Call for Papers

Workshop STS Austria, 13-15 September 2021, Graz:

Digital Living, Digital Infrastructuring

Science and Technology Studies has repeatedly shown that the social, cultural, technological and political conditions of research, knowledge production and innovation processes are being re-shaped through the digitization of data, the virtualization of communication and collaboration, and the design of underlying infrastructures. The COVID-19 pandemic has, however, drawn new attention to the role of digital infrastructures in private and public life. Politics, work, education, research, and everyday life now rely on virtual spaces and digital online platforms. The increased visibility of our dependence on digital infrastructures has made it clear that access to and control of such infrastructures are unequally distributed, both within Austrian society and internationally. While these infrastructures both contribute to new forms of social change and stabilize existing social relations, they invoke changing forms of individual and collective agency through invitations to participate, collaborate, trade, rate, comment, and share. Yet due to the private nature of digital infrastructures available to the general public, they largely remain outside of democratic control.

Starting from this heightened awareness of the role of digital infrastructures, this workshop will offer an opportunity to reflect on STS scholarship on the digital and to advance theoretical work on infrastructuring and digital practices. The concept of infrastructuring evokes doing as a metaphor and refers to the phenomenon that digital infrastructures emerge dynamically and surprisingly, and are at the same time stable and fragile. We are interested in conceptual and empirically grounded perspectives on the digital and digital infrastructuring that consider its dynamics in relation to human subjectivities as well as broader questions of politics, power and social order. We propose to address digital practices and infrastructuring around themes such as:

- The wider sociotechnical networks surrounding digital tools and platforms (including large international platforms such as Google, Amazon, Alibaba, Tencent, or Zoom) in fields as diverse as research, social media, public administration, and others;
- The creation of new global and local realities of governance and communication – ranging from the ubiquitous means of holding online meetings to the increased digitization of government services;
- The multiple controversies, tensions, and disruptions that are emerging around (private) digital infrastructures, including, for example, privacy and discrimination concerns around facial recognition, or delays in COVID-infection data collection and (online) presentation.

We specifically invite contributions that explore such themes from diverse methodological starting points, ranging from ethnographic studies of micro-practices to perhaps more abstract macro studies of (global) power relations.

We invite anyone interested in presenting a paper contributing to STS perspectives on digital practices and infrastructures to send an abstract (max. 300 words) to STS Austria office@sts-austria.org by 31 May 2021. We will send out notifications of acceptance by 30 June.

We aim for a hybrid online/offline format. Although we would prefer participants to be part of the full workshop, a hybrid format allows for participation from people who will not be able to travel to Graz (for Covid or other reasons).

The workshop will be a three-day event, starting in the afternoon of September 13 (CET) and ending in the morning of September 15 (CET), to allow people to travel to and from Graz before and after the workshop.