

European Horizons [ed.]

How Can Digital Technologies Build a More Integrated Europe?

Exploring Digital Progress



Nomos

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edited by ASKO Europa-Stiftung, Saarbrücken and
Europäische Akademie Otzenhausen.



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Introduction

Technology, in order to move our society forward, must be of the people, by the people, and for the people.

The European Commission's new Digital Strategy is committed to shaping a digital future that is more innovative, trustworthy, and safe. The strategy is a step forward in ensuring the full exercise of our four EU freedoms: free movement of goods, free movement of capital, freedom to establish and provide services, and free movement of persons.

Across all of these four freedoms lie the aspirations of the European Union: an open, fair, diverse, democratic and confident economic and political project. In order to execute our project, we need to rethink the policies that will help us build an interconnected and values-driven digital world. For example, the accessibility of information on the internet stands in contrast with the unfair practices of bots that break the balance of political discourse. Similarly, the potential of e-marketplaces to facilitate cross-border SME economic activity is limited by the low levels of digital literacy, which affect our senior and immigrant populations the most.

Today our world is increasingly divided – East and West, North and South, young and old, urban and rural, wealthy and poor, a political system that is less responsive to the needs and voices of its constituents, and an economic system increasingly ignorant of the suffering of vulnerable, less mobile members of society. Digital technologies are both a challenge and an opportunity to address these systemic societal faults. Digital technologies can help public officials listen to its citizens more closely or bring them further apart.

We are also facing crises in the rule of law, social justice, migration, and financial and cultural solidarity among states, each culminating in the mobilization of right-wing populist agendas on both sides of the Atlantic and a general decline in the level and substance of public dialogue. But most worrisome, we face a decline in the desire for mutual understanding and commitment. Misinformation has been the topic of choice over the last few electoral years – and it will continue to be so unless the EU ensures a fair game in the digital space.

At European Horizons, we believe our current struggles require a transatlantic and global response. The younger generations – millennials and Gen Z – are the most connected and, at the same time, the loneliest. They are civically minded, but don't vote at the same rate as older generations

Introduction

despite the increased digital access to information, communication, and engagement. Technology alone is not the solution. It is a tool through which we can activate citizens to build a more prosperous European future.

European Horizons is leveraging digital technologies to give young people a voice in shaping the future of Europe and of transatlantic relations. We are harnessing the energy, idealism and ambition of young people and are empowering them with the right tools, skillsets and connections to influence our policy and political institutions now and in the future. Our network will one day design, enforce, and iterate on policy concepts such as Open Government, transatlantic convergence on cybersecurity, or a green Fourth Industrial Revolution.

For young and old, the year 2020 will mark a turning point in how we interact between each other, not less because COVID-19 is creating a new normal in our social, economic and political lives. In the midst of this uncertainty, digital technologies can build a more integrated European Union that works for its people. This inspiring compilation of academic essays and policy papers open a window of opportunity to achieve European Horizon's vision.

Melina Sánchez Montañés – Co-Founder and Chair of European Horizons

Preface

The ASKO Europa-Stiftung foundation and the Europäische Akademie Otzenhausen gGmbH, both seated in Saarland, Germany, have been dedicated to the European ideals of multilateral cooperation and to civic and vocational education for many decades. It is the passion for these topics that has made the partnership between these two organizations and European Horizons so organic.

We have enjoyed a successful cooperation with European Horizons since 2016. Activities ranging from a youth summit on the topic of the digital economy in 2017 and network conferences to transatlantic online forums have been the fruit of that collaboration. We also supported the development of the European Horizons chapter at the University of Saarland in Saarbrücken, Germany in 2018. Now, we are very happy to continue the collaboration with European Horizons through the publication of this book.

The digital realm has transformed all aspects of life from production and consumption of goods over global communications to decision-making processes. Challenges and opportunities have arisen which would have been unthinkable 25 years ago. With this publication, we aim to support young researchers in their endeavors in meeting these challenges and taking these opportunities to create a healthy and flourishing global community of discourse.

Hans Beitz (ASKO Europa-Stiftung) and Stéphanie Bruel (Europäische Akademie Otzenhausen), July 2020

Table of Contents

Preface	7
What Role Does Digital Literacy Play in Facilitating European Integration? <i>Shireen Al-Chalabi</i>	11
Res Publica ex Machina <i>Michael Schroeder</i>	23
Disinformation and the European Union <i>Jana Stehlíková</i>	49
Longitudinal Study of the Development of E-Government in Europe <i>Javier Cifuentes Faura</i>	75
Cyberdefense in a Globalized World <i>Lucia Lombardo, Jana Stehlíková and Martin Vokálek</i>	91
How can digital technologies build a more integrated Europe? <i>Philipp G. Rombach</i>	97
Artificial Intelligence enabled military systems as a breaking point for the transatlantic security architecture <i>Martina Svibic</i>	107
National Security and Individual Data Protection in the Digital Age <i>Walter De Kock, Max Heidegger, Bianca Herlory, Zahar Hryniv, and Anders Viemose</i>	111
Innovation and Integration: Europe needs to walk before it can run <i>Elissa Nakajima Wickham</i>	117

