Vienna Manifesto on Digital Humanism

A plain-language version for everyone

Why this manifesto matters

The inventor of the World Wide Web, Tim Berners-Lee, has warned that "the system is failing." Digital technologies bring huge opportunities, but they also create serious problems: A few companies dominate the web. Social media helps spread hate and extremism. You only see online what you agree with. And surveillance of our everyday lives is growing.

Digital change is reshaping our societies and even our idea of what it means to be human.

We believe that technology must serve people, not the other way around. To make sure this happens, we need not just technical innovation, but also social and political innovation. And we need broad public involvement, not only experts in labs or boardrooms.

This manifesto is a call to think and act together about how we want digital technologies to shape our future.

What is happening to our world?

Digital technologies – data, algorithms, and massive computing power – are changing almost everything: How we talk to each other, how we work, how economies function, how politics works, and even how science and the humanities operate. These changes:

- Create and destroy jobs
- Make some people very rich and leave others behind
- Help and harm the environment
- Shift power away from citizens and public institutions towards companies and machines.

For many tasks, machines are already faster and more accurate than humans. They can sometimes draw conclusions that look like intelligent reasoning. This is a revolution. It raises a simple but profound question: How do we keep human dignity, freedom, and fairness at the centre?

Technology is never neutral

Digital technologies do not “just happen.” They are created by people making choices: What to optimise, whose problems to solve, which business model to use, what values to build into the system. These choices may be hidden inside code and algorithms, but they are still there – carrying values, economic interests, and assumptions about how the world should work.

Our guiding idea is simple: We must shape technologies according to human values and needs, instead of letting technologies shape humans.

We call this approach **Digital Humanism**. It describes, analyses, and – most importantly – influences how technology and humans interact. It has the goal of a better, more just society that fully respects human rights.

Core principles

Here are the key principles of Digital Humanism:

1. **Technology should strengthen democracy and inclusion**
   Digital technologies must support democratic participation and make societies more inclusive, not more unequal. We should use them to reduce existing gaps, not widen them.

2. **Privacy and free speech are non-negotiable**
   Privacy and freedom of expression are essential for any democracy. Social media platforms and online services must be designed so they protect privacy, allow people to express their opinions safely, and support high-quality information instead of manipulation and harassment.

3. **We need clear rules for algorithms and AI**
   Laws and regulations must be developed through public debate, not only in expert circles. These rules should ensure that software and algorithms are fair, transparent, accountable, and accurate enough for the tasks they perform.

4. **Break up unhealthy tech monopolies**
   When a few companies control key digital infrastructures and markets, they can distort competition and limit innovation. Regulators must be ready to act against such monopolies and not simply assume that “the market will fix everything.”

5. **Humans must stay in charge of decisions that affect rights**
   Decisions that can seriously affect individual or collective human rights – for example in policing, welfare, hiring, or healthcare – must not be left

entirely to machines. Humans must remain responsible and accountable for these decisions, with automated systems only providing support.

6. **Work across disciplines, not in silos**
   Computer science alone cannot solve the challenges of the digital age. We need collaboration between technology, social sciences, the humanities, and other fields to understand and shape the impact of digital systems.
7. **Universities have special responsibility**
   Universities are places where new knowledge is created and critical thinking is trained. They must take their responsibility seriously in researching digital technologies and educating future professionals with a strong ethical and societal awareness.
8. **Researchers must openly engage with society**
   Academic and industrial researchers should not work in isolation. They should discuss their work with the public, reflect on the wider consequences of their research, and still defend freedom of thought and science.
9. **Practitioners must recognise their responsibility**
   Engineers, designers, product managers, and all who build digital systems share responsibility for their impact. They must understand that no technology is neutral and consider both potential benefits and harms.
10. **We need new kinds of education**
    Future engineers and technologists should be trained not just in technical skills, but also in ethics, social issues, and human-centred design. Educational programmes must combine insights from the humanities, social sciences, and engineering.
11. **Teach digital literacy and ethics early**
    Education about computer science, AI, and their social impact should start as early as possible in school. Young people need both technical skills and an understanding of the ethical and societal questions involved, so they can later participate consciously in shaping digital society.

A call to action

We are at a crossroads and must act now.