

DIGITAL TRANSFORMATION  
AS DEMOCRATIC MOMENT

# UNITOPIA

May 12–14

2022

**CALL FOR  
WORKSHOPS**

COLLECTIVELY EXPLORING  
THE FUTURE OF DIGITAL  
TRANSFORMATION

*We work for*  
**tomorrow**



CALL FOR WORKSHOPS

# UNITOPIA

COLLECTIVELY EXPLORING THE FUTURE  
OF DIGITAL TRANSFORMATION

## DIGITAL TRANSFORMATION AS DEMOCRATIC MOMENT

New forms of information technologies have always been tightly linked with the development of political systems. Even before the emergence of what we call “IT” today, the distribution, selection, and forging of information has been an important element of democratic societies. The emergence of mass media is closely linked to the (in)formation of democratic societies (Marres, 2007).

This is just one way in which contemporary democracies are shaped and influenced by modern technologies. Digitization poses a grand challenge, as it questions and challenges the ways how democratic systems and its institutions are working to this day. New possibilities of reaching voters, enforcing laws, and enabling rights through algorithmic means, but also new forms of potentially overarching state power, e.g. through mass surveillance, call us to investigate the way how digital technologies impact and shape democracy at large. Personalized advertisement and voter information threaten the common public sphere, polarization hampers democratic discourse, algorithmic forms of social sorting create unequal treatment and infringe basic rights.

But the question is not only how digital technologies are threatening or damaging modern democracies (Sunstein, 2009). Rather we want to ask how we can shape digital technologies and the innovation systems that ‘make’ them in a way that could actually benefit our democratic societies. This goes beyond a traditional understanding of politics, raising the question of what processes, infrastructures, and institutions are necessary to enable and foster democratic systems in the digital age.

At the upcoming UNITOPIA conference we therefore aim to open a discussion about the risks, but also the potentials that digital transformation brings for our democracies. What forms of regulation, or governance are necessary to align digital technologies with a common good? How would we envision future digital democracies? Which political theory concepts of democracy need to be adapted to the technological development and vice versa? How can we sustain and further develop central

premises of democracy in a new socio-technical order? And how could we enable processes to build socio-technical institutions and orders for our future democracies? These are just some questions we want to tackle at the conference. We understand the digital transformation as a democratic moment. It forces and enables us to rethink and reconceptualize how we understand democracy in the digital age.

At the conference we want to go beyond the classical panel discussion. As part of a more in-depth discussion and community building the conference also hosts different workshop formats at the conference.

**Conceptual and academic workshops** are aimed at discussing specific challenges and issues and to provide a space, where explorative research is enabled. Instead of presenting a finished paper, these workshops encourage early-on and experimental thinking about conceptual and academic perspectives on the conference topic.

**Skills Workshops** are envisioned as a transfer and training area, where young scholars are learning often implicit or unaddressed skills needed to survive in the academic landscape. Hands-on, young scholars can learn how to present themselves in the public, how to write successful grant proposals or how to deal with writing habits. If you have skills that you would like to share with fellow young researchers we are looking forward to your contribution.

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## INVITATION FOR WORKSHOP CONTRIBUTIONS

To foster an in-depth conversation about digital transformation as democratic moment, we invite workshop contributions for UNITOPIA 2022. The workshops should take 1,5h and address one of the two described formats. We especially encourage creative and innovative approaches that exceed standardized workshop formats. The number of participants is limited to 25 per workshop.

### The Conference

UNITOPIA 2022 will be hosted as physical event at the University of Graz from May 12-14, 2022. If it should not be possible to hold the conference as a physical event, the conference will be postponed.

The conference language is English.

Please send your workshop proposals (max. 1000 words) to [unitopia@uni-graz.at](mailto:unitopia@uni-graz.at).

### Deadline: March 3, 2022

If you are unsure if your idea fits into one of the proposed tracks please get in touch before submitting your abstract with [unitopia@uni-graz.at](mailto:unitopia@uni-graz.at).

### Abstract Guidelines

The abstracts should contain:

- a short introduction to the topic
- the central question tackled in the workshop
- a short description of the workshop's format (eg group discussion, paper workshop, etc)
- needed infrastructure for hosting the workshop
- and how it contributes to an ongoing discussion.

Since the conference understands itself as an interdisciplinary event, these are just some guiding bullet points. However, we highly encourage you to keep a diverse audience in mind when formulating the abstract.

Further information: <https://unitopia.uni-graz.at/>