

Rethinking digital intermediation and cultural competence to challenge populism – Bojana Dobran

World-leading voices of culture, art and science will be brought together in Karlsruhe (Germany) on 19 - 20 October at ZKM Center for Art and Media in Karlsruhe to tackle the perils of populism, fake news, xenophobia, and various political and ideological movements at the 2017 edition of the Council of Europe Platform Exchange on Culture and Digitisation ([website link](#)). They will discuss the positive potential of digital tools to empower citizens for democratic and cultural participation, as well as to help them rise above anti-democratic and anti-liberal online behaviour.

Comprehending the scope of digital intermediation

Evgeny Morozov, author of one of the background papers and contributing editor at the New Republic, offers a brilliant analysis of digital intermediation in the different aspects of our lives. Author of several thought-provoking books and a beholder of new age ideas, Morozov presents a creative angle on the capacities of technology to shape our everyday realities.

He reflects on the meanings of freedom, autonomy, and privacy in the digital world, challenging the readers of his paper to employ a new mind-set to rethink these notions. He highlights the role of artists and their collaborations with researchers in the fields of history, sociology, and culture to help break the myths of popular techno-utopian visions. Drawing the line between realistic and naive techno-utopianism, Morozov questions the foundation of prevailing digital philosophies that are becoming increasingly salient for Europe's society.

Addressing the perils of populism

Jan-Werner Müller, a teacher of politics at Princeton University, addresses populism in the digital age and presents the foundations for a modern perspective on the concept. His background paper prepared for the 4th Council of Europe Platform Exchange on Culture and Digitisation, shares some of the key concepts from his 2017 book *What is Populism?*

The slippery concept of populist politics and its immense power is viewed through the prism of contemporary European society, questioning citizens' political and cultural competence. Müller also delves into the algorithmic reality, which now increasingly serves us with news, stories, goods, is influencing our lives beyond our understanding.

His ideas highlight why it is essential to create culturally competent citizens, whose understanding of the digital rules and the power of digital code, can help them enjoy and exploit the true power of technology to give voice and freedom, to connect and empower.

Citizens' empowerment

Morozov and Müller are just some of the thought leaders whose intellect and creativity will spark new debates on the role of technology in European society and its capacity to help create culturally competent citizens. A number of professionals in different fields will join them in questioning our abilities to change our mind-sets and think about technology beyond what it is offering us on a daily

basis. They will explore and discover alternative digital realms, where culture and democracy proliferate, and where citizens hold the power of choice.