

## **Summary**

### **International Symposium**

#### ***The Digital Challenge in Germany and Japan in Comparison: Opportunities, Risks, and Digital Cooperation***

**Hamburg 18 – 19 June 2019**

**by**

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Is digitalization a blessing or a curse? This question has in recent times taken a front role in the hall of intellectual discussion. This is particularly so given its inevitable impact in every sphere of human interaction. From the agricultural, health and industrial sector, to the platform economy, legal and moral ethics of technological changes, several scholars have begun investigating the impact of digitalization in the postmodern society.

The interdisciplinary symposium organised by the Japanese Research Centre, the University of Osnabrück and the German-Japanese Society for Social Sciences from 18 to 19 June 2019 with the support of the Japanese Consulate General in Hamburg and the participation of the Japanese Consul General Kato at the University of Hamburg and the GIGA Hamburg highlighted the future challenges, including the problem of an ageing society, the future of work, ethical and moral questions on digitalization, democracy and identity politics, but also possibilities such as remote work, smart city technology, efficient use of resources and effective health care.

However, digitalization, while providing answers to many of the problems we are currently facing, raises questions that need to be answered. With such pressing issues on the agenda, German and Japanese experts from different disciplines critically analyzed the prospects but also the problems of digitalization, suggesting ways by which we could tackle these problems.

The symposium started with Professor Franz Waldenberger's (DIJ Tokyo) presentation on “Society 5.0 - Japan’s visions and ambitions for the digital age” where he described

and critically assessed the smart Japan initiative highlighting the strength, weaknesses, and challenges of achieving such highly ambitious goals. The second keynote speaker, Professor Arisa Ema (University of Tokyo), who shared her experiences from the Japanese community, stressed the need for ethics in AI and the networking of several disciplines based on her experiences.

The second day began with a critical look at digitalization in Europe. Professor Ingrid Schneider (University of Hamburg) emphasized the emergence of the EU as a regulatory superpower in the digital terrain where tensions are rising between the US and China. Professor Dietrich Albert (Graz University of Technology), who presented on “Digital Learning and Teaching – a European Perspective” unveiled many of the current challenges and future developments in digital learning and teaching across the continent and suggested ways in which digitalization can help improve learning. Professor Christoph Busch (University of Osnabrück) created a bridge between governmental regulatory bodies, the platform economy, and the general populace, stressing some of the gaps yet unfilled in regulatory policies across the region and the world at large.

Accordingly, the second session started with Professor Jürgen Schupp (DIW Berlin). He echoed the need for transparency in the ‘social construction’ of algorithms to maintain a democratic society because algorithms processes are increasingly determining everything from credit rating to our position in the social hierarchy. The second lecture was given by Professor Rainer Knauf (Technical University Ilmenau), who presented various definitions of the term ‘Artificial Intelligence’(AI) and provided general ideas on what could be expected from AI in the nearest future. The second session ended with the presentation of Professor Gabriele Vogt, Anna-Lea Schröder, and Anne-Sophie König (University of Hamburg). They shared the insights of their research project ‘Sustainable long-term care: technology use, care migration and community building in Japan,’ as they revealed the existence of discrepancies between political desire, economic necessity and the social rejection of robotics and technology in the daily routine of long-term care service.

Professor Akira Tokuyasu (Hosei University) opened the third session of the symposium. He considered the formation of physical identities using digital devices. Consequently, Professor Gisela Trommsdorff (University of Konstanz) critically examined the adaptation of digitalization which unveiled the need for a culture-informed theoretical framework. Professor Mototaka Mori (Waseda University) closed the session by presenting critical points on the transformation ‘from the money value society to the non-money value society’ and questioned whether the aging population will adapt themselves to the digitalized cashless society.

With a cursory gaze at the agricultural sector in Japan, Professor Masato Kimura (Takachiho University) started the fourth session by examining the traceability and behavioral targeting system developed in the field of commodity marketing. He concluded that there are increasing reliance and trust in biometric information rather than the human self which he refers to as the “digital twin.” Tami Lang (University of Osnabrück) presented on “Identity in the digital age” by using Instagram as an example. She spoke about questions of identity formation and self-representation in a digital world as well as about possible determinants of the offline well-being of the "self" that can arise from active involvement in social online networks. The final lecture by Professor Carmen Schmidt (University of Osnabrück) was an uncovering of the general field of research concerning digitalization through the lens of modernization theories. While providing a synopsis of previous lectures, Schmidt revealed the linkage between the second modernity and digitalization raising questions on the nature of post-national identities and regulations across every sphere of human interaction, including but not limited to, the level of the state, society, and economy.

Flowing from the series of lectures by seasoned experts, a panel session chaired by Makoto Kobayashi (Tamagawa University) on the question of whether digitalization is a blessing or a curse was organized. In what could be referred to as a highly intense session of brainstorming, several ideas and comments were laid to bare. This included the adoption of a public business model for the platform economy and data protection, the need for a double-check system to separate facts from opinions, the potential of digital education, moral and ethical limits to open assess data (especially in our world of

multiplicity in socio-political systems), decentralization of data gathering and presentation (especially in academia), the need for accountability mechanisms, regulations at national, regional and international levels, and the significant role of civil societies and other data protection agencies.

Having said all and done, the raging controversy as to whether digitalization is a blessing or a curse re-echoed in the minds of participants as the threat and benefits were extensively elaborated upon. In the end, participants took an optimistic stance on the future of digitalization, while emphasizing the need for effective regulations and open dialogue across every field of engagement, including but not limited to the academic realm, the civil society, the business society, regulatory bodies, and the like.