Alexander von Humboldt Institute For Internet and Society presents 'Virtual Research Sprint: "Toward an African Narrative on Digital Sovereignty"'

By:

Alexander Von Humboldt Institute For Internet and Society

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Are you eager to shape the discourse on the role of the internet for sustainable development and personal freedom in your country? Wonder what the future of our world would look like when we are digitised? Are you interested in harnessing artificial intelligence, big data and other fourth industrial revolution technologies to create fairer and better societies? Do you want to create the narrative and work toward concrete policy impact? If yes, become part of our 2021 virtual sprint on African Digital Sovereignty! **Application deadline: Sunday, 23 May 2021, 11:59 pm Central African Time.**

The debate on the digital economy is heating up. Many questions abound. Will robots displace jobs? Is there a new data colonialism? Will large platform companies push out traditional production and sales in countries, or can all businesses prosper? And if so, how can we create the right balance between the greater use of digital technologies and the threats of data extraction and commodification, the rising costs of innovation, and digital surveillance? This research sprint focuses on digital sovereignty in Africa to look at what solutions can help realize national and individual interests of citizens in the digital economy across Africa, and assist African countries leverage their own unique advantages. During the eight weeks, we invite you to put yourself in the shoes of users, technologists and policy makers, to explore important questions and solutions – including technology tools – from an African perspective. We invite you to articulate an internal African vision for development in the digital age.

In a nutshell

- The research sprint will run from 7 June to 30 July 2021.
- It is hosted by the University of Johannesburg, within the framework of the Ethics of Digitalisation project run by the Global Network of Internet and Society Research Centers (NoC) and its partner institutions, including the Alexander von Humboldt Institute for Internet and Society (HIIG), the Berkman Klein Center for Internet and Society (BKC), the Leibniz Institute for Media Research | Hans-Bredow-Institut (HBI) and the Digital Asia Hub (DAH) under the auspices of the Federal President of Germany and funded by Stiftung Mercator.
- The program will consist of up to 8 substantive, thematic sessions online (one per week of around 90 minutes), with assignments and other (optional) offerings, including working groups and “social” gatherings, for networking and mentorship.
- Students at the Masters- and PhD-level, and early career researchers from all disciplines working across Africa (or engaged in African issues at a global level) are invited to apply and will be actively involved in all parts of the program.
- The sprint will use Zoom, Google Drive, and Slack.
- Selected participants will be offered an internet connection sponsorship of up to EUR 100 to cover their internet costs for the eight weeks of the program.

We invite applications from researchers and professionals from academia, industry and civil society with diverse backgrounds (including but not limited to human rights and development studies, data science, software engineering, product management and design, science and technology studies, gender studies, law, social science, and related fields) to join our

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hosted by the South African Research Chair in Industrial Development (SARChI-ID) at the University of Johannesburg in collaboration with the Alexander von Humboldt Institute for Internet and Society (HIIG) with funding from Stiftung Mercator.

What we offer participants

- Evidence-based reflections on the digital economy: a unique opportunity to participate in a focused, solution-oriented process and to engage in ground-breaking problem-solving with scholars and practitioners from across Africa.
- Networking: a chance to learn from and interact with renowned global experts in the field.
- Access to a trans- and interdisciplinary community of professionals dedicated to increasing fairness in the digital economy.
- A chance to contribute to the final report of the sprint on selected issues of relevance for a pan-African narrative for digital sovereignty.
- Support and guidance from a committed project team and mentors at the South African Research Chair in Industrial Development (SARChI-ID) at the University of Johannesburg, the HIIG and its NoC partner institutions, including the HBI, BKC and DAH.

What we expect from participants

- Some background education and interest in topics of digitalisation and the technologies of the fourth industrial revolution from the perspective of social sciences, natural sciences, the law or any other discipline.
- Relevant work experience or excellent academic qualifications (human rights, data science, software engineering, product management and

design, science and technology studies, gender studies, law, social science, and related fields).
- A background working in Africa on these issues, or engaged in African issues at a global level.
- Passion for trans- and interdisciplinary work, with a fluency in English.
- Commitment to take part in recurring virtual sessions (estimated time commitment: 10 hours a week with 90-120 minutes presence in group sessions per week).
- Willingness to engage with other participants and generate active discussions during and after the Sprint.
- The commitment to produce a high-quality short written output (3-4 pages each) within the timeframe of the Sprint.

How to apply

Applications (along with a curriculum vitae and a representative writing sample of any length) are to be submitted through this link:

For queries or technical assistance, please contact Mrs. Koketso Manyane-Dlangamandla on koketsom@uj.ac.za.

Application deadline: **Sunday, 23 May 2021, 11:59 pm Central African Time.**

About the research project

This Virtual Research Sprint is part of the NoC research project "The Ethics of Digitalisation – From Principles to Practices", which aims to develop viable answers to challenges at the intersection of ethics and digitalisation. Innovative formats facilitate interdisciplinary scientific work on application-, and practice-oriented questions and achieve outputs of high social relevance and impact.

Besides the South African Research Chair in Industrial Development (SARChI-ID) and the HIIG, the main project partners are the Berkman Klein Center at Harvard University, the Digital Asia Hub, and the Leibniz Institute for Media Research I Hans-Bredow-Institut.

For more information, click here

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