Digital Anthropology
Innovation in methods, tools and education
Call for Evidence and Ideas

UNESCO and the LiiV Center invite experts and practitioners to present their perspectives on innovation in Digital Anthropology

Why participate in the Call for Evidence and Ideas?

Humans and technology are in a dynamic and reciprocal relationship.

Yet, in our increasingly digitised world, much attention has been focused on understanding digital technologies, and shockingly less attention is being given to inquiring about how these technologies shape and are shaped by human cultures, behaviours and motivations.

Responding to pressing challenges, such as **misinformation, social polarization, digital surveillance and inequality in the digital economy,** depends on our ability to gain insights into the relationship between cultures and digital technologies.

While data science has taken a central role in analysing digital societies, **the overreliance on big data and artificial intelligence is introducing biases and blindspots into our social decision-making.** To re-introduce human perspectives to the debate, interdisciplinary human and social scientists have taken a stand for ethical technologies, data protection, and care for diversity and marginalised communities.

This global movement has been shaped by **decades of innovative research and practice in anthropology**, a discipline that has developed a theoretical underpinning for examining human insights.

Anthropology produces rich and contextualised perspectives about humans, communities and societies in the digital era, sees what big data miss, is sensitive to biases and blindspots and has adopted new technical possibilities to carry out in-depth analyses of thick data. Continuing to innovate is essential for anthropology to bring its unique perspective in the face of the dynamic evolution of the digital space.

UNESCO and the LiiV Center agree that global efforts are needed to bring more digital innovation to anthropology to uncover deeper insights into people in digital communities and societies. The Partnership intends to understand better how human communities and societies are interacting and shaped by digital technologies and how policies can be rendered more ethical and inclusive.

During the second semester of 2022, the project will develop a **Toolkit Publication** that will support academic, private and public institutions to adopt new **methodologies, technologies teaching and social contribution**.

This call for evidence aims to produce a specialized body of knowledge on Digital Anthropology from the perspective of experts and practitioners to be shared in the Toolkit publication**.**

Call for Evidence and Ideas

The Partnership invites experts and practitioners from disciplines related to digital anthropology to present their perspectives concerning the project's core questions, collaborating to understand how human communities and societies are interacting with, and shaped by digital technologies and how they can become more ethical and inclusive.

The themes of the Call for Evidence and Ideas are:
1. Innovative methods and tools of Digital Anthropology
2. Teaching of innovations in Digital Anthropology
3. Contribution of Digital Anthropology to more ethical and inclusive societies.

The Partnership invites you to submit your expert perspective, experience or research on the themes and questions of your choice in the form of a thought piece, article or research paper.

These contributions will be published and referenced within the project's Toolkit Publication and activities.

The Call for Evidence will take place between July and August 2022, and its results will be published in September.

What are we looking for?

- **Potential impact on sustainable development:** We value contributions that think about how decision-makers can apply the methods and teachings in the real world to achieve more ethical, empathetic, fair, inclusive and sustainable societies.

- **Thick & Big Data:** We are interested in novel contributions, actively seeking new data sources from human experience, mixing methods and data from anthropology, data science, and other sciences in creative ways to gain new windows into human insights.

- **Speed and depth:** We look for contributions that are part of a rapidly changing context. Achieving early responses with high levels of depth of analysis is crucial for adoption and impact.

- **Accessibility and adaptability:** We care as much about the potential scalability of ideas as we do about being aware of their context. Contributions should question whether their conclusions and views are valid in cultural and material contexts other than their own.

- **Transferable theory and methods:** We look for ideas based on solid theoretical frameworks. Theories that explain why things work the way they do will allow us to easily and quickly cross-breed ideas and transfer them to other fields, sparking more innovation.

- **Ethical Contributions:** Contributions that address the questions Lf this Call from ethical perspectives, fully engaging with the most challenging contingent debates such as data privacy, online discrimination, digital surveillance, digital identities, ethical algorithms, public opinion formation and disinformation.

Theme 1: Innovative methods and tools of Digital Anthropology

The first theme aims to identify and describe innovative methods and technologies of Digital Anthropology.

While the methods of anthropology have advanced in the last two decades, the space for innovation in the gathering, blending, interpreting and visualizing of human data and insights are still significant. Moreover, innovations are needed to increase the depth, quality, access, speed, scale and reliability of digital tools supporting the work of practitioners of this discipline to elevate its influence and impact.

Two trends have characterized the innovation in anthropology in the last two decades. The first trend is the use of new technologies to improve how known methods of anthropology are used in totally or partially digital contexts. The second trend is adopting an anthropological approach to analyse the recent challenges of digital transformation, such as the ethics of algorithms or the human processes of developing new digital technologies. The first theme asks for future innovations, extending the trends explained before and searching for new ideas in the interactions between anthropology, data science and computer science.

Questions:

- What innovative methods, derived from anthropology and data science, have been developed to understand the needs and motivations of communities in digital spaces?
- What new sources of thick data and big data could be gathered to study the needs and motivations of communities across the digital-physical world?
- How might we gather "thick data" at a similar speed and scale to big data?
- How might we blend thick and big data to examine digital communities?
- How might we use AI and other emerging technologies to understand cultures?
- How might we protect the privacy of digital communities while gathering insights into their needs and motivations?

Theme 2: Teaching of innovations in Digital Anthropology

Questions:

- What initial skills should we teach students to identify and understand the perspectives of digital human communities?
- What skills from anthropology and data science should we teach students to identify and understand digital communities?
- How might we adapt the teaching of tools and methods of digital anthropology to different cultural and material contexts?
- What can we learn from the way digital methods of anthropology are taught?
- How might we re-train professionals to use innovative tools and methods of anthropology to understand the digital world?
- What digitally innovative tools and methods from anthropology could be taught to other professional disciplines, and why? Consider students of business, data science, design or public policy, for example.

The second theme relates to the practices, methods and orientations that could be adopted to teach innovative tools and methods for anthropology.

The teaching of innovative digital methods of anthropology has had a recent emergence in universities and research centers. This development occurs both in faculties and schools of anthropology and with different denominations in faculties of communication and media, technology and other social and human sciences. Furthermore, and unfortunately, this development has been concentrated in higher-income countries and is not sufficiently widespread in many regions.

Along with the uneven development between regions, the experiences observed by the project show that there are opportunities to share experiences, standardize concepts and summarize learning from the teaching experience across universities. This theme will explore questions about the skills that must be taught to understand digital communities with approaches from anthropology and contributions from other sciences. In addition, the need to understand the best re-skilling methods for professionals who want to undertake a career in digital anthropology and how these methods can be taught in different social, material and cultural contexts.

Theme 3: Contribution of Digital Anthropology to more ethical and inclusive societies

The third theme explores the potential impact of Digital Anthropology as an approach to improving decision-making and how insights and decisions are connected.

The influence of the social sciences on governments and private actors' relevant decision-making should grow to make them more ethical and inclusive. In problems underpinned by cultural aspects in digital or digitally mediated communities, the predominance of quantitative analysis, without the counter-balancing effect of qualitative approaches, runs the risk of disseminating biases and blind spots in decision-making and discarding more granular, rich and sensitive perspectives.

Insights from innovative digital anthropology have untapped potential when systematically adopted alongside big data analytics. For this reason, the questions in this theme seek to understand how to systematically establish relationships between digital anthropology and decision-making in policies, practices and technological development.

Questions:

- How could digital anthropology contribute to better decision-making?
- How could digital anthropology influence societies to be more ethical and inclusive?
- How could digital anthropology support the formulation and evaluation of public policies?
- How could digital anthropology influence more empathetic, ethical and sustainable business practices?
- How could digital anthropology affect the way technologies are developed?
- How could digital anthropology promote gender equality?

How to contribute?

Submit the idea of your proposed contribution to the Partnership by 29 July, using the following link. By this date only a brief summary of the main ideas of the future contribution are required.

After submitting your proposed contributions, you will have until Friday, 26 August to submit your final articles or research papers.

Your contribution may include:

- Case studies developed or researched by you or your institution
- Description of methodologies and/or digital tools related to the field
- Reflections on teaching experiences in the field of interest
- Expert overview or synthesis paper in an area related to the research questions
- Briefing or outlines of important aspect of research which is currently underway
- Other similar contributions deemed relevant to the project.

Format and contact:

- Submission should include an Abstract, Background Literature, Discussion and Conclusions, answering a selected question.
- Contributions' length (1,000 - 3,000 words) without considering references. Manuscript format is preferred (Calibri 11pt; 1,5 lines).
- Contributions with clear and brief summaries. Ideally, the main ideas should be summarized in no more than five bullet points.
- A standardized, unique and consistent reference format.
- Contributions should be given a tittle, and a list of authors in order of contribution so that these can be referenced in the future publication.
- More than one contribution may be submitted by each individual or institution. Iinformation and questions: please e-mail j.carmach@unesco.org