EMCSR 2014 -

Symposium Sustainability, Ethics and Cyberspace

Chairs

Stefan Strauß (Institute of Technology Assessment, Austrian Academy of Sciences)
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Call for papers

The variety of current and emerging societal challenges underlines the demand for new concepts towards sustainable ways of living. While sustainability primarily addresses environmental issues, this symposium asks for wider (ethical) perspectives. The extensive diffusion of ICT and the embodiment of cyberspace triggered a variety of societal changes that penetrate all aspects of societal life. New, easy ways of information spreading are accompanied by increasing complexity, diversity and diminishing boundaries between the public and the private sphere as well as the social relations in-between. ICT opened up a wide range of new possibilities for the realisation of human potential, but at the same time affect society in a way that challenges the common grounds of social relations and perceptions of good living in an ethical sense.

This symposium focusses on the entailed ethical challenges and welcomes contributions in the two subsequent sessions:

Session 1 Protecting privacy in a surveillance age – utopia or sine qua non for a sustainable informational ecosystem? (Stefan Strauß)

Privacy is among the most contested issues in contemporary society, not least amplified by the driving force of information and the convergence between analogue and digital environments. This informational transformation of socio-technical systems strains controllability of personal information flows and provides extensive options for privacy infringement and surveillance practices (e.g. drastically highlighted by recent scandals on mass surveillance by security agencies on a global scale); Continuing growth in the availability of personal information is yet unbroken; and individuals encounter further decrease of control over their information and thus their private sphere. Entailed to ongoing socio-technical alterations are controversial views on the function of privacy and its relation to other societal concepts such as security, surveillance practices and transparency. While some technologists propagate a "post-privacy" era linked to utopian visions of blooming open societies free from harm enabled by free information flows, privacy advocates underline the need for a revitalization of privacy. Dichotomized views and perceived trade-offs on privacy vs. security/surveillance often complicate the development of effective privacy-enhancing concepts. Not least as they neglect the societal function of privacy, the complexity of information and the related control mechanisms in socio-technical systems.

This session aims to overcome dichotomous framings by reflecting on the contemporary role of privacy and potential ways to improve the effectiveness of sustainable privacy-enhancing concepts. Topics of interest include but are not limited to

- Dimensions and core functions of privacy in socio-technical/informational eco-systems
- Current and emerging privacy challenges
- Concepts and models towards a sustainable privacy concept
- The (contradictory and complementary) role of transparency and its interplay with privacy
- Privacy as a system, system (theoretical) views on concepts and mechanisms
- Sustainability concepts and their potential adaption to privacy
- Privacy-by-design mechanisms and their role as integral part of the informational ecosystem and/or subsystems

Session 2 Are we losing or gaining in the relationships to other people by the development of cyberspace? (Tomas Sigmund)

The question in the title has an ethical background as it focuses on the relation and responsibility to other individuals. The development of virtual environment has put us into a new situation where everything changes quickly, information can be distributed easily and without control, the internet users don´t know who and how manipulates their information. The information is digital and is processed mathematically which reduces the respect for the specificity and individuality of the information and primarily of the human being. On the other hand the possibilities cyberspace provides us with are inexhaustible, man can be a member of many communities, can engage in various activities, can communicate regardless of space and time and his actions can be perceived by many. All these issues require an ethical reflection.

The session deals with two groups of ideas: one is focusing on the losses caused by cyberspace, the other on the gains and new conditions brought by the virtual conditions. The first group regrets the loss of individual appearance, which manifests itself in the loss of the public space, in the loss of meaning in hyperreality and in considering people and things as disposable. Main thinkers of this stream are e.g. H. Arendt, W. Benjamin, M. Heidegger, J. Baudrillard, H. Dreyfus, A. Borgman and others. The other stream of ideas stresses the new situation brought by the cyberspace and new definition of old ethical concepts in it. The second stream of thoughts believes individuality can be kept in the new conditions and is represented by e.g. R. Capurro, H. Nissenbaum, H. Moravec, R. Kurzweil, M. Eldred, D. Nagel, M. Arnold and others. Can we attempt to unify these two types of thought? Can we evaluate what was lost and try to keep it if it is necessary for the respect of the individual and possibly replace it with new concepts if they are more adequate in our current situation? These ideas will help us define the concept of sustainability.

The papers could concentrate but are not limited to the following topics:

- How can we respect other human beings in their individuality within the digital cyberspace?
- What is the current frame of reference for our ethical thinking? Does relativism prevail? Is ethics context sensitive?

- Do we need a new ethics of the cyberspace? What grounds can it have?
- Is the lack of clarity of the cyberworld acceptable?
- Which old ethical concepts have proven obsolete in the digital era? Should e.g. the concept of intellectual property be revised?
- What is the current state of the public space and its relation to private space? What ethical relevance does their relation have?
- To what extent is it ethically acceptable to display personal information about others on the Internet?
- Is access to the Internet a basic right everyone should have? Should the access to some content be regulated?

Target groups

The symposium is not limited to particular scientific disciplines and welcomes inter- and trans-disciplinary contributions bridging different perspectives (e.g. computing and philosophy, technology assessment and STS, informatics, social, political, techno sciences).

Submission

Please submit your contributions (1-3 pages, 750-2000 words) to your preferred session by **February 15.**

For further details see

http://emcsr.net/calls-2014/calls-for-papers-2014/sustainability-ethics-and-the-cyberspace/