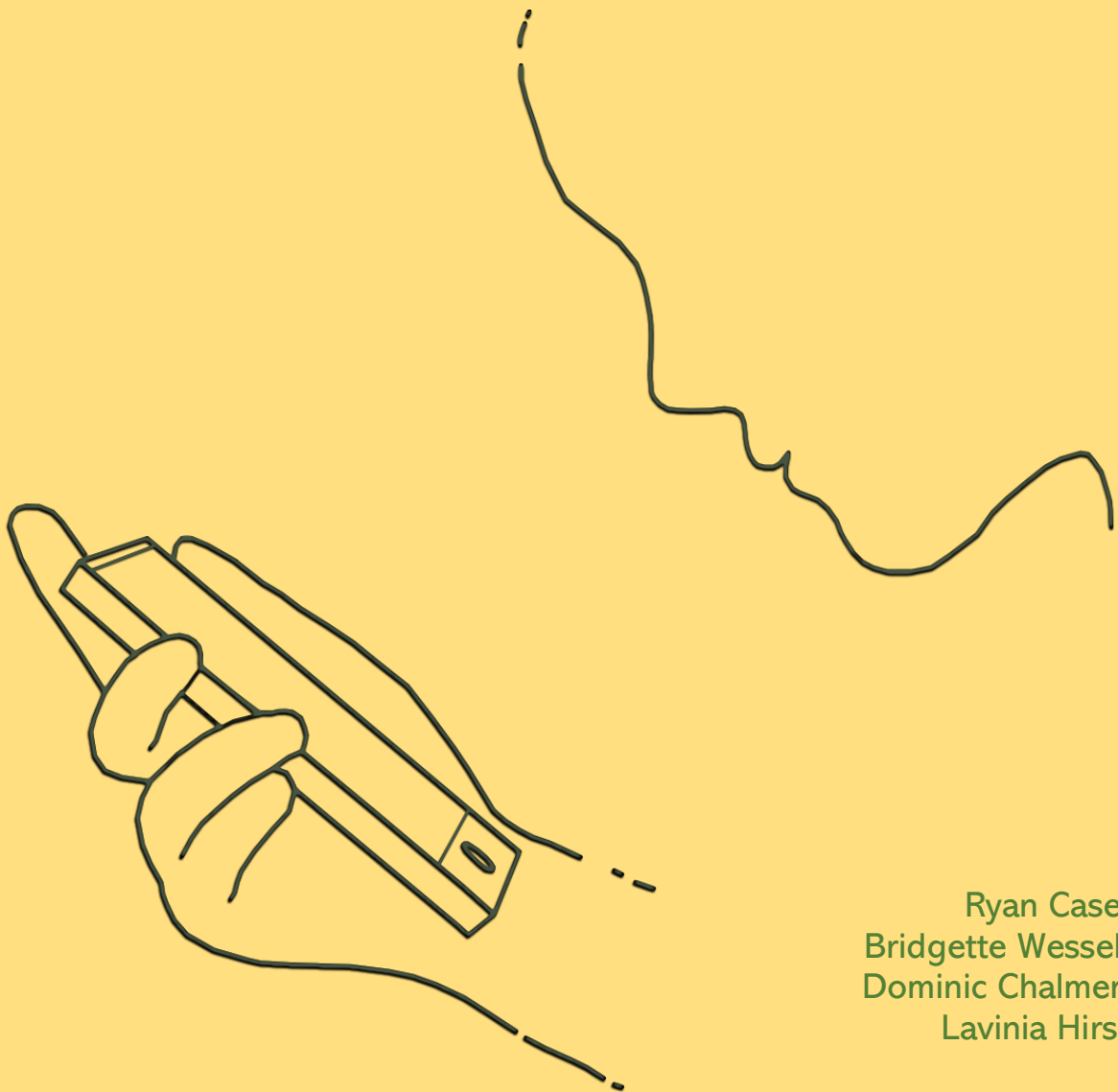


# Living Well in a Digital World: Economic, Social and Cultural Challenges

Briefing paper – May 2023



Ryan Casey  
Bridgette Wessels  
Dominic Chalmers  
Lavinia Hirsu

**Digital Society & Economy IRT | University of Glasgow**

# Introduction

What is a just, inclusive society? How do we live well, particularly in the digital age? In this all-day event and project development forum organised by the Digital Society and Economy Interdisciplinary Research Theme, we explored how the digital is embedded in these important questions of what it means to live well by centring the social, cultural, educational, and economic contexts of digital technologies as opposed to the technologies themselves. These challenges of living well in a digital society were explored through a series of workshop sessions:

- Sustainable productivity: Employee wellbeing and business growth
- Cultural participation: Changes in exhibition and audiences
- Digital (in)justice: Security, surveillance and the future of justice
- Intersectional (in)equalities in a digital world

Moving away from disciplinary silos, diverse expert speakers and attendees discussed how to live well with new technologies in an increasingly complex world. This report shares the main insights from session speakers and highlights from session discussions around developments and challenges in a digital world.

## Digital Society & Economy IRT

This interdisciplinary event was hosted by the Digital Society and Economy Interdisciplinary Research Theme (IRT) within the College of Social Sciences. We are a diverse group of researchers exploring the dynamics of digital society, examining how digital technologies shape and intersect with social and economic change. Much of our research is around social challenges to wellbeing and sustainability, the future economy and better use of resources, and the future of education and alternative ways of knowledge building.

## Session 1

# The Gaitherin: Sustainable productivity: employee wellbeing and business growth

The first session was part of a series of events known as The Gaitherin. The Gaitherin brings together Scotland's most innovative academic and business minds for regular networking events. The purpose of Gaitherins is to find synergies between business and research and look for areas of potential collaboration. With support from the Scottish Forum of The Productivity Institute, this session brought together business, policy, and academic experts to discuss:

- How to define wellbeing in relation to productivity.
- How to develop and implement a new model of productivity with wellbeing at its heart, including how to develop trust as a two-way mechanism between leaders and employees; how to empower managers and employees in how best they manage their time; and how to rethink accountability in terms of completing work to more holistic measures.
- How to gain insights in shaping new organisational practices that support wellbeing development and growth.

There is widespread recognition that productivity in Scotland and the UK is low compared to other advanced economies and this has prompted debate around what sustainable productivity means and how it can be implemented. A key goal is to understand the relationship between employee wellbeing and business growth, and how to balance the needs of the employee and those of the organisation.

### Key points

- Investing in people and their wellbeing, providing security to employees, and supporting innovative, purposeful, and systems-thinking approaches to changing work cultures can drive business growth.
- Business growth and sustainable productivity that has wellbeing at its heart may mean scaling 'deeper' rather than scaling up, to build community and support communities to flourish and grow with local businesses.

To begin the session, **Eleonora Vanello**, Productivity Club Programme Manager at the Scottish Council for Development and Industry, introduced two case studies of staff-centred approaches to sustainable productivity that prioritised employee health, wellbeing and happiness. Examples of policies implemented by businesses include

giving time off to staff for IVF treatment, role crafting, and sharing profits equally amongst all employees. **Louisa Macdonnell**, Scotland Director of Business in the Community (BITC), explored the 'what', 'how' and 'why' of implementing policies and changing work cultures through engagement to make people's jobs better and more meaningful for them. The BITC's recent report on the value of a thriving workforce demonstrates that improving employee wellbeing can save businesses £4-12k per employee/year by decreasing attrition, absenteeism and presentism.

Next, **Rachael Brown**, CEO of Creative Entrepreneur's Club, highlighted unique challenges faced by creative industries around: work insecurity, freelancing, health and wellbeing, and Covid-related disruptions to business. Rachael argued we need to better understand what a workforce is before we can begin to take care of it and that creating more sustainable and robust networks to support creative industries can help to empower creative entrepreneurs to demand better pay and create their own work security. **Will Phillips**, Senior Analyst at RAND, also presented evidence from a RAND Europe study which explored the relationship between work behaviours, wellbeing and work outcomes. The study found that higher levels of wellbeing were related to higher productivity and that definitions of wellbeing vary and can be implemented in different ways to different groups of employees. Lastly, **Shona Hilton**, Professor of Public Health Policy at the University of Glasgow, introduced a potential long-term collaborative project collaboration which aims to find synergistic, actionable solutions around local policy design within the Glasgow City Region that tackle inequalities, while providing an economically, socially, and environmentally sustainable and inclusive future. This involves building a network of partners across sectors to address complex inequalities through place-based solutions and local policymaking.

### Future research directions

- To address workforce and employee wellbeing, we need to better understand the social, economic, and geographic demographics of different kind of workforces and employees.
- There is currently a gap in knowledge around the relationship between racism and wellbeing in business productivity in Scotland.
- There is further potential for using telemetry data and digital methodologies to better understand hybrid working, wellbeing and productivity.

### Tools/resources

- Link to [brief video of the event](#).
- Business in the Community (2023) [Prioritise People: Unlock the Value of a Thriving Workforce](#) report.
- [Evolve Workplace Wellbeing](#) toolkit including cost effectiveness calculator, self-assessment tools, free seminars/events, and other resources.
- [Creative Entrepreneur's Club](#) network

## Session 2

# Cultural participation: Changes in exhibition and audiences

The focus of this session focused on the ways in cultural, and technological change are part of the ways in which people engage as audiences, whether for film, theatre, music, or public affairs and news. Audiences play an important role in public, civic, and cultural life and it is therefore important to address how audiences are changing and what their experiences are. Each of the presentations addressed changes as well as continuities in audience formations, characteristics, and experiences. The significance of these changes was assessed in terms of public, civic, and cultural life. The session also discussed new approaches to the study of audiences by exploring the complex interactions of cultural engagement, people, and technology in the ways audiences form and in shaping audience experience.

Each of the four speakers focused on the relationship between exhibition and audiences. Each talk demonstrated that it is important to address the relationship between type of exhibition and type of audience participation. Together these talks explored the complex relationship between technologies and audiences and audience experiences, and in so doing drawing out the significance of audiences in social, cultural and civic terms.

### Key points

- Film heritage can help to better understand the complex interactions between individuals and institutional life.
- Social media and smart phones are changing the ways that people can participate in creating knowledge, evidence and memory, even in times of war and conflict.
- The relations between technology, production of content and the ways in which audiences can engage feature in the characteristics of audiences. These relations are not only important in terms of understanding audiences, but they also open analysis to the social and cultural value of audiences and their experiences.

**Elisabeth Evans**, Professor of Screen Cultures at the University of Nottingham, began the session by considering the relationship between technology and audiences by focusing on the use of early home films, exploring an early home film camera, the kinora, and its use in domestic life for the Smedley family during the Edwardian period. Elisabeth illustrated the value of film heritage in understanding the complex interaction

between individuals and institutional life by exploring how the specificity of the technology interacted with the ways the Smedley family curated and captured family life. This example of Edwardian amateur film making of family life illustrates a fascination with the mundane, something that continues and is mainstreamed in the contemporary social media world. Elisabeth's analysis was based on the relations between viewers, (commercial), portrait (subjects), family (creators) in the way they captured the personal and domestic, illustrating the relations and practices of film making and audience participation in the process of audience experience.

Next, **Daniela Treveri Gennari**, Professor of Cinema Studies and the Chair of the Creative Industries Research and Innovation Network (CIRIN) at Oxford Brookes University, followed this by examining cinema memories across Europe, bringing out the relationship between venues, screens, and audience experience from the 1950s onwards. Drawing on the comparative European Cinema Audiences project, Daniela argued that the practices of 1950s audiences going to see film at the cinema vary from place to place, with venues and programming featuring in the shaping of film audience experiences. The challenge is to understand these differences to understand audiences and how they participate in relation to social, political, and cultural context. By drawing on the data collected across distribution, programming, venues, and audience memories the project illustrates the ways in which audiences form is through the relations they have with programming, venues and with each other as they come together to enjoy film.

This was followed by a presentation by **Andrew Hoskins**, Interdisciplinary Research Professor in Global Security (Sociology) in the College of Social Sciences at the University of Glasgow. Andrew explored the use of social media in the context of the Ukraine war. As the audience experience for this conflict is mediated by social media in real-time, Andrew argues the Ukraine war is a 'participative war' enabled by social media and other digital media in that it is shaped through a much-expanded ecology of informational and content producers and sharers who create new modes of knowledge and memory about war. The smart phone is significant in the development of participative war, as it is the centre of a new war feed. The more immediate and user-generated content of this type of war reporting raises questions about the quality of its representation in that any notion of proper distance between viewer as audience and producer as reporter is conflated. This in turn raises questions as to how audiences can access the representation of war and their relationship with it.

Lastly, **Bridgette Wessels**, Professor of the Sociology of Social Inequality at the University of Glasgow, explored audience formation as a relational process. This is particularly important in the contemporary digital age, when some commentators question whether argue audiences even exist or are so fragmented or diffuse that it becomes meaningless to talk about audiences. Drawing on the Beyond the Multiplex project, Bridgette discussed new theorisation and conceptualisation of audiences, and film audiences in that audiences need to be understood as a process that involves the ways people develop relationships with film and the level and types of provision, as well as and friends, family, and community. Audience are formed through are personal journeys with film throughout the life course, shaped by access to venues, local film

culture and individual and shared interests. Film and the film audience experience connects individual experience with wider social and cultural knowledge, topics, and narratives. This contributes to a critical and engaged civic life.

### **Future research directions**

- Further research is needed in understanding the process of the ways audiences form in a wide range of contexts such as using social media in the war in Ukraine.
- We need to better understand what type of support is required to enhance the ways people feel they can participate in cultural and civic life through the audience experience.
- Further research is needed to identify how personal and domestic user generated content forms part of the ways in which people develop senses of identity and supports them across the life course.
- Further research is needed to explore the development of critical skills of content in through audience experiences.

### **Tools/resources**

- Data ontology and project website for [Beyond the Multiplex](#) project
- Project website for [European Cinema Audiences](#) project
- Link to [Virtual Museum of War Memory](#)





## Session 3

# Digital (in)justice: Security, surveillance and the future of justice

What is a just, inclusive society? Digital technologies and datafication are changing the ways in which we perceive justice, safety, security, and privacy. Technological innovations have the potential to liberate and empower people, but they can also produce new social harms and injustices while exacerbating existing ones. This session explored different intersections between digital society, criminal justice, and social control. This session posed criminological, legal, ethical, and policy questions about the consequences of digital technologies and looked forward to where emerging technologies are taking us.

### Key points

- Disciplinary silos are limiting the potential for researchers to actively engage with the integration and wide-ranging consequences of digital technologies used in crime and justice contexts.
- Co-creative and emancipatory research designs and methodologies offer innovative ways of better understanding digital justice, surveillance, and security now and in the future.
- While digital technologies open up new possibilities, they can simultaneously create new and exacerbate existing vulnerabilities, anxieties, and inequalities.

To begin the session, **Sanja Milivojevic**, Associate Professor in Digital Futures at Bristol University, discussed the development and impact of 'digital frontier' technologies such as artificial intelligence, the internet of things, autonomous mobile robots, and blockchain on offending, crime control, the criminal justice system, and the discipline of criminology. The innovation and integration of such technologies in criminal justice spaces has wide-ranging consequences, including the proliferation of new types of vulnerability, policing and other mechanisms of social control, and the threat of pervasive and intrusive surveillance. Sanja argues that criminologists need to look towards the future and actively engage with digital technologies, possibly through co-creation.

Next, **Jane Duncan**, Professor of Digital Society and holder of a British Academy Global Professorship, based at the University of Glasgow, discussed her ongoing comparative case study analysis across eight southern African countries on strengthening public oversight of intelligence-driven surveillance. Digitisation has provided intelligence agencies with the capabilities to conduct surveillance at an unprecedented scale, yet many official oversight institutions in southern Africa lack the power and resources to perform these functions. Jane's project is developing a model for successful public

oversight of digital surveillance so that the public can challenge unjustifiable secrecy, publicise abuses, and organise campaigns to rein in intelligence-driven surveillance.

Lastly, **Janos Mark Szakolczai**, Lecturer in Criminology at the University of Glasgow, presented on everyday techniques of biopower and psycho-security, and the ways in which digital technologies mediate power and its effects. Drawing on Agamben's (2003) work on 'state of exception' and Han's (2015) work on anxiety, Janos argued that community WhatsApp groups, private surveillance cameras, and other digital forms of security and surveillance can provide communities with the tools to establish collective security and respond to threats. Yet, ironically, many of these digital security affordances can lead to hyper-vigilance and heightened anxieties.

### **Future research directions**

- Further research is needed to understand the potential and limitations of co-creation and collaboration between researchers and commercial innovation in criminal justice.
- Further research is needed to develop emancipatory toolkits for communities and the public to resist and challenge mass surveillance.
- We need to better understand how digital security and communication technologies both can mitigate and exacerbate everyday anxieties in people's lives.

### **Tools/resources**

- Link to Sanja Milivojevic's 2021 book, [Crime and Punishment in the Future Internet: Digital Frontier Technologies and Criminology in the 21st Century](#).
- Webpage for the [Bristol Digital Futures Institute](#)
- [Q&A with Jane Duncan](#) by the Digital Society & Economy IRT.
- Link to Giorgio Agamben's 2003 book, [State of Exception](#).
- Link to Byung-Chul Han's 2015 book, [The Burnout Society](#).

## Session 4

# Intersecting (in)equalities in a digital world

This session explored dynamics of inclusion, accessibility, and participation in education, finance, and information. As new social and digital innovations seek to address inequalities, challenges remain about how to include under-represented and marginalized groups. Changes in education, particularly in the digital era, involves new flexible and responsive approaches to make learning opportunities inclusive. For those who are financially vulnerable and excluded, innovations in fintech require breaking down barriers around inaccessibility and data poverty. The session also explored philosophic ideologies and social, legal, and economic contexts about the role of information in society to understand complex issues around information equality.

### Key points

- Financial technologies can enable financial and social inclusion, but we must first overcome barriers around trust, access, and transparency.
- Addressing intersectionally gendered inequalities in STEM requires developing new communities of practice, empowering people to grow active digital footprints, and encouraging engagement with professional networks.
- Addressing information inequality requires innovative social and digital policies.

To begin the session, **Felix Honecker**, a Marie Skłodowska-Curie Early Stage Researcher at the University of Glasgow, discussed what **financial exclusion** means and how it can be experienced differently by different people. Financial exclusion is when people encounter difficulties accessing and/or using financial services and products in the mainstream market that are appropriate to their needs and enable them to lead a normal social life. 1.23 million people in the UK are financially excluded and an additional 11 million are financially underserved, which further contributes to social exclusion by making it difficult to secure housing, employment, and education. Felix argued that financial technologies can improve financial inclusion, but that it is not enough to just have access but make effective use of them.

Next, **Catherine Lido**, Professor of Psychology and Adult Learning (People, Place & Social Change), in the School of Education at the University of Glasgow, presented on intersectionally gendered inequalities in STEM in both local and global contexts by drawing on two recent projects. Catherine engaged the attendees in social network mapping activities and other interactive exercises to explore how new communities of inclusive practice can be developed, how to grow an active digital footprint, and how professional networks can help level the gendered playing field of subject areas like STEM.

**Alistair Duff**, Emeritus Professor of Information Policy at Edinburgh Napier University and academic visitor at the School of Social and Political Science, University of Edinburgh, introduced the concept of information equality which is based on the notion that everyone should have an equal amount of essential information. Drawing on Rawl's (1971) work on justice, Alistair argued that as information and digital media are fundamental aspects of the basic structure of modern society, we need to implement social policies that will reduce information and digital inequalities, starting with the most disadvantaged groups in society.

### Future research directions

- Further research is needed to explore the potential of user-centred and co-creation design tools between researchers, fintech developers, and people who are financially excluded.
- improve the legitimacy and adoption of new innovations.
- Social network analyses may help to further explore the ways in which networking and practice communities can address gendered inequalities in work and education.
- Further research is needed to better understand what kinds of information constitute essential information in order to achieve information equality and how a 'digital commons' may help to overcome information inequalities.

### Tools/resources

- Economic Observatory article on [financial technologies and social exclusion](#).
- Webinar series on [intersectional inequalities in STEM](#).
- Project website for [VISNET: Virtual in Situ Networking to Reinvent the Rules of International Collaborations and Reduce Gender Differences in Academic Careers](#)
- Project website for [Gendered Journeys](#) project
- Link to John Rawl's 1971 book, [A Theory of Justice](#)



# Conclusion

Living well cannot be reduced to just economic wellbeing. Wellbeing is at the heart of how we work, how we engage culturally, how we enact justice, and address social and digital inequalities. We conclude that researchers, practitioners, policymakers, and industry leaders must:

- Understand wellbeing and participation as core to living well.
- Develop new research approaches and methodologies that bring together technological, social, and cultural perspectives.
- Develop innovation in policy in terms of better understanding what resources and information people need to live well.

According to business industry leaders, wellbeing in business is about investing in people and their wellbeing, providing security to employees, and supporting innovative, purposeful, and systems-thinking approaches to changing work cultures can drive business growth. Business growth and sustainable productivity that has wellbeing at its heart may mean scaling 'deeper' rather than scaling up, to build community and support communities to flourish and grow with local businesses. This notion of community wellbeing is also relevant for considering how we engage culturally. Audiences are part of cultural life, and it is important, particularly in the digital age, that people and communities have critical skills as audiences of contemporary life and culture. The relations between technology, production of content and the ways in which audiences can engage feature in the characteristics of audiences. These relations are not only important in terms of understanding audiences, but they also open analysis to the social and cultural value of audiences and their experiences.

Living well is also about living in a just society, but justice is always contested. People want to feel secure and fairly treated in their everyday lives, but achieving this is difficult in an increasingly complex digital world. As our uses, knowledge, and relations with digital technologies deepen, this can mitigate and proliferate new and existing risks to our sense of security. The role of the state in the provision of safety and security is questioned as well, as public oversight mechanisms need to be strengthened so people feel like they have power and control over their own lives. These are complex issues that require further academic engagement, but also requires researchers to push themselves beyond the comforts of their disciplines.

Digital inequalities sit on top of existing inequalities and must be addressed intersectionally. For example, addressing intersectionally gendered inequalities in STEM requires developing new communities of practice, empowering people to grow active digital footprints, and encouraging engagement with professional networks. For financial wellbeing, 'fintech' innovations can enable financial and social inclusion, but we must first overcome barriers around trust, access, and transparency. This creates new questions around what kind of policies are needed to break down such barriers. In an age of misinformation, living well also requires rethinking what kind of access people have to quality and trustworthy information and data and how social policies can address information inequalities.