

# Digitalization and the European Union: Ideas, Politics, and Policy

Timo Seidl

Summer semester 2022

E-mail: [timo.seidl@univie.ac.at](mailto:timo.seidl@univie.ac.at)

Office Hours: by appointment

Office: *online*

Class Room: *Hörsaal 2 (H2), NIG 2.Stock A0218*

Class Hours: Thursday, 13:15-14:45

Web: [moodle](#)

---

## Course Description

From meeting people to building things, from ordering food to consuming news, digital technologies have become ubiquitous in our social and economic lives, even before the pandemic made them seem truly indispensable. But as digital technologies have become essential, so have the companies that design and sell them. Large tech companies have become the most valuable companies on the planet, reflecting their enormous economic but increasingly also political power. However, the rise of Big Tech has not remained uncontested. Regulators in different parts of the world have put limits on the collection and use of data, protected gig workers, established guidelines on content moderation, and banned a variety of digital practices. The EU in particular has emerged as a global leader in digital policymaking, being sometimes dubbed a ‘regulatory superpower’ in the digital space. In this course, we will look not only at how digitalization is changing societies and economies, but also the EU has reacted to this transformation. We will explore the political economy but also the ideas underlying the rise of digital capitalism. And we will look at the policies the EU has adopted (or is planning to adopt) in response, as well as at the politics behind.

## Learning Outcomes

The course aims to familiarize students with the digital transformation and the EU’s response to it. At the end of the course, students should be able to

- identify and describe key processes and ideas that drive and inform the digital transformation;
- summarize and critically assess central theoretical and empirical insights of the political science research on the politics of digital policymaking in the EU;

- apply these insights to better understand the future of digital policymaking in Europe and beyond.

## Requirements

Students are required to attend classes and come prepared (i.e., having done and thought a bit about the readings). In addition, there will be four types of assignments that together make up the final grade.

- First, for **two** sessions of their choosing, students need to write short response papers (half a page) that reflect on the readings and end with a question for the class. This will make up 20% of their grade. The response papers are meant to not merely summarize the reading but pick up on one or two key arguments and critically reflect on them. This can be done by connecting them to other readings, recent events in the news, or by criticizing their assumptions or conclusions. Questions should ideally emerge from the preceding reflection, i.e. the reflection is meant to set the stage or prepare the question. Also, remember that questions end with a question mark.
- Second, students are required to deliver a *very short* input presentation (around 5 minutes) for **one** session as well as prepare some discussion points for the class (e.g., questions, empirical examples). This will also make up 20% of their grade. It is important to state that the input presentation is not meant to be a comprehensive summary of the text (or the section of the text you were assigned within your presentation group). Rather, it is meant to pick up on key arguments, present and ideally discuss them critically. The discussion points are meant to kick off the discussion. The presentations can be really short, they don't need to be longer than 5 minutes per person.
- Third, there is a short exam towards the end of the seminar that tests whether students remember key arguments from the readings and the sessions. You will get a reading week (a week without a session) to go over the readings and slides again and prepare for the test. The test will consist of around 15 short questions, most of them in multiple choice format. The test will not be overly difficult but merely test whether you have done the readings and followed the course. This will also make up 20% of your grade.
- Fourth, students need to write a relatively short term paper on a topic related to the course (2000-3000 words). This will make up 40% of their grade. The paper can be theoretical or empirical and is meant to hone in on one particular question that the students can pick themselves (although they should briefly discuss this with me in advance). For more information on what I think makes a good term paper, take a look at [this](#) document.

## Prerequisites

Students need no particular prior knowledge to successfully participate in this course. A broad interest in the topic, basic (!) English language skills, and some knowledge of basic social science are sufficient.

## Course Policy

Basically, don't cheat and try to learn stuff, some more details follow below.

## Grading Policy

You need to submit all the required assignments to pass the course. Your final grade will be the weighted average of these assignments. What is important to me when it comes to grading are two things. First, stick to the task at hand. If your presentation is meant to be 5 minutes, make it no more than 6. It's almost a dad thing to say, but these skills are important not just at a university, but pretty much everywhere you want to end up at. Second, put a bit of effort into it, or at least make it look that way. Have some decent formatting, but also: try to be clear and crisp, which is often harder than writing long and convoluted sentences. Try to prepare a presentation that you yourself would like to listen to. Short, simple points, and make it clear if you found something unclear. You don't need to understand everything, have read a ton of additional literature, or write in a fancy way to get a very good grade. Just stick to the task and try to make sense.

## E-mail Policy

You can always email me if you have an idea for a term paper, if you want to learn more about a certain topic and don't know where to start, or if you have a question that you really don't want to ask in class. Please don't email me with questions that you could easily find the answer to in the syllabus or in my previous emails. I might take it badly.

## Attendance Policy

You are required to attend each session, and I encourage you to prepare for and actively participate in them. However, if you really can't make it, just reach out to me, these things happen once or twice a term.

# Course Outline

## Week 1, March 10 : Introduction

*No readings for this session*

## PART I: FOUNDATIONS

### Week 2, March 17 : What is Digital Capitalism?

Seidl, Timo. 2021. “Commodification and Disruption: Theorizing Digital Capitalism.” Working Paper (updated version of [this](#) paper).

### Week 3, March 24 : The Ideology of Digital Capitalism

Nachtwey, Oliver, and Timo Seidl. 2020. “The Solutionist Ethic and the Spirit of Digital Capitalism,” January. <https://doi.org/10.31235/osf.io/sgjzq>.

## PART II: IDEAS AND POLITICS: CASES

### Week 4, March 31 : Views of Data

Obendiek, Anke Sophia. 2021. “What Are We Actually Talking About? Conceptualizing Data as a Governable Object in Overlapping Jurisdictions.” *International Studies Quarterly*, <https://doi.org/10.1093/isq/sqab080>.

### Week 5, April 7 : Data Protection & the EU

Kalyanpur, Nikhil, and Abraham L. Newman. 2019. “The MNC-Coalition Paradox: Issue Salience, Foreign Firms and the General Data Protection Regulation.” *Journal of Common Market Studies* 57 (3): 448–67. <https://doi.org/10.1111/jcms.12810>.

### Week 6, April 14 :

*We do not have class this week due to public holidays*

### Week 7, April 21 :

*We do not have class this week due to public holidays*

### Week 8, April 28 : Digital Sovereignty

Chander, Anupam, and Haochen Sun. 2021. “Sovereignty 2.0,” <https://ssrn.com/abstract=3904949>.

## **Week 9, May 5 : Digital Sovereignty & the EU**

Roberts, Huw, Josh Cowls, Federico Casolari, Jessica Morley, Mariarosaria Taddeo, and Luciano Floridi. 2021. “Safeguarding European Values with Digital Sovereignty: An Analysis of Statements and Policies.” *Internet Policy Review* 10 (3). <https://doi.org/10.14763/2021.3.1575>.

## **Week 10, May 12 : AI Solutionism**

Katzenbach, Christian. 2021. “‘AI Will Fix This’ – The Technical, Discursive, and Political Turn to AI in Governing Communication.” *Big Data & Society* 8 (2): 205395172110461. <https://doi.org/10.1177/20539517211046182>.

## **Week 11, May 19 : Artificial Intelligence & the EU**

Roberts, Huw, Josh Cowls, Emmie Hine, Francesca Mazzi, Andreas Tsamados, Mariarosaria Taddeo, and Luciano Floridi. 2021. “Achieving a ‘Good AI Society’: Comparing the Aims and Progress of the EU and the US.” *Science and Engineering Ethics* 27 (6): 68. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11948-021-00340-7>.

## **Week 12, May 26 :**

*We do not have class this week due to public holidays*

## **Week 13, June 2 : Content Moderation**

Gorwa, Robert. 2019. “What Is Platform Governance?” *Information, Communication & Society* 22 (6): 854–71. <https://doi.org/10.1080/1369118X.2019.1573914>.

## **Week 14, June 9 : Reading Week (NO class)**

*You can use this week to study for the test in week 16.*

## **Week 15, June 16 :**

*We do not have class this week due to public holidays*

# **PART III: BEYOND POLICY*making*: ENFORCEMENT AND DIFFUSION**

## **Week 16, June 23 : Enforcing Data Protection**

*In this session, we will have a short test on the readings and slides.*

Jang, Woojeong, and Abraham L. Newman. 2021. “Enforcing European Privacy Regulations from Below: Transnational Fire Alarms and the General Data Protection Regulation.” *JCMS: Journal of Common Market Studies*, <https://doi.org/10.1111/jcms.13215>.

## **Week 17, June 27 (!): Digital Brussels Effect**

*Note that this session will take place on Monday (same time) and most likely online as I'll be at a academic conference this week. You're excused if you have conflicting seminar/lecture.*

Bradford, Anu. 2020. *The Brussels Effect: How the European Union Rules the World*. New York, NY: Oxford University Press, pp. xiii-xix *AND* pp. 131-169.