CARE-FUL DATAFIED FUTURES AND TECHNOPOLITICS OF CARE

Irina Zakharova

Centre for Media, Communication and Information Research (ZeMKI) & Institute for Information Management (ifib) at the University of Bremen

Abstract:
This open panel takes as a starting point the "double vision of care" (Linden & Lydahl 2021) encompassing both 'ethico-political obligations' (Puig de la Bellacasa 2017) and practices of local fine-tuning and tinkering (Mol 2008) required to maintain and continue our datafied society. How can care be integrated in data politics and what dark sides can it potentially bring forth (Martin et al. 2015)? How can research and design of socio-technical data systems be more attentive to the subjectivities, affections, and bodies of datafied cyborg selves (Thompson 2020)? How can academic inquiry be more sensitive and care-ful in its analysis of techno- and data politics? Building upon reviving academic discourses on care in STS, this panel aims to explore the possibilities and challenges of care as technopolitical endeavour for the future of our datafied society.

Many scholars have shown how datafication processes—rendering social realities into data and back—are reconfiguring various societal domains from education and health to politics. These datafication processes are performed through various socio-technical data systems. Their techno- and data politics slip into our lives and become inherent parts of states' governance, organisations' work, and the everyday. At the same time, data systems providers often position their products as 'solutions' to multiple crises society is currently facing. These promises to create better worlds, however, elevate some people and societal practices and marginalise others. Feminist and critical data studies (D'Ignazio & Klein 2020, Cifor et al. 2019) continue the long tradition of feminist STS scholarship (Mol et al. 2010, Tronto 1993) in troubling technopolitics by pinpointing when, where, and for whom these promises fail, and by showing care and solidarity with the marginalised, the invisible, and the othered. They commit to "taking sides, participating, acting, making a choice, taking a position, but without taking for granted a general or fundamental principle on which these actions would safely and coherently be grounded" (López-Gómez 2019, p.10).

Within this strain of thought, this panel invites examples of care-ful or care-less datafication processes already taking place and imagine more care-ful datafication futures for empirical practice and academic inquiry. Topics can include reflections on existing theories, methodologies, and technopolitics that lack care or present its dark sides, and speculations about futures where promises of the better worlds follow the needs and voices of those affected by manifold datafication processes.

Key words:
care, datafication, critical & feminist data studies