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**Research Platform Governance
of digital practices**

"They aren't roadblocks. They're signposts." Challenges in researching the governance of digital practices

Kick-Off Event
of the Research Platform Governance of Digital Practices
Online student-led workshop, 14 January 2021, 14:00 – 16:00

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Invitation

How do we govern digital practices?

In our modern society, digitalization is seen as an unstoppable force – a megatrend. It changes the ways we work, live, and think. Ranging from the unprecedented influence of tech-conglomerates to complicated tensions between ownership and openness of digital data, there is a clear need for governing bodies to intervene to ensure sustainable and fair usages of digital technologies.

For the kick-off workshop of our research platform Governance of Digital Practices, we (the platform's four pre-doc students) are inviting you to collectively think through some of the main conceptual challenges in governing digital practices: What exactly should we govern when we govern digital practices (e.g. data, algorithms, people), which tools of governance should we use, and at which level should we govern particular practices? In our workshop, we will firstly walk you through our respective projects and formulate four key challenges that they address. This is where we are going to ask for your input. In small groups, we will ask you to tackle one of the challenges each and then present your solution to the plenum.

Our projects range from questions on knowledge-intensive human work in the age of digital transformation, governing common resources via digital platforms, digital healthcare governance and privacy to ethics in computational social science.

We hope to get you excited for our platform's work and are excited to get to know you!

Who are we?

Our newly established research platform at the University of Vienna brings together researchers from the social sciences, law, and operations research to study and improve the governance of digital practices.

In the first four years, we will focus on addressing the following challenges; each challenge is organised around an interdisciplinary doctoral project.

Knowledge-intensive human work in the age of digital transformation

Digitalization is changing the nature of work all around the globe, and is also affecting the field of academia. In the knowledge-intensive sector, work is becoming increasingly intertwined with digital research infrastructures, which allows researchers from different fields and countries to cooperate and share all aspects of their work more openly, but also creates new challenges and friction.

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Rasmus Kvaal Wardemann, a graduate from the Norwegian University of Science and Technology in Trondheim, will analyse how digital transformation of academic practice challenges the understandings and conditions of knowledge-intensive work. Further, the implementation and development of digital research infrastructures faces several challenges, e.g. regarding fragmentation, technical issues and legitimacy. What then happens in the intersection of practice and infrastructure? How does it develop, and who governs who?

Governing common resources via digital platforms

Digital infrastructures are seen as a promising tool also when it comes to e.g. managing the effects of climate change. There is an increasing trend towards governing common resources with the help of digital platforms, as they facilitate public access to information relevant for monitoring and conserving biodiversity through data exchange. The use of such data "ecosystems" is seen as a sustainable and democratizing development, allowing collaborative governance of shared resources.

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The specificity of such governing of common resources through digital infrastructures will be analysed by **Paul Dunshirn**, a graduate of the Social Sciences Research Master at the University of Amsterdam. A particular focus within this topic will be dedicated to tensions around data ownership and openness, to questions about the fair and sustainable distribution of benefits created from data usage, as well as to ensuring democratic legitimacy in this context.

Digital health care governance and privacy

Digital health care enhances the empowerment of patients and provides valuable additional service but can also give rise to surveillance medicine and exacerbate existing inequities. One field in the digital health sector is the growing market of e-mental health applications. Health data are, by definition, considered sensitive data. Due to the prevalent stigmatisation of mental health disorders, protection and privacy when processing mental health data are even more critical and will ultimately decide on the success of any broader e-mental health strategy in public health care.

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As a law graduate and with a distinguished record in the humanities, **Elisabeth Steindl** will focus on the legal implications of new digital technologies in mental health. One aim of this project is to create a model for a balance between digital health, governability and existing regulation within the EU by analysing the legal frameworks and approaches of exemplary cases.

Ethical and social standards in computational social sciences

Social science research in the 21st century could benefit greatly from the increased use of computational methods and technology. For instance, mapping wealth distribution using only telecommunications meta-data can be done with high accuracy at a fraction of the cost and much speedier, compared to traditional demographic surveys. However, the access to and use of this type of (big) data remains an ethical and regulatory challenge.

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The co-opted fourth pre-doctoral research fellow **Seliem El-Sayed,** a graduate of Institut d'études politiques de Paris (SciencesPo) and Freie Universität Berlin, aims to develop ethical and social standards for the collection and use of data in Computational Social Sciences. He is part of the research project "Digitize!" and will be complementing the three official doctoral projects of the research platform with this relevant topic.

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