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unine
Université de Neuchâtel

International Workshop

**Crisis-driven Digitalization and its
Afterlives in Urban Governance**

28 May 2025

University of Neuchâtel

This workshop is organized by the team of the nccr – on the move research project [Data Politics and New Regimes of Mobility and Control During and After the COVID-19 Pandemic](#):

Ola Söderström, University of Neuchâtel
Sophie Oldfield, Cornell University
Petter Törnberg, University of Amsterdam
Jennifer Barella, University of Neuchâtel
Saskia Greyling, University of Cape Town

Workshop Description

Crises —whether economic collapses, pandemics, natural disasters, or political upheavals— have often been described as powerful catalysts for state interventions that might otherwise be considered politically unfeasible or socially unacceptable. COVID-19, 9/11, the ‘migration crisis’. These crises have motivated the roll-out of digital solutions, sometimes driven by public-private partnerships, a pattern that has recently been described as a ‘smartness mandate’ (Mitchell and Halpern 2023). But rather than following a standard pathway, crisis-driven digitalization is technologically, geographically, institutionally, and politically variegated. Therefore, this workshop has two aims. The first is to explore, beyond ‘shock doctrine’ (Klein 2007) narratives, the *diversity* of crisis-driven processes of digitalization at local governance level. The second is to interrogate the *afterlives* and varied impacts of crisis interventions.

Practical Information

The workshop will be held at the [University of Neuchâtel, Espace Tilo-Frey](#), Room R.S.38. Participation is free of charge but requires registering by [e-mail](#) until **19 May**.

Cover image: extract of an artwork by Martine Edard

- Halpern, O., & Mitchell, R. (2023). The smartness mandate. MIT Press
- Klein, N. (2007). The Shock Doctrine: The rise of disaster capitalism. Metropolitan Books/Henry Holt and Company

Wednesday, 28 May 2025

8:15 – 8:40

Welcome and coffee

8:40 – 9:00

Introduction to the workshop

Ola Söderström (University of Neuchâtel), Sophie Oldfield (Cornell University), Petter Törnberg (University of Amsterdam)

9:00 – 10:20

Crisis as response and opportunity

Stefania Milan (University of Amsterdam)

Crisis as catalyst, infrastructure as legacy: Post-pandemic governance by data infrastructure and the quiet rewriting of democracy

Orit Halpern (TU Dresden)

Planetary design: On the emerging logics of generative AI

10:20 – 10:40

Break

10:40 – 12:00

Digitalisation as crisis

Marie Gibert-Flutre (Université Paris Cité)

Seeing like a digitalizing authoritarian state: Lessons from urban Vietnam

Agnieszka Leszczynski (University of Western Ontario)

The aesthetic crises of the digital urban: The case of the dockless micromobility mess

12:00 – 13:00

Lunch

13:00 – 14:20

Inside the local State: practicing digitalization in times of crisis

Martina Klausner (University of Frankfurt)

Data-Transformations of Urban Mobility. Moving from chronic crises to sustainable futures

Sophie Oldfield (Cornell University) and Saskia Greyling (University of Cape Town)

From city bureaucrats to data activists: Digital governance as crisis response in Cape Town

14:20 – 14:40

Break

14:40 – 16:40

Digitalisation, resistance and rights claims in times of crisis

Aditi Surie (Indian Institute for Human Settlements)

Digital identities for platform workers: Two pathways in the crisis-driven need to digitize social protection

Jessica Pidoux, Núria Sánchez-Mira et Jean-Christophe Schwaab (University of Neuchâtel)

Reconstructing drivers' spatial and temporal work organisation through geolocation: Promises and pitfalls of using personal data for worker's rights in Geneva

Prince Guma (University of Makerere)

Digital scapes beyond capture: Appropriating data and AI for resistance in authoritarian times

16:40 – 17:30

Conclusions