

The Digital State

DIM Elective, Spring 2021

7.5 ECTS

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This Digital Innovation and Management course uses ethnographic studies and theoretical frameworks from Anthropology, STS and Organisational studies to examine the new responsibilities, obligations and of state actors as they implement IT systems. It asks how public bodies use and store data, questions the line between public and private companies, and explores political and ethical questions of infrastructure and responsibility during public digitisation initiatives.

We work through 5 themes. First, we examine different ways the State can be present in everyday life, and how this varies according to country. Next, we move on to examine some of the motivations driving digitalization projects, and consider the responsibilities of those implementing such schemes. We then proceed through an examination of technologies of digitalization and a series of global comparisons. To see this clearly from where we are -in Denmark - we use comparative material from other countries, where digitalization projects play out differently. The course concludes with a regional focus on the Scandinavian State.

The Digital State is primarily based on seminar discussions and workshop exercises. You will therefore be expected to do the class reading before class, using worksheets, and be prepared to participate in active discussion and debate, workshops, exercises and demonstrations.

Intended Learning Outcomes

- Describe and reflect on historic changes occurring in how states organise information
- Compare digitalisation initiatives in a global perspective
- Analyse and participate in ongoing research into the digitisation of Scandinavian states and the Danish state in particular
- Reflect on discourses of innovation through the lenses of transparency, accountability and responsibility
- Theorise new spaces where state and non-state actors intersect

Exam

Students will hand in a 15 page individually authored exam which responds to one mandatory question and one question selected from four options.

Introductory Week

We explore reasons for taking the course, prior student experiences, expectations and course structure. Bring key debates in the field to the fore, for contemplation over the semester. We collaboratively used to digital technologies that we will be using.

February 4th: No literature

1. The Digital State in Everyday Life

Implementing digital public services often relies on a number of existing infrastructures, and digitalization changes the baseline for citizen engagement with the state. In this introductory theme, we look at the history of state relationships to data and information, and early attempts to digitise public services and their concomitant normative cultural imaginaries of connectivity and futurity.

Literature February 11th

Scott, James C. 1995. *Seeing Like a State: How Certain Schemes to Improve the Human Condition Have Failed* Yale University Press. Excerpts: Introduction, Chapter 2 and – optionally – Conclusion.

[Dencik, Lina](#) and Kaun, Anne 2020. Introduction: datafication and the welfare state. *Global Perspectives* 1 (1) [10.1525/gp.2020.12912](https://doi.org/10.1525/gp.2020.12912)

Literature February 18th

Jasanoff, Sheila. 2004. “Ordering Knowledge, Ordering Society” in *States of Knowledge: The Co-production of science and social order* ed. Sheila Jasanoff, London and New York: Routledge, pp.13-46.

Krogness, Karl Jakob. 2011. “Numbered Individuals, Digital Traditions, and Individual Rights: Civil Status Registration in Denmark 1645-2010” in *Ritsumeikan Law Review* 28, 87-126.

2. Motivations for Digitisation

Why does digitalization make so much sense to the state? What makes it desirable, and what visions motivate it? In this theme we examine topics such as *citizen* and *consumer*. We examine the making of the Danish Digitalization Strategies, look historically at changes in attitudes and policy, and learn how to understand policy documents in their political contexts.

Literature February 25th

Hjelholt, Morte and Jannick Schou. 2017. "Digital Lifestyles Between Solidarity, Discipline and Neoliberalism: On the Historical Transformations of the Danish IT Political Field from 1994 to 2016" *tripleC* 15(1): 370-389.

Data as Relation Research Project Launch. 9th March, 2017. IT University of Copenhagen. Jens Krieger Røyen, Head of Office at the Agency of Digitisation, and Judith Simon, Professor at the University of Hamburg.

Literature March 4th

Wedel, Janine R., Cris Shore, Gregory Feldman and Stacy Lathrop. 2005. "Toward an Anthropology of Public Policy" *The Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* 600:30. <http://doi.10.1177/0002716205276734>

Danish Government. 2016. *Digital Strategy "A Stronger and More Secure Digital Denmark"* Agency for Digitisation, Copenhagen Denmark. Pp 4-14.

Aftale. 2020. <https://digst.dk/media/19919/digitaliseringspagt-en-ny-retning-for-det-faellesoffentlige-samarbejde.pdf>

3. Technologies of Digitalization

A wide range of technologies constitute how information is organised. What is digitalization moving from and towards? How are existing ways of studying the state changed or complicated by a shift in practices? What does this mean for power relations? We focus on the politics of infrastructure and take biometrics as an example.

Literature March 11th

Mayer-Schönberger, Viktor. "The Demise of Forgetting - and its drivers" in *Delete: The virtue of forgetting in the digital age*. Princeton University Press, 2011.

Sharon, Tamar. 2020. Blind-sided by privacy? Digital contact tracing, the Apple/Google API and big tech's new found role as global health policy makers. *Ethics and Information Technology* doi.org/10.1007/s10676-020-09547-x

Literature March 18th

Amoore, Louise. 2006. "Biometric Borders: Governing mobilities in the war on terror" *Political Geography* 25:336-351. <http://doi.org/10.1016/j.polgeo.2006.02.001>

[Sanchez-Monedero, Javier](#) and [Dencik, Lina](#) 2020. The politics of deceptive borders: 'biomarkers of deceit' and the case of iBorderCtrl. *Information, Communication and Society* [10.1080/1369118X.2020.1792530](https://doi.org/10.1080/1369118X.2020.1792530)

4. Global Comparisons

This theme draws on cases from different countries to explore how different state digitalization initiatives encounter distinct opportunities and concerns. We look at India and China. The examples show how digitalization practices impact and are shaped by existing assumptions about identity, nationhood, and privacy.

Literature March 25th

Creemers, Rogier. "China's social credit system: an evolving practice of control." Available at SSRN 3175792 (2018)

Liu, Chuncheng. "Multiple social credit systems in China." *Economic Sociology: The European Electronic Newsletter* 21, no. 1 (2019): 22-32

Literature April 8th

Rao, Ursula and Vijayanka Nair. 2019. Aadhaar: Governing with Biometrics. *South Asia: Journal of South Asian Studies* 42(3): 469-481.

Singh, Ranhjit. 2019. Give me a Database and I will Raise the Nation State. *South Asia: Journal of South Asian Studies* 42(3): 501-518.

5. Studying the Scandinavian State

Trust is a central theme in scholarship on Scandinavian engagements with the State. It is also central to digitalization strategies. What is trust? How is it threatened? These examples in Theme 5 focus on the political dimensions of how and where trusting relations are generated.

Literature April 15th

Bauer, Susanne. 2014. "From Administrative Infrastructure to Biomedical Resource: Danish Population Registries, the 'Scandinavian Laboratory' and the 'Epidemiologist's Dream'." *Science in Context* 27(2):187-2013.

Maguire, James and Brit Ross Winthereik. 2019. Digitalizing the State: Data Centres and the Power of Exchange. *Ethnos: Journal of Anthropology*. DOI: [10.1080/00141844.2019.1660391](https://doi.org/10.1080/00141844.2019.1660391)

Literature April 22nd

Valtysson, Bjarki. 2014. "Democracy in disguise: the use of social media in reviewing the Icelandic Constitution" *Media, Culture & Society* 36(1):52-68.

Markussen, Randi, Lorena Ronquillo and Carsten Schürmann. 2014. "Trust in Internet Election: Observing the Norwegian Decryption and Counting Ceremony" *International Conference on Electronic Voting*

April 28th: Extra Curricular presentation by Lilly Irani in the Illinois Just Infrastructure Series: "Claiming Democracy over Digital Infrastructures"

<https://just-infras.illinois.edu/speaker-series/schedule/>

April 29th Exam Preparation - Online Supervision

6. Writing Weeks

May 6th

Exam Date
May 27th 2021