

## Exploring the possibilities of digital inclusion

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### **Project description - project aims, theoretical perspective/field and proposed methodology (this information can be general as applicants are expected to develop their ideas in a proposal):**

Big data is rapidly transforming both society and the economy. While traditionally this refers to huge data sets that requiring advanced processing software, increasingly it denotes the gathering of valuable information using sophisticated predictive and behavioral analytical techniques. It holds the promise for creating “smarter” cities, workplaces and businesses. Yet recently the potential of such analytics have been challenged by evidence that data is negatively impacted by human derived racial, ethnic, and sexual biases (See Caliskan et al., 2017). These concerns are exacerbated by emerging reports on the lack of diversity and the continued white, middle-class, male dominance of the technology sector from which much of this technology is derived. These developments, in turn, reflect a growing set of academic literature across the social sciences that highlight the constitutive role of cultural influences for shaping the collection (See Ferguson, 2017; O’Neill, 2017) and interpretation (Davies, 2015) of data as well as the development of software used. Less explored, though, are the organizational processes that continue to support the ideological, cultural and social homogeneity in the treatment and development of big data and its associated technologies.

These concerns are especially significant when there has been a concerted effort to expand the so-called “big data party”. While analytics has its roots in corporate research and market based values, it is now being adapted to meet the needs of public and third sector stakeholders. This involves creating new types of softwares and conceptual frameworks for collecting and analysing data. Further, in the UK and elsewhere there are rapidly growing fresh initiatives to use big data for socially responsible ends – such as “smart” urban planning and data empowerment projects at organizational as well as societal levels. These developments have led to an emerging research focus on the relation between organizational life and “digital” practices and values (see for instance Ganish and Barber, 2009; Gibbs, 2009; Massa, 2016; Thoren et al., 2017). Yet it remains to be studied, how ultimately inclusive these efforts currently are, along with deeper theoretical investigations of which types of underlying ideologies and dominant cultures they are intentionally or inadvertently reproducing.

This call is looking for research students interested in exploring contemporary organizational issues of digital inclusion particularly associated with big data. More precisely, the research project focuses on the ways the collection, analysis, and use of data contributes to processes of social inclusion or exclusion both within organizations and broader society. In particular, we are keen to supervise projects examining the how diverse types of organizational cultures impact on the inclusiveness and exclusiveness of data collection and analysis within these organizations. Additionally, we are interested in projects theoretically reconsidering the concept of “digital inclusion” to reflect these diverse organizational realities drawing on ideas from feminist theory, post-colonialism, inter-sectionality, and critical race theory. We are quite open to a range of different epistemological perspectives and methodologies, however we would give special preference to those adopting critical theoretical frameworks and qualitative approaches.

### **References:**

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