

The Digital Enlightenment Forum's catalogue of Fireside Chats

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Title & Host	Method	Date	Year	Discussion Title	Topic Description
Fireside Chat, Critical Thinking Series	Online	27-Feb	2025	Critical Thinking Series	<i>This will be a Fireside Chat with Danielle McKernan former Computer Science teacher who now works at Everyway (formerly Texthelp) and Dessie Tennyson former post-primary Irish teacher who now works at McGraw Hill. The Digital Enlightenment Forum (DEF) is a forward-thinking organisation dedicated to exploring the societal impacts of digital transformation. Bringing together experts from diverse fields, DEF fosters insightful dialogue on the ethical, legal, and societal dimensions of technology in our lives. Committed to promoting human-centred digital progress, DEF encourages approaches that respect fundamental human values such as privacy, transparency, and accountability. Through workshops, studies, and thought leadership events, DEF plays a pivotal role in shaping a digital society that aligns technological advancement with the principles of democracy and individual rights. This event will centre on the transformative power of teaching critical thinking in education and its importance in today's rapidly evolving world. As a thought leader dedicated to advancing meaningful change, your insights and expertise would greatly enrich our discussion. Together, we will explore successful approaches, share impactful experiences, and inspire new strategies to equip future generations with the skills needed to think critically, navigate complexity, and lead effectively. We hope you'll join us for what promises to be a powerful exchange of ideas and experiences with fellow experts and educators.</i>
Fireside Chat, Dr Lollie Mancey & panel	Online	27-Nov	2024	Critical Thinking Series	<i>This event will centre on the transformative power of teaching critical thinking in education and its importance in today's rapidly evolving world. As a thought leader dedicated to advancing meaningful change, your insights and expertise would greatly enrich our discussion. Together, we will explore successful approaches, share impactful experiences, and inspire new strategies to equip future generations with the skills needed to think critically, navigate complexity, and lead effectively. We hope you'll join us for what promises to be a powerful exchange of ideas and experiences with fellow experts and educators.</i>
Critical Thinking and Democracy in Troubled Times	Online	31-May	2024	Critical Thinking Series	<i>Panelists: Dr Lollie Mancey, UCD Innovation Academy Päivi Leppänen, Finnish National Agency for Education Tiina Härkönen, The Finnish Innovation Fund Sitra Moderator: George Metakides, co-founder and Honorary President of the Digital Enlightenment Forum, Professor Emeritus, University of Patras It is several years now that a strong consensus has been built on two issues of major importance: - The "blossoming" of the Web/Internet at the turn of the century did not usher along a "blossoming" of democracy with better educated and informed citizens engaging in a digital-powered public sphere as was hoped. Practically all studies, though using different indices and weights, show a "backsliding" of democracy over the last two decades with an increasing number of young people living on "islands of disjoint truths". The advent of generative AI has the potential to further exacerbate this situation unless vigorous and innovative action is taken. This action, in addition to regulation and public investment, should include innovative approaches to education starting at the earliest possible level. - This brings up the second issue which is how to equip today's youth with not only the required "digital literacy" but also the critical thought skills that are needed if they are to navigate successfully in the evolving digital ecosystem and harness the positive potential of digital technology while limiting its harms. Today's classrooms are tomorrow's societies (democratic or not) Digital technology, spearheaded currently by AI, is moving fast and education has certainly not kept pace as AI powers the so-called "extremely connected era" where social networks perpetuate and aggravate toxic effects on the ability of coming generations to think critically and independently. Independent critical thought is (and has been recognized as such since Socrates' time) a prerequisite needed to discern true from false premises, and valid from invalid conclusions from these premises. Daring to assume responsibility for one's own independent thinking (emasculated by today's garden variety of filter bubbles) is also a prerequisite for avoiding falling prey to the "herding" that is happening measurably and increasingly and leads to observable mob behavior. (The U.S. political landscape and fauna would present an exquisite study case) There are, once again, some education pilot programs in some European countries that look very promising with innovative approaches and, very importantly, with a first glimpse of measurable, positive results. Finland is playing a leading role in these pioneering efforts The future of democracy in an AI-powered digital ecosystem may well depend on how successful such pilots are, how effectively they are complemented with digital democracy civics and how fast and broadly they are adapted and adopted. For this, a platform of best practices would be most timely. The Digital Enlightenment Forum, which had organized related events in the past, reached out to SITRA, aware of SITRA's excellent track record on addressing challenges related to both democracy and education with a view to joining efforts (including with other like-minded organizations in the future) towards creating a platform where novel approaches to education are presented, compared, and metrics for measuring their success are developed towards, eventually, broadly accepted best practices. This panel discussion is only a first step in this process. Dr Lollie Mancey Lollie is focused on how society flourishes in a digital age. Lollie has built upon her teaching experience in social justice and ventured into the realm of artificial intelligence and ethics, exploring how society can navigate the evolving cultural and technological landscapes. Päivi Leppänen Senior Adviser Päivi Leppänen works at the Finnish National Agency for Education. She promotes equality among children and young people in the development of digital competences. Tiina Härkönen Tiina Härkönen is a Senior Lead within the Digital Power and Democracy project of the Democracy and Participation focus area at The Finnish Innovation Fund Sitra. Moderator: George Metakides George Metakides co-founder and Honorary President of the Digital Enlightenment Forum, Professor Emeritus from the University of Patras, Visiting Professor at several universities and Advisor to a number of international organisations. He is involved in the analysis of the economic, political and social impact of digitization, related cybersecurity, data protection and regulatory issues and the promotion of international cooperation towards a digital ecosystem respecting shared human values.</i>
Fireside Chat with Prof. Dr. Willem Jonker	Online	21-Feb	2024	Generative AI : opportunities and responsibilities	<i>Generative AI is a next step in the fast developing field of AI. The current state of computing power allows for the training of Large Language Models with large amounts of data, which has recently led to impressive results, such as for example ChatGPT. The resources needed to develop these Large Language Models or Foundation Models makes that currently the development of these models is dominated by non-EU Big Tech. The potential of Generative AI is recognised and at the same time there are challenges in safeguarding responsible use. The fireside chat will discuss the state of the art regarding Generative AI, its applications, and the efforts regarding responsible use.</i>
Fireside Chat with Prof. Lynda Hardman	Online	07-Dec	2023	Artificial Intelligence along the New Silk Road	<i>This fireside chat discusses the development of the relatively young AI and computer science fields in Europe and China and how the current situation has developed over the past 20 years, where European and Chinese researchers are equal colleagues on an international stage and where diplomatic relations between the USA and China on the international stage have consequences felt directly by European AI researchers in their labs. In what ways are AI researchers in China and Europe competitors with each other, for example in terms of the global shortage of trained AI researchers and practitioners? At the same time, the AI research community collaborates globally, so how can we ensure that the field continues to benefit from open international collaboration?</i>
Fireside Chat with Leanne Fry	Online	30-Mar	2023	Hybrid work - here to stay?	<i>The pandemic has driven a significant digital change in the way organisations work, and customers and stakeholders engage with them. For many organisations, remote working was already part of their playbook. But is that still fit for purpose? What are the opportunities we might be missing? Should we go back to first principles and re-design all hybrid practices to be human-centric?</i>
Fireside Chat with Kavé Salamatian	Online	16-Mar	2023	Geopolitics of cyberspace: a multidisciplinary approach	<i>Geopolitics of cyberspace: a multidisciplinary approach I have been involved for almost 20 years in multidisciplinary studies in the overall area of Internet sciences. This talk will lean on my personal journey as a computer scientist that has moved from very technical dimensions of computer sciences to geopolitics. I will reflect on the difficulty of doing multidisciplinary research specially at early stage of career. I will illustrate my talk with concrete example that shows clearly the importance of multidisciplinary research and will describe its pitfalls and also beauty and interest.</i>

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<p>Fireside Chat with Riccardo Genghini</p>	<p>Online</p>	<p>26-Jan</p>	<p>2023</p>	<p>How to configure Identity and Freedom in a Digital Society</p>	<p><i>Riccardo Genghini's research on a natural law for a digital society, tries to find new answers to old problems that arise every time the human society shifts from one communication medium to another.</i> <i>Social unrest (and war) have ensued during the transition from oral tradition to literacy; with the invention of the printing press, of the radio, of the cinema, of the television and now with internet and social media. But also individual and mass transportation have had an important role in changing human society.</i> <i>The instinctive reaction, has always been, to see the new medium as (part of) the problem and to try to curb it with censorship, limitations on personal freedom, in particular the freedom of movement and other police measures.</i> <i>On the other hand today nobody would doubt, that each improvement in the technology for storing and communicating information (from handwritten documents, to printing press, radio, cinema, television) have been relevant cultural and social phenomena, that have significantly extended the access to knowledge, and transformed language, politics and society.</i> <i>If only half a century ago some intellectuals dreamed of a society where only printed books would provide "good knowledge", today nobody dreams of reversing our society into a cultural XIX Century.</i> <i>Still, we see that mass communication (and in particular social media) are nagging at the fabric of our open pluralistic democratic societies.</i> <i>What can be done, to reinforce pluralistic democracy in a digital world?</i> <i>We need new principles of natural law for a digital society that are the digital equivalent of "Life Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness": this is the Digital New Deal.</i></p>	
<p>Fireside Chat with Stefano Cerri</p>	<p>Online</p>	<p>01-Dec</p>	<p>2022</p>	<p>Human centered, interactive Artificial Intelligence</p>	<p><i>Since its first definition in 1956, Artificial Intelligence was cultivated by researchers and companies with various degrees of success. Now one historical variant of it, is pervasive with respect to most if not all possible domains of application. Certainly, the context of use of AI is not the same as before: machines are significantly improved and there are billions of humans and machines interacting on the Web. This radical change of paradigm requires a profound reflection about the future of AI seen as a prosthesis of human societies in multi-agent interactions among human and artificial Agents, not just as a set of technologies offering turn-key solutions. If humans are not only considered - as it was often the case - the users but also the producers of Information, then the interactive scenario of a Social Artificial Intelligence becomes much more realistic, reassuring and promising.</i></p>	
<p>Fireside Chat with Cristiano Codagnone</p>	<p>Online</p>	<p>24-Nov</p>	<p>2022</p>	<p>Online Platforms: Power and Regulation</p>	<p><i>Online platforms in recent years have been the object of heated controversies and of policy debates about the need to regulate them. The discussion will focus on the various forms of power held by online platforms and on current regulatory activities at EU level.</i></p>	
<p>Fireside Chat with Jeremy Millard</p>	<p>Online</p>	<p>31-Mar</p>	<p>2022</p>	<p>Society and technology in the new age of crisis and disruption</p>	<p><i>For many years we have seen the disruptive impacts of new digital innovations on society when Silicon Valley's mantra of 'move fast and break things' appeared dominant. But the technology-society relationship has never been all one way from a proactive former to a passive latter. Although digital, as the new general-purpose technology, is probably always an enabler, it is hard to describe it ubiquitously as the driver. The financial crisis of 2007-8 caused huge economic disruption around the globe, then compounded by the 2020-? Covid-pandemic that affected all aspects of social and economic life, and now turbo-charged by the Ukraine war depositing a thick layer of geo-political tectonic change on top. Underlying all this is the 'mother-of-all' crises that sees our natural environment stretched to near collapse, thereby putting the very survival of our species in peril. It is clear that the 21st Century has ushered in a new age of more or less continuous crisis and disruption and that these are not times for business-as-usual. It is time for rethinking many of our shibboleths, both sustainable development and resilience, how we re-structure our economies and politics, as well as how we work, play and live on the earth's surface. These are huge issues, intimately inter-related, and in which digital technology clearly plays an essential role. We will discuss a few of these issues, including how we work, the jobs we do, and how cities and settlements are organised, although we can instead touch on others depending how the discussion goes. However, I will contend we should mainly see the technology as an enabler that certainly opens new possibilities, whilst insisting that the type of society we want, especially in Europe, needs to be the driver.</i></p>	
<p>Fireside Chat with Joep Crompvoets</p>	<p>Online</p>	<p>28-Feb</p>	<p>2022</p>	<p>Good governance for a smart world</p>	<p><i>This fireside aims to answer the central question 'what is good governance for a smart world?'. In order to answer this question, the concepts of good governance and the associated public values are introduced as well as smart cities/world. The answers refer to governance mechanisms, key registries, user-centricity, problem-solution-problem-solution sequence orientation, Interdisciplinary and interoperability. The session is divided into two parts. The relevant concepts and theories are introduced in the first part. Based on a set of provocative propositions, the introduced concepts and theories are intensively discussed and so become more alive in the second part. The session ends with a shared answer to the central question.</i></p>	
<p>Fireside Chat with Robert Hamilton</p>	<p>Online</p>	<p>03-Feb</p>	<p>2022</p>	<p>Sympathetic Intelligence</p>	<p><i>Robert first contemplated the existence of, defined and coined the term Sympathetic Intelligence as a Musician with The Fat Lady Sings playing the sweaty rock and roll venues of London and watching audiences behave collectively as one. Intrigued, Robert began musing as to what it was that enabled audiences to become one collective unit, a phenomenon that he called Epiphanicism. Over the years he drilled down and discovered what he believes is the source that lies behind this phenomenon Sympathetic Intelligence. As an instructor at the State University of Albany, Robert's successful use of Sympathetic Intelligence came to the attention of the College's President – Dr. James Stellar, who encouraged Robert to pursue his passion for the concept further. In 2020 Robert set up The Center For Sympathetic Intelligence with colleagues from Albany, and the Center has very rapidly come to the attention of professionals from many other fields beyond Education, not surprisingly including those involved in Artificial Intelligence where it may be able to facilitate a more interdisciplinary approach to the development of more robust AI systems, as has been advocated for by leading members of the AI community such as Gary Marcus and many others.</i></p>	
<p>Fireside Chat with Jonathan Sage</p>	<p>Online</p>	<p>07-Dec</p>	<p>2021</p>	<p>Cloud and Cyber, regulatory environment in Europe, challenges of innovation and growth with trend toward digital protectionism.</p>	<p><i>Until recently Jonathan was part of IBM's Government and Regulatory Affairs Europe team handling tech policy, in particular cloud computing and cyber security in the EU. He handled IBM's response to EU cyber security initiatives such as the NIS 2.0 Directive proposal and the Cyber Security Act. He also leads IBM's involvement in GDPR related Codes of Conduct that IBM is participating in. He is IBM's lead in the Charter of Trust for Cybersecurity.</i> <i>In previous roles, Jonathan led IBM's involvement in EU Framework Programme research. Formerly he was managing consultant in the IBM's Strategic Change consulting practice in the public sector based in Belgium. Before joining PricewaterhouseCoopers where he led the EMEA internal knowledge management team, and then IBM, Jonathan was marketing director for a UK software company which pioneered the first eCommerce applications. He also spent 6 years as Commercial Attache for the British Embassy in Vienna responsible for trade relations in the capital goods sector. He held a part time post Assistant Professor at the University of Business Administration and Economics in Vienna. He was also on the faculty of the Open University Business School for its MBA course and tutor in Strategy. Jonathan is currently an external lecturer at the College of Europe in Bruges and visiting professor at the University of Babeş Bolyai in Cluj Napoca, Romania.</i> <i>Jonathan holds a degree in modern languages from the University of Oxford (MA) and an MBA from Henley Business School, UK.</i></p>	

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<p>Fireside Chat with Michal Boni</p>	<p>Online</p>	<p>04-Nov</p>	<p>2021</p>	<p>DISINFORMATION</p>	<p>There are many cases of disinformation all over the world. It establishes the political tensions, undermines the democracy, supports the polarisation development, which is very often a key tool for the populist forms of governance. The fake-news, the conspiracy theories development requires the proper response as some tools and solutions used in the catalogue of the European Code of Practices on disinformation for online platform and some future projected instruments, as for instance the defunding of ads used in the process of dissemination of disinformation (demonetisation of fake news).</p> <p>But the challenge is regarding to the awareness of people and the critical thinking skills among the societies. It also requires the clear warning system in the internet build by collaborative efforts of all partners: platforms, users, civil society organisations, media fact-checkers, researchers.</p> <p>It is essential to understand the reasons of so far dissemination of disinformation - related to the sociocultural phenomena (the lack of trust of public institutions and science) and psychological causes (some discomforts, especially increased during the Covid-19 time, or related to the attitude of the extreme individualism - "defending my own liberty I am against vaccination" e.g.).</p> <p>In the light of the growing disinformation examples during Covid (especially anti vaxx attitudes) and the European institutions works on strengthening the role of Code and its tools for reducing the impact of disinformation - we can discuss about the problem. In addition trying to find the powerful organisers of those manipulative actions.</p>	
<p>Fireside Chat with Reinhard Posch</p>	<p>Online</p>	<p>20-Oct</p>	<p>2021</p>	<p>Privacy and Security - The unexpected Digital Game-Changer of COVID</p>	<p>At least in Europe both on a national and on a coordinated European level we had and have ample programs for the digital transformation and at least until the crisis started we had principles to follow. Just to give a few very important ones:</p> <p>(a) Security – administration is holding many many information about citizen and companies as well as other entities and has to take responsibility that this information is used the way legislation advises.</p> <p>(b) There is a big difference between public administrations and private companies. People cannot escape the administration and therefore of prime importance is the principle "ADMINISTRATION CAN ONLY PROCESS AND MANIPULATE DATA THE WAY LAWS EXPLICITLY ALLOWS". In contrary "THE PRIVATE SECTOR CAN PROCESS AND MANIPULATE DATA AS LONG AS NO LAW IS AGAINST". There is a big gap between these two approaches.</p> <p>When COVID started it became apparent that administrations in the best case are in the midst of implementing their programs and strategies but COVID will not wait. This has led to situations where many were stating that the private sector has tools and programs – why not using them. But these tools follow the principles for the private sector. As an example just take the simple case of videoconferencing which – for COVID reasons – has been used to approach the administration, for teleteaching ... Who asked the questions?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> •How can I make sure that this is the right person on the other side – private sector tools do not provide eID the public sector can take the needed liability for – and within short time periods we also noticed quite some abuse. •How can the system make sure that inherent personal data is not going just somewhere? <p>A further example is the "Green Pass". Initially designed for border control to enable "free movement" it is used like everywhere. And it is potentially transferring sensitive medical and personal information.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Why should a restaurant know my name? •Why should my employer know that I had COVID? •I.. <p>Just imagine companies like McDonalds using this to build and maintain customer profiles – eventually profiles of move. Technology would allow to avoid this extensive QR-Code transferring only the information GO or STOP. It is not so much the complexity but much more the "need" to make quick money out of the crisis which drives the scene.</p> <p>How do we get knowledgeable civil servants able to understand what is behind?</p> <p>How do we avoid this functionality first? With data protection, security ... coming later to stay in the mind as this attitude proves "success"?</p> <p>Who tells the administration to follow the laws??? – at least when we are back to a new normality.</p> <p>COVID is an important factor when it comes to principles with digital technology, Big Data, AI, ... and it is doing its job without really involving the society.</p> <p>We must take extreme care that technologies serves both the purpose and the society.</p>	
<p>The Fluid Society</p>	<p>Online</p>	<p>06-Oct</p>	<p>2021</p>	<p>The fluid society</p>	<p>Peter Hagedoorn was educated as a physics engineer and has followed a career in which he has worked alternately for the public sector and the business community.</p> <p>He has worked for Shell, the Ministry of Economic Affairs, Bull-Netherlands, RAET, Hagemeyer and Océ. He was also the first chairman of the CIO-Platform Nederland, in which capacity he also became Board member of the European CIO Association. Later he was appointed Secretary General of this organization.</p> <p>Today he writes columns and books about the digital society. https://thefluidsociety.com/home-english/</p>	