Key statements and conclusions from DigHum2025

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Digital Humanism is essential to securing a good life in the digital age

Digital Humanism seeks to reassert human agency and societal cohesion amid the sweeping forces of the digital revolution. At its core, it places the rights of the individual – both civil liberties and the collective freedoms that rely on shared institutions and cooperative action. We firmly reject technological determinism. In the face of significant challenges and risks, we call for the co-evolution of digital technologies and our foundational societal institutions. As a forward-looking, design-oriented approach, Digital Humanism affirms that humanity possesses both the capacity and the responsibility to shape digital transformation in alignment with human and democratic values.

Assembling in Vienna: A call to shape the digital future

In May 2025, around 500 participants gathered in Vienna for the first major international conference on Digital Humanism. This growing movement brings together computer scientists, researchers from

the social sciences and humanities, policymakers, civil servants, corporate leaders, funders, artists and civil society actors. United by a shared commitment, we pursue a twofold goal: to co-create inclusive, forward-looking technological and societal solutions – and to establish robust safeguards that ensure these developments serve the common good. This milestone event comes six years after the publication of the **2019 Vienna Manifesto on Digital Humanism**, building on its vision and the progress made since.

The core principles of the Manifesto remain strikingly relevant: the disruptive impact of digital technologies; the dangerous convergence of technological acceleration and political instability; the erosion of fundamental rights and reasoned public discourse; and the urgent need to shape digital systems through democratic, participatory and empowering processes. It continues to underscore the vital role of cutting-edge science and education in preserving our capacity to act with clarity and autonomy – as individuals and as societies.

Today, the scale, scope and speed of the digital transformation have become undeniable. We stand at a pivotal moment in human history. The urgency is real. This is a renewed call to action.

What we see: A revolution unfolding

Current digitalisation is not an evolution – it is a revolution. Its most immediate impact is visible in the technological realm, where artificial intelligence (AI) has moved to centre stage, especially through the rise of large language models (LLMs). AI, long embedded in online shops and social media, recommender systems and algorithmic management, has now become a defining force globally. It underpins our networks, shapes our worldviews and drives predictive systems. Its influence is expanding rapidly into institutions – transforming trust, markets, legal frameworks and

enforcement mechanisms. Power structures are shifting with unprecedented speed. Whether this moment constitutes a social revolution remains uncertain – unless we understand it as a top-down upheaval, orchestrated by tech oligarchs and authoritarian regimes.

We can no longer speak of these developments as mere side effects. We are witnessing the convergence of computational, financial, predictive, coercive and even military power – all underpinned by an insatiable demand for energy. The illusion of a seamless digital utopia with only minor trade-offs has collapsed. Today's digital technologies are reshaping children's cognitive development, reinforcing monopolies, eroding truth and trust, reviving neo-colonial dynamics, degrading the environment and displacing key societal and democratic institutions. These shifts are not coincidental – they result from the entanglement of corporate dominance and technological development.

Democracy remains pivotal – but is under immense pressure. To govern effectively means first ensuring the stability of institutions, the rule of law and the protection of individual freedoms. Yet today, market radicalism, hyper-individualism, authoritarianism and techno-solutionism are converging in ways that undermine democracy. The sovereignty of the people – expressed through democratic representation – must be preserved. Upholding rights – even more under pressures of deregulation – and ensuring social cohesion in the digital era requires not only defending democracy but also rethinking and renewing it.

There is resistance – and it has already begun. Societies are mobilising to reclaim agency. Large corporations will not spontaneously align with the public good. Change requires concerted effort: from grassroots movements and watchdog groups to new regulatory frameworks and renewed business and political

ethics. Digital Humanism is part of this broad, interconnected response. We recognise the cost of these conflicts, and we meet them with resilience, solidarity and a commitment to shaping a digital future that serves humanity.

What we want and propose

Our vision applies to individuals and institutions alike – across businesses, cities, states and continents: the pursuit of digital sovereignty and meaningful autonomy in an interconnected world. This sovereignty is not isolationist, but a foundation for resilient, inclusive and solidaristic societies. To move toward this goal, we identify key areas for immediate and sustained action.

We advocate for progress that is both ambitious and grounded – embracing innovation while advancing democratically accountable, socially beneficial regulation. Constructive engagement with the unknown must go hand in hand with building systems that serve the public interest.

Strengthen research, education, and public goods

Progress and constructive approaches are part of our agenda. This means innovation, societally beneficial regulation and the assessment of new developments from both individual and societal perspectives.

- **Support science and research** – financially and politically – as drivers of innovation and critical insight. Societies must protect and fund independent academic research, particularly cross- and transdisciplinary efforts that bridge technical, social and ethical domains.

- **Invest boldly in education** to strengthen both algorithmic literacy and critical thinking. Only a well-informed public can navigate and shape the digital age with agency and confidence.
- **Establish public digital infrastructure where necessary** – federated or centralised – particularly in areas like data governance, network services, quality journalism and information, and cybersecurity. Public control over critical systems is essential for democratic oversight, societal resilience and sovereignty.

Regulation and Innovation: both are essential

Regulation and innovation are not opposing forces – they are complementary. The era of unchecked, unaccountable digital development must come to an end. Effective governance is essential to ensure that technological progress serves the public interest.

- **Enforce existing legal frameworks**. A broad range of regulation – originally created for the non-digital world – requires better enforcement: from antitrust and consumer protection to liability, contract, and criminal law. While digital industries have unique characteristics, the concentration of power and wealth they produce echoes earlier industrial eras. Large technology companies are not above national law. We reject pseudo-legal regimes based on private terms of service and opaque click-through contracts. Corporations must be held accountable to act in line with democratic principles, consumer protection regulation, freedom of expression and act against societal harms caused by disinformation, manipulation, and systemic opacity.
- **Strengthen regulatory efforts targeting large technology companies** at both national and international levels. New

regulation needs to balance the dominance of powerful digital actors currently threatening fundamental democratic and societal values. Regulation must uphold a fair balance between individual rights, societal well-being and economic innovation and should be commensurable with the size and power of the digital actors. Current trends towards "de-regulation" need to be critically examined. While efforts to keep Europe a stronghold of innovation are welcome, deregulation must not be an excuse to lower our standards.

- **Affirm that concentrated power – whether economic, technological, or informational – has no place in a healthy democracy**. While the state's legitimate monopoly on the use of force remains essential, all other forms of dominance must be subject to rigorous oversight. Powerful actors – especially those controlling digital infrastructures, platforms, or data – require special regulation to prevent the erosion of democratic norms, ensure accountability and align their operations with the public interest. Unchecked dominance, in any form, threatens pluralism, distorts markets and undermines self-governance.

Global responsibility and institutional renewal

The revival of international cooperation is imperative. Without renewed global and regional accords, we risk falling into destructive prisoner's dilemma scenarios – where short-term national or corporate interests undermine collective survival. The digital age demands a new commitment to shared governance and common ground.

- **Advance global and regional compacts** on digital and AI governance, standards and taxation. These agreements must be shaped through open, value-driven debate about needs,

justice and power. The Global South must be given its rightful voice in shaping the digital order. Policy innovation and empowered international institutions are essential to overcoming zero-sum dynamics and building cooperative futures.

- **Address the runaway energy consumption of the digital sector**. The sustainability crisis cannot be solved by science and engineering alone. Climate and digital policies must be integrated and mutually reinforcing, with clear limits and strategic goals. A habitable planet is a precondition for any meaningful digital future.
- **Regulate autonomous weapons** – a moral and strategic imperative. These systems risk an uncontrolled escalation of violence. They must be placed under strict international agreements on restricted use, human oversight and non-proliferation. Their development cannot be left to geopolitical chance or corporate ambition.

Institutions for the digital age

Societal institutions must evolve in a dynamic interplay between the old and the new. We must co-develop our inherited democratic structures and emergent digital frameworks to uphold foundational principles such as the rule of law, freedom of expression, economic fairness and inclusive democracy.

- **Strengthen the institutional bridge between tradition and innovation**. Not every digital novelty should be embraced as a societal innovation. Equally, traditional democratic institutions – often public and under strain – require reform, renewed legitimacy and sustainable support.
- **Invest in public data governance**. Democratic states must enhance their capacity to manage digital infrastructure, data

and platforms in ways that are transparent, accountable and aligned with the public interest. Modern public management depends on it.

- **Rebuild truth and trust as foundational societal pillars**. This will require sustained investment in education, science, legal frameworks and shared social norms. Though this task seems daunting today, it is essential for societal cohesion and democratic resilience.

Freedom and collective agency

At the heart of Digital Humanism lies a commitment to freedom – individual and collective – the freedom to act, to speak, to dissent, to create and to shape the future together.

- **Protect individual rights and liberties**, including freedom of expression, privacy and the right to assemble. Negative freedoms must be upheld alongside positive rights – the rights to participate meaningfully in society and to have access to the conditions that make freedom real.
- **Support social innovation, civil society and the arts** as drivers of diversity, critical inquiry and cultural resilience. These actors are essential for imagining and enacting alternative digital futures. Their capacity and agency must be nurtured.
- **Develop robust theoretical and conceptual frameworks for action**. Clear analysis is as vital as political will. We need ideas that guide practice – frameworks that help navigate complexity, identify leverage points and inspire collective action.

No time left to wait

The signs are unmistakable. The harms of ungoverned digitalisation are no longer theoretical – they are real, widespread and deepening. From the erosion of truth to the undermining of democracy, from extractive business models to environmental degradation, the digital revolution is already reshaping our societies in ways we can no longer ignore.

We must act now. There is no justification for delay. The challenges are visible, the tools are available, and the stakes are existential. We do not start from zero: we stand on the shoulders of democratic institutions, legal traditions, social innovations and international cooperation. These foundations must not be dismantled by digital forces – they must be extended and adapted to meet today's realities.

We call on all those engaged in similar efforts – policy makers, academics, civil society, public institutions and committed actors in the private sector – to join forces. Only through solidarity, clear principles and coordinated action can we defend and revitalise democracy in the digital age.

Urgent and concrete demands:

- **Ban click-through contracts** as instruments of unilateral private rule. Terms of service that override basic rights and evade meaningful consent must no longer govern our digital lives. Legal clarity, fairness and accountability must replace exploitative fine print.
- **Enforce existing laws within the digital realm.** From antitrust and consumer protection to labour rights and liability, we already have legal frameworks that must be

applied without exception in digital contexts. The rule of law must not stop at the edge of a screen.

- **Safeguard and renew democracy for the digital era**. This means investing in research on digital democracy, developing new inclusive formats for civic deliberation and creating participatory infrastructures that ensure all voices are heard – especially those often excluded. Democratic societies must be proactive in defending themselves, not only through regulation, but by reinventing how collective decisions are made in a digital world.

The future is not a given – it is something we must shape. Digital Humanism is a call to reclaim this future, together, with determination, an optimistic attitude and democratic purpose.

Contact

Cite as:

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