



**Stanford PACS**

Center on Philanthropy  
and Civil Society

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Greetings,

I am delighted to extend this invitation to join us at a two-day, invitation-only workshop on Digital Civil Society at Stanford University on October 31-November 1, 2019. This will be an important contribution to the broad scholarly and public dialogues about digital data, infrastructure, and democracy. We believe this to be one of the few such conversations dedicated specifically to the changing structures, norms, regulatory domains, and practices of civil society in the digital age and are delighted to be bringing together scholars, practitioners, policy makers, and funders.

Our dependence on digital infrastructure, online information ecosystems, and networked data systems challenge the notion of independent or private civic participation. Successful political protest, voluntary collective action, and nonprofit service delivery increasingly depend on practical understandings of how the digital environment works. Scholarship on civil society and democracy must account for the digital political economy in which associational life now takes place and digital capacities of individuals and organizations as commonplace, not exceptional factors.

There are many areas of research and literature across many disciplines, from computer science work on fair algorithms to management studies of digital labor, legal analysis of associational rights to communications scholarship on content moderation that speak to the concept of digital civil society. We seek to draw perspectives from a wide range of scholarship to consider the nature of associational life in democracies in our time of digital dependence. Are our associational opportunities, institutions, and practices changing as digital systems reach into so many aspects of our lives? How do our online and offline activities and identities factor into these associational opportunities? What are the legal and regulatory questions (and answers) to our digital/analog associational practices? What forms of technological, organizational,



regulatory or behavioral adaptations or innovations are developing, and how do they affect their larger democratic contexts? These are the underlying questions that animate the two days - which have been structured to ensure a rich cross-disciplinary and cross-sectoral conversation.

The conference is organized around a series of metaphors that capture key points of intersection for scholarship, activism, innovation, and policy. There are six panels corresponding to six spheres of engagement: the first panel revisits the renowned highway metaphor and explores the infrastructural conditions of possibility for a digital civil society; the second introduces the digital townhall metaphor and focuses on the threats and opportunities for democratic deliberation; the third takes us to the online square(s) focusing on digital activism; the fourth explores the formation of a digital collective in the labor-force (online factory); the fifth focuses on maintenance activities and enters the digital basement; and, finally, the sixth panel looks at the ways in which the digital civil society creates culture and meaning.

These sessions will be structured to actively engage all conference participants. The event intends to foster new connections and spark new ideas that have immediate applicability to the work of scholars, policy makers, and civil society actors.

We hope you will be able to join us. Note that there is no registration fee for the conference. Please let us know as soon as possible (and no later than September 30, 2019) by responding to me at this email and to Heather Robinson, Program Associate for the Digital Civil Society Lab at [hnrbsn@stanford.edu](mailto:hnrbsn@stanford.edu).

Thank you and we hope to see you in October.



Respectfully,

Lucy Bernholz, Senior Research Scholar and Co-Director, Digital Civil Society Lab, Stanford University

Toussaint Nothias, Postdoctoral Fellow, Digital Civil Society Lab, Stanford University

Argyri Panezi, Postdoctoral Fellow, Digital Civil Society Lab, Stanford University

Jonathan Pace, Postdoctoral Fellow, Digital Civil Society Lab Stanford University

Morgan Currie, Lecturer in Data and Society, University of Edinburgh

Jessica Feldman, Assistant Professor, Dept. of Global Communications, American University of Paris