

“We are on a mission”. Exploring the role of future imaginaries in the making and governing of digital technology

Call for Abstracts

Deadline: 02.03.2018

Workshop

Friday, 27 April 2018

Alexander von Humboldt Institute for Internet and Society

Französische Straße 9,

10117 Berlin, Germany

Keynote: Sally Wyatt (Maastricht University)

“We are on a mission to build a more open, accessible, and fair financial future, one piece of software at a time” promises the software platform *Blockchain*. “Imagine if everyone could get around easily and safely, without tired, drunk or distracted driving” envisions the self-driving car company *Waymo* (a subsidiary of Google’s parent company, *Alphabet Inc.*). “The Regulation is an essential step to strengthen citizens’ fundamental rights in the digital age and facilitate business by simplifying rules for companies in the Digital Single Market” claims the *European Commission* with regard to the General Data Protection Regulation.

These examples show how imaginaries of future societies are enacted to promote digital innovations or legitimate certain modes of internet governance. They illustrate how software providers, tech companies and legislators dig into the rich pool of cultural norms, visions and values to support (or question) digital tools, rules and regulations. Future prospects seem to be central for making decisions in the present.

What role do future imaginaries perform in the making and governing of present digital technology? How are they mobilised to push or oppose digital innovations such as artificial intelligence, the internet of things, blockchain technology or open source/open data projects? How are prospective imaginaries shaped in policy discourses and governance practices regarding networked technology and global data flows? What significance do European specificities have in global technology imaginations? Can different mechanisms be identified in mainstream discourses and counter-narratives? What happens if future scenarios are contested and digital promises become contradictory?

Themes of the Workshop

These are central questions to be discussed in our workshop. We welcome theoretical, methodological and empirical contributions that help us understand how the future is mobilized to make and govern digital technology in the present.

The workshop is organized around three central themes:

- 1) Theories and concepts to analytically grasp future visions and their roles in the making and governance of digital technology
- 2) Methods and tools to analyze the nexus between future imaginations and their functions in and impact on policy-making and technology development
- 3) Empirical research and case studies on future imaginaries and their roles in the making and governing of present digital technology

Submission

We welcome theoretical, methodological and empirical contributions from various disciplines that speak to the themes of the workshop. Please send an english language **300–500 word abstract including title** that describes your contribution to the workshop. We encourage you to submit work-in-progress.

Abstracts are submitted via e-mail to astrid.mager@oeaw.ac.at **before 2 March 2018**. We will send out notifications on 13 March 2018.

Organisers

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