The Digital Society - prospects and challenges

Advanced Study Group at the Pufendorf Institute

The Advanced Study Group (ASG) on the Digital Society gathers experts from six faculties at Lund University during the fall of 2012 in order to identify challenges and innovative and cutting edge research in relation to the digital society. It is formed upon the notion of there being several key issues regarding the digital society that requires a multidisciplinary approach in order to be properly understood and targeted for research. The Advanced Study Group is headed by Per Runeson, professor in Software Engineering and research director for the industrial excellence center in Embedded Applications Software Engineering, and Stefan Larsson, PhD in Sociology of Law and research director at Lund University Internet Institute (LUii).

The aim of the ASG is to create a multi- and cross-disciplinary research program centered on prospects and challenges of digitization in society. Further, to identify key issues within the field with the purpose of catalyzing research regarding these issues. In addressing the multitude of issues and challenges which are consequences of digitization and which can be felt throughout the entire social structure, a digital society research program must engage scholars from many and diverse disciplines such as engineering, social sciences, law, economics as well as the humanities.

Practical examples exist in abundance around us, ranging from the design and use of mobile phones, to the metaphors used and changed by digitization. Our vision is that the program will provide a scientifically sound basis for identifying and understanding the most pressing challenges and the most likely promises of the digital society. We set out to lay the grounds for cross-disciplinary research programs with capacities for more than silently observing the phenomena and for engaging in innovative use of knowledge relevant for organizations, industries, legislators, individuals and the civil society.

The backbone of the ASG is a number of seminars where two or three participants will present their perspectives on the topic. Following, we as a group will - through open discussions- collaborate and elaborate on the various aspects of digitization presented:

- Seminar 1: Introduction, overview, presentation of participants. The broad representation across six faculties, requires some effort to get to know each other and validate the common goals.
- Seminar 2: Old concepts in new contexts. Metaphors may be used to understand and conceptualize technological change, transforming concepts from non-digital to the digital world. How does this process work, and how can we use it?
- Seminar 3: Trust in digital technology and government. Digitization enables large-scale surveillance and changes our notion of reliability of people, services and products. How can we establish and maintain trust in the digital society?
- Seminar 4: An information-segregated digital society and its consequences. Personalized search algorithms and products designed for the rich, young and healthy create information segregation. What is needed to counteract this development?
- Seminar 5: Work-life in transition. Digitalization and social media create possibilities and challenges to traditional organizations, structures, hierarchies, business models, etcetera. How to utilize the possibilities and master the challenges?
- Seminar 6: Social norms and law related to digitization. Technological shifts tend to create legal challenges, where social norms may take different paths than legislators expect. Which are these gaps, and how can they be addressed?

In short, digitization affects, develops, constructs and challenges large parts of contemporary society. We must address the many issues brought on by these multilayered changes and the grand challenges facing society. The Advanced Study Group will foster dialogue and research-efforts across disciplines and in this unite experienced researchers with early career researchers from most of the Faculties of Lund University.
Leading the advanced study group on “The Digital Society – Prospects and Challenges”:

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The Digital Society - Seminar Program

• Seminar 1 (10/9, 12:30-16)
Introduction, overview, presentation of participants. The broad representation across six faculties, requires some effort to get to know each others and validate the common goals.

• Seminar 2 (1/10, 12:30-16)
Old concepts in new contexts. Metaphors may be used to understand and conceptualize technological change, transforming concepts from non-digital to the digital world. How does this process function, and how can we use it?

• Seminar 3 (22/10, 13:30-16)
Trust in digital technology and government. Digitization enables large-scale surveillance and changes our notion of reliability of people, services and products. How can we establish and maintain trust in the digital society?

• Seminar 4 (12/11, 13:30-16)
An information-segregated digital society and its consequences. Personalized search algorithms and products designed for the rich, young and healthy create information segregation. What is needed to counteract this development?

• Seminar 5 (3/12, 12:30-16)
Work-life in transition. Digitalization and social media create possibilities and challenges to traditional organizations, structures, hierarchies, business models, etc. How to utilize the possibilities and master the challenges?

• Seminar 6 (14/1, 12:30-16)
Social norms and law related to digitization. Technological shifts tend to create legal challenges, where the social norms may take a different path than legislators expect. Which are these gaps, and how can they be addressed?