UK Research and Innovation

Transformations: social and cultural dynamics in the digital age

Opportunity status:	Open
Funders:	**Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC)**, **Arts and Humanities Research Council (AHRC)**
Co-funders:	Austrian Science Fund, Fund for Scientific Research, The Research Foundation – Flanders, Bulgarian National Science Fund, Croatian Academy of Sciences and Arts, Croatian Science Foundation, Czech Academy of Sciences, Danish Agency for Higher Education and Science, Estonian Research Council, Academy of Finland, DLR Project Management Agency on behalf of BMBF, National Research, Development and Innovation Office, The Icelandic Centre for Research, State Education Development Agency, Research Council of Lithuania, The Luxembourg National Research Fund, The Research Council of Norway, National Science Centre, Executive Agency for Higher Education, Research, Development and Innovation Funding, Slovak Academy of Sciences, Slovenian Research Agency, Ministry of Education, Science and Sports, Agencia Estatal de Investigación, Forte, The Swedish Research Council for Health, Working Life and Welfare, Swiss National Science Foundation.
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Apply for funding to understand how digital innovations affect social and cultural changes and are influenced by society and culture. Proposals must demonstrate a strong European dimension.

You must be a UK applicant. Research areas must be within ESRC or AHRC's remit.

You must collaborate with researchers from participating countries. Project teams must include at least four principal investigators who are eligible for Collaboration of Humanities and Social Sciences in Europe (CHANSE) funding.

Projects start in September or October 2022 and will last 24 to 36 months.

UK project components can be up to €750,000 (funded at 80% full economic cost).

Who can apply

The programme has been co-created by the Humanities in the European Research Area (HERA) and New Opportunities for Research Funding Agency Cooperation in Europe (NORFACE) networks.

It will be implemented by 27 research funding organisations from 24 countries, coordinated by the National Science Centre, Poland (NCN).

The UK component of proposals may only be submitted by research organisations eligible to apply to UK Research and Innovation (UKRI). This includes:

- higher education institutions that are directly funded or research by the Higher Education Funding Council for England, DEL, Higher Education Funding Council for Wales and Scottish Funding Council
- independent research organisations that have received recognition to apply to the research councils
- research council institutes.

The list of **eligible research organisations is available on the UKRI website**.

You can collaborate with researchers from countries participating in the call:

- Austria
- Belgium
- Bulgaria
- Croatia
- Czechia
- Denmark
- Estonia
- Finland
- Germany

- Hungary
- Iceland
- Latvia
- Lithuania
- Luxembourg
- Norway
- Poland
- Romania
- Slovakia
- Slovenia
- Spain
- Sweden
- Switzerland
- United Kingdom.

Project teams must be composed of at least four principal investigators; meaning partners eligible to receive funding from the CHANSE funders from four or more different participating countries.

Any academic researcher from an established international research organisation (outside of the participating country applicants) of comparable standing to a UKRI-eligible UK higher education institution will be eligible to be listed as an international co-investigator under this call.

Further details can be found at:

- **inclusion of international co-investigators on proposals (ESRC website)**
- **international co-investigators (AHRC website)**.

View the **UK national eligibility annex (PDF, 710KB)**.

What we're looking for

The call will fund projects in the following areas:

1. Cultural transformations in the digital age

Cultural transformations are a constant phenomenon in human history. Nevertheless, today, digital tools, the processes of digitalisation and the digitalisation of processes have, really or apparently, contributed to the acceleration of these transformations.

We are approaching a culture of algorithms that influences our daily lives, behaviours, cultural practices, judgements and values.

The questions to be asked are:

- What is the impact that such processes are having on us and our cultures?

- How radically new are these processes in relation to past innovations such as literacy, print, railways, the telegraph, radio and television?
- What is the influence of different cultural traditions on technological transformations?

Identity, values and worldviews

As digital tools permeate virtually every aspect of our lives, we are connected through devices which constantly yield data that are being captured, analysed, and returned to us in processed forms such as personalised adverts and recommendations.

- How does this affect our identity and individual sovereignty?
- How does it shape our encounters with and understandings of the other?

Digital communication holds the promise of social interaction, global integration and human solidarity.

However, it makes inequality more visible and can also isolate individuals and groups (regional, political, ethnic, class-based) in echo chambers or 'filter bubbles', compromising the existence of a common space for public debate and enabling the spread of fake news, hate speech, populism and xenophobia.

- How do we create and secure spaces for free and creative thoughts in a digitalised world?
- How are freedom and creativity even defined, as algorithms learn and use our patterns of communication?
- How do we address issues of responsibility, trust, and transparency?
- How does one develop legal and ethical standards that can cope with these challenges?
- Does historical comparison help understand these processes and problems?

New stories, new aesthetics: remaining human

From ancient times to the science fiction of Jules Verne, H. G. Wells and the Cyberpunk, the arts, literature, philosophy, etc. have been a fundamental source of imagination and imagery, inspiring technological inventions and trying to foresee their social, cultural, and linguistic consequences.

Today, utopian as well as dystopian understandings of technological developments and digitalisation resurface in the different currents of posthumanism and what is becoming known as the posthumanities.

Digital visualisation, machine learning, robotics and artificial intelligence are major innovations fast developing in the fields of the technical and natural sciences, whilst, at the same time, constantly interacting with emotions, creativity and imagination.

At such junctures, new aesthetics and narratives emerge, questioning how we want to live and how we can live together.

- What are the cultural, ethical and futuristic accounts of a digitalised world?

- How do they interact with the processes of digitalisation?
- To what extent are technological transformations responsible for reshaping the worlds of our imagination, and to what extent is technology giving shape to transformations already anticipated in earlier imaginative thinking: utopian and dystopian?

The humanities and technological transformations: past, present, future

Throughout its history, humanity has experienced many forms of inventions, some of which have brought major technical transformations.

Scholars have always reflected upon the relations between humans and their cultural environments, investigating the impact of technological change on the generation, storage and transmission of knowledge.

For example, a highly representative strand of the humanities in the 20th century has developed a thorough critique of modernity and technological progress, calling into question the very humanistic foundations of European cultures and societies.

- What has been, is and might still be the role of the humanities in assessing large systemic transformations?
- Can we compare current developments in the digital era with historical phenomena?
- How do we move from passive observation and critical distancing to active participation in shaping the processes of digitalisation, reflecting on the human use and adoption of new technologies in order to move towards a more equal, democratic, knowledge-based access to and use of them?
- Is there a place in all this for humanism or will it be replaced by some thoroughly non-anthropocentric vision of humanity and its interactions with the non-human?

2. Digitalisation and social transformation

The changing relationship between technology and society potentially transforms the social, political, legal, economic and psychological conditions of life and raises questions about the role of technological innovation for societal progress.

For example:

- do technological innovations save time in our daily lives, leaving us ever freer for social and cultural pursuits, or does the distraction caused by digital interruptions actually drive out creativity and innovation and jeopardise education and productive work?
- does digitalisation constitute a threat for individual and communal freedom or lead to citizen-driven transformations?
- how can we harness robust empirical research to optimise the positive outcomes of technological transformation whilst simultaneously understanding and mitigating the potential downsides for individuals, communities, organisations, institutions and society as a whole?

Digitalisation and social relations

The debate about digitalisation resembles previous controversies about large-scale social transformations like modernisation, industrialisation and globalisation.

On the one hand there are enthusiasts praising the immense potential of innovations for growth and enhanced social progress. On the other there are sceptics fearing for the loss of essential human qualities at the hand of technology.

Observers have noted how digitalisation is altering social life and the use of time, but more rigorous research is needed to understand the antecedents and effects of technological innovation for social relations and the pace of life.

- Has digitalisation led to a new form of temporality?
- What kind of effects does digitisation have on the very understanding of time and space?
- How does digitalisation impact the quantity and quality of the time we spend with family and friends?
- How does digitalisation affect intra-generational communication?
- How do digital innovations create or solve social inequalities?
- How do innovations shape gender-differences, our work-life balance and ways in which we use time?

Digitalised work and organisations

New technology has created novel challenges for the labour market, giving a new edge to the ongoing debate about skill-biased technological change.

Digitalisation is having significant ramifications for organisations in both the public and corporate sphere.

The changing nature of work has already become a salient public issue, with the rise of outsourcing and the gig economy.

Current technological transformations are increasingly affecting our perceptions of quality of work and of productivity, altering the temporal and spatial dimensions of work and collaboration.

We need to increase our understanding of fundamental questions addressing the meaning and productive potential of work in the digital age.

- Does new technology always effectively lead to greater efficiency or does digitalisation have counter-productive side-effects and unintended negative consequences?
- What kind of effects does digitalisation have on the workings of public policy, institutions and the economy?
- What is the impact of digital transformation on job displacement, on wages, on wealth distribution and poverty?
- How can we understand new forms of organisational memory in times of massive data generation?

- What are the main driving forces behind digitalisation and what actors promote it through public policies?

Knowledge and learning in the digital age

Digitalisation affects not only the production of data but also its accessibility and the consumption of information, and thus the very nature of knowledge production.

Innovations such as the high-speed internet, electronic books and digital newspapers, and mobile devices have fundamentally changed the way knowledge is acquired and information is consumed.

The diffusion of "content" is immediate and virtually everyone has the potential to influence public opinion through social media.

The potential for knowledge manipulation through new technologies also raises political questions, such as the impact of digitalisation on elections, justice and ethics.

From a legal point of view, new questions regarding copyright law and freedom of expression have emerged in the digital era. New technology has also raised new challenges for education and learning.

- How do education systems adapt to meet emerging skill requirements?
- What and how do we teach?
- In relation to what we as societies consider important to protect and safeguard against?
- Do technologies help us to acquire knowledge more quickly?
- What are the effects of technological transformation on attention, memory, and cognitive and emotional capacities?

Research is also needed as well to identify the potentially adverse impacts of digital innovations.

This line of inquiry may interrogate the ownership of the huge data-intensive digital platforms that control access to the new world of knowledge and learning, and shape how data about ourselves is processed, interpreted and transformed into accepted knowledge in society.

Finally, the emergence of artificial intelligence and data mining has also affected the epistemological and methodological bases of social science research itself, and new studies may elucidate the ways in which the production of scientific knowledge is impacted by new forms of human-computer interaction.

[The full opportunity topic description and the UK national eligibility annex, which details eligible costs, are available on the CHANSE website](#).

Inter and transdisciplinary research is especially encouraged in this call. We encourage proposals from the arts and humanities, social sciences and interdisciplinary proposals from disciplines outside of the remits of the AHRC and ESRC.

Proposals must fall primarily within the remit of one or both of these councils.

How to apply

Information about the **submission process can be found on the CHANSE website**.

Proposals are submitted to NCN as the CHANSE Call Secretariat.

The deadline for outline proposals is 7 May 2021 14:00 CEST (13:00 GMT).

Deadline for full stage proposals (for invited applicants) is 7 December 2021 14:00 CEST (13:00 GMT).

Inter and transdisciplinary research is especially welcome in this opportunity. For administrative purposes, your application will be routed either through ESRC or AHRC to check eligibility with the call and UKRI requirements.

If your funding application is successful, UKRI will be in touch regarding the lead council that your proposal will be funded and managed by.

You are asked to select either: "cultural transformations in the digital age", "digitalisation and social transformation" or "both".

These topics broadly fit into AHRC and ESRC's remits respectively. A selection of cultural transformations will be routed through AHRC and a selection of social transformation will be routed through ESRC. If "both" is selected, AHRC and ESRC will jointly consider your application.

The budget must be submitted in euros. There is no defined exchange rate for this call and you will not be required to state one in the outline application. Research organisation institutional exchange rate policy applies.

How we will assess your application

Evaluation of the proposals follows a two-stage procedure. The outline proposals are evaluated by the review panel at the first stage evaluation and the full proposals are evaluated by the review panel assisted by external experts at the second stage evaluation.

Outline proposals will be assessed according to a set of four criteria (relevance to the call, excellence, impact, and quality and efficiency of the implementation).

The full proposals will be assessed according to a set of three criteria (excellence, impact, and quality and efficiency of the implementation).

The evaluation criteria are listed and defined in the **opportunity announcement which can be found on the CHANSE website**.

Contact details

UK national contact points (for UK specific enquiries)

Joe Ellery (ESRC)
Dr Jamie Davies (AHRC)
Email: **chanse@esrc.ukri.org**

General enquiries CHANSE Call Secretariat

Dr Malwina Gębalska, CHANSE programme coordinator
Michał Kaczmarek, CHANSE Coordination Office
National Science Center, Poland
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Additional info

The CHANSE consortium announce a call for international research projects: Transformations: social and cultural dynamics in the digital age.

Over centuries, various technological changes have affected and continue to affect all spheres of human activity. At the same time, society has been and is shaping technological changes.

This is particularly important now, since today's social, economic, political, technological and cultural transformations generate opportunities as well as challenges.

Digitalisation, which refers to the cultural and societal changes brought about by the pervasive use of digital technologies, brings economic progress and opportunities, but also threats, social anxieties and feelings of insecurity.

Digitalisation yields new forms of communication, expressing emotions and creativity, as well as new forms of acquiring knowledge and distributing information.

On the other hand, digital transformations raise questions about values and identities, about individuality versus public interest and solidarity, about participation, social justice and inclusion.

These changes do not occur simultaneously in or uniformly across all countries and in all parts of societies, resulting in new social divisions and differences between various

social groups and communities.

Proposals must be submitted in euros. The maximum amount of funding for UK partners is €750,000 per project. The UK is contributing €7,000,000 to a €36,000,000 total budget.

The participation of the UK in this HERA and NORFACE call is not affected by the UK's exit from the European Union (EU). A portion of this call's funding comes from EU top-up funding, however UK researchers can continue to receive EU grant funding for the lifetime of individual projects.

More information can be found at: **Working on EU-funded projects**.

In order to facilitate the process of forming research consortia, we offer applicants a **partner search tool (NCN website)**. This tool can be used by projects looking for partners and partners looking for projects.

Supporting documents

- **CHANSE call theme (PDF, 678KB)**
- **National eligibility annex (PDF, 710KB)**

Timeline

○ **9 March 2021**
Opening date

○ **7 May 2021 13:00**
Closing date for outline proposals

○ **7 December 2021 13:00**
Closing date for full proposals (for invited applicants)

○ **May or June 2022**
Decision date