



HUMANITIES & SOCIAL CHANGE

Centre at the University
of Cambridge



UNIVERSITY OF
CAMBRIDGE

A report prepared for the Humanities and
Social Change International Foundation

MARCH 2019



The University of Cambridge extends its sincere gratitude to Mr Erck Rickmers and the Humanities and Social Change International Foundation for the donation of £2,002,000 to support research on the humanities and social change.

This generosity enabled the establishment of the Centre for the Humanities and Social Change (CHSC) within the Centre for Research in the Arts, Social Sciences and Humanities (CRASSH).

Both projects taking place within CHSC – **Expertise under pressure** and **Giving Voice to Digital Democracies** – are now underway. The findings of the projects will inform our understanding of how information is acquired, shared and utilised, along with the subsequent implications for social change. Our researchers are also exploring how policy makers, academics, and leading figures in industry might collaborate to better engage with these issues at a time when communications technology is rapidly developing, and more people than ever have access to an overwhelming amount of information.

This report contains an introduction from CRASSH Director, Professor Steven Connor, project updates from Dr Anna Alexandrova and Dr Marcus Tomalin, and a table demonstrating expenditure on the projects so far.

This report is confidential and only for the information of the intended recipient



Introduction

by PROFESSOR STEVEN CONNOR

Professor Steven Connor is Director of CRASSH and Grace 2 Professor of English in the University of Cambridge. He is a Fellow of Peterhouse, Cambridge.

We are proud and excited to be hosting the Humanities and Social Change projects described in this report. What follows gives details of the postdoctoral teams that have now been assembled and describes the seminars and other public events developed by the projects, along with contacts established with policy experts and plans for future events. The Humanities and Social Change projects have developed considerable momentum and are now a headline part of the research being undertaken in CRASSH. The academic and postdoctoral teams are well integrated within our academic community, helping to potentiate invigorating cross-overs with cognate research on the technologies of knowledge and communication in CRASSH and beyond.

We are confident that the research of the teams will have considerable impact as it develops and we look forward to continuing to collaborate productively with the other centres in the Humanities and Social Change International Foundation.



ABOUT CRASSH

The Centre for Research in the Arts, Social Sciences and Humanities was established at the University of Cambridge in 2001 and is now one of the world's largest interdisciplinary research institutions. CRASSH has grown into an energetic research community of 40 researchers (not counting visiting and early career fellows) working on 11 major projects alongside a public programme involving over 200 events a year.

CRASSH exists to initiate and foster transactions between different forms of expertise and ways of thinking, deepening connections both within Cambridge and between Cambridge and the world more generally.



Expertise under pressure

An update from Principal Investigator

DR ANNA ALEXANDROVA

The team

- Dr Anna Alexandrova, Principal Investigator (above)
- Professor Michael Kenny, Co-Investigator (top right)
- Dr Emily So, Co-Investigator (second from right, top row)
- Dr Robert Doubleday, Co-Investigator (bottom left)
- Dr Federico Brandmayr, Postdoctoral Research Associate (third from left, top row)
- Dr Cléo Chassonnery-Zaïgouche, Postdoctoral Research Associate (bottom right)
- Hannah Baker, Research Associate (second on left, top row)
- Una Yeung, Project Administrator (first on left, top row)



Aims

What is the role of experts in understanding social change?

Expert judgment today is both intensely sought out, across private and public spheres, and also intensely criticised and derided with well-publicised failures to predict various high profile social and natural phenomena. Does the problem lie with the very idea that objective expertise about complex processes is attainable? Or does it stem from the way that expert judgment is developed and communicated? Or, perhaps it reflects the diminished standing of experts and expert knowledge in democratic and pluralistic societies?

To explore these questions, we propose three case studies in which expert judgment is both consequential and controversial. They are:

- the UK Government's emergency response,
- the use of agglomeration theory in city planning,
- and deep philosophical controversies about the possibility and objectivity of social science.

These cases differ in scope and focus but they enable us to analyse four distinct features of legitimate expertise: sensitivity to temporal scale, translatability in space, ambivalence about precision, and moral responsibility.

The overarching goal of the project is to establish a broad framework for understanding what makes expertise authoritative, when experts overreach, and what realistic demands communities should place on experts.

The Expertise Under Pressure project started in September 2018, with the PIs dedicating the first three months to recruiting staff, conducting seminars and building links with policy experts. More details follow.

Recruitment

Two Postdoctoral Research Associates (PDRAs) have been hired for the case studies on authority of social expertise and agglomeration. Drs Federico Brandmayr and Cléo Chassonnery-Zaïgouche were appointed beating a strong international field of applicants.

Dr Brandmayr is a sociologist of social sciences with experience conducting research and teaching at the Sorbonne University in Paris, among other institutions. His project investigates the phenomenon of “sociological excuse”, whereby social scientific explanations of bad actions and conditions (such as crime, poor health, or unemployment) are believed to provide excuses for people engaging in such actions or experiencing such conditions.

Dr Chassonnery-Zaïgouche is a historian of economics with degrees in economics, politics, and epistemology from University Paris 1 Panthéon-Sorbonne and the Institut d'études politiques de Lille and thriving research programme on the history and sociology of economic expertise especially as it relates to gender discrimination and court testimony. They join Hannah Baker, a PDRA named on the project, who is completing her PhD at the Engineering department in Cambridge using case studies to research the decision to demolish or adapt existing buildings and what lessons can be learnt from this.

Meetings and events

We have conducted seminars on the cutting-edge literature on expertise and its role in democratic polities. One seminar examined Susan Owens's *Knowledge, Policy, and Expertise* and another Alfred Moore's *Critical elitism: Deliberation, democracy, and the problem of expertise* with the author himself joining the team for a close and intense discussion.

We have commenced building links with policy experts. As part of this Dr Doubleday organised and conducted a one-day meeting of the Centre for Science and Policy's Policy Leaders Fellowship in Cambridge on Friday 23 November 2018, to discuss the question “What is progress?”, attended by fifteen senior UK Civil Servants and international policy leaders. Dr Alexandrova delivered remarks on measurements of happiness and well-being.

Dr Brandmayr started in January 2019 and since then, along with Dr Alexandrova has conducted seven interviews with senior scholars from Cambridge and London on the question of validity of social expertise. We also established connections with other related projects at CRASSH (including running a new cross-project reading group on case studies with the Quantity/Quality group). Dr Brandmayr delivered several talks and commentaries at research events in Cambridge and Paris. He is now organising an interdisciplinary workshop on ‘sociological excuses’ for September 27th 2019 (three eminent scholars from USA, UK and Europe have already enthusiastically committed to attending).

Now the project is properly underway with the team fully assembled. Ms Baker and Dr Chassonnery-Zaïgouche started in early March and have already devised a thorough and sophisticated programme of establishing and maintaining a social media presence via Twitter and blogposts. The team now has a thriving Twitter account with a quickly growing list of followers and a clear plan for academic and public engagement events for the rest of this academic year and the year to come.

Future plans

Our plans for the immediate future include:

- a joint seminar for end of March on the controversies surrounding climate science expertise with a leading figure in this field, Professor of Human Geography, Mike Hulme.
- Dr Alexandrova will be delivering an invited lecture “On the definitions of social science and why they matter” at the 16th International Congress for Logic, Methodology, Philosophy of Science and Technology in Prague in August 2019.



Giving Voice to Digital Democracies

An update from Senior Research Associate
DR MARCUS TOMALIN

The Team

- Professor Ian Roberts, Principal Investigator (top left)
- Professor Bill Byrne, Co-Investigator (bottom left)
- Professor Ann Copestake, Co-Investigator (top right)
- Dr Marcus Tomalin, Senior Research Associate (above)
- Dr Stefanie Ullmann, Postdoctoral Research Associate (bottom right)
- Una Yeung, Project Administrator



Aims

This exciting four-year project began on October 1st 2018. Its central aim is to explore the profound social changes induced by Artificial Intelligence (AI) and Information and Communications Technology (ICT) in modern digital democracies. It is exploring the following questions:

- What form should an applied ethics of AICT take?
- To what extent can social biases be removed from AICT?
- How can the dangers of dis/mis/malinformation in AICT applications be reduced most effectively?
- How can ethical AICT have a greater positive impact on social change?

Recruitment

Our first Research Associate (RA), Stefanie Ullmann, started working on the project on 1st November 2018:

<http://www.crassh.cam.ac.uk/blog/post/meet-the-researcher-stefanie-ullmann>

She has settled into her new role quickly, and has been an active participant in organising many of the events summarised below.

The deadline for applications for the second RA position closed on 31st January, with shortlisting and interviewing of the strongest applicants taking place in February.

Meetings

As emphasised in the original project proposal, the success of the project depends in part on us establishing good working relationships with interested parties in academia, government, and industry. Accordingly, we have organised numerous meetings of this kind, and have participated in several high-profile events involving a range of relevant groups:

- 19th October: there was a meeting with Noa Elefant-Loffler, the Public Policy and Government Relations Senior Manager at Google. We discussed all aspects of the project with her, and she offered to put us in contact with other key personnel at Google
- 12th November: there was a meeting with Jat Singh, Jennifer Cobbe, and other members of the Trust & Technology Initiative. We identified areas of mutual interest, and we agreed to collaborate on some joint academic research concerning the notion of decision provenance in the context of artificially intelligent communications technology. We also agreed to develop a syllabus for teaching technology and ethics to university students studying computer science and information engineering

- 16th November: Marcus Tomalin gave a talk entitled 'The Ethics of Artificially Intelligent Communications Technology' at the Computer Laboratory in Cambridge
- 28th November: Marcus Tomalin gave a talk about the project at the Winter Reception for Continuing Policy Fellows organised by the Centre for Science and Policy at the University of Cambridge. The event took place at the Royal Society, in London, and the audience included representatives from the UK Space Agency, the Trust and Security Unit of the European Commission, the Foreign and Commonwealth Office, and the Home Office, and the Nuffield Foundation
- 18th January: there was a meeting involving Benjamin Greenstone, the Private Secretary to the Minister for Digital and Creative Industries, Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport. We discussed the project with him in detail and he was extremely interested. He has offered to help us to connect with key figures in the newly-formed Centre for Data Ethics and Innovation.

Fourth-Year Projects

Bill Byrne, Marcus Tomalin, and Stefanie Ullmann have developed two fourth-year projects for the Engineering undergraduates at Cambridge, and these focus on topics that are a primary focus for Giving Voice to Digital Democracies. One concerns the automatic detection of offensive language and hate speech, while the other focuses on the automatic detection of inaccurate statements (for example, fake news).

The students can choose whether they wish to be considered for these projects. So far, the response has been overwhelming, with 40 students expressing an interest. Those sorts of numbers are unheard of, since usually the proposed projects attract around four to five people each.

The projects were allocated in the first two weeks of February, and the students will start developing software for the systems in October 2019. We look forward to providing updates on these in future reports.

UROPs

Given the huge level of interest in the fourth-year projects we developed, we are currently arranging to have two students working on automatic hate speech and fake news detection systems during the summer. These students will be part of the Undergraduate Research Opportunities Programme (UROP):

<http://to.eng.cam.ac.uk/teaching/urops>

Hopefully the two students who will have been assigned the fourth-year projects will be willing and able to undertake these UROP placements, to ensure continuity of system development.

Workshops

The plans for the first project workshop at the end of March 2019 have been finalised. The invited speakers are all from government, academia, and/or industry:

- Dr Marcus Tomalin: Giving Voice to Digital Democracies
- Baroness Olly Greender: House of Lords Select Committee on Artificial Intelligence
- Dr Melanie Smallman: University College London, Alan Turing Institute
- Dr Margaret Mitchell: Ethics and Natural Language Processing, Google
- Professor Jeroen van den Hoven: Professor of Ethics and Technology, Delft University of Technology
- Dr Emily Bender: Natural Language Processing, University of Washington
- Dr Adrian Weller: Machine Learning, Centre for Data Ethics and Innovation

Hackathon

We have started developing plans for a 'Hate Speech Hackathon' that will either take place in September 2019, or January 2020. This three-day event will bring together computer scientists and linguists, to enable them to focus on developing methods and approaches for the automatic detection of hate speech.

Stefanie Ullmann and Marcus Tomalin had a preliminary meeting with Dr Steven Wingett from the Babraham Institute who recently organised the very successful Cambridge Bioinformatics Hackathon. His input informed the project team's discussions and enabled us to refine our plans considerably.

Project Branding

Stefanie Ullmann and Marcus Tomalin have designed a project logo that will be used on all websites, posters, workshop booklets, merchandise (including t-shirts and cups) relating to the Giving Voice to Digital Democracies project:

The main design principles were as follows:

- the icon indicates, visually, the project's focus on technology and language



- it also complements the other main logos associated with the project, with the green background using exactly the same colour as the Foundation's logo for the Cambridge Centre, and the square shape referencing the existing CRASSH logo:





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Dear
World...

Yours,
Cambridge

Contact:

Professor Steven Connor

Director - CRASSH

Centre for Research in the Arts, Social Sciences
and Humanities

Alison Richard Building

7 West Road

Cambridge

CB3 9DT

Tel: + 44 (0)1223 765275

Email: skc45@cam.ac.uk

<http://www.crassh.cam.ac.uk/>

Aaron Westfall

Director of Development

University of Cambridge Development
and Alumni Relations

1 Quayside, Bridge Street

Cambridge

CB5 8AB

Tel: +44 (0)1223 766116

Email: aaron.westfall@admin.cam.ac.uk

www.cam.ac.uk/YoursCambridge