Public Digitalisation

The changes being brought about by digitalization processes are particularly visible in the public sector. A successful digital future, such as the one envisaged in various Danish digitalization strategies, requires a thorough engagement with the motivations, priorities, histories, practices and discourses that drive digitalization processes. It also requires a set of methodological tools and theoretical concepts suited to take into account the technologies at the centre of public digitalization, such as machine-learning algorithms, data centres, biometrics, satellite-based control mechanisms, social media platforms, digital patient journals and user portals.

This specialization provides you with a grounding in the history, theory, policy, expectations, challenges, practicalities and methods of digitalization initiatives. The two parts of the specialisation are united in their shared concern with ethnographic studies and both draw on theoretical frameworks from anthropology, Science and Technology Studies and organizational studies. In the first part, The Digital State, you develop an historically informed foundation for thinking about technologies and state projects over time, and a global perspective on public digitalization initiatives. The second part of the specialization, Digitalization and Public Sector Transformations, revolves around practical research projects in the local government setting and the different kinds of processes currently underway.

By following the specialisation, you will gain critical skills in analysing, conceptualising and contextualising the changes around us. You will develop competences in the methods and techniques through which to study public digitalization yourself. Together, the two parts of the specialization provide a grounded and comparative understanding of the digitizing state in Scandinavia and prepare you to work at the forefront of public sector transformations.

Spring Semester

The Digital State (7.5 ECTS)

The Digital State asks what the state is, in order to provide a foundation for understanding the changes that are taking place through initiatives of public digitalization. Taking a historical, comparative and global perspective, the course is arranged by themes which move us from past examples into the present and the everyday.

First, we examine different understandings of the State, and how it can be present in everyday life. Drawing on students' own encounters with the State, we critically explore the familiar. Next, we examine some of the motivations driving digitalization projects, and consider the priorities of those implementing such schemes. In our third theme, we consider the technologies involved in digitalization projects, across a range of state sectors. To see local initiatives clearly from where we are –in Denmark – we make use of comparative material from other countries, where digitalization projects play out differently. Drawing on cases from China, India, Iceland, Norway and more, we look at the different priorities and concerns arising around State digitalization globally. The course concludes with a regional focus on questions of trust and accountability in the Scandinavian State.

Autumn Semester

The Digital State in Practice (15 ECTS)

This second part of the specialisation builds on theoretical tools from The Digital State and combines them with empirical insights into how public sector transformations take place and unfold in practice.

Digitalization is bringing large-scale institutional changes to the public sector, not least in Denmark, a world-leading IT nation. Our focus in Digitalization and Public Sector Transformations is on the Danish public sector. You will have the opportunity to go into depth with the 'how' of public sector digitalization: how are digitalization processes changing the landscapes and infrastructures of the public sector today? Which types of hopes, challenges, motivations and risks are involved in these processes?

The course consists of three main elements:

- *Thematic focus*: How are digitalisation processes changing and challenging the welfare state? How are local governmental institutions, welfare encounters, work, professions and management practices changed by digitalization?
- *Concepts and method*: How do we study and make sense of the changing organisational practices of the Danish welfare state?
- *Project work*: Grouped in research teams, you will conduct ethnographic research projects in local governmental settings going through processes of digitalization.

You will carry out ethnographic research projects in groups in a local governmental setting, where you will study an ongoing IT project. As digital technologies transform internal work and management practices, they also transform the relation between welfare professionals and citizens. Understanding these processes of transformation and what they entail is crucial for working with digitalization, both in the public sector or a consultant in the private sector.

Through your ethnographic research project, you will gain insight into the implementation and the organizational and societal changes caused by digitalization. Your project will enable you to link your empirical work to core theoretical concepts in the specialisation, and can be used as preparation for your thesis.