

The Commercial in/for IR*: Authority and Legitimacy of Private Tech Companies

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Information and communication technologies increasingly permeate societies. Digital infrastructures, products and services are entwined into the daily lives of billions of people. A complex assemblage of public and private authorities and interests are invested in bringing about these transformations to our lives and societies. The role of commercial actors and social media platforms is crucial for this development. The aim of this workshop is to situate and analyse this transformation in/for International Relations (IR) through the vocabulary of International Political Sociology, especially of the kind initiated by studies of the role of commerce and private companies in IR.

At the core of the workshop lie important political questions concerning the changing role of private companies for society and the antecedent changes for our understanding of what we mean by 'public' and 'private' and who we consider legitimate provider of formerly public infrastructures and goods. These present conditions also force us to consider whether the maintenance of territorial and conceptual boundaries associated with national state sovereignty are compatible with the ubiquitous spread of digital technologies and the associated role of tech companies? Is the prevailing Westphalian world order, predicated on sovereign nation-states, being effaced or reinforced by the pervasiveness of digital? We want to discuss these questions against the background of changing technology and new possibilities digital and networked technology offer as well the impact these technologies have on empowering a few global ICT companies.

The workshop thereby brings together different disciplinary traditions such as IPS, IPE, Critical Security Studies as well as object-centered approaches and methodologies stemming from science and technology studies. In that way, the workshop fosters debate across multiple disciplinary traditions. We aim at preparing a collaborative publication stemming from this workshop such as a forum or a special issue. This workshop invites papers that investigate the politics and position of the commercial in the digital era. Possible contributions might include but are not limited to the following questions:

- The big five as unit of analysis: Between seduction and reduction
- The role of commerce in providing digital security services
- Reconfigurations of the public/private and national/international divide
- Theorizing the (international?) politics of Big Tech
- Methodological challenges researching the commercial in a digital era

* The title is based on the chapter by Anna Leander: 'Afterword: The Commercial In/For International Political Sociology'. In *Routledge Handbook of International Political Sociology*, edited by Xavier Guillaume and Pinar Bilgin. New York, NY: Routledge, 2017.