REGISTER NOW!

DIGITAL PARTICIPATION SYMPOSIUM

27 November 2023, 13.30 - 17.00

House of Connections
Grote Markt 21, Groningen
(1st floor, opposite to La Place)

About the symposium

We are happy to invite you to the 2nd Symposium organised by the Public Participation Centre and the Wubbo Ockels School in collaboration with the New Energy Coalition.

A vast majority of citizens across Europe participate digitally in public discourse through free apps offered by big tech firms such as Meta (e.g. Facebook, WhatsApp, Instagram), X Corp (previously Twitter), and ByteDance (TikTok). Given the recent debates on whether such apps foster inclusivity and enhance public engagement and on the power of big-tech companies as private gatekeepers of public discourse, the theme of the upcoming symposium is Digital Participation.

In the first part of the symposium, based on three short pitches from leading academics we invite you to discuss both in parallel break-out session and in a plenary session about: How are bot factories destabilising elections? How do big tech strategies influence citizens' opinions? What steps is the EU taking? In the second part of the symposium, we focus on practical aspects of employing digital tools for citizen participation: what developments are taking place in the region, how do we define successful digital participation and what do we need to consider when advancing these developments? Finally, we will engage in a digital participation experiment on the spot!

We would like to thank you in advance for your interest in the Digital Participation Symposium and we look forward to welcoming you on the 27th of November!

Symposium Programme | 27 November 2023

13:30 - 14:00   **Walk-in with welcome drink**

14:00 - 15:20

PART 1 - Digital citizen participation: addressing big tech's dominance

Organisers:

     David Langley, Faculty Economics and Business, University of Groningen

     Stefan Couperus, Faculty of Arts, University of Groningen

Guest speakers:

     Lisa Gaufman, Faculty of Arts, University of Groningen

     Jeanne Mifsud Bonnici, Faculty of Law, University of Groningen

     Cleo Silvestri, Faculty Economics and Business, University of Groningen

15:20 - 15:40   **Coffee/tea break**

15:40 - 17:00

PART 2 - Digital technology for supporting democracy

Organisers:

     Yori Ong, Faculty of Medical Sciences, University of Groningen

Guest speakers:

     Davide Grossi, Faculty of Science and Engineering, University of Groningen

     Oskar Gstrein,Campus Fryslân, University of Groningen

     Annet Witvoet, Municipality of Groningen

     Sirin Yildiz, Municipality of Groningen

     Alexander Smit, Faculty of Arts, University of Groningen

17:00 - 17:45   **Drinks**

Digital citizen participation: addressing big tech's dominance

The vast majority of citizens across Europe already participate digitally in public discourse, through free apps offered by big tech firms such as Meta (e.g. Facebook, WhatsApp, Instagram), X Corp (previously Twitter), and ByteDance (TikTok). While some argue that such apps foster inclusivity and enhances public engagement, others express concerns about the power of big-tech companies as private gatekeepers of public discourse. They use secret algorithms, actively promote personalized content, decide which specific users to block, control the digital infrastructure to repress alternative platforms, and form their own oversight bodies. The direct and indirect effects of these new conditions for public discourse, and the commercial incentives driving them, are not well understood. In this part of the symposium we will discuss a set of thought-provoking statements based on three short pitches.

Organisers | Part 1

David Langley is a Full Professor of Digital Transformation and Strategy at the Department of Innovation Management and Strategy at the University of Groningen. Working in the area of internet innovations, since 1991, he has set up and led research projects in a wide variety of industries, including telecoms, energy, banking and the public sector. His research findings and advice have been implemented by many organizations, including Achmea, Ahold, Avro, Eneco, KPN, Philips, Rabobank, Randstad, Unilever, UPC, Vodafone, and the Dutch government. His scientific research has been published in leading journals, including Organization Science, the Journal of Product Innovation Management, and the Journal of Business Research.

Stefan Couperus is Associate Professor of European Politics and Society at the Faculty of Arts at the University of Groningen. His teaching and research work are situated at the intersection of modern political and social history and social sciences. He has a particular interest in the history and theory of democratic innovation and change, the use of the past in political and public discourse, and how political practices and institutions are legitimized in the public sphere in the past and the present.

Guest Speakers | Part 1

Lisa Gaufman is an Assistant Professor of Russian Discourse and Politics at the Faculty of Arts. After completing her PhD at the University of Tübingen, Germany, in 2016, she spent 3 years as a postdoctoral fellow at the Institute for Intercultural and International Studies at the University of Bremen. She is the author of "Security Threats and Public Perception: Digital Russia and the Ukraine Crisis" (Palgrave, 2017). Her other publications include peer-reviewed articles on nationalism, sexuality, and social networks, as well as regular blog posts at "The Duck of Minerva". Lisa's research is situated on the intersection of political theory, international relations, media and cultural studies.

Jeanne Mifsud Bonnici is a Professor in European Technology Law and Human Rights at the University of Groningen. In 2009 she was awarded a Rosalind Franklin Fellowship at the University of Groningen. Since 2015 she has been appointed as a full Professor at the same university and holds the Chair in European Technology Law and Human Rights at the University of Groningen. Here, she co-founded and co-leads the STeP Research Group, an interdisciplinary team of researchers engaging in research in security, technology and privacy. Her current research focuses on privacy and security, data protection and health-related data, internet governance and converging technologies and convergence of law. In each of these themes, she participates in EU-funded research projects and/or supervises doctoral research projects. Her work has been published in multiple books and numerous articles in international journals.

Cleo Silvestri is an Assistant Professor of Innovation Management and Strategy in the Faculty of Economics and Business at the University of Groningen. Her research interests lie at the intersection of strategic management and organizational behaviour. In her work, Cleo employs organization theory, frequently adopting a sociological perspective, to examine how social actors, both individuals and firms, influence the behaviour of others. Central to her focus is the exploration of how the public conduct of these social actors is, in turn, frequently shaped by conflicting demands. The domains she investigates encompass social-media organizations, university-industry relations, creative industries, and hybrid organizations.

Part 2

15:40 - 17:00

Digital technology for supporting democracy

How can we leverage digital technologies to make our democracy more engaging and fair? If used properly, online platforms and algorithms can be powerful tools for involving citizens in decision making and organizing participation. We will discuss what defines successful digital participation, which new developments are happening in our region and a digital participation experiment on the spot.

Organiser | Part 2

Yori Ong has a multi-disciplinary background in dental medicine and experimental physics and a PhD in biomedical engineering. In his current work, he connects insights from network science and artificial intelligence with behavioural science to create digital networks algorithms that support engagement with collective behaviour change. In addition, he develops implementation strategies at the individual and organizational level, with a focus on the public health and sustainability domains. By bridging the exact sciences with clinical practice, I adopt a perspective on research that is focused on operational problem solving and valorization.

Guest Speakers | Part 2

Davide Grossi is an Associate professor at the University of Groningen (Bernoulli Institute for Mathematics, Computer Science and Artificial Intelligence) and the University of Amsterdam (Amsterdam Law School and Institute for Logic, Language and Computation). He works in several areas within Artificial Intelligence concerned with decision-making and reasoning in groups. He is particularly interested in how algorithms can be used to support better collective decision-making, especially in democratic contexts.

Oskar Gstrein is an Assistant Professor at the Department of Governance and Innovation at Campus Fryslân, where he is also a member of the Data Research Centre. He joined the University of Groningen to collaborate with the first United Nations Special Rapporteur on the right to privacy in a Senior Researcher position. Currently, he serves as Programme Director of the Bachelor Data Science and Society. In addition, he is theme coordinator for Data Autonomy at the Jantina Tammes School of Digital Society, Technology and AI. Oskar's overall research theme is 'Human Dignity in the Digital Age.'

Annet Witvoet is the Coordinator of Citizen Participation at the Municipality of Groningen.

Sirin Yildiz is Digital Consultant at the Municipality ofGroningen.

Together they will present "De Stem van Groningen," the online participation platform of the Municipality of Groningen. We aim to explain its functions and showcase concrete examples of its usage. These examples range from participatory budgets to how residents can have a say in a playground in their neighbourhood. The central focus is: "What is the impact on the resident? " Additionally, we also face some challenges, such as measuring the success of the participation process. What criteria can we use to do this effectively? How do we determine the impact of the process? Another question is: What data should we request from a resident to maintain accessibility while ensuring a fraud-resistant participation process?

Alexander Smit is a PhD candidate at the Centre for Media and Journalism Studies at Groningen University. He focuses on the sub-target group of low-literate and low-digital literate citizens and examines how they understand, conceptualize and practice digital literacies within their everyday lives, what aspects of contemporary digital literacy frameworks and digital inclusion policy they experience as problematic and/or important in their civic and daily activities, and how they experience digital exclusion and digital inequalities on the basis of structural and personal barriers, capabilities, needs and values.