

DIGITALIZED WORK AND SOCIAL EMANCIPATION

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CALL FOR ABSTRACTS

The future of work in current discussions is most intrinsically connected to questions related to the power effects of digitalization. The current wave of digitalization does not only bring about significant transformations in the organization of work, but raises critical issues of social justice in highly technologized societies at large. In this workshop, we invite contributions with an analytical focus on the connections between digitalized industries and social emancipation.

The idea of social emancipation through new technologies has been a recurring theme in STS scholarship. Networked, digital fabrication technologies like 3D printing were hailed as an empowerment of grassroots level “producers” and open source communities. Networked communication technologies, coupled with the ubiquity of private computers were seen as a material precondition for flat hierarchies. More recently, advances in medical technology sparked hopes of body modification as enabling free development of the subjects beyond the restrictions of dominant body norms.

This workshop aims to critically examine this emancipatory potential of the digital transformation. We welcome papers that situate the digitalization of work in larger social contexts.

The following questions could be posed, among others:

If most digital technology is produced in social contexts of domination, is this domination inscribed into them, or can they be used for emancipatory purposes as well? What does the increasing inclusion of computer-enabled organizational decentralization (e.g. Open Innovation) into capital accumulation mean for alternative forms of organizing? What is the reality of the widespread automation of tasks across employment sectors? How could the redistribution of automation’s productivity gains be utilized to reshape employment regimes and work organization in the future? How do digitally enabled forms of mass customization affect body representation in the production of medical- and consumer goods? Can such

technologies be appropriated by user communities to upend the ways such goods are produced?

We base these questions on a broad understanding of emancipation as the elimination or reduction of domination on different levels, such as gender, class, ethnicity or (dis)ability. Analysis at the intersection of these categories are especially welcome. We welcome empirical, historical, as well as theoretical analysis.