Digital Future Society

Digital Future Society Summit 2021

Humanism in the digital age

Debating today for a better future

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Digital Future Society organized a **top-notch hybrid event** that took place within the **MWC Barcelona 2021, in collaboration with the Secretary of State for Digitalization & Artificial Intelligence (SEDIA), from the Government of Spain**. The event aimed to present possible courses of action to solve the great challenges that have arisen this **digital emergency** from a humanist perspective.

The current global crisis –involving health, societal and economic matters- has raised profound lines of questioning on the **future of humanity in the digital era**. Technology is driving disruptions, and public and private actors need to understand the meaning and consequences of these changes, and build effective dialogues to set new rules, frameworks, and aspirations to secure that technology works for people. These actions and priorities need to rely on an accurate understanding on the implications of the digital era for the future of humanity.

The event gathered key stakeholders from public administration, private sector, top-leading thinkers and activists, as the best way to work together on building a **more sustainable, equitable and inclusive digital agenda**.

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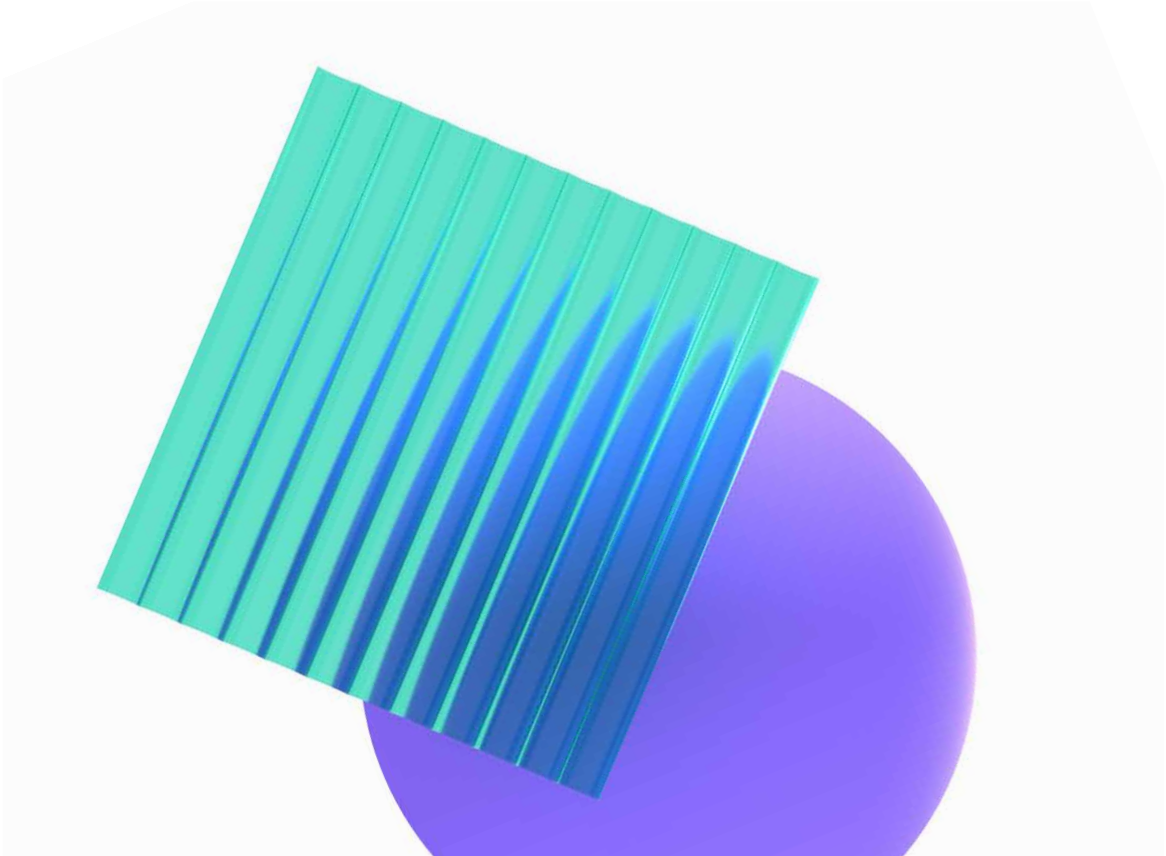

Welcome & Acknowledgments

Jaume Collboni, First Deputy Mayor for Economy, Labour, Competitiveness and Finance from Barcelona City Hall, kicked off his speech by welcoming and thanking everyone for being there in person that day. He also thanked the MWC and DFS for their collaborative effort in hosting this event, showing their solidarity in the commitment to Barcelona.

He remarked that Barcelona is proving to be the engine of Spain's economic and social reactivation, hosting conferences such as the Economic Circle, the Spain-Korea Summit, the Italy-Spain Forum, and now the Mobile World Congress and Digital Future Society Summit. He pointed out that Barcelona currently is –and plans on keeping it that way– the Digital Capital of Spain and one of the investment and talent attraction hubs in southern Europe.

He hightlighted that Barcelona has several digital competitive factors such as the desire to constantly learn, good connectivity, financial resources, technological knowledge, innovations, creativity, shared knowledge, and talent. Barcelona aims to be a space of equal opportunities, inclusion, and equality. In this sense, he recognised that the city has been fighting against the digital divide through different actions and inclusion policies.

Collboni stressed the current challenges ahead such as the digital divide, data privacy, and data governance framework, AI, the urban environment, or the digital green transition, and called for both public administrations and the private sector to lead policies to foster digital inclusion and ensure equal opportunities for everyone. Within this context, he believes that the Next Generation UE Recovering Funds will act as a great catalyser for digitalisation, inclusively accelerating the adoption of technology without leaving anyone behind. His final comments emphasised the leading position of Barcelona in addressing all those challenges, being committed to working towards a fair digital transition and a technological revolution with a human face, and hosting events such as this one.

Dialogue 1:

Human evolution and the future of a connected world

Carme Artigas, Secretary of State for Digitalisation & Artificial Intelligence at the Government of Spain, started with a welcome address thanking the Digital Future Society for organising this event in the framework of the MWC 2021 and introducing the dialogue by making some remarks. First, she pointed out that the current global crisis has raised profound lines of questioning about the future of humankind in the digital era. Secondly, she highlighted that technology is causing disruptions in our society and economy, and posed some questions such as: How will technology affect our future? Could we still aspire to human agency? In this context, she called for the assessment of urgent and neglected questions rising from a paradigm shift in human self-conception, and she explained that this session invites us to ask ourselves bigger questions to find the answers and the solutions that technology can bring.

Then, she introduced and presented the two dialogue guests: **Yuval Noah Harari**, historian, philosopher and best-selling author, and **Juan Luis Arsuaga**, Paleoanthropologist and author.

Carme Artigas opened the discussion by introducing the first topic, which is the future of humankind and the important breakthrough we are witnessing in science and technology. As an example, she mentioned different advances and technologies that seem to enable humans to evolve themselves: neural implants, gene editing, or the huge amount of data allowing us to develop algorithms that can influence our decision-making processes.

Juan Luis Arsuaga believes that the question about the future of humankind can be discussed on two sides: physically and mentally. He focused his answer on the physical point of view, stating that the natural selection is responsible for the human body's shape adaptation. He believes that we, humans, like ourselves as we are. That is to say, we like our species-specific morphology. Neural implants and prostheses define a future of cyborgs, and it seems this is where we are fated but, at the same time, our personal efforts are more and more dedicated to sculpting our bodies in gyms and fighting against baldness. In this sense, it seems we are still pursuing biological ideas rather than sophisticated technological capacities so, in his opinion, in the future, we will keep trying to be like the classic Greek sculptures: strong, flexible, and young.

Yuval Noah Harari stated that today we are still the same animals that we were thousands and thousands of years ago. However, he advocated that in a hundred or two hundred years from now, the Earth will be dominated by entities very different from us. The reason is that humans have always dreamed of upgrading themselves, but until now they didn't have the proper tools. Now, we are gaining the tools of biological engineering, not just to edit the DNA and change the body, but actually to break free from the limitations of organic biochemistry and start creating non-organic entities like cyborgs or AI. In this respect, he thinks many people are afraid and concerned about the dangers of these technologies, as the temptation is too big, and he believes there will be religious, ideological, and political movements that will make use of these technologies to try to create superhumans.

Carme Artigas pointed out that until now, these kinds of technologies weren't available. Now that they are a reality, she asked **Arsuaga** if he would renounce himself from the possibility of increased longevity or the possibility of having a better memory, just because he doesn't want to have an implant in his brain.

Arsuaga answered by stating that longevity is the dream of humanity. However, he doesn't think that to be easy to achieve, as humans are already a long-lived species but with really slow growth, since it takes 20 years to produce a human adult. Within this context, **Harari** affirmed that biotechnology moves more slowly than digital technology. Therefore, AI and Big Data will change the world much faster than biotechnology, bringing many changes to our society. He remarked that, in the next twenty years, the problem of immortality or gen editing won't be solved. However, AI will completely change our economy, our culture, or the job market, among others. Moreover, even though our emotions will remain the same, AI will also change human relationships. For example, in 20 years we might dispose of a Date APP that allows us to know in advance if someone is attracted to us, through the analysis of both persons (their body language, their facial expressions, their tone of voice, etc.), or an APP that allows parents to understand better their children through their behaviour. Hence, the big revolution of the next twenty years will not be immortality – as this will take much longer –, it will be the ability to hack human beings, meaning the understanding of a person better than this person understands itself.

Arsuaga added that for a product to be successful, it needs to be attractive to humans, as they are the end users. We are offered products that we are interested in. Hence, the offer adapts to people and not the opposite. However, **Harari** argued that in this context of unprecedented amounts of computing power, personal data, and biological knowledge, there could exist a situation where algorithms know people better than we do ourselves, allowing an external system to be able to hack a human's emotions changing its tastes and desires. Whoever owns these algorithms will have the power to manipulate humans. It's up to the public and the politicians to make wise decisions on how to use this technology for good and not for evil.

Being asked by **Carme Artigas** if he thinks that governments are currently playing a role as catalysts or setting the limits about the uses of AI, **Yuval Noah Harari** replied that he definitely thinks so, as this is the government's job. He also added three basic principles to make sure that these technologies are being used for good and not for evil: Firstly, whenever some entity or corporation collects data on someone, this data should be used to help people and not to manipulate them. Secondly, it should never be allowed for data to be concentrated in only one place. Finally, whenever surveillance of individuals is increased, the surveillance of governments and corporations must be increased simultaneously.

Carme Artigas then returned to the topic of biological evolution and specific applications of AI. In this context, she asked what will happen once we start talking about general AI and once the algorithms start becoming more intelligent than human beings. Until now, we have described ourselves, humans, as the most intelligent species existing on earth. So, if singularity comes, then how will we describe ourselves?

Arsuaga started answering by stating that this question has two sides: the technical and the ethical or moral question. Technically, it is very difficult to edit or upgrade human beings because of the way the genes' system work. As for the ethical aspect, and supposing that one day it's possible to produce a super-human, the first dilemma will be to agree on the "ideal" of the perfect human, as this neither exists today. He advocated that the idea of producing the perfect human is in itself a monstrosity, as we should not have a unique idea or model of what a perfect human is.

Following up **Arsuaga'**s opinion, **Harari** pointed out that people tend to forget past lessons and some of the most painful lessons of the 20th century , and people are going back to ideas that we thought were gotten rid of forever. Regarding the question of the rise of artificial intelligence,

he thinks that the key point is that we still don't really understand human consciousness. Hence, there should be more investment in the exploration and development of human consciousness, as this will be our best defence.

Taking the statement of Harari about not learning from the past, **Artigas** then asked what we have learned from the pandemic and how crises, in general, affect human evolution. In this respect, **Arsuaga** highlighted that, from a historical point of view, we have reached the end of the cycle of expansion, colonisation, and exploitation of natural resources, as there is no virgin continent to be conquered in order to make our lifestyles more sustainable. Hence, we are in a moment in history that never had happened before.

Being asked if technology can prevent the next pandemic, **Harari** explained that, for the first time in history, we are in a position to stop pandemics, as we now have the technology to stop a new virus from becoming a global pandemic. However, the problem is that we are not using all the tools we have wisely, as stronger global political leadership and global cooperation are needed to do so.

Finally, **Artigas** summarised both panellists' points of view: while **Harari** believes that technology can predict everything based on existing data patterns, **Arsuaga** believes that biology is bringing us complex systems where the causes and the effects are not yet discovered because there is no data available. With that, **Artigas** closed the session posing a final question: do you think that technology will ever be able to understand complex systems?

Arsuaga believes that people worship science as if it were a new religion, expecting miracles from it and preventing societies to grow up. He pointed out that technology is not going to solve all our problems and called for societies to grow up and confront the real problems that they are creating. Finally, **Harari** agreed with this statement, remarking that science and technology don't solve problems. Instead, they provide us with tools and it's up to politicians and society to make good use of these tools.

Dialogue 2:

Responsible technologies in a digital society

Mats Granryd, CEO of GSMA, started with a welcome address to all the participants and high-level speakers, congratulating the Digital Future Society, a program within the Mobile World Capital, for making this event possible and generating knowledge and awareness that leads to transformative actions to build an inclusive, equitable and sustainable future society in the digital era. He pointed out the willingness of GSMA to continue their mutual collaboration and collaborative actions with the Digital Future Society to keep bringing up the debate about technological humanism and technology as a driver of social wellbeing, and in order to help the digital industry understand the societal challenges that IT sectors can contribute to tackling.

He remarked that, with the pandemic, connectivity has become more important than ever as so has the mobile industry. Within this context, he also highlighted the three mobile industry fundamentals: challenge, champion, and care. Equally important, he remarked that the mobile industry is resolute in driving digital inclusion and their vision at GSMA is, precisely, to unlock the full power of connectivity so that people, industry, and society thrive.

The moderator of this dialogue, **Cristina Colom**, Director of Digital Future Society, kicked off the session on responsible technologies in a digital society by explaining how this summit, an event hosted at the heart of MWC Barcelona 2021, the flagship mobile industry and technology event, is a great opportunity to bring to the table a necessary debate on the role and the impact of technology in order to shape a more inclusive, fairer and more sustainable digital future where we should not leave anyone behind.

Colom pointed out that the world is shifting from analogue to digital faster than ever before, further exposing us to the vast promise and peril of new emerging technologies. Specifically, COVID-19 has exposed digital inequities globally and has exacerbated the digital divide. With a lot to gain from digitalisation, she believes the private sector can play an outsized role in the roadmap towards achieving further digital inclusion, however, she stressed that there is still much to be done.

Moving onto the session, Cristina Colom presented the panellists: **Renata Ávila**, International Human Rights and Tech Lawyer, Co-Founder Alliance for Inclusive Algorithms, Race and Technology & Fellow at Stanford University; **Lorena Jaume Palasí**, Founder and Executive Director at The Ethical Tech Society; **Markus Reinisch**, VP of Public Policy Europe, Middle East and Africa at Facebook and **Christoph Steck**, Director Public Policy & Internet at Telefónica.

Then, Colom started the discussion with a question addressed to both **Renata** and **Markus**, regarding the complex problem of the digital divide. She asked which areas are those that have not yet been tackled to progress towards digital inclusion, what the main challenges we are facing as a society are and, finally, where shall we focus.

Renata Ávila answered first, commenting on the challenge of the existing digital divide, where we need to consider that those who are not connected are being subject to a very centralised digital power. She thinks the first divide we need to tackle to design the future is the way technology is being deployed and designed which, unfortunately, is far away from the communities and the people affected by them. Hence, we need to bring and include real people like us in the design of technology. The second thing we need to tackle is closely connected to the first one, and it is the fact that in 2021 we are still talking about connectivity as the main divide. In this sense, she emphasised the need to be very ambitious and forward-looking, thinking of the big divide as the access to social innovation and working to shape the technology of the future outside the logic of the market.

Markus Reinisch's approach focused on the fact that the digital inclusion issue is not just a supply problem, it is a demand issue, as half of the people that are already connected are not tackling out the Internet. During the covid crisis, the demand for digital life and services has skyrocketed, but despite all of this several regions and communities have been left out from the digital life, and he strongly believes that if we do not tackle that, we won't be able to have an equal society. He thinks that Facebook, as a social platform, has the responsibility to address this issue. In this sense, he commented on the fact that one cannot improve what one cannot measure. Therefore, the first step Facebook did was to find out how big the digital divide actually is, creating the Digital Inclusion Index. Finally, he emphasised two actions to improve women's digital inclusion. The first one is safety, that is to say, to provide protection so they feel safe from any form of abuse on the Internet. The second one is to help female entrepreneurs to start and grow their businesses.

Cristina then invited **Christoph** and **Lorena** to illustrate some sorts of approaches through which we could address the challenges posed and to explain which strategies we should be exploring or fostering.

Christoph Steck believes that the year of the pandemic is the year we have become a truly digital society, and digitalization has been done in a few weeks when in other circumstances would have been done in several months or even years. Unfortunately, this process has been asymmetrical, and inequalities have been raised over the last year. He stated that the first thing we need to do is to provide and improve connectivity to people while shaping the right policies for that. Secondly, we need to work on the demand side as well and, lastly, we need to work on digital confidence, as people need to feel that it has become better, safer and more transparent.

Lorena Jaume Palasí started off by slightly disagreeing with the challenges posed as well as with the data that is being gathered to identify those challenges, as she believes that not everything can be identified and mathematics behind the data is only one part of the story. Apart from that, she advocated for a careful consideration of who has access to all that information gathered. The strategy behind inclusion needs to recognise the dark side of the data we are gathering and analysing through mathematics models, as there is no such thing as neutral rationality.

Cristina expressed her interest in deep diving into the role of the private sector, by asking **Christoph** and **Markus**, both of them representatives of global private corporates, what solutions their companies are providing so that technology is designed in a way that is trusted, trustworthy, responsible and useful. Also, she asked what else should their type of companies be doing to promote this digital inclusion.

Christoph Steck stated that, like Telefonica, they are doing a lot regarding connectivity. One of the projects he mentioned is a project in Perú, called "Internet para todos" ("Internet for all"), where they have innovated on different fronts and where the regulator has helped create the right conditions for the project to thrive in very remote areas.

Markus Reinisch explained that Facebook is working on the creation of an environment where the existing infrastructures can spread much further to more than 50% of the population. He also described how they can complement the infrastructure's existence, investing in some of the co-infrastructures like submarine cables. Lastly, they are helping to develop standards and new measures to create open-access technology thanks to partnerships such as the ones they have with Telefonica or GSMA.

After hearing what Markus and Christoph shared, **Cristina** gave the floor to **Renata** and **Lorena** by asking them what else is missing and what else could we be doing from a private sector perspective.

In this respect, **Renata Ávila** stressed the importance of not only making the Internet feel safer for women but also allowing them to build the platforms that will get us out of this centralised data structure model that we have today, as that would be the real inclusion. The problem though, a problem which the private sector is part of, is that the basic material needed to unlock the potential, the data, is locked and very centralised, excluding women from the possibility of creating parallel platforms.

Lorena Jaume Palasí remarked on the importance of the political design of who has access to infrastructures and how is this access provided and prioritised. This is one of the more subtle ways of creating and shaping society, and it is one of the reasons why infrastructure can be very exclusive and problematic. Hence, in the very end, the idea behind creating infrastructure with optimisation as a guiding principle is just wrong, as optimisation is about adapting to a stable situation assuming that the future is going to be just like the past, which is an incorrect assumption.

Cristina Colom closed the panel by saying we cannot afford a society where digitalisation may lead to social exclusion, limit professional opportunities, hinder access to public services or cause financial hardship. We must work hand-in-hand to shape this digital agenda that is more inclusive and benefits us all. Finally, she highlighted that Digital Future Society - as a global initiative - keeps on working on its roadmap to inspire the key stakeholders who have a say on shaping the digital agenda to take effective and impactful measures to face the digital emergency.

Dialogue 3:

Foundations for an EU leadership of global digital landscape

Opened by the Master of Ceremonies this session started with a video address from **Margrethe Vestager**, Vice-President for Europe Fit for the Digital Age and Competition, EU Commission, in which she shared some thoughts on Europe's digital transition and the role that Europe plays in the global digital landscape.

She remarked that the digital transformation we are living in today knows no borders and it concerns us all. The same question has arisen everywhere: how will digital tools change our lives? The position of the UE is that no matter how fast technologies evolve, they must always serve a human purpose, and therefore, technology must be trustable, and everyone must feel that they can be a part of our digital future society. She explained that, in May, the UE Commission launched an open public consultation on a comprehensive declaration of digital principles, open until 2nd September. She also emphasised the importance of these principles to be extended to digital education and digital skills for everyone to play an active part in society and democracy.

She mentioned that the Commission will propose a joint EU declaration later this year and that it should be our reference framework for Europeans to fully benefit from the digital citizenship. Finally, she highlighted that the UE - together with the United States - established a trade and technological council to cooperate on the key principles and policies that will define the transatlantic digital space. In this sense, we must also intensify our partnership with developing countries to close the digital divide and ensure the respect for human rights is two sides of the same coin.

Finally, **Nadia Calviño**, First Vice-President and Minister for Economy and Digitalisation of the Government of Spain, takes the floor and kicked off her keynote speech by sharing two thoughts complementing the ones that have already been shared throughout the event. The first one is a conclusion she took from this whole debate, and it is the need to have the right regulatory framework. That is why three years ago they started to act and draw up some rules in this regard, making Spain one of the hubs of these global debates, participating in a very active manner, while also setting up the Digital Future Society.

In this respect, Calviño mentioned that they have also been working on a charter of Digital Rights, with a very participatory process, where different sectors and profiles have participated in the drafting of the text through an open consultation and an expert group with multidisciplinary representation. At the time of the event, they were in the process of finalising the second public consultation. She stated that they wanted to be an important input for all future legislation as well as a value for the debate that is taking place at the European level.

Regarding the protection of digital rights, democracy, and the welfare state, she described the most recent development, which is the creation of a scholarship by different universities with the purpose of promoting this debate, works, investigations, and research on artificial intelligence and, specifically, democracy. This is a collaboration between the Spanish Government together with the Institute for Democratic Governance and The European University Institute.

Calviño advocated investing the money wisely. In this regard, Spain plans to invest around 7 billion euros through the Spanish Recovery Plan. It is a very ambitious plan, a transformative process with deep reforms that bring Spain on track in terms of modernisation, digitalisation, and fighting climate change, with these reforms and investments mostly concentrated between 2021 and 2023. She commented that the idea is to devote around 30% of the total investment in this first period to digitalisation. She emphasised that this, together with the rest of the programs Spain is launching, shows that the Spanish public sector aims to invest its money carefully, including the promotion of public partnerships and mobilising private enforcement with a mission: trying to solve today's human challenges.

Calviño concluded her speech with the motto "the future is unwritten", instead it will depend on the decisions we make now. In this regard, Spain and Europe are taking several measures to ensure that Europe continues to be the beacon of freedom, equality, and protection of human rights, guaranteeing that digitalisation is set up to build a better world and is providing the right global answers to the global challenges posed ahead.

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