

Program

09.30 – 10.00 Registration
10.00 – 10.15 Welcome Address –
Ernst-Ludwig von Thadden,
Universität Mannheim (President)
Nils Schaks,
Universität Mannheim

1st panel: “Digitization and the State” Chair: Dominik Steiger, TU Dresden

We will start our analysis by focusing on the implications of digitization for the constituent elements of the state. We will ask whether digitization results in a fragmentation of “the people” into isolated and opposing groups. We will also consider how digitization affects state power, in view of the influence of powerful private internet companies. Is all state authority still derived from the people, or are we governed by algorithms instead? As physical space is increasingly overtaken by virtual space, questions are raised about the capacity of national and international law to address these issues. In addition and with regard to third states, can certain acts aimed at influencing the outcomes of elections be classified as a violation of public international law’s principle of non-intervention? This principle may play a role in the context of securing democracy as it stems from the principle of sovereignty and protects states against outside interference into their internal affairs.

10.15 – 10.45 Wessel le Roux,
University of the Western Cape
10.45 – 11.15 Stephanie Schiedermaier,
Universität Leipzig
11.15 – 12.15 Discussion
12.15 – 13.30 Lunch break

The conference is kindly supported by



2nd panel: “Democracy in Times of Digitization” Chair: Jelena Bäuml, Universität Rostock

The second panel provides an opportunity to examine whether and to what extent digitization threatens current notions of democracy, or, on the contrary, provides opportunities to rethink and deepen democratic theory and practice. It is not clear if and how democracy as a form of government is affected by digitization and what will result from that. The way in which digitization is valued by the public has changed over the years. During the Arab Spring, digitization was hailed as a vehicle for democracy. These days, after the Brexit decision and the 2016 US presidential election, the optimistic view is less common, and much is said about filter bubbles, echo chambers, fake news etc. There are at least three elements of democracy that seem to be at risk in a digitalized world and are worth being examined more closely: the electorate’s freedom of political will-formation, democratic control and accountability, and the acceptance of majority decisions.

13.30 – 14.00 Joanna Botha,
Nelson Mandela University,
Port Elizabeth
14.00 – 14.30 Klaus F. Gärditz, Rheinische Friedrich-
Wilhelms-Universität Bonn
14.30 – 15.30 Discussion
15.30 – 16.00 Coffee break

3rd panel: “Digitization and the Open Society” Chair: Henk Botha, Stellenbosch University

How democracy and the open society can be protected by the state without damaging fundamental rights, especially freedom of expression, will be the guiding question of this third and last panel. Democracy presupposes the existence of an open society which is characterised by robust public debate about matters of public importance. Today, this vision of an open society is confronted by a number of ambiguous developments, many of which are associated with digitization. These developments include the declining role of political parties, the negative perception of traditional media, the use of digital mass media, and the rise of hate speech and of big data. Against this background, the session will examine the role and limits of legal regulation as a means of controlling the negative effects of digitization.

16.00 – 16.30 James Fowkes,
Westfälische Wilhelms-Universität
Münster
16.30 – 17.00 Thomas Wischmeyer,
Universität Bielefeld
17.00 – 18.00 Discussion
18.00 – 18.10 Closing Address: Towards the 2020
meeting in Stellenbosch
(Henk Botha, Wessel le Roux,
Nils Schaks, Dominik Steiger)