder emphasized the requirement to design and align Web 3.0 protocols to a community's goals through economic incentives. To achieve this alignment, developers and entrepreneurs had to stop viewing token holders as just customers, users, or investors. Instead, he posited that blockchain protocol and technology stakeholders must start seeing their token holders as engaged contributors who must take an active role in improving a protocol, whether that be as a developer, content creator, or survey taker to create the feedback loop required to improve the technology.

Other presenters at the conference like Elizabeth Stark, Co-founder of Lightning Labs, echoed Adam's sentiments in building the Web 3.0's infrastructure and technology. Elizabeth reminded her audience during her presentation that, "The first Blockchain code release happened in 2009. Blockchain is still a new technology. Blockchain companies are still working to develop the technology and the infrastructure". 2017 was also the year blockchain technology hit the mainstream with meteoric growth as reflected in Coindesk's *2018 State of Blockchain* report.

Fabric Ventures, one of the VC investors of Blockstack protocol, among other conference participants, also meted similar sentiments Adam Breckler expressed regarding the obstacles Blockchain companies need to overcome. In their *2018 State of the Token Market* report, Fabric Ventures reviewed several of the obstacles facing the fledgling Blockchain industry, the most prominent being overcoming the hurdles of providing long-term incentives and continuity for new ventures.

Many of the conference presenters provided attendees an ample survey of the state of the blockchain space and identified the critical requirements for blockchain ventures to succeed. Companies like Prism Labs, are providing tools to foster new ventures in the Web 3.0 space and be successful. These companies are helping blockchain entrepreneurs to leverage the Darwinistic process where the best managed, self-regulated projects create and merge economies and technologies through incentivizing community involvement, and thus, stabilize tokens for long-term capitalization and growth. Using the Blockstack protocol, these companies are carving a distinct market niche.

As John Perry Barlow stated to the governments of the world in his *Declaration of the Independence of Cyberspace*, "You have no sovereignty where we gather." The participants of Blockstack Berlin are continuing to strive to make Blockstack the commons for the 'sovereignless'.

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