



(De-)Centralisation of Digital Infrastructures
Social-Science Track at the International Digital Security Forum (IDSF) 2023
20.09.2023, Raiffeisen Forum, Vienna / Austria

The [Vienna Centre for Societal Security](#) (VICESSE) and the [Austrian Institute of Technology](#) (AIT) are happy to announce their continuous collaboration to host the Social-Science Track on the 20th September 2023 at the [International Digital Security Forum](#) (IDSF) in Vienna, Austria on the theme: “(De-)Centralisation of Digital Infrastructures.”

The centralisation and at times monopolisation of digital infrastructures, with a concentration among major international corporations, most importantly the Big Five (Alphabet, Amazon, Apple, Meta and Microsoft), bear significant risks for digital societies founded on the idea of a free and open internet. As digital infrastructures and the companies running them first and foremost have a logic of profit maximisation, democratic principles such as equality, transparency, accountability and the safeguard of human rights, which are the fabric of our modern societies are only secondary and often need to be requisitioned again and again. Looking at the example of content regulation on major Social Media platforms, moderation often follows the principles set by the companies. These are based on political, economic, cultural, and sometimes religious beliefs held by key actors in the organisation and thus tend to manifest in the ruling principles of the platforms and digital infrastructures. However, what these principles are, how they are negotiated and how they can be contested is often completely left in the dark, with little to no means for individual users to protest. Compared to democratic societies, where important processes have been put into place to ensure that citizens can exercise their democratic rights, major platforms and digital infrastructures lack these democratic tools despite their significance in digital societies.

While in the last years, major policy and governance initiatives have been announced and partially been put into place to ensure a regulation of (private) digital infrastructures and platforms, their implementation and uptake is slow, their reach often too little and platforms prove to be creative with measures to circumvent regulations, largely due to their supra-territorial scope. Additionally, while regulations can be successful in limiting the power of single digital infrastructures, on a societal level, the burden of ensuring and enforcing rights largely remains with the individual user of the system or the digitalised citizen. This raises the question of what alternatives could be created, when states start to think of digital infrastructure as another public infrastructure: a possibility to invest in creating a world and open source, open data and decentralised digital infrastructure that has the citizens interest in mind and that can be changed democratically. The aim of the Social-Science Track “(De-)Centralisation of Digital Infrastructures” is thus to discuss the problems of these centralised digital infrastructures, the power of platforms and their impact on digital societies and their citizens, and the possible alternatives in the form of decentralised digital infrastructures, and

hence the ways in which digital resilience can be strengthened for citizens in a world of centralised and monopolised digital infrastructures.

The Social-Science Track at the IDSF 2023 provides a unique opportunity to discuss insights from novel research undertakings on the centralisation of digital infrastructures and digital resilience with a diverse international audience – academic and non-academic alike. This also includes stakeholders from the private sector, from the national and international governments and public bodies, such as the United Nations, OSCE or the European Commission, as well as from non-governmental organisations.

We invite research-papers, concepts and discussion-papers from social science scholars, interdisciplinary teams including non-social science disciplines such as from the computer science, and papers which incorporate non-academic collaborators, contributing to one or more of the following general topics:

- The problems that arise from centralisation of digital infrastructures and platforms and their impact on democratic societies
- Digital Infrastructures and democratic principles of free speech, elections, minority rights and human rights, and resilience of digital citizens
- The resilience of digital infrastructures, and how does centralisation, size and global reach influence this factor – how robust are digital infrastructures, what measures are in place to safeguard against disruptions, and how are responsibilities negotiated in times of disruption?
- Alternative models for regulating and shaping digital infrastructures, such as decentralised initiatives, public digital infrastructures, open-source initiatives, etc.

Information on abstracts and submission:

- An extended 1000-word abstract is required.
- The deadline for abstracts is 30th June 2023.
- Abstracts should be submitted via e-mail to office@vicesse.eu
- Review Results and information to the authors by 28th of July 2023.

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Additional information on the International Digital Security Forum 2023, the preliminary program, conference venue and the means of participation can be found on the homepage: www.idsf.io