AI FORA
artificial intelligence for assessment

First general meeting

Technik- und Innovationssoziologie, Simulationsmethoden

TISSS LAB
Technology & Innovation Sociology / Social Simulation Laboratory

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WP1

Empirical social research

1st General Partner Meeting
5-7 April 2022
Johannes Gutenberg University
Mainz (JGU), Germany

JGU

The empirical social research in WP1 is characterized by the following:

- Comparative framework

  The focus of WP1 is studying the use of AI systems in specific domains of social goods provision in different countries.
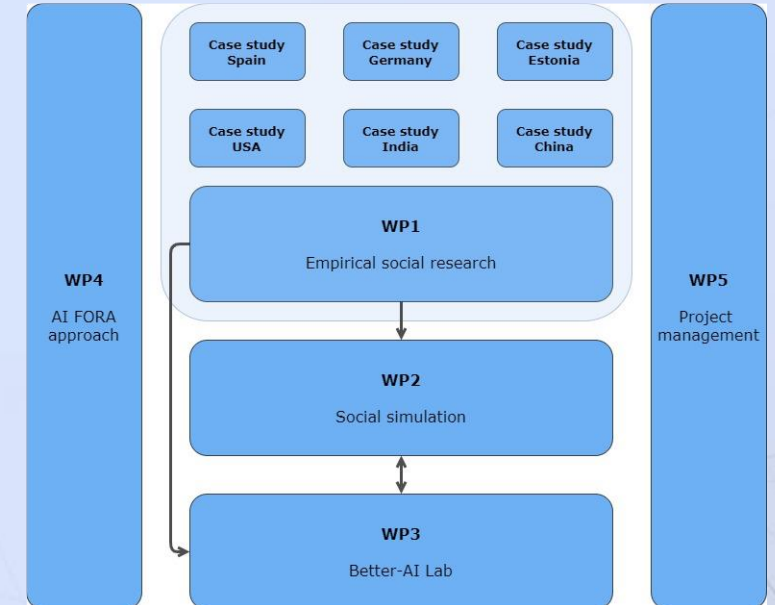
- Dual teams

  (Almost) every case study is conducted by a social and a computer science team from their respective perspectives.

- Methodological triad

  Methodologically, the empirical research is approached by a triad: participatory workshops, interviews & empirical field work, discourse analysis to monitor public discourse

The most obvious change is AI FORA's expansion

- AI FORA now has empirical case studies in 10 or 11 countries.
- The set of originally six countries was expanded with (proposed) case studies in:
  - Iran, Italy, Mexico, Nigeria and Ukraine
  - However, unclear how the Ukrainian case study can continue
- This coincided also with adjustments in the comparative framework
- More on the rationale tomorrow

What has changed?

The second most obvious change is that research has started

- First reports of AI FORA case studies have been created.

- The domains of the case studies have been further investigated.

- First results have been achieved.

- First challenges have appeared.

This has started a process of realigning the AI FORA research approach.

The biggest challenge is and was Corona

- Empirical research relied heavily on working from home
- Meetings have been postponed, hybrid online/offline work has become the default
- Potential stakeholders are difficult to reach, access to interview partners, infrastructures and other items of empirical research is restricted due to many people working from home
- Recruiting for workshops is complicated

Nonetheless, (some) workshops took place and after a first postponement the general meeting is taking place.

(Some) topics that have appeared in the empirical research

- Margin of discretion

In many cases social goods provision is organized according to a set of laws. The assessment of people is conducted according to these laws. The operational domain of AI is therefore often just within the "margin of discretion" that administrators have to evaluate potential recipients.

- The clash of administrative and technological work

An existing, implemented AI system within a domain of social goods provision does not necessarily mean that the AI system is used. Implementation of AI or digital systems in public administration includes work and administrative processes within public administration.

(Some) topics that have appeared in the empirical research

- Corporatist and non-corporatist case studies

Some of the case studies are embedded into corporatist structures involving complicated interactions of institutionalized stakeholder interactions (public administration, churches, unions, parties, civil society organisations, specialised semi-private companies, NGOs, policy makers, etc.).

- Different objectives of AI & digitalisation

AI seems to be primarily a tool that is used in order to make processes more efficient. However, this is a weak statement. It can mean to make existing administrative processes cheaper, more reliable, etc., it can mean to expand the scope of administrative processes or something inbetween.

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(Some) topics that have appeared in the empirical research

- Diversity

In some of the case studies internal diversity of the country plays a big role, in others it does not. Likewise, different milieus, regions or demographics may differ in their value attitudes (more on that tomorrow).

- Regulation

AI FORA's core topic, the AI use in public distribution of social goods based on an assessment, has become the subject of EU regulation. The EU commission has published a proposition for a new EU regulation that classifies AI use and connects the risk assessment of these systems to (yet unknown) clearance processes or bans them.

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The topics and challenges that arise require adjustments of the AI FORA approach

- Pandemic contingency

Research methods must be implemented that allow the continuation of empirical research in periods of extended virus spreading. This creates a double challenge: In conducting empirical research just online, important aspects get lost. Having to cancel interviews, workshops and other physical meetings, however, is as bad.

- Methodological adjustments, changing foci

Some of the foci of WP1 are adjusted e.g., regarding stakeholders, administrative processes, legal background, etc.

Questions, comments and other matter