



# REMAKING CITIZENSHIP



Welfare Reform and  
Public Sector Digitalization

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# Remaking Citizenship

## Welfare Reform and Public Sector Digitalization

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# Abstract

Since the early 1990s, advanced capitalist states have increasingly turned to digitalization as a new means of welfare state restructuring and public sector reform. Often narrated as a simple, technical solution to complex political and institutional problems, digitalization has risen to the top of policy agendas in Europe and beyond. Yet, so far, little research has been conducted on the impact and consequences of this political instrument for welfare institutions and citizenship. Not least due to an intellectual division of labor, research on digitalization has largely tended to work in isolation from citizenship studies and research on the welfare state. This dissertation sets out to remedy this gap by presenting a study of welfare reform and public sector digitalization from a citizenship perspective. Doing so, it seeks to unpack how and in what ways citizenship has been remade in the transition to an increasingly digitalized public sector. The dissertation attends to these questions through a case study of digitalization reforms in Denmark, a country that has been continuously promoted as an international frontrunner in terms of digitalizing its public sector. Through five separate research publications, the dissertation examines the remaking of citizenship as a simultaneously political, institutional and technological set of processes stretching back to the early 1990s. The publications investigate the discursive construction of citizenship in national policies, the local governance of citizens in municipal citizen service centers and the exclusionary patterns that are currently emerging in and around contemporary ideals of citizenship. In doing so, the dissertation documents a series of interlinked political, institutional and structural shifts connected to digitalization reforms. First, it shows how new normative expectations have been constructed by policymakers as to the proper forms of citizen-subjectivity. Framing citizens as inherently active, self-sufficient and responsible beings, policymakers have increasingly come to maintain that all citizens are or must be digital and self-serving. Second, it demonstrates how these political discourses have paved the way for new legal mechanisms, technological infrastructures and institutional configurations. Zooming in on municipal citizen service centers, the dissertation foregrounds how new disciplinary practices are coming into being, premised on transforming citizens that do not conform to the dominant normative expectations. Third, it details how these processes have served to uphold and produce both new and old patterns of exclusion. Most substantially, the dissertation argues that citizens already at the fringes of the welfare state are being further excluded with the turn towards increasingly coercive forms of policy implementation. Taken together, the dissertation argues that these different forces must be grasped as part of a *layered*

*political strategy seeking to significantly alter the relation between the Danish state and its citizens.* By demonstrating these changes, the dissertation contributes with original knowledge to existing research on citizenship and welfare state reform. It does so, empirically, by showcasing the concrete changes taking place to citizenship in an era of intensified digitalization and, theoretically, by pushing for the integration of several areas of research that have so far remained disparate. The dissertation thus gives a forceful argument for why scholars of citizenship and welfare restructuring can only ignore digitalization at their own peril.

# Resumé

Avancerede kapitalistiske stater er siden 1990'erne i stigende grad begyndt at anvende digitalisering som en måde at omstrukturere velfærdsstater og reformere offentlige sektorer. Digitalisering er kommet øverst på politiske dagsordener i både Europa og resten af verden, og er ofte blevet set som en simpel, teknisk løsning på en række komplekse politiske og institutionelle problemstillinger. På trods af disse udviklinger findes der dog til stadighed kun få undersøgelser af, hvordan og på hvilke måder dette nye politiske område har været med til at forandre borgerskab og velfærdsinstitutioner. Forskning om digitalisering har alt for ofte haft en tendens til at arbejde isoleret fra forskning om borgerskab og velfærdsstaten, hvilket ikke mindst skyldes en bestemt intellektuel arbejdsdeling. Formålet med denne afhandling er at arbejde på tværs af disse kløfter samt præsentere en undersøgelse af offentlig digitalisering med fokus på borgeren som politisk figur. Afhandlingen ser således på hvordan og på hvilke måder borgerskab er under forandring gennem et casestudie af digitaliseringsreformer i Danmark; et land, der ofte er blevet italesat som en international frontløber i forbindelse med digitaliseringen af dets offentlige sektor. Gennem fem forskningspublikationer undersøger afhandlingen, hvordan borgerskab er under forandring som følge af en række både politiske, institutionelle og teknologiske processer, der strækker sig tilbage til begyndelsen af 1990'erne. Publikationerne undersøger den diskursive konstruktion af borgere i nationale politikker, den lokale styring af borgere i kommunale borgerservicecentre samt de former for eksklusion, der opstår i og omkring nutidige borgeridealer. Dermed dokumenterer afhandlingen en række sammenhængende politiske, institutionelle og strukturelle skift. For det første viser den, hvordan nye normative forventninger om de "rigtige" former for borgerskab er blevet konstrueret af nationale beslutningstagere. Borgeren er blevet italesat som et aktivt, selvstændigt og ansvarligt individ, der i stigende grad skal være digitalt og selvbetjent. For det andet viser afhandlingen, hvordan disse politiske diskurser har banet vejen for nye juridiske mekanismer, teknologiske infrastrukturer og institutionelle logikker. Ved at se specifikt på kommunale borgerservicecentre, viser afhandlingen, hvordan der er opstået nye former for disciplinering, hvis formål er at transformere borgere, der ikke passer ind i de dominerende normative forventninger. For det tredje beskriver den, hvordan disse processer har været med til både at skabe og opretholde nye og gamle former for eksklusion. Borgere, der allerede er på kanten af velfærdsstaten, ekskluderes yderligere, idet tvang i stigende grad er blevet en præmis for gennemførelse af digitaliseringsreformer. Samlet set argumenterer afhandlingen for, at disse forandringer skal forstås som en del af en

samlet og lagdelt politisk strategi, hvis formål er at omdanne forholdet mellem borger og stat. Ved systematisk at undersøge disse forandringer udgør afhandlingen et nyt bidrag til forskning om borgerskab og velfærdsstatens udvikling. Afhandlingens bidrag består dels i empirisk at vise, hvordan borgerskab er i forandring som følge af stadigt intensiveret digitalisering og dels i teoretisk at bygge bro mellem ellers isolerede forskningsfelter. Dermed giver afhandlingen et stærkt argument for, hvorfor forskning om borgere og velfærdsstaten ikke længere kan ignorere digitalisering som et nyt og vigtigt politisk område.

# Acknowledgements

It has been said before, but it bears repeating: No thesis is an island. This also holds true for the present work, which has benefited immensely from the intellectual support of a number of people – both friends, family and colleagues. Thanks, first of all, to my supervisor, Morten Hjelholt who has also continued to push my thinking to its limits, generously offering suggestions and advice on hundreds of drafts and much more. Thanks to the welfare professionals that agreed to be interviewed for this project. I have learned much from our encounters and the concerns voiced in our conversations have often stuck with me. Hopefully, some of these are reflected in the present work. Thanks also go to my family for having steadfast support for my different projects, though I am sure it has not always been clear what exactly it is I have been doing. My wonderful parents deserve a special place here for all they have done and continue to do. This work has the mark of their continued presence in unforeseen ways, channeling the intellectual abstractionism of my father and the social indignation of my mother.

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# Publications

The dissertation contains the following five publications:

1. Schou, J. & Hjelholt, M. 2017. Digitalizing the Welfare State: Citizenship Discourses in Danish Digitalization Strategies from 2002 to 2015. *Critical Policy Studies*, 1-20 (online first). <https://doi.org/10.1080/19460171.2017.1333441>
2. Schou, J. & Hjelholt, M. 2018. "Rolling out Digitalization: Hegemonies, Policies and Governance Failures." In Schou, J. & Hjelholt, M., *Digitalization and Public Sector Transformations*, pp. 59–83. Cham, Switzerland: Palgrave Macmillan.
3. Schou, J. & Hjelholt, M. 2018. Digital Citizenship and Neoliberalization: Governing Digital Citizens in Denmark. *Citizenship Studies*, 22:5: 507–522. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13621025.2018.1477920>
4. Schou, J. & Hjelholt, M. accepted for publication. Digital State Spaces: State Rescaling and Advanced Digitalization. *Territory, Politics, Governance*.
5. Schou, J. & Pors, A. in review (minor revisions). Digital by Default? Citizenship and Exclusion in Digitalized Welfare. *Social Policy & Administration*.

As part of the research conducted for this dissertation, the following works have also been published (not included):

6. Schou, J. & Hjelholt, M. 2018. *Digitalization and Public Sector Transformations*. Cham, Switzerland: Palgrave Macmillan.
7. Hjelholt, M., & Schou, J. 2018. The digital divide and citizen classifications: the inscription of citizens into the state. In M. Ragnedda, & G. Muschert (Eds.), *Theorizing Digital Divides*, chapter 13, pp. 173-185. London: Routledge.
8. Hjelholt, M. & Schou, J. 2017. *Den digitale borger [The Digital Citizen]*. Copenhagen: Hans Reitzels Forlag.



9. Schou, J. 2017. Hvordan skabes et alternativ? Om det radikale demokratis mulighedsbetingelser. *Politik*, 3(20): 138–153.
10. Hjelholt, M. & Schou, J. 2017. Digital Lifestyles Between Solidarity, Discipline and Neoliberalism: On the Historical Transformations of the Danish IT Political Field from 1994 to 2016. *tripleC: Communication, Capitalism & Critique. Journal for a Global Sustainable Information Society*, 15(1): 370-389.

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# **Part I. General Introduction:**

## **Background, Themes and Contributions**

This first part provides an overview of the research project undertaken in this dissertation. It does so by laying out the background for the present study, explicating key theoretical concepts and situating the research in its wider historical and scholarly context. The methodological process involved in collecting and analyzing empirical material is furthermore described and reflected upon. In the final half, the publications contained in the second part of the dissertation are presented. Outlining core arguments and cross-cutting themes, this culminates in a unified description of the remaking of citizenship currently taking place at the intersection between welfare reform and intensified digitalization. In sum, this first part explicates this dissertation's background, themes and contributions to international scholarship.

## *Prologue: a scene from the political system*

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On the 13<sup>th</sup> of April 2012, a new bill was proposed in the Danish Parliament (*Folketinget*). In this first out of three readings, members of the parliament were to discuss what was to become the so-called “Law on Digital Post” (“Bekendtgørelse af lov om Digital Post fra offentlige afsendere”). If the law were to be passed, all citizens above 15 years would by November 2014 be expected and legally obliged to communicate with the Danish public sector using a digital mailbox called Digital Post. Forms of communication between citizens and the public sector that had previously relied on paper forms, physical letters or interpersonal forms of communication would, as a consequence, be moved to online platforms. Citizens would be expected to act as active and self-provisioning individuals, capable of using standardized platforms to not only receive communication from the state but also serve themselves across a range of welfare domains. Far from an accidental political path, the implementation of this law would be “the final goal of 15 years of digital strategies for the Danish public sector” (Henriksen, 2015, p. 145).

This first reading of the bill was marked by a high degree of consensus across the political spectrum. Jacob Jensen, Member of Parliament (MP) and spokesperson for Venstre (the largest liberal-conservative party in Denmark at the time), argued that “digitalization plays a completely natural key role when it comes to developing and modernizing and rationalizing public services; it contributes to the interplay between public institutions; and, of course, it also eases the communication.”<sup>1</sup> In viewing digitalization as a supposedly natural tool for modernization, Jensen channeled the dominant political vision at the time: namely that, as a still developing area of policymaking and institutional change, digitalization should provide a powerful means of rationalizing public sector institutions by simultaneously cutting expenditure and creating easier means of communication. Despite this commonly held consensus, concerns were raised by some members of the parliament as to the *mandatory* component involved in the law. Indeed, some suggested that already vulnerable groups of citizens might become further excluded with the increasingly pervasive use of digital technologies. However, these concerns were quickly swept aside and, as a whole, there were few genuine attempts to seriously question the law’s viability. It was, for all intents and purpos-

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<sup>1</sup> Based on official sources from the parliament, see:

<http://www.ft.dk/samling/20111/lovforslag/1160/beh1/forhandling.htm#speak0> All quotes translated by author.

es, seen as a necessary step in wider transformations of the Danish public sector: if the already proactive digital agenda was to be pushed even further, this law *had to* be put in place. In his closing statement, Bjarne Corydon, then Minister of Finance from the Social Democratic party (*Socialdemokratiet*), captured the consensual setting, arguing that (in his view):

there is a broad majority in favor of reforming and future-proofing the welfare society and use digitalization as a tool in this context. The digitalization of the communication between citizens and the public sector is first and foremost about saving money, but, at the same time, it is also about giving a good and more flexible service than before. Therefore, the digitalization of the public sector is, for me, a necessary task that has to release resources, and I, of course, listen to the diverse comments made about these resources, but basically you might say the principle is that what is saved is earned – and isn't this something that gathers broad support from the Parliament?

On the 6<sup>th</sup> of June 2012, the bill passed and by November 2014 it was put into effect. Danish citizens were from then on legally expected to communicate through digital platforms and serve themselves in the context of welfare services. From this point on, the political development has only moved in one direction, as digital self-service technologies have been rolled out across an increasingly diverse range of areas related to welfare provision and social benefits. The Danish public sector and welfare state have taken a number of steps towards making citizenship become almost completely digital.

## 1. Introduction

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This dissertation is dedicated to understanding the contemporary changes taking place to citizenship within advanced capitalist states. More specifically, it attends to how governmental digitalization has become a new form of *political intervention* (Bejerot & Hasselbladh, 2013), currently deployed across Western welfare states as a means of reforming public sectors. Through an in-depth case study of reform efforts in Denmark, combining historical policy analysis with empirical investigations in local welfare agencies, the dissertation unpacks the specific ways in which digitalization has been used to reform public sector institutions and change the relation between the Danish state and its citizens. Doing so, it argues that not only have these reforms meant the construction of new normative ideas as to how citizens should and ought to act, they have also implied the coming of new legal mechanisms, technological infrastructures and institutional logics. When taken together, these different

forces have combined to create a new form of political intervention aimed at reforming citizenship in significant and as of yet undescribed ways. This has been premised on fostering active individuals who are capable of serving themselves through digital platforms in connection to a growing array of welfare areas. It has meant profound institutional changes in local welfare agencies, as frontline workers have to relate to and govern citizens in new ways. And it has served to create new forms of exclusion, as citizens unable or unwilling to use standardized governmental platforms face new barriers for inclusion in the welfare system. By charting this remaking of citizenship, the dissertation provides important new knowledge on the shifting relations between citizens and welfare states. It adds to our current understanding of the changes taking place to citizenship by systematically demonstrating how digitalization has become an important form of political intervention.

Documenting these changes, the dissertation adds to our existing knowledge of citizenship and welfare reform. Since the 1980s and 1990s, citizenship has undergone profound political and institutional changes across advanced capitalist states. As a response to a series of both internal and external conditions – including the new capitalist economy that emerged following the breakdown of the Fordist-Keynesian compromise in the 1970s, intensified cultural and economic globalization, demographic developments and the legitimization crises of the welfare state – seemingly distinct “welfare regimes” (Esping-Andersen, 1990) have come to remake the contents and meaning of citizenship in the last three decades. These changes have been broadly premised on fostering active, self-reliant and flexible individuals who are capable of taking on risks, responsibilities and duties previously handled by formal organizations (Halvorson & Jensen, 2004; Goul Andersen et al., 2002, 2005; Hvinden & Johansson, 2007; Jessop, 2002; Clarke, 2005; Clarke et al., 2007). Political scientists and sociologists have variously dubbed this as the coming of “active citizenship” (Jensen & Pfau-Effinger, 2005; Sivesind & Saglie, 2017), “citizen-consumers” (Newman, 2001, 2005; Newman & Clarke, 2009), “activating welfare” (Larsen, 2005; Lessenich, 2003; 2015), “competition states” (Jessop, 2002; Hirsch, 1995; Cerny, 1997), “workfare states” (Peck, 2001; Handler, 2004; Brodtkin & Marston, 2013) or the gradual rollout of “neoliberalism” as a new means of governance and state restructuring (Whitworth, 2016; Brown & Baker, 2013; Dean, 1999; Peck, 2010; Peck & Tickell, 2002; Brenner, 2004; Olsen, 2018).

While interpretations certainly differ as to the precise mechanisms, extent and outcome of these changes, researchers generally agree that in contrast to the form of citizenship promot-

ed by welfare states in the period after the Second World War, citizens have increasingly been cast as self-sufficient, autonomous and responsible beings. Ideas of national cohesion, solidarity and universal welfare *rights*, central to the welfare states erected in the 1950s and 1960s, have gradually been shifted towards active *duties* and *obligations* (Dwyer, 2000, 2003; Boje, 2017). Citizens have been expected, and sometimes forced through more or less coercive means, to be self-reliant and self-providing citizen-subjects. Labor-market policies, in the form of activation and workfare programs (Peck 2001; Handler, 2004; Wacquant, 2009; Lodemel & Moreira, 2014), meant to turn supposedly passive and unemployed citizens into employable jobseekers, provide some of the clearest examples of this transition. However, the underlying turn to active and individualized forms of citizenship, seeking to foster a “governmentality of the self” (Clarke, 2005; Dean 1999), constitutes a shift that can more or less be found *across* the various domains of social and public policy, including eldercare, healthcare and more (Brown & Baker, 2013). It can be said to constitute what Jensen and Pfau-Effinger (2005) have called *the new face of welfare*.

This dissertation sets out to deepen our current understanding of the political and institutional changes taking place to citizenship in our contemporary age of advanced neoliberalism (Peck & Tickell, 2002). It does so by focusing on an area of political intervention and welfare state reform that has so far remained largely neglected in the international literature, namely digitalization. Since the 1990s, advanced capitalist states have increasingly turned to information and communication technologies (ICTs) as a means of delivering state services to citizens and restructuring public sector institutions (Henman, 2010, 2013; Adler & Henman, 2005; Dunleavy et al. 2006; Fountain, 2001, 2008, 2014; Margetts, 1999; Margetts & Dunleavy, 2013; Weerakkody & Reddick, 2013). They have done so not least in pursuit of more efficient, flexible and self-providing forms of welfare provision, delegating administrative tasks previously handled by welfare professionals to citizens themselves (Henman, 2010; Crow & Longford, 2000). While the coming of electronic forms of governance stretches back to the 1950s (Margetts, 2009), with the gradual arrival of electronic archives and computers, digitalization has intensified as a form of political intervention in the last fifteen to twenty years. This has given way to what has been labeled as new forms of *digital citizenship* (Mossberger et al., 2006, 2008; Mossberger, 2009; Missingham, 2009), premising citizenship on *access to, use of* and *participation through* digital platforms (Isin & Ruppert, 2015, 2017). So far, however, both political scientists and sociologists have remained decidedly silent about the changes taking place to citizenship in the intersection between welfare restructuring and



digitalization. Indeed, research concerned with welfare state restructuring and citizenship has largely failed to take account of digitalization as a genuine area of political intervention, encompassing a combination of policymaking discourses, regulatory changes and institutional developments. Furthermore, the research that *has* examined the changing conditions of citizenship in contemporary welfare states has often focused on either labor market policies or more traditional areas of social policy, paying less (if any) attention to how citizenship is being remade through the increasingly pervasive use of technologies.<sup>2</sup> As a consequence, little is known as to the impact of digitalization as a new means of political intervention in European welfare states, particularly in the context of citizenship. This represents a major gap in the research literature, and it is precisely this gap that the present dissertation seeks to fill.

The premise of this dissertation is that it is simply not possible to understand the nature of citizenship in our contemporary era without taking the intensified use of digitalization reforms into account. If we wish to comprehend current changes taking place to citizenship and welfare states, we have to decipher the role played by digitalization as a genuinely political and regulatory set of policies, politics and practices. *The purpose of this dissertation is thus to investigate and understand the political and institutional consequences of digitalization as a means of welfare restructuring from a citizenship perspective. Using Denmark as a productive case study, capable of showcasing the contemporary remaking of citizenship at the crossroads between welfare restructuring and digitalization, the dissertation seeks to produce new knowledge on the contents and structures of contemporary forms of citizenship. Doing so, the dissertation aims to showcase how*

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<sup>2</sup> There is a very large body of sociological and political science literature dedicated to the nexus between welfare reform and citizenship. This includes edited volumes such as *Citizenship and Welfare State Reform in Europe* (Bussemaker, 1999a), *The Changing Face of Welfare: Consequences and Outcomes from a Citizenship Perspective* (Goul Andersen et al., 2005), *Citizenship in Nordic Welfare States* (Hvinden & Johansson, 2007), *Promoting Active Citizenship: Markets and Choice in Scandinavian Welfare* (Sivesind & Saglie, 2017), monographs like *Social Citizenship and Workfare in the United States and Western Europe* (Handler, 2004), *Responsible Citizens* (Brown & Baker, 2013), *The Moral Neoliberal: Welfare and Citizenship in Italy* (Muehlebach, 2012), *Creating Citizen-Consumers* (Clarke et al., 2007) and *Welfare rights and responsibilities: Contesting Social Citizenship* (Dwyer, 2000), notwithstanding the classic contributions of scholars like T. H. Marshall (1992 [1950]) and Ruth Lister (1990). None of these contributions, however, touch upon the role of digitalization in *particular* or technological change in *general*. While some of this may be attributed to the still emergent nature of these areas, it can also be seen as a reflection of a particular intellectual division of labor, relegating the use of technologies to an essentially administrative or technical (rather than political) issue. In this context, Paul Henman's *Governing Electronically: E-government and the Reconfiguration of Public Administration, Policy and Power* from 2010 still stands out as one of the most sustained and successful attempts to move beyond this impasse.

*digitalization has become an increasingly powerful means of political intervention that warrants serious scholarly attention.*

The dissertation is a *thesis by publication*. It contains this first part as well as five separate research publications. These five publications, included in the second part, explore different theoretical and empirical entry-points in order to deal with two overarching *research questions*:

- (1) How and in what ways has digitalization been used as a means of political intervention in the Danish welfare state?
- (2) What are the consequences, both political and institutional, of such interventions for citizenship?

While the publications all investigate these questions, they simultaneously mobilize different theoretical concepts and target diverse empirical settings. Some examine the discursive construction of citizenship in national policies, while others look into the impact of such policies in action by zooming in on municipal welfare institutions. In this sense, the included publications both build on each other *and* stand as separate contributions to specific scholarly conversations. As they have been written over the last two years, they reflect shifting empirical foci and theoretical interests. Moreover, as each publication has targeted specific journals and audiences, they enter into a series of interdisciplinary conversations, spanning such diverse fields as political science, political economy, policy studies and political geography. In this sense, there are both empirical similarities and substantive conceptual differences between each publication. The purpose of this first part is to tie these separate publications together and offer a somewhat broader argument. This is specifically done by linking the included publications *conceptually* to the idea of citizenship and *historically* to the shifting forms of the welfare state. As a consequence, a substantive portion of this first part is taken up by a discussion of the idea of citizenship followed by an attempt to draw out cross-cutting arguments emerging across the separate publications. By doing so, the dissertation contributes to our current understanding of the ways in which citizenship is being reconstructed at the beginning of the 21st century. It pushes for a greater scholarly attention around the consequences and implications of digitalization for current welfare regimes. And it details the political and sociological dynamics of citizenship under contemporary conditions of intensified governmental digitalization.

## 1.1. Why Denmark? Why now?

The dissertation focuses on citizenship as it is being produced at the nexus between welfare state restructuring and digitalization in Denmark. In this context, Denmark is taken to be an instructive and empirically productive case, exhibiting and exemplifying trajectories found in other advanced capitalist states. Taking Denmark as a case study suggests that the present investigation sheds light on political dynamics and changes in a broader political and institutional perspective. The underlying assumption in this context is that if properly contextualized and historically placed, case studies can provide important insights to social phenomena beyond the scope of the specific case itself. In *Five Misunderstandings About Case-Study Research*, Bent Flyvbjerg (2006) dismantles some of the most common prejudices in the social sciences: namely that case studies cannot be used for generalization, are subjectively biased and difficult to translate into theory-building. Instead he argues that if accurately placed, case studies can offer powerful, context-dependent and situated outlooks on wider research problems. An important point in this regard concerns the choice of cases. Flyvbjerg (2006) demarcates between four overall types of cases (based on information-oriented, rather than random, selection strategies): (1) *extreme/deviant* cases, (2) *maximum variation* cases, (3) *critical cases* and (4) *paradigmatic* cases. Table 1 outlines the main purpose of each of these strategies.

Table 1. Types of case study selection

Types of selection	Purpose
EXTREME/DEVIANT CASES	Obtain information on unusual cases, which can be especially problematic or especially good in a more closely defined sense.
MAXIMUM VARIATION CASES	Obtain information about the significance of various circumstances for case process and outcome.
CRITICAL CASES	Obtain information that permits logical deductions of the type, "If this is (not) valid for this case, then it applies to all (no) cases."
PARADIGMATIC CASES	Develop a metaphor or establish a school for the domain that the case concerns.

SOURCE: Flyvbjerg (2006, p. 230), modified slightly by author.

The case study being undertaken in this dissertation is best understood as an *extreme case study* insofar as Denmark represents a fairly unique combination of historical and political developments. Extreme is not meant in a normative sense but is simply used to imply that the particular case represents an unusual combination of social, political and historical circumstances. What, then, is so "unusual" about Denmark?

Starting out, significant institutional and political economic changes have taken place in the Danish welfare state since the 1990s (Pedersen, 2011; Petersen, Petersen & Christensen, 2013, 2014; Olsen, 2018). Not unlike the state transformations taking place across European welfare states (Genschel & Seelkopf, 2015; Cerny, 1997), structural reforms and modernization programs have sought to recreate and significantly repurpose the meaning and contents of citizenship in Denmark. Moving from a universalistic welfare model, crafted in the aftermath of the Second World War, towards an increasingly competition-oriented and market-premised system, citizenship has changed from a primarily *rights-based* and *communitarian* model to an increasingly *obligations-based* and *individualized* regime (Pedersen, 2011; Petersen, 2014, 2016). As stated above, activation policies constitute one of the most prominent examples of these changes, as these have attempted to transform unemployed citizens from passive welfare recipients into active citizen-subjects, ready to be “catapulted” into the labor market (Larsen, 2005). However, the turn to “active citizenship” has not been limited to labor market policies but represents a wider discursive, institutional and political turn in welfare provisioning altogether (Jensen & Pfau-Effinger, 2005). Against the universal ambitions of the post-war state, the new “competition state” (Pedersen, 2011) is no longer concerned with alleviating class differences, sheltering citizens against the market’s cycles of boom and bust or including all parts of the social spectrum. Instead, it seeks to actively mobilize citizens as part of global competition, foster personal responsibility and punish those failing to meet the new demands imposed by the labor market (Petersen, 2016).

These changes have in many ways been pushed further through the coming of digitalization as a political instrument used to refunctionalize public sector institutions and recreate the meaning of citizenship.<sup>3</sup> Denmark has since the 1990s actively pursued digitalization as an area of policymaking and public sector reform (Jæger & Lofgren, 2010; Jæger & Pors, 2017; Johansson, 2004; Hjelholt & Schou, 2017b). While the use of electronic technologies can be traced back to the 1960s, where the first electronic archives were implemented in the Danish public sector, policy efforts really took off in the 1990s alongside the rise of the internet and new digital technologies. This has, amongst other things, meant that public sector institutions have increasingly been pushed to adopt digital systems within their internal adminis-

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<sup>3</sup> ‘Refunctionalization’ is taken from the work of Bob Jessop (2002). Used in an institutional context, it is quite literally taken to mean that the function of existing (welfare) institutions is changed as part of new ‘state projects.’ Against discontinuous terms such as ‘dismantlement’, ‘withdrawal’ or ‘retrenchment’, ‘refunctionalization’ draws attention to the dialectic of continuity and discontinuity that is often at the heart of welfare state restructuring and institutional change.

trative practices in order to become more flexible and efficient in the eyes of policymakers (Schou & Hjelholt, 2018a). It has also implied the implementation of a whole range of digital self-service technologies, replacing existing relations between welfare professionals and citizens with standardized, online platforms (Hjelholt & Schou, 2017b). Indeed, welfare services that previously required paper forms or interpersonal contact have increasingly moved online, making citizens responsible for filling out forms, requesting services and taking on administrative duties previously handled by welfare professionals.

In the context of such digital public services, Denmark has often been construed as being a frontrunner or leader (Schou & Hjelholt, 2018a), scoring some of the highest marks in international benchmarks like the European Union's *Digital Economy and Society Index* (DESI). This index has been formed as part of the EU's *Digital Single Market* strategy and is intended as a "composite index that summarizes relevant indicators on Europe's digital performance and tracks the evolution of EU member states in digital competitiveness."<sup>4</sup> Denmark has scored the highest marks since the index' launch in 2014. In doing so, the country has been classified as the leading European nation in terms of the indicators constructed by the Union. As a recent report by the global consultancy firm, *Accenture*, stated, "Denmark is a highly advanced digital economy and scores well in comparison with other EU nations across a range of metrics. It is ranked first in the EU on the Digital Economy Index [*sic*] with 93% of the Danish population online regularly" (Accenture, 2017, p. 5). This marketing of Denmark as an example of a highly digitalized country should not mislead us to uncritically partake in these endorsements. Ranking exercises exhibit and enact their own politics of numbers and tell us less about the actual "performance" of particular countries and more about the means of classification that are currently used to categorize and judge what is counted as valuable. If classifications like the DESI can be used for anything, it is as an expression of what is currently counted as the bleeding-edge of public sector digitalization.

Taken together, these intersecting lines between welfare restructuring, institutional changes and the roll-out of digitalization reforms make Denmark a highly interesting and somewhat unusual case. In contrast to comparable welfare states, such as Sweden and Norway,<sup>5</sup> poli-

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<sup>4</sup> Cf. <https://ec.europa.eu/digital-single-market/en/desi>

<sup>5</sup> As a recent comparison between Denmark, Sweden and Norway concludes: "The continual shift to digital communication in societies is apparent in the three Scandinavian countries. Digital post solutions have been implemented to push communication

cymakers in Denmark have by far pushed the digital agenda the furthest. Here, digitalization has not just been pursued as a matter of rationalizing public sector institutions, but also as a powerful political means of reforming the contents of citizenship altogether (Hjelholt & Schou, 2017b; Schou & Hjelholt, 2018b). The turn towards mandatory communication with the public sector, codified in the *Law on Digital Post* introduced in the prologue, represents an in many ways unusual trajectory. Danish policymakers and politicians have turned to coercive, top-down and centralized forms of policy implementation in order to push national initiatives across the welfare state. The dissertation thus argues that using Denmark as a specific case may shed light on some of the transformations within citizenship taking place in the intersection between welfare reform and digitalization. Unusual as it may be, the Danish path is continuously perceived and promoted as a role model of digitalization and policy initiatives. Looking at this country can help us understand how and in what ways a historically strong welfare state, rooted in universalistic ambitions, have come to be transformed and remade through the use of digital technologies in the past two to three decades.

## 1.2. How and what? Approach, arguments and contribution

This dissertation is, as stated above, a collection of works already published or in review for publication in international scholarly journals. These publications combine historical policy studies, concerned with unpacking the formation of digitalization from a discursive perspective, with institutional analysis of municipal welfare institutions, examining the institutional handling and governance of citizens. Combining these perspectives, the dissertation is concerned with understanding digitalization as a form of political intervention by looking at the different ways in which this area has been constructed and developed by national policymakers over time, as well as the impact and consequences of such policies in local, welfare institutions. The dissertation seeks to investigate changes to citizenship through a multi-level setup that does not fall prey to a lopsided analysis, over-privileging either discursive, institutional or historical trajectories. At the very least, this has been the intention of the pre-

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between public institutions and citizens/business to such digital channels. There are similarities between the three countries, but as has been shown in this paper, there are also significant differences. All three countries are driven by the idea of a 'digital first choice', which means that citizens should primarily use digital means for their communication with the public sector. But when such a 'choice' is made mandatory, as in Denmark, there is actually no choice. In Norway, there are policy and infrastructural arrangements to make the use of digital post as a first, but still real choice. In Sweden, there are only non-coercive policy declarations about digital first choice. An infrastructure for digital post has been rolled out, but the strategy is to let public instructions and external users to choose freely how to communicate" (Jansen, Berger & Goldkuhl, 2016, p. 13).

sent work: to combine different empirical and theoretical resources in order to shed light on the transformations of citizenship from a political sociological perspective.

The main empirical resources for this study include governmental documents, policies and strategies related to public sector digitalization on a national level, as well as interviews with welfare state professionals in seven Danish municipalities. This combination of data has allowed me to, on the one hand, map the shifting discursive constructions of citizenship as these have unfolded within national policy documents since the early 1990s. Doing so, the dissertation suggests, provides a powerful entry-point for understanding and deciphering the ways in which various normative conceptions of citizenship have been discursively constructed and upheld. On the other hand, interviews with frontline workers within municipal welfare institutions, more specifically within so-called citizen service centers (*Borgerservice* in Danish), provide an important window into how national ideas are handled, negotiated and experienced on the ground floor of the welfare state. They help showcase how national reforms pave the way for new institutional roles and relations between the state and its citizens. The methodological choices and analytical process will be described further in Section 4. For now, these remarks are simply provided in order to give an overall idea about the empirical project being undertaken here. Fusing historical and contemporary, national and local, political and institutional, empirical and theoretical vectors, the dissertation seeks to shed light on how citizenship is being transformed with the gradual roll-out of digitalization reform as a simultaneously political, institutional and structural set of processes.

Based on the publications contained in the second part of the dissertation, as well as the cross-cutting themes that emerge between these, the dissertation seeks to make two overall contributions to the existing literature on citizenship and welfare state restructuring. These contributions can, in a somewhat simplified form, be said to be both empirical and theoretical in nature and will be explicated below.

#### 1.2.1. Empirical contributions

The dissertation makes an empirical contribution to existing research on citizenship and welfare state restructuring by examining the political and institutional implications of digitalization from a citizenship perspective. This is a topic that is yet to receive systematic attention, despite the increasingly pervasive use of digitalization as a policy instrument in Western states. Zooming in on Denmark as a particularly instructive case, the dissertation

charts the formation of a new form of citizenship that spans political, spatial and structural properties. In so doing, it contributes to political sociological dialogues on the current state and future of citizenship.

The empirical contribution presented in this dissertation touches upon three interlinked arguments. First, the dissertation empirically demonstrates how the current remaking of citizenship has relied on certain normative ideas and discourses produced by policymakers and politicians over the last two decades. Unpacking the discursive construction of citizenship in national digitalization policies, the dissertation showcases how Danish citizens have increasingly been expected to be self-serving and *digital by default*. This has simultaneously meant that “non-digital” citizens – or citizens otherwise difficult to fit within the dominant political norms – have been discursively relegated to a second-tier status. This is, the dissertation argues, a historical development that takes place from the early 2000s and partially reverses the normative ideas of citizenship found in the 1990s. In contrast to digitalization policies back then – which emphasized social inclusion, equality and non-coercive forms of implementation as important ideas – policymakers have since the early 2000s downplayed these concerns. Second, based on qualitative studies in citizen service centers, the dissertation showcases how these reforms have meant that welfare professionals have to relate to and govern citizens in new ways. Citizen service centers, previously responsible for providing an official entrance point to the public sector for *all citizens*, have increasingly become a place for citizens that do not conform to the normative rationalities imposed by the state, needing help, guidance and tutoring (according to the state) on the use of digital self-service platforms. The dissertation argues that these seemingly soft forms of governance are in fact new disciplinary practices, intended to transform citizens so as to fit them within the normative ideas produced by policymakers. Third, the dissertation argues that studying such welfare encounters foreground how digitalization reforms both reinforce and reproduce existing modes of exclusion and social stratification. Citizens already at the fringes of the welfare state become further excluded, as they find themselves unable to use the standardized technological infrastructures provided by the state. This leads to new forms of state intervention and can have very real material repercussions insofar as citizens can risk losing their welfare benefits.

Taken together, the dissertation thus argues that digitalization reforms turn out to be far from merely technical in nature, as they are inherently bound up with the production of cer-



tain forms of citizenship. Indeed, the dissertation argues that these empirical findings document the coming of a new and fairly coherent mode of citizenship that combines political, spatial and structural components into a unified political strategy. Premised on making citizens able to act as digital, self-sufficient and active beings, this form of citizenship has been formed through a combination of shifting policy discourses, legal mechanisms, technological infrastructures, institutional logics and exclusionary patterns. Charting this remaking of citizenship provides important clues as to overall transformations of citizenship and welfare states. It showcases how digitalization serves to remake citizenship in important ways that are yet to be described and understood by research. Section 6 will discuss more in-depth how these empirical contributions add to several contemporary conversations on citizenship and welfare state reform.

### 1.2.2. Theoretical contributions

The dissertation provides a theoretical contribution to existing literature on citizenship and welfare state restructuring insofar as it attempts to join several bodies of literature that have so far remained isolated. Throughout the publications contained in this dissertation, there is an on-going effort to build new empirical and theoretical bridges between research concerned with citizenship and welfare reform as well as scholarship concerned with the gradual intensification of digitalization as a means of political intervention and public sector reform. The dissertation argues that these areas have tended to be studied in almost complete separation from each other. While research on citizenship and welfare reform has bracketed digitalization as a merely technical issue (Chini, 2008; Hall, 2008; Löfgren & Sørensen, 2011), scholarship on so-called e-government and digital era governance has largely proceeded as if in a political and historical vacuum (Henman, 2010, p. 9). The theoretical argument offered by this dissertation is that these distinctions are no longer feasible. Traversing and integrating insights from several bodies of literature, there is a need to recognize the profoundly political foundations and implications of digitalization reforms for the contents and structures of citizenship. Not only does this imply placing this latter area within its proper political and historical context, it also means dispelling with overly normative ideas about what the intersecting lines between citizenship and digitalization might imply. All too often, scholarship has proceeded as if the current changes taking place to citizenship should be considered inherently positive and productive developments, signaling the coming of a more informed and engaged citizenry. Such accounts, this dissertation argues, fail to grasp the ways in which citizenship is politically produced, institutionally handled and structurally asymmet-

rical. Rather than assuming digitalization and citizenship to already imply something substantive, the dissertation argues that scholars ought to pull their political mechanisms apart in order to tease out their proper significance. This requires attentiveness towards the ways in which political reforms and discourses are produced, institutional spaces are reconfigured and patterns of exclusion are upheld. It is my suggestion that a political sociological approach, willing to enter into a productive dialogue with adjacent fields and scholarship, provides a powerful backdrop for this. In sum, the dissertation pushes for a historically grounded approach for understanding and investigating contemporary modalities of citizenship. If we want to examine contemporary forms of citizenship, we have to place the figure of the citizen within its specific historical, geographical and political context. Rather than assuming any substantive meaning of this concept to already be in place, there is a need to locate the specific set of politics and practices that goes into the making of citizens.

#### **Box 1. Digitalization as concept, process and practice**

Throughout this dissertation, the notion of “digitalization” is used to denote a historically shifting area of political reform linked to the institutional structures of the welfare state and its public sector. Indeed, the dissertation focuses on digitalization as a *comprehensive form of political intervention* (Bejerot & Hasselbladh, 2013, p. 1365) concerned with introducing and using digital technologies within and across the public sector. Such interventions comprise the formulation of political discourses, programs, regulations, plans and normative expectations, often formed “from a longer period of debate and various attempts to influence public services” (ibid.). They are, moreover, always “mediated through a number of steps from the government or government agencies to the local and regional levels” (ibid.) and cannot be attributed to single individuals or actors. It is not possible to predict the contents and outcomes of any political intervention in advance, as these must be studied through concrete empirical analyses. Digitalization, as any other form of political intervention, must be grasped as a historically layered, politically contested and institutionally embedded set of political practices developing over time.

By framing digitalization in this way, the dissertation simultaneously distances itself somewhat from the terminology employed by a number of existing accounts. Here, ideas such as ‘digital era governance’ (Dunleavy et al., 2006), the ‘virtual state’ (Fountain, 2001, 2008) and ‘e-government’ (Margetts, 1999) have often been dominant conceptual tropes. As stated in the main text, these concepts have tended to work in isolation from scholarship on welfare reform and citizenship. As I have argued at length elsewhere (Schou & Hjelholt, 2018a), these have also tended to have a normative undertow: not only has the use of digital technologies been seen as inherently productive and efficiency producing, the political and political economic dimensions of these have also been more or less obscured. Indeed, as Chini (2008, p. 46) has argued, the “tendency to understand ICT policy as unambiguous and technical has led to an underestimation of its political nature and implications.” Löfgren and Sørensen (2011, p. 299) have pointed to something similar, suggesting that “there has so far

been a strong technical bias in the literature on e-government towards the design of integrating different systems, whereas the public administration and policy research of the processes has [...] been almost completely absent from the field.” To my mind, assuming ‘e-government’ or ‘digital (era) governance’ to already mean something substantial, irrespective of political path-dependencies and political economy, is analytically infeasible. It clouds our ability to understand and unpack the genuine changes taking place to citizenship and the capitalist state in the current era of intensified governmental digitalization. It might even, as Barbara Crow and Graham Longford (2000) already argued in 2000, contribute to further depoliticizing digitalization, reproducing “the powerful mythologies perpetrated in state and corporate representations of digital technology and the information society” (p. 208-209).

Focusing on digitalization as a form of political intervention, the dissertation devotes less space to investigating the working of particular technologies and platforms. Indeed, whenever the dissertation invokes the term digitalization, it does so *not* in any technical sense, but as shorthand for the complex political efforts contained in reform processes. This is not to imply that specific technologies or platforms should be seen as neutral or simple mediators of political logics. As Henman (2010) has demonstrated, there is a need to recognize the agency of digital technologies and the ways in which such agency shapes (and is shaped by) public sector institutions and citizen interactions. The dissertation recognizes the importance of these arguments, yet also proposes a slightly different focus. Turning to digitalization as a form of political intervention, with an emphasis on its impact on citizenship, it hopes to showcase the historical developments, normative underpinnings and institutional consequences of this area. This is suggested as a *complementary*, rather than opposed, mode of analysis to the one developed by Henman (2010, 2012).

## 2. Theoretical backdrop: citizenship as guiding concept

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This dissertation revolves around three core concepts: citizenship, welfare state restructuring and digitalization. Out of these, citizenship is taken to be the main concept framing the different empirical engagements and discussions undertaken in this dissertation. To understand this notion, particularly within the context of welfare states and policymaking, the dissertation argues that we need to be attentive to its historical legacy, while also putting it into contact with the shifting forms and political economy of the welfare state itself (on this, see e.g. Bussemaker, 1999b; Johansson & Hvinden, 2007b). What it means to be a citizen within shifting historical conjunctures and geographies is deeply tied to the function and institutional foundations of the state. It is from this basis, the dissertation will argue, that digitalization should and can be approached: not as a merely technical issue but as a political instrument currently being used to remake the contents of citizenship in profound ways. This section dives deeper into the conceptual links between citizenship and welfare reform by

providing a sustained reflection on the first of these concepts. It does so by focusing on citizenship as an analytical category, political construct and contested concept.

## 2.1. Citizenship as a contested concept

The idea of citizenship can be traced back to Ancient Greece (Athens, Sparta and Rome) in the 6<sup>th</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> century B.C. (Dwyer, 2003; Heater 1999). Citizenship, in this early form, was highly selective and limited to the male part of the population. In its most simple form, being a citizen implied a particular commitment to engage in the governmental and legal functions of the political community (Heater, 1999). Aristotle famously elaborated an idea of citizenship that emphasized communal bonds, civic duties and virtue as integral to the well-being of this community. In the subsequent Roman Empire, this “Athenian” legacy was carried on (Dwyer, 2003, p. 18), not least due to the work of Cicero, and later came to constitute the foundations for what is today thought of as the civil republican tradition of citizenship. Citizenship thus has a long and complex history, yet the interest in this concept has waned and oscillated over time. Relegated to a somewhat minor position in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, the concept came back to prominence within social scientific literature by the 1980s and 1990s. Indeed, there was a veritable resurgence in interest in citizenship as an academic concept at that point in time. As Will Kymlicka and Wayne Norman (1994) argue in their often-cited article from 1994, there “has been an explosion of interest in the concept of citizenship among political theorists. In 1978, it could be confidently stated that ‘the concept of citizenship has gone out of fashion among political thinkers.’ Fifteen years later, citizenship has become the ‘buzz word’ among thinkers on all points of the political spectrum” (p. 352, in-text citation omitted). This explosive interest has not ebbed out since then, as citizenship continues to constitute an important social scientific concept. This has meant that a large body of scholarly interventions and resource have sought to understand the meaning and contents of this category (Isin & Turner, 2002; Isin & Nyers, 2014; Kivisto & Faist, 2007; Mouritsen, 2015; Boje, 2017). Yet, it is somewhat more unclear whether this has implied greater analytical precision or if the concept has (as warned by Kymlicka & Norman in the early 1990s) become inflated, used to denote an ever-expanding list of social, political and cultural phenomena.

Not unlike other key concepts in political thought, citizenship remains an often contested and multifaceted idea (Clarke et al., 2007; Lister, 2002; Susen, 2010). In the everyday language used by politicians, media figures and public intellectuals, the notion is often used to

denote a fairly imprecise array of phenomena. Within the scholarly literature there is also an overflow of different competing perspectives. In this context, Ruth Lister (2002, p. 61) observes the following:

Citizenship is one of those slippery terms that means different things to different people and is the subject of disparate understandings according to the national context. At one level it simply represents a legal status [...]. However, it also has a deeper, more substantive, sociological and political meaning, which describes the relationship between individuals and the state and the relationship between individuals within a national community. As such, it is also a highly contested concept at every level, from its meaning to its political application.

While contested at every level, researchers generally seem to agree that citizenship implies a “way of imagining a link between the state and the individual” (Dwyer, 2003, p. 2). What the precise nature of this link is, however, cannot be settled in abstract terms but is a historical and empirical question. In an effort to move beyond this initial concretization of citizenship as a link between the individual and the state, political theorists often point to citizenship as a combination of three interlocking factors (see e.g. Lister, 1990, 2002; Jenson, 2007; Joppke, 2007). Citizenship, first of all, implies a certain membership or status. Being a citizen means being a formal part of a political community and territory; often, though not exclusively, co-existent with the geography of the nation-state. This also implies the ‘rights to rights’ (Arendt, 2017 [1951]) within that territory. Citizens are, in other words, *recognized* as legitimate actors who hold the right to claim certain rights. Secondly, citizenship can be identified not only by this *right to rights*, but also by the particular content of such rights. These can be more or less passive or require active participation, e.g. through democratic elections or participation in communal juridical functions (Boje, 2015). Thirdly, citizenship touches on questions of identification and community. To be recognized as a member and hold certain rights has historically implied being part of a community that constructs and upholds certain normative ideas about the nature of a proper life, a prosperous society and a good state. Far from just a legal category, citizenship is a moral construct bound up with ideas as to how ‘we’ should and ought to live, and who are treated as aliens and outcasts.

Breaking citizenship down into these three interlinked factors – status, rights/obligations and identity/community – points to the different layers within the relation between the state and individuals. It also, and more substantially, foregrounds the shifting historical

boundaries and meanings of citizenship. What it means to be a member within a certain political community is not static. The same goes for the contents of rights and forms of communal identification. Indeed, it is in many ways because citizenship is a moving target that this concept is also so hard to pin down. As T. H. Marshall (1992 [1950]) made clear in his famous exposition of citizenship, there is nothing to determine how and in what ways citizenship will appear in any given moment or location. There is no hidden essence or 'telos' waiting to be unleashed within the concept itself. When viewed through this lens, it becomes clear that the meaning of citizenship is never settled for good but remains the object of negotiations and political struggles over time.

Without falling prey to constructing too neat political divisions, the history of citizenship is often presented as a struggle between two major philosophical strands: a so-called *liberal* tradition, concerned with citizenship as a certain set of (passive) *rights*, and a (civic) *republican* tradition, connecting citizenship with active duties and obligations (Heater, 1999; Dwyer, 2000; Lister, 1990). According to Heater (1999), the liberal tradition was largely born out of the English (1688), American (1775) and French (1789) revolutions and is connected to thinkers like John Locke, John Stuart Mill and (later) neoliberal voices. As stated, this tradition places an emphasis on individual rights and personal freedom as foundational principles. Such rights should make each individual capable of choosing based on their own preferences and inclinations. As Dwyer (2003, p. 21) notes, "the liberal citizen is in essence the bearer of individual rights and preferences [...]. Liberalism is less personally demanding than civic republicanism; becoming a citizen does not require that an individual has to give up the pursuit of self-interest." The liberal tradition is in many ways a product of the advancement of capitalism and the gradual decline of feudalism and monarchial orders. Yet, as Heater (1999) reminds us in this context, the relationship between capitalism and citizenship is complex and contradictory: while capitalism may have helped promote liberal citizenship, so citizenship also helped facilitate capitalism. Moreover, at various points in history, both capitalism and citizenship have directly and indirectly combated each other. Indeed, as Marshall (1992) would outright state, throughout modern history "citizenship and the capitalist class system have been at war" (p. 18).

The civic republican tradition stretches further back in time, finding its first articulations in the work of Aristotle and Cicero (Heater, 1999). During the Enlightenment, Rousseau became one of the primary advocates for this position, arguing for the necessity of maintaining

and promoting a sense of community and civic duty. According to Heater (1999), the “republican style of political thinking places great emphasis above all on the necessity for the state and its citizens to be a community, an organic society, not merely a collection of individuals” (p. 55). This also means, in opposition to the liberal position, that this tradition argues that citizens *ought* to be actively contributing to the commonwealth. Citizens *ought* to engage in public life and participate in the building of the political community: “The whole republication tradition is based on the premise that citizens recognize and understand what their duties are and have a sense of moral obligation instilled into them to discharge these responsibilities” (ibid., p. 64). Both the liberal tradition and civic republicanism can be found in a number of different forms today and have developed into distinct strands of thought. These inherited traditions serve to frame contemporary debates in and around the nature of citizenship in profound and often implicit ways.

## 2.2. Social citizenship and T. H. Marshall

What we have seen thus far, then, is how citizenship can be understood *in its most basic form* as implying a particular way of observing the relation between states and individuals. We have seen how this linkage can be further graduated into components of membership, rights/obligations and identification, with different political and philosophical traditions moving citizenship in either the direction of passive rights or active obligations. Keeping this historical legacy in mind is important insofar as it continues to form how citizenship is thought of today. Moving closer to the main topic of this dissertation, I now want to turn to a more in-depth discussion of one of the most important contributions to modern scholarship on citizenship and welfare states, namely T. H. Marshall’s (1992 [1950]) seminal work *Citizenship and Social Class*. This essay is often used as a point of departure for thinking through contemporary modalities of (social) citizenship (see e.g. Goul Andersen & Jensen, 2002; Dwyer, 2003, 2000; Betzelt & Bothfeld, 2011; Crouch, Eder & Tambini, 2000; Handler, 2004; Panica & Ulmestig, 2016; Revi, 2014; Hoxsey, 2011; Turner, 2001). Indeed, as Bussemaker (1999b, p. 2) remarked in 1999, “[w]hen discussing citizenship and the welfare state it is impossible not to mention T. H. Marshall.”

T. H. Marshall was a Professor of Sociology at the London School of Economics and Political Science. In 1949, he was given the opportunity to give a lecture series commemorating the work of Alfred Marshall. Out of this came the by now classic essay *Citizenship and Social Class*. The basic issue tackled by T. H. Marshall in this essay was the historical relation be-

tween, on the one hand, the “human equality associated with the concept of full membership of a community” (1992, p. 6), or what he names as *citizenship*, and the inequalities caused by the advancement of capitalism and social classes on the other hand. For Marshall, the puzzle was the following: How can a principle of equality (citizenship) co-exist with a principle of inequality (capitalism)? To “attack” this problem, Marshall proceeded by way of a historical analysis. Focusing on citizenship in England, Marshall put forth the by now classic division of citizenship into three main parts; civil, political and social rights:

The civil element is composed of the rights necessary for individual freedom-liberty of the person, freedom of speech, thought and faith, the right to own property and to conclude valid contracts, and the right to justice. [...] By the political element I mean the right to participate in the exercise of political power, as a member of a body invested with political authority or as an elector of such a body. The corresponding institutions are parliament and councils of local government. By the social element I mean the whole range from the right to a modicum of economic welfare and security to the right to share to the full in social heritage and to live the life of a civilized being according to the standards prevailing in the society. The institutions most closely connected with it are the educational system and the social services. (1992, p. 8).

In his essay, Marshall goes quite some way to explicate the gradual movement from civil rights to political and (later) social rights. According to his analysis, it is possible “without too much violence to historical accuracy” (p. 8) to assign each set or bundle of rights to particular historical times: civil rights were developed in the eighteenth century, political rights in the nineteenth and social rights in the twentieth. As Marshall makes clear, there are certainly overlaps and elasticity within this periodization. That being the case, it is nonetheless possible to view the history of citizenship as a gradual accumulation of different rights, with social rights – in the form of welfare and education – constituting the latest addition.

For the purpose of the present exposition, it would go too far to dive into a more specific survey of the historical dynamics of each set of rights and how they came to be. For now, let us simply note that what interested Marshall the most about these historical developments was what he terms as a significant change by the end of the nineteenth century. “[T]he impact of citizenship on social inequality after that date was”, Marshall (1992, p. 18) argues, “fundamentally different from what it had been before that.” According to Marshall, the relationship between citizenship and social inequalities can be understood by a kind of uni-



versal feature of citizenship: "Citizenship is a status bestowed on those who are full members of a community. All who possess the status are equal with respect to the rights and duties with which the status is endowed" (ibid., p. 18). From this, it might seem to follow that citizenship – and the "equality implicit in the concept" (p. 19) – would serve to undermine the inequality of social classes and capitalism. However, in actuality the "growth of citizenship, substantial and impressive though it was, had little direct effect on social inequality" (p. 27).

By the end of the nineteenth century this started to change, as the "first big advance in social rights" (p. 28) took place. This concretely meant that a number of schemes – in the form of social services, education, and health care – were put in place alongside "a universal right to real income which is not proportionate to the market value of the claimant" (p. 28). For Marshall, this signaled a profound shift in the relation between citizenship and social inequality, as citizenship became a much more pronounced vector of equalization and redistribution along existing lines of stratification. According to him, this meant "a general enrichment of the concrete substance of civilised life, a general reduction of risk and insecurity, an equalisation between the more and the less fortunate at all levels – between the healthy and the sick, the employed and the unemployed, the old and the active, the bachelor and the father of a large family" (p. 33). In this way, the advancement of social rights served to, if not undermine, then at the very least counterbalance the inequalities created by capitalism and class. According to Dwyer (2003, p. 41), what emerges from Marshall's analysis is thus a focus "on how, by developing the notion of citizenship, on both a theoretical and practical level, to include rights to welfare (the social element), it may be possible to remove some of the inequalities generated by the continuing operation of an essentially capitalist market system." The argument developed by Marshall in this context was not necessarily that all social inequalities should be eradicated – or that they could – but rather that "market-generated class-based inequalities [were to be] held in check by the promotion of citizenship" (ibid., p. 42).

Delivered in the late 1940s, Marshall account is in many ways a testimony to the nascent British welfare state. It was an account that placed an emphasis on welfare and social rights as integral to modern forms of citizenship and which was formed by a certain historical optimism. That being the case, it might be tempting to ask "Why this fame?" as Derek Heater (1999, p. 18) does. Indeed, as argued above, it does seem that Marshall's account has become inherent to almost all subsequent discussions of citizenship and welfare state reform. Ac-

cording to Heater, the reason for this should be attributed to the fact that “[h]is two principal assertions – that citizenship contains three elements or ‘bundles’ of rights, and that social citizenship is a vital underpinning for the other two – were simple, illuminating insights encapsulating much truth.” Prior to this point, there had only been few attempts to include social dimensions into discussions of citizenship and welfare reform. In this sense, Marshall pointed in an original fashion to an aspect that had often gone unnoticed.

There is an extensive literature dedicated to reviewing and critiquing Marshall’s account (for reviews, see Dwyer, 2000, p. 61-62; Heater, 1999, p. 17-24; Susen, 2010; Bulmer & Rees, 1996). Without wanting to reiterate these in full, let us simply note that his work has been criticized as being “Anglophile” and methodologically nationalist (reifying the ‘nation’ as a static political construct); limited in terms of its geographical perspective (generalizing beyond the narrow confines of the UK and the development of the post-war welfare state); both explicitly and implicitly gendered and patriarchal (leaving women, ethnic minorities and disenfranchised groups out of his “evolutionary” account); and too naively optimistic (viewing the on-going accumulation of social rights as a more or less historically given). Moreover, critics have argued that the very distinction between civil, political, and social rights is flawed, either because each bundle of rights should be demarcated into distinct subcategories, or because this distinction downplays and neglects differences between *formal* and *substantive* citizenship, i.e. between *what* citizens can expect in terms of rights (formal) and *who* has the rights to rights (substantive) (see Heater, 1999, p. 22). Finally, Marshall has been charged with historical inadequacies insofar as his account does not represent the development of citizenship rights accurately. Citizenship did not evolve, this critique goes, in the kind of accumulative or seemingly irreversible fashion outlined by Marshall. These critiques should be taken seriously. They each pinpoint important shortcomings and problems with Marshall’s work as represented by *Citizenship and Social Class*. Nevertheless, this should not lead us to neglect the historical importance Marshall’s account has had (and continues to have). His assertion that equality and social rights (in the form of welfare) are integral to citizenship remain key arguments that still warrant scholarly attention. In this sense, one way of thinking “beyond” Marshall might be to think both *with* and *against* his account.

### 2.3. Thinking citizenship beyond Marshall

Acknowledging the inherent shortcomings of Marshall’s approach, contemporary scholarship has moved substantially beyond the somewhat rigid and evolutionary account of citi-

zenship provided in his 1949 lectures. It has done so in order to further flesh out the complex and layered composition of citizenship as a contested political category. This is a discussion that has already been hinted at in the text above – noting how citizenship is prone to very different interpretations and understandings – but which may be pushed a bit further following our exposition of Marshall’s early account of social citizenship. Doing so, we can begin to further tease out the ways in which citizenship functions as a means of linking the individual to the state, including the sociological dynamics that are at play in this relation.

What does it mean, more concretely, to view citizenship as a contested political category? According to Bussemaker (1999b, p. 3-4), one conclusion we might draw from this proposition is a certain epistemological need to move beyond stale and static images of what citizenship implies. Indeed, according to him, scholars must recognize that the “establishment and redefinition of citizenship does not take place in a vacuum. Citizenship is a contested concept, and the definition of citizenship is part of a political and social struggle. Various actors articulate various definitions of citizenship and they argue for different programmes and instruments to implement their notion of citizenship within social policy” (Bussemaker, 1999b, p. 3-4). In this view, thinking through citizenship as a contested category requires us to adopt a both historically-grounded and politically-informed view on the concept, acknowledging not only how it may transform and develop over time, but also its implication within political struggles. Citizenship does not come from nowhere but has to be actively created and constructed through divergent political interests and struggles. One way of diving deeper into these political struggles is to focus on the particular set of discursive or ideational practices used to define and articulate the purpose of citizenship. Recognizing that citizenship cannot be reduced to (legal) rights, this means viewing citizenship as bound up with the production and contestation of different forms of meaning, normativity and morality. “The concept of citizenship”, Maurice Mullard (1999, p. 12-13) writes in this context,

is a contestable site [...] occupied by a number of competing discourses that seek to define and redefine citizenship. [...] They [competing discourses] bring different emphasis to the constitution of the meaning of citizenship and have distinctive implications for the future of welfare states. These discourses are shaped and influenced through the process of political practice.

Further building on this point, Jensen and Pfau-Effinger (2005, p. 4) have argued that dissecting discourses and ideas is completely central to understanding welfare reform and

changes to citizenship. Resonating more general arguments within discourse analysis and institutional theory, they suggest that understanding discourses should not be limited to a merely textual analytical strategy: “for discourses to materialise as actual change, they must become institutionalised, partly as change in the material and symbolic signals in the welfare state, partly as changes in citizens’ schemes of perception” (ibid.). Linking citizenship explicitly to the production of discourses and ideas serves to further bring out the conceptual vectors outlined above. It does so by recognizing that rights are not merely legal, but also imminently moral and normative. Handler (2004, p. 9-10, original emphasis) argues that “[t]he core [...] of social citizenship rights, as with all citizenship rights, is fundamentally moral. Redistribution is an act of solidarity, of *inclusion*. [...] Thus, citizenship is also used in an ideological or symbolic sense – to distinguish people from others within the borders or from those who are outside the borders. It is often used as a term of exclusion, of moral superiority, a construction of the ‘Other’.”

This last point is worth reflecting on insofar as it showcases how – at the core of any conception of citizenship – lies a certain unvoiced or inherent vision of *what* and *who* is counted and recognized as citizens and who are not. This seems to highlight what we might, with scholars such as Engin Isin (2002) and Étienne Balibar (2015), view as the multi-sided demarcation distinguishing ‘insiders’ from ‘outsiders’, the ‘included’ from the ‘excluded’, that lies at the base of citizenship. Indeed, it would seem that while the contents and shape of citizenship has shifted tremendously over time, one thing has remained a constant: namely that citizenship (always) implies exclusion and otherness. Historically, ‘women’, ‘slaves’, ‘immigrants’, ‘foreigners’ and other groups have been (and continue to be) denied either full or partial access to citizenship. In this sense, there is, as Keucheyan argues, “no citizenship [...] that is coextensive with the whole of humanity” (2013, p. 125). It is furthermore important to bear in mind, as Engin Isin remind us, that “images of being political bequeathed to us come from the victors: those who were able to constitute themselves as a group, confer rights on and impose obligations on each other, institute rituals of belonging and rites of passage, and, above all, differentiate themselves from others, constructing an identity and an alterity simultaneously” (2002, p. 2). Tales of citizenship are, in other words, most often told by those who have been on the inside, speaking from a position of inclusion. As a counterbalance to such images, it is important to also look at the outside and Others of citizenship. Yet, Isin warns us not to take the binary division between included and excluded at face value. If seen as signifying an irreconcilable divide, this conceptual pair can risk blurring what is re-

ally at stake in citizenship, namely that the excluded are not merely a subtraction or negation of the included. Instead, at a much more fundamental level, such “others” constitute the “conditions of possibility” for citizenship altogether. As Balibar (2015) has argued, “exclusion and inclusion do not describe fixed rules or situations so much as the stakes of the conflict through which citizenship, in a sense, ‘thinks’ its own conditions of possibility” (p. 74). Moving this point somewhat further, Balibar has argued that citizenship is internally differentiated and divided into internal forms of exclusions. Rather than any strict division between the included and the excluded, citizenship provides different opportunities and constraints to different parts of the social space. Thus, against the universal claims tied to citizenship, sociological studies reveal this category to be internally interlaced with power relations, graduating social space into a discrete series of normative and political pieces. While citizens may be formally equal, in practice the opportunities and constraints offered to citizens is highly stratified.

Suggesting that citizenship not only works along existing lines of social stratification, but that it might also be recursively deployed as an instrument of stratification is an important point, resonating concerns leveled by T. H. Marshall (1992, p. 45). However, this should not mislead us to think that citizenship is simply imposed onto an already composed set of individuals from above. Becoming a citizen is not just a one-way street *from* the state apparatus *to* the individual. Being constituted as a citizen-subject also takes place through performative ‘acts of citizenship’ enacted by citizens themselves. Thinking through citizenship as a contested concept forces us to recognize that changes to the rights and status of citizens does not just take place through political struggles that are internal to the state. Indeed, the history of citizenship is also in many ways a history of civil struggles, right-claims and social movements demanding political influence and change. In this light, citizenship is to a large degree the outcome of political struggles from below, as citizens otherwise denied certain rights or access to the community demand a (partial or total) revision of the very rules of the game. There is a fairly substantial body of literature within citizenship studies concerned precisely with approaching citizenship from such a critical and performative angle (Isin & Nielsen, 2008; Isin & Saward, 2013; Isin, 2017; Clarke et al., 2014). Acting in the name of citizenship – in order to claim new rights, disrupt settled practices or redraw the boundaries of the political community – is deeply implicated in producing new citizen-subjects. Focusing on citizenship as performative and enacted also “challenges the debate on citizenship [in the context of welfare states], which is passive, and which identifies who benefits and who loses

from welfare provision. By contrast, citizenship as resistance questions the assumptions of welfare provision" (Mullard, 1999, p. 20).<sup>6</sup>

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Starting from a relatively simple proposition – namely that citizenship can be seen as a way of observing the link between states and individuals – we have moved into increasingly complex terrain. Through a series of reflections, citizenship has shown itself to not only constitute a shifting bundle of rights (civil, political and social), but also as the object of political contestation and resistance. Adding to this, the discursive and normative components of citizenship have been foregrounded, showcasing how competing ideas might try to articulate and capture the supposed nature of citizenship. This led, in the final part, to a consideration of the ways in which citizenship not only names the ‘victors’ or ‘insiders’, but also those who are deemed as ‘alien’, ‘foreign’, ‘deviant’, and ‘outside.’ Rather than irreconcilable divides, these exclusionary divisions pierce through and within the political community itself, distinguishing the inside of citizenship into layered and stratified categories of subjectivities. Taken together, these reflections carve out a space for thinking through citizenship that is less concerned with producing abstract and static ideals for how citizens ought to behave and more focused on empirically understanding the complex and variegated forms of citizenship taking shape within particular geographies and contexts. It is a way of thinking through and within the ‘Marshallian’ legacy, while still recognizing the instable and continuously repurposed modalities of citizenship.

## 2.4. Digital citizenship

Up until this point, citizenship has been used in its singular form, as if to imply that this category can be understood as a relatively unified block. Even while taking historical, geographical and political variance into account, the presentation provided above still seems to

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<sup>6</sup> The performative angle on citizenship – an idea of “citizenship as resistance” (Mullard, 1999, p. 20) – is not systematically addressed in this dissertation. While it is acknowledged as an important contribution and perspective in its own right, the dissertation focuses on carving out the space against which such resistance might become possible. It is attentive to the discursive and institutional frameworks that seek to construct and produce certain governmental visions as to how citizens should and ought to act. In this way, the dissertation hopes to lay the groundwork for what can later become a genuine analysis of new forms of resistance and acts of citizenship emerging against the background of intensified governmental digitalization. Rather than seeing acts of citizenship as opposed to the structural conditions inscribed in political institutions, we ought to see their genuine dialectical relation (Isin, 2017).

suggest that the citizen is a homogenous figure. However, such a point of view has become increasingly problematized, not only by historical developments, but also by scholarship. As Isin and Turner (2002, p. 2) commented in their introduction to the *Handbook of Citizenship Studies* more than fifteen years ago (I quote at length):

The modern conception of citizenship as merely a status held under the authority of a state has been contested and broadened to include various political and social struggles of recognition and redistribution as instances of claim-making, and hence, by extension, of citizenship. As a result, various struggles based upon identity and differences (whether sexual, 'racial', 'ethnic', diasporic, ecological, technological, or cosmopolitan) have found new ways of articulating their claims as claims to citizenship understood not simply as a legal status but as political and social recognition and economic redistribution. Hence the increase in the number of scholars who work in feminist studies, queer studies, Aboriginal studies, African studies, diaspora studies, postcolonial studies, race and ethnic studies, urban studies, immigration studies, and environmental studies, who are exploring and addressing concepts of sexual citizenship, ecological citizenship, diasporic citizenship, differentiated citizenship, multicultural citizenship, cosmopolitan citizenship, and Aboriginal citizenship.

This lengthy quote is offered here not only to illustrate the flourishing nature of citizenship studies as an interdisciplinary field of research lodged between political science, sociology and other social scientific approaches, but also for its closing enumeration of new modalities of citizenship examined by scholars. The burgeoning of these new modes of citizenship signals an increasingly diverse scholarly attention to the citizen-subject. It also helps foreground the de-centering of the citizen from a strict nation-state context. This development has taken place together with geopolitical processes of globalization, neoliberalization and more (Isin, 2008; Susen 2010), and warranted the coming of what is perhaps more fluid modes of being made and becoming a citizen-subject. Citizenship can no longer be seen as simply implying a link between states and subjects, but has widened out to include an array of other areas and domains.

In the context of the present dissertation, one of the more interesting discussions currently on-going in research has to do with the relation between citizenship and the increasingly pervasive nature of digital technologies (Mossberger, Tolbert, and McNeal 2008; Isin and Ruppert, 2015, 2017; Vivienne, McCosker & Johns, 2016; McCosker, Vivienne & Johns, 2016;

Siapera, 2017). Indeed, while research is yet to make any firm statement on the shifting relations between citizens and welfare states in our current age of digitalization, there has been an awareness of the intersecting lines between digital technologies and citizenship for quite some time. This has often been encapsulated within the notion of *digital citizenship*, a concept that has been around since the early 1990s. In a somewhat stylized manner, digital citizenship can be said to emerge in the early 1990s as a response to the increasingly pervasive adoption and use of digital and internet-driven technologies across both state institutions, private organizations and everyday life. It did so not least in response to otherwise ubiquitous and supposedly stereotypical portrayals of computer users as nerds and geeks. Contrary to these, American authors such as Katz (1997) argued that users of digital technologies were much more than that. According to him, they were also highly engaged political subjects that would inaugurate the coming of a completely new way of doing and participating in politics. ‘Engaged’, ‘informed,’ ‘pro-market,’ ‘liberal’ and ‘free thinking’; these were the kinds of words conjured up within the utopian and (seen from our contemporary situation) somewhat naïve account provided by Katz. This was subsequently critiqued by a number of scholars (see e.g. Warnick, 1999; Wallace, 1999) for being overly polarizing (differentiating between digital and non-digital citizens based on their use of digital platforms), optimistic and technophile. Despite these reservations, however, scholars largely adopted the digital citizen as a new figure worthy of academic attention. By the mid-2000s, two relatively stable positions had emerged within the literature (see Schou & Hjelholt, 2018b). One position was formulated within the context of educational practices and institutions, viewing digital citizenship as a set of ethical and practical guidelines as to how (young) citizens ought to act as responsible individuals online. The idea has been that young citizens should be taught the proper ways of being and acting online, making sure that they do not share information, download illegal content or encounter predatory others (Gurstein, 2001; Ribble, Bailey, and Ross, 2004; Borko et al., 2009; Ohler 2011; Jones and Mitchell 2016). At the core of this discourse has often been a strongly moralizing component, suggesting that digital citizenship is something to be imprinted and passed on to still incumbent citizens. Meanwhile, another position has seen digital citizenship as the ability to participate in society online (Mossberger, Tolbert, and Gilbert, 2006; Mossberger, Tolbert, and McNeal 2008), often using quantitative tools to measure the extent to which the presence of such abilities might correlate with economic gains, democratic participation and similar issues. Despite the difference in focus, this position has also had a fairly normative and *a priori* sense of what digital citizenship might



mean and include. Being digital has been seen as a normatively desirable goal – an advantage to society, the state and the market – that *all* citizens should aspire to.

More recently, authors such as Isin and Ruppert (2015, 2017) and Vivienne, Johns & McCosker (2016) have started to question these dominant approaches, arguing for research that is much more embedded within current critical literature in citizenship studies (see also Siapera, 2017). Doing so, particularly Isin and Ruppert (2015) have argued that *in contrast* to existing takes on digital citizenship – reducing this category to a fixed definition – scholarship ought to look into the actual practices, power relations and forces that goes into the making of citizen-subjectivities:

If [...] there is an emerging political subject called ‘the digital citizen’, we cannot assume that this subject is without history and geography. We cannot simply assume that being a citizen online already means something (whether it is the ability to participate or stay safe) and then look for those whose conduct conforms to this meaning. The understanding of citizenship and political subjectivity associated with it has a complex history and geography that should not be simplified as participation, safety, security, or access although obviously these are arguably important aspects of being a citizen. (Isin & Ruppert, 2015, p. 19).

This newer strand of research, dedicated to understanding and examining the coming of new forms of digital citizenship, has done well in terms of criticizing the otherwise highly normative approaches dominating the scholarly literature. It has done so by insisting that citizenship neither can nor should be reduced to reified categories that can then be applied to measure populations. Doing so, it has forcefully argued, simply overtakes the very issues that ought to be investigated: namely how and in what ways the digital citizen comes into being as a new political figure. This dissertation recognizes the important thematic emphasis provided by this recent scholarship. Indeed, a number of the publications contained in the second part of this dissertation explicitly draw on and situate themselves in dialogue with these newer developments in citizenship studies. However, in turning to the nexus between citizenship and welfare reform, this dissertation simultaneously takes a broader and, in some ways, more conventional approach to understanding the changes taking place to citizenship in the contemporary conjuncture. Rather than opting for an approach concerned explicitly with the citizen as a digital being, the dissertation argues that there is a need to recognize the ways in which already inherited and established forms of social citizenship are

remade through the coming of digitalization as a new form of political intervention. Instead of presuming an epochal shift from citizenship to digital citizenship, the dissertation instead argues that contemporary modalities of citizenship premised on the use of, access to and participation through digital technologies ought to be seen *as integral parts of* citizenship altogether. To do so, there is a need to integrate the study of new digitalized forms of citizenship within the wider literature on citizenship and welfare reform. This is something that has so far remained underdeveloped in the existing literature and where this dissertation treads new ground.

## 2.5. Remaking citizenship: Pulling the strings together

Taken together, then, the previous sections have presented a series of reflections on the concept of citizenship. They have done so in order to lay out a way of thinking within and through this complex idea without having to rely on fixed and all too often *a priori* definitions of its substantive meaning. Starting from T. H. Marshall's famous distinction between civil, political and social rights, I have gradually moved into more recent research territory in order to showcase the complexities involved in grasping citizenship. Doing so, I have highlighted how citizenship is a contested category that is constructed through political struggles that are both discursive and performative in nature. I have suggested that citizenship demarcates between insiders and outsiders through the construction of not just binary demarcations, but also internal forms of exclusion. And I have argued that citizenship must not only be understood as a historically situated, politically variegated and contingent category, but that multiple and overlapping modalities of citizenship may co-exist at any given time.

The purpose of providing these reflections on citizenship, foregrounding its various modalities and dimensions, has been to argue for a need to go beyond one-dimensional approaches, reducing this category to legal, political or institutional components. Instead, I want to suggest that there is a need to view these different dimensions within a relatively unified theoretical and conceptual framework. Citizenship cannot be reduced to a legal status or political construct but *is* – in one form or another – all of the elements carved out above. It *is* a certain set of state-held responsibilities demarcated from other social fields. It *is* a certain historical delegation of rights and duties, creating frameworks for identifying who are counted as full citizens and who are relegated to second-tier status. And it *is* certain institutional mecha-

nisms involved in facilitating, delivering and otherwise handling both the rights associated with citizenship and citizens themselves.

Building on this premise, the individual publications contained in the second part of this dissertation will each attempt to hone in on different elements found at the nexus between citizenship, welfare state restructuring and digitalization. In so doing, they each rely on and accentuate parts of the elements presented in the exposition above: some target the discursive components of citizenship, while others look at issues of governance and exclusion. However, it is my contention that, when taken together, these different empirical entry-points coalesce into a relatively unified portrayal, demonstrating how new forms of citizenship are currently being produced, governed and institutionalized within the Danish welfare state. In the final portion of this first part, I will attempt to demonstrate how and in what ways these common elements can be understood by drawing out cross-cutting themes emerging across the different publications. For now, however, I want to further look into the nature of citizenship by turning to the historical context of the present study.

### 3. Historical context: the changing face of welfare

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Grasping the relation between citizenship and welfare reform requires us to not only recognize the complex conceptual and political history of citizenship. There is also a need to locate shifting forms of citizenship within the wider political economy of the welfare state itself. Indeed, with Johansson & Hvinden (2007b), we might do good to remember that welfare governance and new modalities of citizenship are mutually reinforcing processes: neither can be neatly separated or singled out as sole drivers of political and institutional change, but must be understood in their dialectical relation.

Within the following sections, I will expand on this link by tracing the changes to social citizenship taking place within European welfare states in *general* and the Danish state *in particular*. This will help situate the investigation presented here by highlighting how the dynamics described in this dissertation resonate with wider changes taking place within the Danish welfare state. This historical contextualization will be presented in two main steps. First, an ideal-typical account will be provided focusing on the transition from national welfare states to what has variously been named as competition states, neoliberalism or post-Fordism. This will be done by drawing on existing scholarship in order to showcase the changes taking place to citizenship across European welfare states. Secondly, a closer look will be taken on

the Danish welfare state, outlining a series of developments within social policy and welfare reform. This will allow me to showcase how citizenship has changed considerably since the 1980s and 1990s, as new political discourses and policy measurements have come into being. Both of these sections, then, focus on how welfare states have been reformed during the last number of decades, including the changes this has meant to citizenship. In so doing, they help further flesh out the conceptual trajectories presented above.

### 3.1. Welfare state transformations

Existing accounts of the welfare state, citizenship and their mutual historical transformations are plentiful within the international literature (Bussemaker, 1999a; Hvinden & Johansson, 2007; Handler, 2004; Goul Andersen et al., 2002, 2005). Explanations abound, as scholars continue to disagree about the course of the welfare state in the last three decades. Are we dealing with welfare retrenchment, refunctionalization, dismantling, upgrading or something entirely different (Pierson, 2006; Jessop, 2002; Gilbert, 2004; Wacquant, 2009)? Yet, putting differences aside for a moment, scholars generally seem to agree that important changes *have* taken place within (European) welfare states and their accompanying forms of citizenship. They also seem to agree that from the 1980s and 1990s, a new set of expectations, ideas and discourses have started to emerge, signaling a shift within the previous allocation of rights, duties and obligations. Whereas the post-war welfare state, created in the aftermath of the Second World War in a period of exceptional (and perhaps unique) economic growth and prosperity (Handler, 2004), generally sought to expand social rights, foster national cohesion and guard citizens against the fluctuations of the market (not least through counter-cyclical “Keynesian” measurements), there was a turn in the last half of the twentieth century. Citizens were from then on increasingly expected to be individualized and sovereign beings, capable of actively seeking out the services provided by the state, while being self-reliant and flexible in order to proactively contribute to (inter-)national competitiveness.

One way of explaining these changes, particular by scholars of political economy and political sociology, has been to link them to the transition from “Fordist-Keynesianism” to the building of contemporary post-Fordist welfare states emerging across European countries and the US (Jessop, 2002; Peck, 1996, 2001; Brenner, 2004; Wacquant, 2009). Fordist-Keynesianism is taken as shorthand for the specific compromise between the economy and the (welfare) state that consolidated in the aftermath of the Second World War (Harvey, 1989). This compromise increasingly broke down in the 1970s, as a number of crisis tenden-

cies started to surface within the international (political) economy. Indeed, during the 1970s, the otherwise stable political-economic order that had been created in the aftermath of the Second World War (the so-called “golden age” of Fordist-Keynesianism) increasingly came into disarray. Facing a series of interlinked conditions – not least the oil crises in 1973, the collapse of the Bretton woods in 1971, the gradual implosion of the Fordist accumulation regime, stagflation, intensified competition prompted by economic globalization and the fiscal crises of the Keynesian welfare state itself – European welfare states began facing a set of simultaneously political, economic and social crises tendencies. What was being called into question was the very legitimacy of the welfare state. The expansive (public) administrations and bureaucracies crafted in the 1950s and 1960s were no longer perceived as assets. Instead, its adversaries claimed that these turned citizens into needy clients: passive, infantilized and stripped of any motivation to actively enter the labor market. Indeed, contrary to the universalistic welfare policies promoted by policymakers in the 1950s and 1960s, what was demanded from the 1970s and 1980s was a more competition-oriented, market-driven and international state (Genschel & Seelkopf, 2015; Hirsch, 1995). This was in large part a response to the changing conditions of the labor market. Whereas Fordism had traditionally relied on mass work, mass consumption and economies of scale (modeled on the nuclear family and assembly line workers), the new post-Fordist accumulation regimes that started to spread from the 1980s and 1990s required a very different kind of laborer (Amin, 1994; Lipietz, 1992; Bonefeld & Holloway, 1992). Flexibility, knowledge and international production networks were increasingly pushed to the top of the economic and political agenda. Citizens were expected to be entrepreneurial beings engaging in life-long learning and what had to be fostered now was an entrepreneurial climate. Indeed, as Bob Jessop (2017) has argued, neoliberal policies put in place at that point in time had a “pro-market bias, regarding citizens as entrepreneurial citizen-consumers, committed to flexibility, adaptability and autonomy” (p. 19).

In a somewhat broader perspective, Jessop (2002) has conceptualized these changes as a move from a *Keynesian Welfare National State* (KWNS), forged in the aftermath of the Second World War, to *Schumpeterian Workfare Post-national Regimes* (SWPR). He has done so to emphasize a series of both continuous and discontinuous shifts taking place within advanced capitalist states since the 1980s and 1990s. According to him, one of the most prominent developments, caused in large part by the crises tendencies outlined above, has been within the economic policies pursued by Western states. Whereas the welfare state was explicitly

“Keynesian” in nature, seeking to counteract the destructive cycles of the market, the SWPR pursues an altogether different set of policies: instead of stability and protection of citizens, it is now economic dynamism, entrepreneurialism, competitiveness and flexibility that become primary economic targets. This has meant that the state is no longer primarily oriented towards a national scale. Instead, non-state mechanisms, international actors and forums play an increasingly large role in shaping both domestic policies and political interests (Peck, 1996; Brenner, 2004; Jessop 2002). In the area of social policies, there has also been a series of important changes. In particular, *welfare* has increasingly turned into *workfare* (Peck, 2001), as social rights and welfare benefits have become reliant on active participation, individualized risks and personal obligations. In the context of public sector reforms, this has been underpinned by an increasingly profound use of marketization, privatization and welfare retrenchment. Public sector institutions are no longer expected to grow unhindered, but must become more efficient, lean and flexible. As Jessop notes, this *ideal-typical account* is primarily concerned with bringing out major structural shifts. It does, in other words, not cover all changes nor does it imply that public institutions are completely dismantled or removed. Instead, existing institutions are often reoriented in order to pursue new political goals, meaning that old paths come to intermingle with new political strategies. Taken together, Jessop suggests, this has meant the coming of ‘competition states,’ a diagnosis that has also been proposed by scholars such as Hirsch (1995) and Cerny (1997; see also Hay, 2004). Genschel and Seelkopf (2015, p. 237) have summarized these points, based on a wide-ranging review of the existing literature on this new state form, in the following way:

In contrast to earlier state transformations, which were punctuated by wars, revolutions, and violent institutional ruptures, this transition is incremental, undramatic, and peaceful. The basic institutions of the welfare state remain in place but are gradually trimmed, rearranged, and ‘refunctionalized’ (Jessop, 2002, p. 258) to serve a new purpose: to make society fit for competition. While the mission of the welfare state had been to protect national society from excessive competition by controlling cross-border economic transactions, by granting social rights and protection, and by nationalizing key public services, the competition state pursues ‘increased marketization’ (Cerny 1997, p. 259). It liberalizes cross-border movements, re-commodifies labor, and privatizes public services. The welfare state domesticated capitalism, whereas the competition state vies for capital.

Another closely related and, at certain points, overlapping way of conceptualizing these changes has been to associate them with the gradual neoliberalization of advanced capitalist

states. This is a perspective that is drawn on throughout the publications contained in the second part of the dissertation. Neoliberalism has in many ways become an increasingly inflated and problematic term, used with little clarity and much normative prejudice (Birch, 2018). According to some, it has come to be used as a way of denoting seemingly everything that is deemed deplorable by (Leftist) scholars. While this might be the case in its more colloquial use, there is a fairly large and in many ways nuanced body of literature dealing with neoliberalism without relying on overtly normative or confused definitions. Particular the work of radical and economic geographers such as Jamie Peck, Nik Theodore, Adam Tickell and Neil Brenner – broadly concerned with understanding neoliberalism not as a unified political project, but as a series of multi-scalar, conflictual and gradually unfolding processes – provides important insights to the changes described above (Peck, 2010; Brenner, Peck & Theodore, 2010; Peck & Tickell, 2002; Brenner, 2004). They do so by viewing neoliberalism as a forward rolling project that is not just concerned with dismantling existing institutional structures, but also with creating new ones based on particular political and economic doctrines. Brenner, Peck & Theodore (2010) thus suggest that since the 1970s, processes of neoliberalization, understood as a “tendential, discontinuous, uneven, conflictual and contradictory reconstitution of state-economy relations” (p. 184), have served to recreate the institutional and political landscape, sometimes in rapid bursts and sometimes through incremental accumulation of policy changes. What unites these measurements can, on a very general level, be seen as “a commitment to the extension of markets and logics of competitiveness with a profound antipathy to all kinds of Keynesian and/or collectivist strategies. The constitution and extension of competitive forces is married with aggressive forms of state downsizing, austerity financing, and public-service ‘reform’” (Peck & Tickell, 2002, p. 381). The cumulative effect of these changes has been a still more pronounced move, particularly since the 1990s, into new forms of “deep neoliberalization,” turning neoliberal ideas and policy options into integrated features of political institutions and practices. Contrary to what many believed at the time, the financial crisis of 2007-2008 did not signal the end of neoliberalism (Crouch, 2011; Streeck, 2013). Instead, it has meant increasingly distinct forms of austerity and pro-market restructuring.

### 3.1.1. Citizenship, remade

What, then, have these changes within advanced capitalist states meant for the main topic of this dissertation – namely citizenship? In this context, Pfau-Effinger (2005, p. 189) has pro-

vided an apt summary of how a fundamentally new understanding of citizenship emerged in the transition from Fordism to post-Fordism and neoliberalism:

In fordist industrial society, the term 'citizen' was constructed as employed citizens who, by virtue of their relatively strongly standardized employment biographies on the basis of full-time employment, received social rights that were connected to the cultural concept of 'decommodification', that is, rights to maintain a reasonable standard of living during periods beyond employment, including unemployment, retirement and illness. [...] During the transition to a post-fordist service society, this basic cultural construction of citizenship has changed. The development can be characterized as a shift from a notion of citizenship as passive towards a model of active citizenship [...]. The main features of 'active citizenship' include autonomy, self-responsibility, flexibility, geographical mobility, a professional education and the ability to engage in civil society to fulfil one's own interests. In this context, claiming responsibility for one's own life and well-being is not seen as merely an option; to an increasing degree it also represents an obligation.

In this line of argumentation, the transition from Keynesian welfare states to new post-Fordist, competition-oriented states signaled a simultaneous shift in the dominant form of citizenship (Pfau-Effinger, 2005; see also Lessenich, 2015). Indeed, a number of scholars have argued that the turn to advanced forms of neoliberalization has also meant that a new set of expectations about the proper forms of citizenship have taken hold. All individuals must now be "innovative, energetic, enterprising, competitive, risk-taking, self-reliant, self-responsible, eternally mobile, always ready to adjust to price signals" (Bonefeld, 2017, p. 99).

These somewhat high-level observations, meant to portray changes across fairly diverse European welfare states, quickly gain specificity when turning to particular political and geographical settings. John Clarke (2005, 2006, 2009) has, together with Janet Newman (2001, 2005, 2010) and other colleagues, done so in the context of *New Labour* in the UK, looking at the political changes since the early 1990s. Clarke (2005) here details how citizenship was of major concern for New Labour. At the core of their preoccupation with the concept was, he suggests, an effort to make citizens come into being as simultaneously 'activated', 'empowered', 'responsibilized' and 'abandoned' beings. Indeed, not unlike the changes charted above, there was a strong urge to transform citizens from supposedly passive individuals to active and self-sustaining beings. Such calls for active citizenship was, however, not limited



to labor market policies and the world of work, but could, according to Clarke, be seen across a variety of state domains. Parallel to this, a framing of citizens as consumers also started to take hold, the idea being to “rescue [the people] from an over-bearing, intrusive and dominating public power” by “expanding the reach of choice and voice” (p. 449). For Clarke, these intersecting lines between activation and consumer-choice led to the generalization of the trope of individual responsabilization, making citizens responsible for their own well-being, life-style and choices across all areas of welfare provision. This is a strongly moralizing development, as “[all] ‘bad choices’ result from the willfulness of irresponsible people, rather than the structural distribution of resources, capacities and opportunities” (p. 451). Finally, these developments took place together with a partial “abandonment” of citizens, insofar as the protective institutions and policy measurements used to guard these against the destructive capabilities of the capitalist economy were dismantled and withdrawn. Rather than one epochal swing, then, this type of analysis reveals the overlapping and co-existing ideals of citizenship being installed at the same time.<sup>7</sup>

The coming of the ‘neoliberal’ subject has attracted a great deal of research attention (not just in the UK) from different perspectives within political science and sociology (see e.g. Johansson & Hvinden, 2007a; Halvorsen & Jensen, 2004; Goul Andersen & Jensen, 2002; Goul Andersen et al., 2002, 2005; Betzelt & Bothfeld, 2011; Hvinden & Johansson, 2007; Pathak, 2013; Cowen, 2006; Schram et al, 2010; Hackell, 2016; Isin, 2004). It has particularly, though not exclusively, been associated with the gradual rise of activation measurements (Larsen, 2005; Lessenich, 2003; 2015) and workfare policies (Peck, 2001; Handler, 2004; Brodtkin & Marston, 2013; Marston, Larsen & McDonald, 2005). However, the basic logic and idea can indeed be seen across a range of seemingly different welfare domains. In this context, Stephan Lessenich (2015, p. 128) has argued that the move from ‘state provision’ to ‘self-provision’ is part of a much wider shift within the political economy of the welfare state. The aim is, he argues, to make otherwise public responsibilities *private*, move *risks* from collective to individual concerns, and create *responsibilized* citizens. Pushing these arguments further, Lessenich suggests that this new activating agenda is not just a response to the transition to post-

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<sup>7</sup> It is important here to distinguish between discursive and institutional changes, as the idea that citizens should be left on their own does not necessarily translate into material developments. Indeed, as Wacquant (2009) has time and again pointed out, the neoliberal slogan of small government and state downsizing often remains purely discursive, as *actually existing* neoliberal states have turned out to be highly interventionistic, growing and expanding. Thus, contrary to its own self-description, the neoliberal state is not necessarily “hands-off”, at least not for all parts of the social spectrum.

Fordist accumulation regimes, but that the welfare state is in and of itself a mainspring in its production and construction: “the ‘activating’ turn of welfare-state policy, under way in all late industrial societies for at least a decade, perfectly toes the line of the new, flexible capitalism’s legitimacy order. What is more: the ‘activating welfare state’ is not only the victim of the general social mobilisation, but also a driving force behind it” (Lessenich, 2015, p. 128). While Lessenich’s arguments are important for understanding contemporary changes to European welfare states and citizenship, they also seem to imply an at times too linear view of both categories. There is, to my mind, a very real risk of turning the so-called activating agenda into a somewhat oversimplified political strategy that is forged from above and then mechanically imposed onto citizens below. The problem in doing so is not only that such a point of view tends to minimize the space for citizenship as a contradictory and contestation-filled process, but also that it assumes a too monolithic outlook on citizenship altogether. Johansson and Hvinden (2007b, p. 5) have, in this context, argued for a more multidimensional take on these issues (see also Johansson and Hvinden, 2007c). What is at stake, they argue, is not a one-way process where the welfare state is simply responding to the demands imposed by the market. Instead, we are dealing with a series of complex processes where institutional forms, modes of governance, political discourses and citizen-demands are mutually influencing each other in reinforcing processes. At the same time, Johansson and Hvinden (2007b) suggest that the turn towards active forms of welfare provision *in some areas* has also meant a partial retrenchment or withdrawal of the state into more passive forms *in other*, as private actors or market-like mechanisms are called upon to solve problems previously handled by the state. This argument, resonating with concerns leveled by Brown and Baker (2013), points to the ways in which the lines between responsabilization and de-responsibilization, active and passive, private and public are not simply moved in one direction, but are instead dispersed and displaced into altogether new patterns. Taking this point one step further, Johansson and Hvinden (2007b) question whether the turn towards active welfare provision is for everyone, only “the poor” or perhaps the “well-off.”

These are important points insofar as they direct our attention towards the ways in which citizenship may not only function along already existing lines of stratification but also constitutes an instrument of stratification in itself (an argument that T. H. Marshall (1992) also made in 1949, as noted above). The turn towards neoliberalized forms of active citizenship might, according to this line of reasoning, imply differentially distributed capacities for action towards different groups. Indeed, one of the major empirical points that will be made in

this dissertation is precisely that digitalization has impacted different groups of citizens in very different ways. While offering ‘easier’ and more ‘convenient’ solutions *for some*, it has simultaneously served to exclude and discipline *others* (particularly those already at the fringes of the system).

Janet Newman (2010) has also questioned the tendency to collapse widespread policy changes into seemingly singular orders or state projects. Taking the UK as a case, Newman argues that, while it is true that a range of new policy instruments have been put in place over the last number of decades, broadly premised on fostering a ‘governmentality of the self,’ it would be wrong to assume that these can all be subsumed into one political project. Against sweeping notions about the state being “decentred or hollowed out, and governmental power dispersed, devolved and decentralised” (p. 721), Newman instead calls for research that is attentive to the multiplicity of sometimes overlapping, sometimes competing framings, practices and institutional mechanisms to be found within and beyond formal state institutions. This simultaneously warrants a focus on the internally differentiated ways in which different groups are ‘summoned’ as citizens. The language of “empowerment” may, as an example, be used to cover different calls for the enactment of citizenship, “with migrant populations summoned to perform a particular formation of Britishness, disadvantaged citizens being summoned as empowered and agentic members of communities, activist or potentially disruptive citizens being summoned as partners in governance, dependent welfare clients summoned as independent, choice-making customers and school pupils summoned as the responsible citizens of the future” (p. 722).

From this ideal-typical account, concerned with the changing forms of citizenship found across European welfare states, we can thus begin to see that important changes have taken place at the nexus between welfare reform and citizenship. However, we have also seen that this should not be viewed as an epochal shift from one singular order to another. Instead, we are dealing with a series of layered and to some extent contradictory developments.

### 3.2. Looking closer at Denmark

Having looked at the changes taking place to welfare states and citizenship in a European context, I now want to turn to the Danish state in particular. Like its European counterparts, important changes have also taken place to the Danish welfare state since the 1980s and 1990s (Petersen, Petersen & Christiansen, 2013, 2014; Pedersen, 2011; Petersen, 2014, 2016;

Torfig, 1999, 2001, 2004). Indeed, similar to the developments outlined above, this has meant the coming of what has been named as the competition state (Pedersen, 2011) as well as profound changes to citizenship as a political construct, category and practice. At the same time, there are a number of national particularities that need to be considered when looking at the development of the Danish state.

### 3.2.1. From the welfare state to the competition state

The complex set of crises tendencies facing Western welfare states in the 1970s and 1980s also took hold in Denmark. In 1973, the oil crises kicked off and by the 1980s, unemployment had risen to new heights, not least due to stagflation tendencies (Torfig, 1999). This effectively put a stop to the seemingly unlimited and unhindered growth of the Danish welfare state that had taken place in the post-war period. Riding the economic wave of the 1950s and 1960s, the Danish welfare state had grown considerably in the post-war years. Not only had the public sector and administration increased significantly in size, the rights associated with citizenship had also been expanded, making the Danish welfare state consolidate in its so-called “classic” form. Christiansen and Petersen (2001, p. 184) thus argue that the “decades between 1950 and the mid-1970s were the golden years of the Danish welfare state.” In these years, they furthermore note, “a series of social reforms [...] transformed both the social security system and the way in which social problems were talked about. Denmark became a modern welfare state in the Nordic sense: tax financed, universal social security organized in a rational, scientific way formulated as social rights” (ibid.).

With the crises-tendencies of the 1970s and 1980s, the Danish welfare state started to face internal limitations *and* came under ideological attack (Petersen, Petersen & Christiansen, 2013). “[A] word often heard describing this period,” Christiansen and Petersen (2001, p. 194, emphasis added) thus notes, “is the *crisis* of the welfare state.” Indeed, across the political system and traditional political divides, a staunch critique was formulated against the welfare state. Not only was it deemed to be economically unviable, it was also seen as actively taking individual freedom and choice away from citizens. As Olsen (2018, p. 194, original emphasis) remarks, “the criticism of the welfare state and its growing public sector was economic *and* political in nature. According to its critics, the welfare state was ineffective and expensive, as well as repressive and undemocratic because it subjected its citizens to and made them dependent on a system that was particularly beneficial for its rulers—the public servants.” As a response to these criticisms, calls for more entrepreneurial, modern and

market-driven forms of governance were formulated. In many ways, critics were calling seemingly every part of the welfare system into question: “taxation levels, the growth in the welfare system, the number of public sector employees, equality as a political goal, the efficiency of the public sector, the deficiencies of the welfare state, organizational weaknesses, problematic side-effects, the standardization of services, the large number of control mechanisms, bureaucracy and the lack of attention to the individual’s preferences” (Petersen, Petersen & Christiansen, 2013, p. 83, my translation). In the 1980s, this crisis of legitimacy only escalated further. Rising unemployment rates continued to put pressure on existing welfare systems and the need for political interventions seemed increasingly pertinent.

One of the major responses to these tensions came in 1982, as the newly elected Conservative Prime Minister, Poul Schlüter, declared that the individual’s own initiative and responsibility were to be placed center stage on the political agenda (Olsen, 2018, p. 233). This gave way to a series of wide-ranging modernization programs, aimed at reforming a public sector that was deemed too bureaucratic and expensive (Petersen, Petersen & Christiansen, 2013, p. 116). Labelling itself explicitly against the old welfare model, this modernization of the Danish public sector was to be based on ideas of “quality, efficiency and productivity, working through self-regulating mechanisms, systems of competition and decentralization” (ibid.). Without going too far into detail with these programs, they essentially served to push ideas of free choice, marketization, competitiveness and individual responsibility throughout the Danish public sector (Olsen, 2018). When a new coalition, led by Prime Minister, Poul Nyrup-Rasmussen, and the Social Democrats took over in 1993, many of these ideas were carried on. It was continuously stated that the public sector needed to be slimmed through a combination of outsourcing and marketization, e.g. by introducing governance forms like “New Public Management” (NPM) and similar techniques.<sup>8</sup> This also meant the gradual breakthrough of activation policies (Petersen, 2014).

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<sup>8</sup> In 2006, Greve (2006, p. 165) would thus argue that NPM had become omnipresent in the Danish public sector: “Talk to any public manager in the Danish public sector and they will use the well-known vocabulary and phrases connected with NPM: performance-based management, market mechanisms, quality systems, balanced score cards, customer orientation, e-government, performance-related pay and contracts. [...] Every organization today has to have written efficiency strategies (service strategies in local government) that state what management tools the organizations use in order to fulfil their mission from politicians and citizens.” More recently, researchers have argued that NPM is in the process of being superseded by new forms of governance (for an overview, see Andersen et al., 2017).

With the liberal-conservative coalition headed by Anders Fogh Rasmussen from Venstre coming into power in 2001, reforms intensified and took on an even more pronounced focus on privatization and marketization. Indeed, as the image of *homo economicus* (“economic” or “rational” man) became the underlying principle of policymaking (Petersen, 2016, p. 265), individual work and responsibilities came to dominate the political agenda: “The individual’s will to work became a public concern. The cornerstone of society was the individual’s will to work, while the public culture of subsidization weakened society. The task was therefore to *reward* those, who could and would, *punish* those, who could, but did not want to, while those, who wanted to, but couldn’t, should be *helped*” (ibid., my translation and emphasis). Work thus came to be one of the primary concerns of the state, as its aim was to mobilize its citizenry as part of the global economy and competition.

In a Danish context, these shifts within the institutional, discursive and material composition of the state have often been subsumed as a gradual movement from a welfare state to a competition state. Inspired, if mostly implicitly, by the work of Jessop, Hirsch and other neo-Marxist scholars, this line of scholarship has come to be closely associated with the Danish political economist, Ove Kaj Pedersen (2011). Capturing the historical developments laid out above, Pedersen (2011) has suggested that a number of changes have taken place at the core of the Danish state since the 1980s and 1990s. First, while the classic welfare state pursued universal welfare and social rights, the competition state hopes to make citizens able to participate within the global economy. Indeed, whereas the welfare state explicitly sought to counteract the movements of the economy, the competition state aims to actively participate in and sustain that economy. Economic stability is turned into economic dynamism. Second, this simultaneously means that obligations and responsibilities that were previously handled by public institutions are cast as personal duties. The state is no longer concerned, at least not primarily, with creating a national community but instead seeks to produce active and individualized citizens. Third, this also means a reformulation of basic political concepts such as freedom and work. According to Pedersen (2011), freedom is no longer seen as bound to communities or democracy but is envisioned as the freedom to pursue one’s own personal interests. And fourth, this simultaneously implies a much more internationally oriented state. While the welfare state was primarily a national project, both economically and politically, the competition state is fundamentally tied up with international organizations, forums and networks. Table 2 summarizes these changes in an ideal-typical fashion, showcasing some of the major shifts in the Danish state’s form.

Table 2. From welfare state to competition state

	Welfare state (circa 1945-1990)	Competition state (circa 1990-)
MAIN AIM	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Promotion of welfare</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Promotion of national competitiveness</li> </ul>
RELATION BETWEEN ECONOMY AND POLITICS	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Stability and national orientation</li> <li>Sheltering citizens against the market's cycles of boom and bust; countercyclical interventions and Keynesian instruments</li> <li>Politics as primary vis-à-vis the market</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Dynamism and international orientation</li> <li>Mobilizing citizens and businesses to take part in global competition</li> <li>Politics and the market as equal</li> </ul>
CLASS	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Equal rights and recognition of all citizens; inclusionary society.</li> <li>Class differences should be lessened through more equality and universal rights</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Society divided in two; exclusionary society.</li> <li>Reproduction of social inequalities through the distribution of rights and duties along pre-existing lines of class stratification</li> <li>Equality as the individual's own ability to realize his or her utility</li> </ul>
CITIZENSHIP	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Collective responsibility and moral education; solidarity with the 'dependent', 'the weak' and 'the excluded'</li> <li>Community as bound to democracy, citizenship, participation</li> <li>Freedom as freedom to participate in political processes</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Individual responsibility and responsabilization; solidarity with the working and tax-paying part of the population</li> <li>Community as bound to work</li> <li>Freedom as freedom to realize one's own needs</li> </ul>
PUBLIC SECTOR REFORM	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Reforms based on thorough planning in order to create "the good society"</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Continuous reform activity ("the never-ending reform") in order to create competitive economies</li> </ul>

SOURCE: Categorized by author based on Petersen (2016, p. 268-270) and Pedersen (2011)

### 3.2.2. Active citizenship and the exclusionary turn in social policy

The turn towards a competition state in the 1990s also meant a shift within the dominant form of citizenship. Indeed, as indicated by the arguments presented above, new modalities of active citizenship have largely come to dominate the political agenda. The point of doing so has in part been to accommodate the shifting demands of the capitalist economy: citizens have had to be or become flexible and entrepreneurial beings that can be mobilized within the nation's competition with other nations. One of the consequences, Pedersen (2011) argues, of this shift within the dominant form of citizenship has been that social inequalities and class differences are no longer sought counteracted by state intervention. Instead, these are actively reproduced through new policy measurements, implying that the state takes on a more pronounced role as a *stratifying agent*: "the competition state does not – in contrast to

the welfare state – have the purpose of creating equality and does not use a universalistic distribution of rights to do so. It instead accentuates existing social inequalities by distributing rights and duties depending on where in the social hierarchy the individual is (administratively) placed” (Pedersen, 2011, p. 278, my translation).

In this context, Jørn Henrik Petersen has argued that the turn towards activation policies are indicate of wider normative developments within social and public policy. Within the Keynesian post-war welfare state, Petersen (2014, p. 153) argues, welfare services were linked to the citizen’s status *as a citizen*. Having the right to benefits offered by the state hinged on the individual’s formal right as a citizen and was, as a consequence, decoupled from his or her tax contribution to the state itself. Citizens were effectively able to get ‘something for nothing’, as no expectation or principle of direct reciprocity was built into the welfare system. Those who contributed the most through taxes did not necessarily receive the most in return. With activation policies, and the normative idea of citizenship these contained and helped foster, this started to change: citizens were now expected to be active and contributing individuals, capable of taking care of their own life. In this way, *something for nothing* was replaced by the slogan *something for something*. This normative change took place, Petersen suggests, together with a change in the way that the lower strata of the class hierarchy were perceived and governed: “The ‘dependent’, the ‘vulnerable’, the ‘excluded’ were met with empathy, respect, and recognition in the welfare state. Now, they became scapegoats and the object of resentment and anger. In the dominant political order, there is inbuilt the tacit assumption that there is no longer room for those who do not get up every morning and go to work” (2016, p. 273, my translation).

What we can begin to see, then, is how the turn towards the competition state has warranted the coming of new normative ideas and policies intended to foster the proper forms of citizen-subjectivity. Assimilating tropes found across European welfare states, citizenship has moved from a primarily rights-based model to being increasingly premised on active obligations and contributions. This has taken place, as argued above, together with the construction of new differentially distributed modes of hierarchization: both discursively and institutionally, the competition state is increasingly modelled on the active, flexible and working citizen, while those being unable to participate within the reproduction of capitalism increasingly face punitive and disciplinary forces.



### 3.3. What does this dissertation add?

Zooming in on the relation between citizenship, welfare state restructuring and digitalization, this dissertation adds a new angle and set of descriptions to the changes outlined above. It does so by arguing that digitalization, as a nascent regulatory instrument, is increasingly becoming an important area of political intervention and institutional change. Far from just a technical upgrading, this dissertation seeks to showcase how digitalization has become a powerful form of intervention used to build and expand the competition state. This political form of intervention has become a genuine means of institutional change with wide-ranging implication for citizenship. These implications have, the dissertation argues, so far remained underexamined by research, as scholars have largely failed to take notice of digitalization as a proper political project and means of welfare reform.

The argument that will be presented in this dissertation can, when distilled to its core, be stated as follows: Danish policymaking efforts around digitalization started to take off in the early 1990s. They did so not least due to the advent of new technologies, internet infrastructures and the flourishing of new transnational imaginaries, such as the information society promoted by the European Union. The political vision constructed in the 1990s largely revolved around ideas of participatory democracy, welfare, participation and freedom to information. At the same time, policymakers saw the use of new technologies as providing an important means of rationalizing core public sector institutions, cutting-costs and enhancing efficiency. These ideas were closely linked to the wider modernization programs touched upon above, which served the purpose of trimming the welfare state. The 1990s was, in this sense, very much a balancing act where calls for democracy and welfare were articulated together with economic ideas centered on cutting costs and creating more flexible welfare agencies. From the early 2000s, however, the balance tipped in favor of the latter, as policy actors reformulated the dominant set of policy visions. No longer a question of creating an information society, but instead a *digital administration*, digitalization reforms shifted towards being primarily a means of public sector rationalization, optimization and cost-cutting. By the late 2000s, these strategies came to be increasingly coupled with new ideas of citizenship. It was not only the public administration that had to be or become digital, but also citizens, as new self-service solutions started to be implemented across the welfare system. These changes took place throughout the different domains of welfare provision and signaled a shift in the relation between citizens and the state. Since then, citizens have increasingly been expected to be active, self-provisioning and self-reliant digital subjects, ca-

pable of solving their own administrative problems through digital interfaces and platforms. This has been achieved (and pushed) through the introduction of *new legal mechanisms* (making digital communication the default legal option), the *refunctionalization of existing welfare agencies* (increasingly made to help citizens become digital) and the *construction of new normative divisions* (dividing citizens into new groups depending on their ability to meet the demands imposed by the state). It has moreover meant that new forms of exclusion have been created, as those unable or unwilling to follow along the rapidly changing demands imposed by digitalization start to become left out. It is this complex set of changes – spanning both normative, legal, institutional and exclusionary aspects – that this dissertation will describe. Doing so not only showcases that digitalization has become a potent means of welfare reform and political intervention, but also lays bare its *particular* dynamics and implications for citizenship.

#### 4. Methodological approach

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The research presented in this dissertation builds on a set of empirical investigations dealing with citizenship at the intersection of welfare reform and digitalization. As stated in the introduction, the study can be understood as a *case study* (Flyvbjerg, 2001, 2006), using Denmark as a specific case through which broader issues and dynamics related to citizenship can be understood and unpacked. The dissertation takes Denmark to be a particularly productive case for understanding the transformations taking place within a traditionally strong welfare state that has pushed a very proactive digitalization since the early 1990s. As a consequence, studying this country, and the *specific* set of circumstances surrounding it, can provide insights into political pathways and trajectories that may become actualized in other welfare states, particularly in Europe.

To investigate this case, the dissertation has opted for what may best be described as a multi-level setup concerned with the interplay between the national field of policymaking and local governmental practices. Based on the arguments presented in the preceding sections, the premise for this project has been that in order to grasp citizenship as a particular relation between the state and individuals, there is a need to integrate and hold together political discourses, governmental practices and institutions. The dissertation operationalizes this framing by simultaneously paying attention to the ways in which national policymakers have constructed citizens as digital individuals over time *and* the ways in which this has shaped and been shaped by local governmental practices. In so doing, the methodological design of the

present study seeks to combine different vectors within a more or less unified analytical matrix: merging national and local, historical and contemporary perspectives into a single framework. Table 3 lays out this research design in greater detail.

Table 3. Overview of research design

Focus	Description	Aim
NATIONAL POLICYMAKING	Discourse analysis of digitalization policies, strategies and reports produced from 1992 to 2017.	To understand how and in what ways citizens have been constructed within national digitalization policies over time.
LOCAL GOVERNMENT	Qualitative analysis of municipal citizen service centers in seven Danish municipalities based on interviews.	To understand how welfare institutions have changed due to digitalization reforms, as well as the changing relations between welfare professionals and citizens.

SOURCE: Author's own compilation

#### 4.1. Epistemological and ontological premises

The research conducted in this study has been driven by what may be termed as a *problem-oriented research strategy*, concerned less with working within strict disciplinary boundaries and more with gradually mobilizing different empirical as well as theoretical instruments in order to produce more comprehensive depictions of social and political phenomena. The dissertation has in particular taken central cues from so-called *post-disciplinary* currents within political sociology and political economy (Brenner, 2004; Sum & Jessop, 2013; Sayer 2000). One of the more comprehensive articulations of this kind of research agenda can be found in the work of cultural political economists, Sum and Jessop (2013). They describe their approach as “pre-disciplinary in inspiration, trans-disciplinary in practice, and post-disciplinary in its aspiration” (2013, p. ix). Post-disciplinary is here taken to encompass a particular *self-reflexive practice* that does not fit easily within pre-existing disciplinary boundaries. Indeed, Sum and Jessop (2013) summarize the main thrust of such an approach in the following way:

This approach refuses historically contingent disciplinary boundaries. Instead, post-disciplinary analyses begin by identifying specific problems independent of how they would be classified, if at all, by different disciplines; and they then mobilize, develop and integrate the necessary concepts, methodologies and knowledge to address such problems without regard to disciplinary boundaries. In sum, this research orientation is critically self-aware of both the epistemic and ontological limits of inherited disciplines and

is explicitly problem-oriented rather than tied to disciplinary blinkers. As such, this is a research programme that should be discursively and structurally resistant to disciplinary institutionalization, that is, to becoming another discipline alongside others. (p. 15)

Post-disciplinarity thus implies a commitment to working with a non-exclusive, self-reflexive and inherently open frame of theorization that cannot be reduced to mechanically applying a set of predefined concepts or ideas. This is not an *anything goes* mentality, as research needs to be based on a certain set of internally coherent epistemological, ontological and normative commitments. Yet, it does signal that there are multiple *entry-points* to the same problem. To reduce the complexity of social and political phenomena, there is a need to mobilize different conceptual tools and ideas. It seems to me that Neil Brenner hit the nail on its head when he, in his book *New State Spaces* from 2004, argued that post-disciplinary approaches have become “increasingly relevant in an era in which established divisions between social, economic, political and cultural processes are being undermined” (2004, p. 23). This dissertation builds on and contributes to these international currents by advancing a political sociological account of citizenship that *purposefully and explicitly seeks to move beyond disciplinary boundaries and scholastic blinkers*. A major part of this dissertation consists precisely in working against the rigid compartmentalization of particular research problems as a consequence of disciplinary path-dependencies. This is, as stated above, not a call for an “anything goes” mentality and so the present work also takes a series of epistemological and ontological claims as foundational for the present study. These have been formed throughout the project in dialogue with the work of scholars from both sociology and political science and will only be recounted here in a somewhat schematic way (for a detailed discussion, see Schou & Hjelholt, 2018a, chap. 2). Overall, the dissertation builds on four premises.

1) *The dissertation grounds its approach to political institutions and processes in an ontological understanding of complexity and complexity reduction.* In essence, this is an ontological claim insisting that “the world is too complex to be grasped in all its complexity in real time (or ever) and for all permutations to be realizable in the same time-space” (Sum & Jessop, 2013, p. 3). In order for individuals and institutions to ‘go on the in the world’, they have to reduce, manage and steer complexity in certain historically situated ways. This takes place both discursively, insofar as some elements, objects and subjects are given meaning in particular way, and it takes place in terms of limiting the potential range of social relations through efforts of structuration. The important point to take away from this argument is that while

there is an overflow of contingent possibilities (complexity), these have to be reduced in such a way that certain forms of meaning and structure are more likely than others. Over time, these forms of complexity reduction become layered, creating certain path-dependencies. Not only does this signal that history matters, but also that other paths (forms of complexity reduction) have been open in the past and could be opened again.

2) *This focus on complexity as a foundational premise is coupled with a historical epistemology that is sensitive to the particular contextual and embedded nature of knowledge and truth.* Inspired in equal parts by Foucault and Marx, Sum & Jessop (2013) have argued that “knowledge is always partial, provisional and incomplete. ‘Knowledging’ activities can never exhaust the complexity of the world. On this basis, against a universal, trans-historical account [...], we emphasize the inevitable contextuality and historicity of knowledge claims” (ibid., p. 5). In this sense, against positivist or reified takes on the nature of knowledge, they advocate a historical approach to the practices and power relations that goes into the making of certain knowledge forms and truth regimes. Knowledge is something that is produced and recursively involved in producing the very reality it seeks to describe.

3) *In line with its historical epistemology, the dissertation asserts the centrality of discourses and meaning-making for the study and interpretation of political processes and structures.* In so doing, it not only turns its gaze to “the meanings that shape actions and institutions, and the ways in which they do so” (Bevir & Rhodes, 2016, p. 3), but also views discourses and meaning-making as central for political analysis at an ontological level (Sum & Jessop, 2013; Glynnos & Howarth, 2007). The dissertation thus suggests that neither national policies nor local governmental practices can be understood without paying close attention to the particular concepts, ideas and languages mobilized by each (Fischer et al, 2015; Howarth & Torfing, 2005; Jessop, 2009; Jessop & Sum, 2011). This goes against the all too persistent positivist inclinations of both orthodox policy studies as well as research on digitalization as a particular form of political intervention. Indeed, the field of critical policy studies very much emerged in the 1980s as a response to this type of reified view on knowledge and meaning.<sup>9</sup> As Frank Fischer et al. (2015, p. 1) summarize in their recent *Handbook of Critical Policy Studies*:

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<sup>9</sup> One of the most precise and trenchant critiques of these orthodox strands remains the one formulated by Jamie Peck and Nik Theodore (2012, p. 23; see also 2015): “Orthodox analyses of policy transfer tend to be normatively positive and methodologically positivist; they are principally concerned with the legible design features of ‘successful’ policies, with the patterns of dif-

One of the most important issues for critical policy studies, then, has to do with the nature of knowledge, both the knowledge used to shape policy and the kinds of knowledge and assumptions that guide the implementation of policy decisions. Basic to this approach has been a critique of the positivist conception of knowledge that has long informed the theory and practice of policy studies and policy analysis in particular. Critical policy studies, drawing on studies of the cultural and historical context of knowledge, largely adopts an interpretive, culturally and historically constructivist understanding of knowledge and its creation.

Building on this type of approach does not mean losing sight on wider structural constraints and frameworks. Indeed, in an effort to move beyond a merely culturalist or interpretivist approach, the dissertation suggests that the respective strengths of political sociology and political economy, focusing variously on the symbolic and the material, must be held together (on this, see Wacquant, 2008; Sum & Jessop, 2013).

4) *Finally, while acknowledging the situated and contextual nature of all knowledge claims and truth regimes, the dissertation nonetheless maintains that social scientific research must engage in normative questions.* It must do so in order to de-neutralize and re-politicize otherwise sedimented structures. Research can and should help bring out the pathways that have been discarded over time, highlighting the possibility for other futures. At the same time, research can also play a role in bringing to the front asymmetries of power and differentially distributed capacities for action. Why is it that certain policy options, for example, do not have the same consequences and outcomes for different social classes and groups? And what is the both intended and unintended impact of policies in action? As I have discussed elsewhere at length (Schou, 2016, 2017), a commitment to normative interventions does not presuppose a moral high ground. It simply means acknowledging that social scientific research is always, willingly or not, participating in the very reality it seeks to describe. Table 4 summarizes these overall arguments, outlining their methodological consequences.

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fusion that they describe (typically 'outward', from singular places of invention), and with the decision-making and learning behaviors that facilitate these transfer processes [...]. Conventionally, little attention is paid to the social and ideological contexts of the policy-making process, to the politics of policy knowledge production, or to the more indeterminate zones of policy implementation and practice [...]. Policies themselves are likewise reified, usually in terms of specific design features, and they are seen to travel, more or less intact, across generally inert institutional landscapes."

Table 4. Epistemological and ontological premises

Principle	Description	Methodological significance
COMPLEXITY (ONTOLOGICAL)	The world is extraordinarily complex and cannot be grasped in its totality: there is a need for complexity reduction in order for individuals to be able to 'go on' in the world.	Research must be attentive to the reduction of complexity, understood as historically layered, path-dependent and reinforcing forms of meaning and structuration. Need to mobilize different entry-points, concepts and methods.
HISTORICITY (EPISTEMOLOGICAL)	All knowledge is contingent and contextually embedded: truth regimes do not refer to pre-given essences but are the result of layered historical dynamics and power relations.	Research must adopt a contextualist and historical mode of analysis, tracing the formation of practices, institutions, discourses and more. This also goes for the concepts employed by research itself.
DISCURSIVITY (ANALYTICAL)	Discourses and meaning-making are central to political processes and practices: language and knowledge matters for the construction of problems, solutions and actions.	Research must be attentive to the ways in which particular concepts and ideas serve to frame and produce actions, institutions and practices, including their relation to social structures.
CRITIQUE (ETHICAL)	Social scientific research is always implicated in engagements with the world it seeks to describe: research ought to question and critically engage with domination, asymmetries of power and processes of de-politicization.	Research cannot take particular discourses or forms of knowledge as natural, neutral and depoliticized, but must question their historical conditions of emergence, differentially distributed capacities for action and asymmetrical consequences.

SOURCE: Author's own compilation

## 4.2. Studying national discourses and policy processes

Having now presented some of the overarching methodological premises guiding the research conducted for this dissertation, this section turns to a more in-depth look at the empirical material and analytical process. The project started out by focusing on the changes taking place to citizenship with the gradual rollout of digitalization policies on a national level. Indeed, the first part of the project was very much concerned with mapping national policy discourses connected to digitalization, including the idea of citizenship these have constructed and served to produce. This was in large part fueled by an interest in the discursive dimensions of policymaking and a reaction to the all too often de-politicized approaches found in existing research. Indeed, in existing scholarly literature, there has not only been a tendency to downplay discursive or ideational components of digitalization (cf. Hall, 2008; Chini, 2008; Löfgren & Sorensen, 2011), but also to disassociate this policy area from wider processes of citizenship and welfare reform. In an effort to go beyond this current impasse,

the project began by systematically collecting and analyzing national policies in and around public sector digitalization in Denmark.

#### 4.2.1. Collecting data

The collection and analysis of policies was carried out in two consecutive phases moving from an initial *thematically-oriented* analysis, concerned with understanding the discursive construction of citizenship within a limited selection of documents, to a wider *historical mapping* focused on shifting policy discourses over time. For the first phase of analysis (presented in Publication 1), the main empirical data consisted of the four major digitalization strategies produced by the Danish Ministry of Finance in the period from 2001 to 2015 on a two to three-year basis. These policies have all specifically targeted the Danish public sector and sought to formulate certain visions and targets for how and why welfare institutions should and must use digital technologies. The policies have functioned as the main political drivers of both national and municipal initiatives. All the strategies were collected through the official homepage of the Danish Agency for Digitisation ([www.digst.dk](http://www.digst.dk)). Some of the strategies exist in both Danish and English versions. In these cases, where applicable, the English versions have been used, while in all other cases I have translated quotes into English from Danish.

In the second phase of analysis, a more comprehensive archive was established through a systematic collection of governmental documents. This was done in an effort to pursue a more wide-ranging and historically oriented analysis, capable of tracing the formation and development of policy ideas over time. Based on the first phase of analysis, it seemed to me that there was a need to not only move beyond the periodization already provided by existing scholarship, but also put contemporary policy ideas in their proper historical and institutional context. To this end, a more comprehensive archive of national strategies, annual reviews, white papers and reports was assembled. This was done by collecting documents formulated in the context of governmental digitalization and published by shifting national governments, ministries and working groups since the early 1990s (1992–2017). This collection of documents took place through a combination of online archives, searching for documents on governmental websites, and the use of Danish libraries, where some of the early documents were located as hard copies. In the latter case, online archive systems were used to track down physical documents using a combination of keyword searches. The collection of data deliberately focused on publications that target “information and communication



technologies”, “digitalization”, and “information technology.” This also meant that, as a rule (with few exceptions), strategies, policies and reports in which these topics only play a minor or tangential role have not been included in the archive. Thus, while the archive was collected through a systematic process, it does not claim to include every governmental policy or document ever formulated as to the purpose and function of public sector digitalization. Exclusions and oversights are always present when collecting data in this sort of fashion. Be that as it may, the archive does represent a substantial selection of published documents and may, as a consequence, serve as a productive entry-point for mapping policy processes over time. In total, 56 governmental documents have been collected, spanning the period 1992 to 2017. Appendix A includes a full list of all included documents ordered chronologically and by ministry.

#### 4.2.2. Analyzing data

Mirroring the data collection detailed above, the analysis also took place in two consecutive phases. As will be discussed in Publication 1, the initially collected data, consisting of the four major digitalization strategies from 2001 to 2015, was coded using concepts from discourse theory (Laclau & Mouffe, 2014 [1985]; Howarth, 2000) based on the methodological guidelines provided by discourse theoretical scholars such as Howarth (2005). Focused on unpacking the formation of discourses from an interpretivist angle, this involved a thematic mode of analysis examining how and in what ways citizenship was discursively configured in the strategies. The coding of the strategies took place in a two-step process. First, the strategies were read a number of times, while noting key signifiers linked to citizenship (“Borger” in Danish). This led to the establishment of three main themes, named “citizens as businesses”, “citizenship as homogeneity”, and “citizenship as individuality,” each denoting a particular discursive logic found in the strategies. These inductive codes were then applied in a second round of coding. At this point, the three themes were further fleshed out by linking specific textual passages from the strategies to each of these. Taken together, this allowed for the production of a fairly thick description of the particular ways in which citizens have been constructed in the strategies. This analysis thus took a *synchronic* perspective on the data (Andersen, 2003), focusing on national policies as a more or less coherent thematic block containing a relatively unified set of discourses and themes.

The second phase of analysis involved devising a more elaborate coding scheme in order to examine the more comprehensive archive of data. This was done in order to focus on both the historical development of meaning over time and the institutional context for producing

each policy. As a consequence, this portion of the analysis was also conducted in a multi-step process, yet slightly different from the previous one. First, all assembled documents were read through in order to familiarize myself with their contents and history. This reading was contextualized based on the descriptive accounts provided by previous scholarship (see Jæger & Löfgren, 2010; Johansson, 2004; Greve & Ejersbo, 2014, 2017). In this reading, notes were taken on major political themes and actors involved in policy processes. This was done with a focus on the shifting historical relations between 1) ministries (actors), 2) documents (articulations) and 3) discourses (ideas). Second, having read through the documents and mapped their internal relations, a systematic coding of the strategies deemed most central to the policy process was conducted. This was done through a combination of inductive and deductive codes, using a custom-made Excel database. The database combined a series of codes that were deductive (created in advance) *and* inductive (generated from interpretation of text). Table 5 provides an overview of these codes which were applied to specific textual extracts from the analyzed documents. Analyzing the documents in this way allowed me to filter quotes and search in various ways through the material. This made it possible to sort all passages related to a specific topic, such as “citizens”, which could then be traced over time. Third, using this database as a starting point, a chronological analysis focusing on the interplay between agents and discourses was constructed. The results of this analysis are captured in Publication 2.

Table 5. Coding scheme/database

Call name	Year	Quote	Comments	Primary code	Secondary code	Tertiary code	Page	Source
Short-hand name for document	Year of publication	Coded quote from the document	Comments if something is particular important in quote	Deductive. Is the theme related to: 1) citizens 2) public sector 3) Denmark 4) businesses 5) hybrid	Inductive text. What are the main themes addressed?	Inductive keywords. What are the main keywords describing quote?	Page number	Full source

SOURCE: Author's own compilation

### 4.3. Studying local government and citizen service centers

The second part of the research project implied a move beyond official policy discourses and into local governmental agencies. While this part of the project had been planned from the outset of the research, its importance became increasingly clear to me while analyzing national policies. Indeed, it seemed that going beyond the mainly textual focus of these strategies was incredibly important for understanding and unpacking the actual implications of

national policies for citizenship and the welfare state. Moving into local municipal institutions was, however, not just a means of understanding the movement of policies from a national political scale to local institutional settings. It was also a matter of attending to the specific institutional roles and responsibilities emerging in and around citizens in these local circumstances.

Tracing the links between the national field of policymaking and local governmental agencies proved somewhat of a methodological challenge. The national policies investigated in this project have targeted a wide variety of different welfare institutions and fields. In being aimed at the public sector in the broadest sense possible – including such diverse areas as education, healthcare, welfare services, taxation and more – their translation and translocation cannot be understood by simply following their movement from one site to another. Rather than attempting to map out the entire range of sites targeted by national policies, a conscious choice was made to focus on so-called *citizen service centers*. This was done because these centers provide a particularly apt setting for understanding and deciphering the changing relations between the state and citizens (as will be explained below).

#### 4.3.1. Collecting data

Citizen service centers were established throughout Danish municipalities in the mid-1990s as an official entrance-point for citizens needing to get in contact with the public sector in order to acquire official documents, welfare services and otherwise make requests to the public sector (Pors, 2015a,b). In 2005, the function of these centers was formalized through the introduction of new legal frameworks. This took place together with the so-called structural reform (*Strukturreformen*) that was put into effect in 2007. As Bhatti et al. (2011, p. 4) recounts: “In January 2007, the Danish municipal sector underwent a radical structural reform. The number of municipalities was reduced from 271 to 98 when 239 of the old municipalities were amalgamated in 66 new entities. The remaining 32 municipalities maintained their pre-2007 physical borders but received new areas of authority. The average number of inhabitants increased from about 20,000 to 56,000, and the average size of a municipality increased from 159 square kilometres to 440 square kilometres.” The idea of this reform was, amongst other things, to place citizens at the center of public services (Pedersen, 2009). Citizen service centers were seen as a central resource for doing so. Envisioned as an official entrance or one-stop shop, these centers were supposed to handle all interaction between the public sector and Danish citizens. In their capacity as (imagined) unified entrances to the

public sector, taking care of several different areas of welfare provision, these centers provide a particularly instructive setting for understanding the new relations between the state and its citizens. For reasons that will be explained below, the collection of data was done in a small handful of municipalities, situated in quite different geographical settings and characterized by differentially distributed socio-economic dynamics. After choosing citizen service centers as a useful place for attending to the new relations being formed between citizens and the state, the next issue was devising a fitting research strategy for picking the municipalities to study. In this context, an exploratory approach was opted for, loosely derived from what Flyvbjerg (2006) labels as “maximum variation cases.” Instead of choosing to do prolonged studies in one municipality, several different municipal settings were therefore chosen in order to get a sense of the changes taking place across the country. A focus on qualitative interviews rather than in-situ observation was moreover opted for in order to get a wider sense of these local governmental agencies.

In my choice of municipalities, the aim was first of all to cover different geographical settings in order to move beyond a narrow preoccupation with, for example, large urban municipalities. Secondly, the idea was to include municipalities with different socio-economic characteristics, such as percentage of unemployed citizens, early retirements and average income. Using metrics provided by The Ministry for Economic Affairs and the Interior (<http://www.noegletal.dk/>), a list of municipalities was compiled relying on official demographic and socio-economic data. The aim of doing so was not to take the official statistics as neutral descriptions or make a representative selection of municipalities. Instead, these were employed in a somewhat heuristic fashion. By combining geographical placement with socio-economic metrics, I created a shortlist of twenty municipalities. Out of these, I contacted 12 different municipalities through official email channels. From this, 8 municipalities replied back: one declined (due to organizational changes within the municipality), while seven agreed to participate. As the project focuses on political and institutional commonalities found across the different municipalities, all names, places, and identities have been anonymized throughout the dissertation.

#### 4.3.2. Interviews and analyzing data

The main mode of data collection in each municipality was through the use of qualitative interviews. These interviews were conducted in the period from April to July 2017. At the end, 17 welfare professionals across seven municipalities had been interviewed: this includ-

ed 8 frontline workers and 9 daily managers of citizen service centers.<sup>10</sup> The interviews were conducted in a semi-structured format, combining factual and phenomenological aspects (cf. Kvale & Brinkmann, 2008). They were both meant to obtain “descriptions of the life world of the interviewee in order to interpret the meaning of the described phenomena” (ibid., p. 3) and provide more general insights into both frontline workers and daily managers’ work practices. The interviews were, in other words, simultaneously intended to give an image of the experiences of welfare professionals and descriptions of their daily practices.

Separate interview guides were created for frontline workers and managers. With frontline workers, interviews focused on everyday work practices, encounters with citizens and reflections on their own work situation. The aim was to get a sense of how and in what ways these workers had to navigate and relate to citizens on a day-to-day basis. In cases where the frontline worker had been employed in the particular municipality for a prolonged period, they were asked whether their work had changed over time and (if so) how. Throughout the interviews, frontline workers were prompted to give specific examples as to encounters with citizens. They were furthermore asked to narrate a typical encounter with a citizen by walking through each step of the process: from citizens entering the citizen service center to being helped by frontline workers and walking out.

With daily managers, interviews focused first and foremost on the institutional organization of citizen services (roles and responsibilities), the particular competences expected of frontline workers and the implementation of national policies in the particular municipality. Here, it is important to note how daily managers occupy very different positions than do the welfare state professionals who are in daily contact with citizens. Indeed, the managers interviewed for this project often held a role as middle manager stretched out between the upper municipal management and the everyday practices of frontline workers. They had to navi-

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<sup>10</sup> The notion of ‘frontline’ workers (or ‘street-level’ bureaucrats) is taken from the work of Lipsky (2010) and is not necessarily used in any normative sense. Instead, it is an attempt to capture the particular institutional role of welfare professionals, employed to deliver policies through local encounters with citizens. Studying frontline workers is, as Zacka (2017, p. 16) has recently argued, a way of looking at the state and policies from a “bottom-up” perspective. In this sense, it can serve to portray a very different set of dynamics from those promoted in national policies and strategies. Frontline workers are often subject to a strange double bind, Zacka moreover notices, insofar as these “occupy some of the lowest and least influential ranks of the various agencies to which they belong. [...] And yet, street-level bureaucrats are also responsible for personifying their agencies – and with them, the state – to citizens. [...] This asymmetry, between how they are perceived from within their own organizations and how they are perceived from without, colors their everyday work” (ibid, p. 24).

gate and translate between wider political visions and everyday practices (a tension that came up in the interviews). Additionally, in some municipalities, daily managers were fairly high up in the municipal management chain and also had other areas than citizen services as part of their portfolio. In this sense, the professional roles were not fixed across municipal boundaries, as their contents and responsibilities were very much tied up with the institutional legacies and path-dependencies of the chosen municipalities. The interview guides were revised incrementally throughout the process of conducting interviews. While the basic set of questions remained the same, my own knowledge on the topics matured significantly during the process. This meant that I was able to ask more specific questions and probe deeper into particular topics of interest. Box 2 contains some additional reflections on the interview process and situation.

All of the interviews were recorded using a portable audio recorder and lasted between 40 and 90 minutes. The interviews were analyzed through repeated listens, where I noted down key themes and topics emerging across the different conversations. In the process of doing so, key passages were transcribed from the interviews and analyzed through close textual readings. Based on this combination of active listening and transcription, a number of overarching themes started to take form. These revolved around topics such as everyday work experiences, encounters with citizens, professional competences and citizen service centers as a particular institutional space. These were used as the basis for the analysis presented in Publication 3, 4 and 5.

#### **Box 2. Reflections. (Mis)understanding and interviewing**

In the closing part of *The Weight of the World*, Pierre Bourdieu (1999, p. 607-626) delivered a powerful (methodological) meditation, reflecting on questions of scientific practice and procedure. In this, Bourdieu notes that interviews are, like all other social relations, intertwined with relations of power and the position of agents within social space. In being able to set the parameters of the situation – its aim and purpose – there is a founding *asymmetry* at the heart of most interviews. “It is the investigator who starts the game,” Bourdieu writes, “and sets up its rules, and is usually the one who, unilaterally and without any preliminary negotiations, assigns the interview its objective and uses” (ibid., p. 609). These asymmetries can, moreover, blend together with *social asymmetries* insofar as the interviewer engages with agents occupying a lower fraction of social space. In displaying these asymmetries, interviews represent a particular type of “object construction” (Bourdieu argued), whose social conditions and performative effects must be considered quite carefully. Not only does this warrant attention to the practicalities of the interview itself, prompting the researcher to follow along with the situation, while simultaneously picking up on spur of the moment opportunities. It also means a denaturalization of the whole situation, acknowledging its, in

many ways, artificial circumstances and constraints. The interviews conducted for this project – combining conversations with frontline workers and daily managers – brought out these tensions and social conditions quite clearly for me. Not only because managers and frontline workers occupy very different positions within their institutional space, but also because their particular background and embodied histories are widely different. Talking to and interviewing these two different “groups” presented its own challenges, leading me to revise my methodological strategy iteratively throughout the process of conducting interviews.

Interviewing managers, often occupying a position stretched out between the strategic-political layer of municipal politics and the everyday groundwork of welfare state professionals, proved a persistent challenge throughout the process. Unlike frontline workers, who were not always used to describing their work practices to others, the managers interviewed for this project all had extensive professional experience with doing just that: legitimizing and justifying their work and decisions. In being used to navigate shifting political orders, they were often able to produce very coherent and internally synchronized accounts in response to the questions I posed. As a consequence, I often got the sense that what I was being told, particularly in connection to questions of policymaking and political processes, were answers that had been given countless times before. The story I was being given, it seemed to me, often came out in a highly analytical and almost theorized way: rather than describing particular events or practices, managers would often give political explanations as to the particular mechanisms governing certain changes. Moreover, particularly the first interviews were marked by a strange set of misunderstandings. While I had made completely clear that I was a researcher – not a civil servant, bureaucrat or state official – managers sometimes spoke to me *as if* I would somehow relay their comments back to the centralized political system. In so doing, it felt as if they were not, in fact, talking to me, but instead using me as a vehicle to carry their particular observations to somewhere else. This was made particularly clear in one interview, which ended with the manager saying ‘Please, don’t close us down!’ To which I could only reply, somewhat dazed, that I had no intention of (or power to) do anything of the sort.

The informational asymmetry contained in the interview situation – where I, as a researcher, pose questions and know the objectives – was sometimes problematized or questioned head-on by some managers (particularly from larger urban areas). Indeed, in occupying higher positions within the social space than I, they seemed to flip the situation around, interrogating me and demanding answers. In one municipality, I had to describe my research design at length at the beginning of the interview, accounting for the choice of interviews (rather than quantitative measurements) and outcomes in terms of rationalization benefits. In so doing, the informant seemed to not only put into question the objectification of them as a research object, but also invoke their own objectification of the situation.

Similar concerns surfaced in my interviews with frontline workers. When I started out interviewing this group, in an effort to understand and capture their everyday practices, I quickly realized that a number of sociological dynamics were at play. Not only did I know

very little about their everyday situation, leading me to pose questions that were seemingly so obvious that they often left them confused, I did not even have a proper language to articulate this sense of not-knowing. Moreover – and in stark contrast to the often well-rehearsed “speeches” delivered by municipal managers – the first frontline workers I interviewed seemed both nervous and somewhat anxious about the whole situation. In the first municipality I visited, we were quite literally cramped into a corner in the room usually reserved for lunchtime. As “colleagues” gradually came into the room – in order to get their lunch from the refrigerator – both the frontline worker and I gave a coy smile to them, almost as if our very presence was embarrassing or an intrusion to their everyday practices. In the next set of interviews, I wanted to take these obstacles much more firmly and reflexively into account. I did so, first of all, by clearly stating the objectives for my research, emphasizing that I was *not* an evaluator, a ministerial reporter or a journalist, but “simply” a curious researcher. Secondly, I began to start each interview with a guided tour of the citizen service center, opting for a more informal approach to open the interview. Finally, I focused on moving from a directional approach to interviewing (asking questions in search of answers) and instead adopted a more active and continuous unfolding way of relating, listening and responding to my informants. From these reflections, no grand methodological program should be devised. These are simply presented here to showcase the on-going work of construction and reconstruction that has gone into the interviews pursued here. Far from neutral descriptions of an already pre-packaged reality, interviews are implicated in their own conditions of production, involve their own dynamics and must be engaged with through a self-reflexive learning process.

#### 4.4. Integrating different perspectives

The final part of the research project was dedicated to pulling the different empirical sites and theoretical concerns together. The aim was not only to place the conducted research within its wider historical context, but also to draw out common themes, contradictions and divergences between these different engagements. My concern was how and in what ways the empirical and theoretical strands could be linked together with literature on welfare reform and citizenship in order to form a more coherent narrative. The aim of doing so was to draw out and understand the structurally coherent patterns emerging from the empirical sites under scrutiny. While my empirical starting point had been a focus on digitalization as a partially autonomous, though certainly embedded and politically institutionalized, area of political intervention, this third phase increasingly led me to rethink my initial theoretical constructs somewhat. Placing my different investigations in contact with wider national and international literature, most prominently on the political restructurings facing advanced capitalist states in general and Denmark in particular, led me shift the analytical focus slightly. It increasingly seemed to me that rather than being about digitalization *per se*, the present investigation is actually about the remaking of citizenship as it is currently taking place in



the intersection between forward rolling pro-market, competition-oriented state projects and digitalization as a distinct means of political restructuring. In this sense, the arguments presented in this dissertation have in many ways been formed through an on-going exchange between theoretical ideas and empirical analysis.

Table 6. Overview of publications: research questions and status

<b>Publication</b>	<b>Research question</b>	<b>Main analytical focus</b>	<b>Status</b>
1. <i>Digitalizing the Welfare State: Citizenship Discourses in Danish Digitalization Strategies from 2002 to 2015</i>	How have citizens been discursively constructed within national digitalization strategies? What normative ideas have been tied to citizenship?	Discourses and ideas with an emphasis on the normative construction of citizenship	Published in <i>Critical Policy Studies</i> in 2017
2. <i>Rolling out Digitalization: Hegemonies, Policies and Governance Failures</i>	How have policymakers constructed the purpose and aim of national digitalization strategies? How has this changed over time?	Discourses and policy processes with a focus on historical shifts in meaning	Published as part of the monograph <i>Digitalization and Public Sector Transformations</i> in 2018
3. <i>Digital Citizenship and Neoliberalization: Governing Digital Citizens in Denmark</i>	How are digital citizens constructed and governed? How are different citizen-subjectivities produced?	Discourses and governmental practices involved in constructing citizenship	Published in <i>Citizenship Studies</i> in 2018
4. <i>Digital State Spaces: State Restructuring and Advanced Digitalization</i>	How are new forms of state spatiality constructed in and around ideas of citizenship? What are the differentially distributed forms of state power?	Discourses, political economy and state spatiality	Accepted in <i>Territory, Politics, Governance</i> (2018)
5. <i>Digital by Default? Exclusion in Digitalised Welfare</i>	What new forms of exclusion start to emerge in digital welfare encounters? How and to what extent are existing forms of stratification reproduced?	Welfare encounters between frontline workers and citizens with a focus on exclusionary mechanisms	In review for <i>Social Policy and Administration</i> (submitted early 2018, revised mid 2018)

SOURCE: Author's own compilation

## 5. Overview of publications

The second part of the dissertation contains five separate research publications each dealing with the remaking of citizenship taking place at the nexus between welfare reform and intensified digitalization. The publications collected for the dissertation have been organized

in terms of their thematic focus and publication history. They thus reflect the shifting empirical emphases developed in the project over time and provide different entry-points to the themes being addressed in the overall dissertation. Table 6 contains an overview of the included publications, detailing the specific research questions addressed by each, their main analytical focus and current status. Four out of the five works have been published or are accepted for publication, while the last publication is currently in review. In the following sections, the contents of each publication will be described in detail, including their separate contribution to research. This is followed, in Section 6, by a reflection on the main cross-cutting themes emerging between the separate contributions.

### 5.1. Publication 1: Digitalizing the Welfare State

The first publication contained in this dissertation is the journal article, *Digitalizing the Welfare State: Citizenship Discourses in Danish Digitalization Strategies from 2002 to 2015*, published by Critical Policy Studies in 2017 (Schou and Hjelholt, 2017). The purpose of this publication was to examine the ways in which citizenship has been discursively constructed within Danish digitalization strategies in the period from 2002 to 2015. The article takes a thematic entry-point to this issue. Rather than seeking to unpack the historical development of policy discourses over time, the article instead seeks to provide a synchronic textual analysis. The article departs from a research gap within the existing literature. On the one hand, a large body of research has claimed digital citizenship to be a new “fundamental concept” (Missingham, 2009, p. 392) or “ideal of citizenship” (Mossberger, Tolbert and McNeal, 2008, p. 140), yet it has often remained less clear what such ideals entail, who they are constructed by and who they are constructed for. On the other hand, there is a large body of research dedicated precisely to investigating such questions in the context of welfare state restructuring and neoliberalization. This research has often paid great attention to the shifting normative ideas of citizenship. The publication seeks to remedy this gap in two ways. First, by dispelling with *a priori* normative ideas of digital citizenship, instead opting for an empirically grounded approach drawing on discourse theoretical concepts. Second, by bringing the existing literature on neoliberalism and state restructuring into contact with digitalization through an empirical study. Drawing on central concepts from the Essex School of Discourse Analysis (Howarth, 2000; Laclau & Mouffe, 2014 [1985]), the publication foregrounds three central discursive logics attached to citizens within national digitalization strategies in Denmark. Citizens have, first of all, been constructed as economically driven subjects that are continuously involved in improving and optimizing their own productivity, efficiency

and time management. Secondly, citizens have been constructed as being both highly individualized *and* a homogenous group of individuals. Most substantially, all citizens have been seen as individuals who are more or less *digital by default*. This also means that citizens unable to use digital technologies have been constructed as a subtraction or negation of this dominant norm. Thirdly, citizens have been constructed as active and responsabilized individuals who are capable of taking care of their own request, problems and needs. Taken together, these three logics showcase not only how ideas usually associated with processes of neoliberalization have been repurposed in the context of digitalization policies and strategies. More substantially, it suggests that digitalization reforms are bound up with the production of particular normative ideas as to how citizens ought to act as proper citizen-subjects. In demonstrating these links, the article challenges otherwise decontextualized accounts of digital citizenship as a new ubiquitous ideal, seemingly detached from wider historical and political economic processes. Instead, foregrounding the connections being made between this emergent form of citizenship and existing trajectories of welfare restructuring, the publication highlights how digitalization reforms serve to both reproduce and extend wider changes to citizenship altogether. In so doing, the publication calls for more research seeking to understand the links between the citizen as a deeply political figure, tied to particular geographical and historical circumstances, and processes of public sector digitalization. It furthermore argues that if citizenship is becoming premised on the use of digital technologies then a more pronounced focus on the subjectivities that fall outside such normative frameworks is needed.

## 5.2. Publication 2: Rolling out Digitalization

The second publication contained in the dissertation is the chapter *Rolling out Digitalization: Hegemonies, Policies and Governance Failures* published as part of the co-authored monograph *Digitalization and Public Sector Transformations* by Palgrave Macmillan in 2018 (Schou and Hjelholt, 2018a). The chapter seeks to investigate the discourses tied to digitalization policies over time with a particular focus on the relation between policy actors and ideas. The chapter departs from a current lack of studies attempting to address how and in what ways digitalization policies have been negotiated, discursively configured and embedded within wider state projects over time. Indeed, far too often, both international and national research has tended to downplay the political dimensions of digitalization, instead portraying this area as a solely technical or administrative question. In an attempt to re-politicize contemporary policy discourses, this publication seeks to excavate the different normative ideas contained within Danish digitalization policies and their development over time. The publication

draws on central insights from ‘cultural political economy’ (Sum & Jessop, 2013), a current within political sociology that seeks to take culture, discursivity and ideational changes seriously within the study of political economy. In so doing, the publication provides a complementary picture to the first publication insofar as it showcases how the thematic issues analyzed in that article should be conceived as the historical outcome of wider policy processes and shifting political agendas. Providing this historical analysis, the publication showcases how different ministries and working groups have been put in charge of delivering national policy visions over time. It moreover outlines how these institutional shifts have taken place together with significant ideational changes. In the early 1990s, the Danish Ministry of Research was put in charge of delivering a formal vision for Denmark’s entrance into the so-called information society. At this point in time, the discourse promoted by policymakers was decidedly hybrid in nature. On the one hand, policymakers articulated ideas of democracy, participation, information access, equality and protection of so-called “weak” citizens as integral to the political agenda. On the other hand, when it came to the public sector, a much narrower discourse was formulated, primarily centered on ideas of efficiency, flexibility and optimization. Yet, due in part to a series of governance problems in the late 1990s, the policy area was given over to the Ministry of Finance by the early 2000s. Not only did this signal a more pronounced focus on the public sector (rather than “society” or the “state”), it also meant that ideas that had otherwise been subordinate in the policy field became dominant. Efficiency, flexibility and rationalization now became central political ideas. Since the early 2000s, this discourse has become sedimented and policymakers have increasingly turned to more coercive forms of policy implementation, demanding citizens to be or become digital. Taken together, this publication thus highlights not only the historical development of contemporary policy ideas, but also their institutional embeddedness. The publication brings back the subtle and often forgotten discursive struggles taking place within the political field, showcasing how ideas that are seemingly natural today are in fact the product of political processes. This contributes to our understanding of digitalization as an area of policymaking and provides important insights into the remaking of citizenship.

### 5.3. Publication 3: Digital Citizenship and Neoliberalization

The third publication contained in this dissertation is called *Digital Citizenship and Neoliberalization: Governing Digital Citizens in Denmark* and has been published in *Citizenship Studies* in 2018 (Schou and Hjelholt, 2018b). This publication takes up the mantle from the previous studies and seeks to move beyond the realm of discourses in order to investigate how and in

what ways new forms of governance have emerged around the digital citizen as a political figure. The article does so by zooming in on the discourses and practices that goes into constructing this figure on both a national-political and local-administrative level. While recent research on digital citizenship has started to emphasize its political, situated and contested nature, less research has showcased how citizens are actually governed and produced through specific institutional practices and legal mechanisms. Turning to the ways in which normative ideas have played together with technological infrastructures and modes of governance, the publication argues that digital citizens are not simply “out there.” As a new form of citizen-subjectivity, this political figure has to be actively created and produced. Empirically, the publication draws not only on the discourse analysis framing the previous publications, but also adds qualitative material from interviews with welfare professionals in citizen service centers. Doing so, it focuses specifically on the encounters between frontline workers and citizens who have “trouble” conforming to the norms produced by national policymakers. The publication showcases how citizen service centers have changed considerably in terms of their functions and professional responsibilities. Whereas these centers used to constitute the official entrance to the public sector for the entire population, these have increasingly become the place where citizens who have either trouble with or cannot use digital technologies gather. Indeed, as self-service technologies have been implemented across many of the areas previously handled in these centers, citizens no longer need to show up physically in such centers if they have requests for the public sector. This also means that frontline workers should no longer, at least not primarily, act as specialized administrative bureaucrats, capable of dealing with specific administrative problems. Instead, these increasingly have to ‘coach’, ‘tutor’ and ‘teach’ citizens how to use digital self-service solutions, as they should make citizens capable of becoming active, self-sufficient and responsible beings. This simultaneously means that the main focus of welfare encounters in these centers is no longer on specific tasks or requests made by the citizen. It is instead the citizen herself, as an individual being, that starts to form the main center for the administrative gaze: it is the citizen as an individual being that does not conform to the expected norms and thus the citizens that should be transformed. Taken together, the article showcases how digital citizenship is not a pre-given political category, but one that has to be actively constructed. This takes place not only through new discursive categories, but also through the establishment of institutional logics intended to transform the subjectivities that do not conform to the dominant ideals. These findings contribute to a deeper understanding of the re-making of citizenship by pointing to the different forces that go into the production of new

citizen ideals. The publication not only pushes for a greater cross-fertilization between otherwise disparate research streams, it also seeks to empirically showcase the links being made between existing modes of welfare governance and new ideas of citizenship.

#### 5.4. Publication 4: Digital State Spaces

The fourth publication, titled *Digital State Spaces: State Restructuring and Advanced Digitalization in Denmark*, has been accepted for publication with the journal *Territory, Politics, Governance* (2018; co-authored with Morten Hjelholt). This publication expands on the arguments presented in the previous publications by attending to the institutional and spatial components of digitalization. Taking citizen service centers as its starting point, the article seeks to understand how new forms of state spatiality and state power have been created in and around contemporary ideas of citizenship. The theoretical starting point for this article is a combination of state theoretical research, concerned with state spatiality as a continuously unfolding, layered and conflict-ridden process (Brenner, 2004), and emergent scholarship on digital geographies dedicated to unpacking how and in what ways political geographies are created in and through digital technologies. The article suggests that these theoretical currents, attentive to the ways in which space is politically produced and contested, serve as a counter-weight to the often fairly limited ideas of spatiality found in the existing literature. Here, welfare agencies and public sector institutions have often been seen as static containers on top of which particular practices or institutional logics are placed. In contrast to this, this article argues that state spaces are multi-scalar and hybrid in nature. Through this lens, the article proposes the notion of “digital state spaces” as a way of capturing the new forms of state power that is starting to form at the interface between welfare restructuring and intensified digitalization. More concretely, the article showcases the relation between policy ideas, technical infrastructures and local administrative practices. It demonstrates how citizen service centers increasingly have to handle the residual categories caused by national policymaking trajectories. This takes place, the publication argues, through new disciplinary practices intended to transform citizens within the confines of municipal institutions. However, the boundaries of citizen service centers are not static, as frontline workers also move out into the field, helping citizens in their private homes or within places formerly distinct from the administrative practices of the state. The publication argues that particularly citizens already at the fringes of the welfare state, often relegated to the lower strata of the class spectrum, are being further excluded as part of these practices. Taken together, the article suggests that the notion of digital state spaces might serve as a useful heuristic for

holding together seemingly different and distinct forms of state spatiality. The article argues that the use of digital self-service solutions *for some* and local guidance within citizen service centers *for others* should be seen as part of the same political and spatial strategy. Digital state spaces are asymmetrical, as different kinds of bodies start to frequent different kinds of spaces. This becomes particularly apparent within local citizen service centers, as it is now here that the citizens unable to use the official digital platforms show up. The article argues that as asymmetrical spaces, digital state spaces serve to actualize a common political strategy: namely to remake citizenship along digital lines. All in all, the publication provides insights into the new spatial and institutional contraptions being forged in and around contemporary ideals of citizenship.

### 5.5. Publication 5: Digital by Default?

The fifth and final publication, called *Digital by Default? Exclusion in Digitalised Welfare*, is currently in review with the journal *Social Policy and Administration* (submitted start 2018, revised mid 2018; co-authored with Anja Pors). The starting point for this publication is, once again, citizen service centers. Yet, this time, these centers are used as an entry-point for understanding a wider structural issue: namely questions of inclusion and exclusion from citizenship. The article departs from the premise that citizenship carries a strongly moral and normative undercurrent, as it serves to delimit and demarcate between the subjectivities that are counted as insiders and members of society and those who are counted as deviant, outsiders and Others. Continuing the arguments laid out in the previous publications, this article turns directly to these questions of inclusion and exclusion in the context of welfare agencies and digitalization. While research has been done on the so-called digital divide and digital exclusion since the early 1990s, there is still little work that deals with these forms of exclusion in the context of state institutions and digitalized welfare encounters. Using empirical material from citizen service centers, the publication shows the new exclusionary mechanisms that emerge at the frontline of the digital agenda. It argues that citizen service centers, formerly responsible for helping the entire population, increasingly become home to already precarious citizens, such as 'homeless', 'unemployed', 'poor pensioners', 'disabled' and 'addicts' who are often at the fringes of the welfare system. This group not only have trouble using the standardized self-service solutions promoted by the state, thus requiring help from frontline workers, they also experience a sense of exclusion and second-class citizenship. The publication showcases how links are being made between existing forms of exclusion and new digital modalities, giving central insights into the impact of digitalization

for marginal populations and welfare agencies. It showcases how it is often citizens most in need of welfare support that gets caught in novel forms of exclusion. This suggests that the roll-out of digitalization reforms (premised on citizens being digital by default) might serve to further exclude citizens already at the fringes. These findings challenge the current policy discourses promoted by Danish policymakers: while policymaking efforts have often categorized citizens based on whether they are ‘digital’ or ‘non-digital’, the publication showcases why this distinction is a poor representation of actual processes of exclusion. It moreover showcases why digitalization is far from just a technical upgrade of public services. It is also, this publication suggests, becoming a new vector of social stratification used to discipline the poor.

## 6. Discussion and implications

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Taken together, then, the five publications included in this dissertation help shed light on a series of interlinked historical, political and institutional processes taking place in and around contemporary forms of citizenship and welfare reform. They highlight how digitalization has been and continues to be used as a powerful means of political intervention that entails the construction of new normative expectations, legal mechanisms, institutional configurations and patterns of exclusion. In so doing, they empirically document how new forms of citizenship have come into being in the last two decades. Before discussing the implications of these findings for existing scholarship and laying out potential areas of future research, however, the following sections will reflect on major cross-cutting themes and structural dynamics brought to the front by the five publications.

### 6.1. Remaking citizenship? Three cross-cutting themes

One of the core theoretical ambitions of the present work has been to argue that citizenship cannot be reduced to a static or merely legal category. Instead, there is a need to hold together the “institutional arrangements, rules and understandings that guide and shape concurrent policy decisions and expenditures of states, problem definitions by states and citizens, and claims-making by citizens” (Jenson, 2007, p. 55, see also Jenson & Phillips, 1996). This must be done, this dissertation has argued, against the backdrop of wider historical changes to the political economy of the welfare state itself. Thus, if we wish to understand how and in what ways citizenship is currently becoming premised on the use of, access to and participation through digital technologies, we have to place such demands within the wider historical and political context of the welfare state. This forces us to move across



seemingly isolated bodies of literature in order to produce comprehensive, sociological accounts that do not become either too myopic or too structuralist. In this section, I wish to take these theoretical arguments seriously in order to offer a series of cross-cutting themes that can be highlighted from the five publications contained in the second part of this dissertation. Drawing attention to three such themes, I want to suggest not only that the individual publications each contribute to understanding a common empirical problem. More substantially, I want to argue that collectively, they help bring out a layered and complex form of political intervention that has served to significantly alter the meaning and contents of citizenship.

#### 6.1.1. Political properties – new normative ideas

The publications contained in this dissertation first of all document how new normative ideas and discourses have been produced in the Danish political system since the early 1990s. These have been broadly premised, particularly since the early 2000s, on producing certain expectations as to how citizens *ought* to act as digital individuals. The publications showcase how these contemporary political discourses have both reproduced *and* reworked policy ideas often associated with the gradual transition from a universalistic welfare state to a neoliberal competition state. Not unlike other areas of social and public policy, digitalization reforms have also come to rely on an image of citizens as inherently individualized, active and self-reliant. Yet, what is specific to digitalization is that policymakers have increasingly come to couple such ideas with the expectation that all citizens are *digital by default* and can serve themselves through digital platforms. This has entailed a move towards increasingly mandatory or coercive form of responsabilization, tipping the balance from digital *options* to digital *obligations*. It is no longer a question of using digital technologies as a voluntary choice, as all citizens are seen as necessarily and inherently capable of using such technologies in the first place. This has also meant that subjectivities unable or unwilling to conform to these expectations have been seen as deviating or departing from the norms. The publications not only document how these policy discourses have been formed over time in a national perspective, but also showcase how they have impacted and shaped everyday encounters in local welfare agencies in profound ways. Indeed, one of the major cross-cutting arguments levelled by this dissertation is that the normative ideas produced by policymakers have come to substantially frame local welfare encounters and institutional logics. Far from freely floating ideas, the publications show how these have been codified into new le-

gal measurements, technological infrastructures and governmental practices, providing the normative justification for digitalization as a means of political intervention.

#### 6.1.2. Spatial properties – new institutional forms

Secondly, the publications collected in this dissertation systematically portray how new geographies of state power and governance have started to develop alongside the deployment of digitalization as a means of political intervention. These new state spaces have played an important part in remaking the relation between the Danish state and citizens, offering digital platforms *for some* and local discipline *for others*. The publications have examined these new forms of governance by turning specifically to the frontline of the Danish welfare state, looking at citizen service centers as a particular welfare agency. By doing so, the publications show how digitalization reforms have served to move responsibilities previously held by public sector institutions to citizens themselves, while simultaneously changing existing institutional spaces to accommodate the inherent gaps produced in the process of doing so. Thus, while most citizens have to interact with the state through digital platforms and self-service solutions, those unable, unwilling or incapable of doing so are left to the discretionary and disciplinary practices of frontline workers. One of the important cross-cutting themes explored by this dissertation is thus that digitalized forms of citizenship are not merely imagined from above (by policymakers), but also realized and produced from below. Local welfare encounters are intended to handle the residual categories of policymaking, transforming those unable to follow along the rapidly shifting structures of the public sector itself. Indeed, the state not only expects its citizens to *be* active and self-reliant individuals but is ready to *make* them into such beings. In this way, the discursive and political shifts described above have taken place together with new institutional formations of power. This helps to foreground a layered spatial strategy that fundamentally offers asymmetrical opportunities and constraints to different parts of the citizenry.

#### 6.1.3. Structural properties – new exclusionary patterns

Thirdly, the publications included in this dissertation demonstrate that digitalization reforms have served to reproduce and extend existing structural asymmetries. As a form of political intervention, digitalization has served to introduce and uphold both new and old patterns of exclusion and marginalization. The publications showcase how such exclusions have taken place on multiple fronts: *discursively*, with certain forms of subjectivity being privileged over others in national policies; *institutionally*, with different groups of citizens starting to face the state in different spaces; and *in terms of rights*, as citizens unable to use

standardized governmental platforms risk losing their social rights and welfare benefits. In this way, the publications display how the turn towards mandatory forms of digital self-service, requiring the use of digital communication through legal mechanisms, have created new hierarchies between citizens, distinguishing insiders from (internal) outsiders. The dissertation moreover demonstrates how it is particularly citizens who are already at the margins of the welfare system that have trouble using the standardized public infrastructures offered by the state. Not only does this lead to an experience of being excluded, but it can also have material repercussions, as the individual citizen might fail to respond to official communication and lose welfare benefits. This suggests that the turn towards new forms of citizenship, premised on fostering digital and self-reliant beings, also has a stratifying component, as differentially distributed capacities for action are afforded to individuals depending on their place within social space. As policymakers have come to model digitalization on the able and the willing, citizens unable to conform have been relegated to a second-tier status.

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It is my suggestion that these three cross-cutting themes, explored throughout the five publications contained in this dissertation, help to bring out a fundamentally new way of organizing the relation between the state and citizens. As a form of political intervention, digitalization has entailed the production of new normative ideas, institutional logics and structural asymmetries. While these have been formed over several decades, often through a process of trail-and-error, and while these have been mediated and negotiated through a wide variety of institutions and sites, it is nonetheless my contention that *they add up to form a relatively unified political strategy*. This strategy has been layered insofar as it has served to instill and uphold different ideas, spaces and opportunities to different parts of the citizenry. Although claiming to simply offer an easier and more convenient access point to the public sector, what actually seems to be emerging is a *multi-tier model of citizenship*. It is my suggestion that the three properties presented above (summarized in Table 7), allows us to grasp the main ways in which this differentiation of citizenship takes place. Though analytically distinct, these three properties should be seen as mutually reinforcing processes that collectively serve to push the capacity to use digital technologies as more or less integral to citizenship altogether.

Table 7. Overview of cross-cutting themes

Property	Implications of digitalization for citizenship
POLITICAL	Construction of new normative ideas as to the contents and proper forms of citizenship. All Danish citizens are expected to be digital, as “being digital” is seen as a lever for becoming active, self-reliant and responsabilized. This is an almost ethical obligation for the sake of both the self and the community.
SPATIAL	Refunctionalization of existing welfare institutions to accommodate subjectivities that do not conform to political norms. Citizens who cannot partake in expected forms of citizenship have to either be “transformed” or “opted-out.”
STRUCTURAL	Reproduction of existing structural asymmetries, as already precarious parts of the social spectrum are further excluded in the context of digital self-service solutions. This takes place in a number of ways, both discursively, institutionally and technologically, yet seems to hit those already in vulnerable situations the hardest.

SOURCE: own compilation

## 6.2. Reflections and connections to existing research

In describing this new form of citizenship, the dissertation provides an original contribution to long-standing debates in sociology and political science on the shifting forms of citizenship in Western welfare states (Bussemaker, 1999a,b; Goul Andersen et al., 2002, 2005; Hvin-den & Johansson, 2007; Brown & Baker, 2013; Clarke et al., 2007; Clarke, 2006, 2009; Dwyer, 2000, 2003; Dwyer & Wright, 2014). It does so not only by focusing on an area of political intervention and governance that has so far remained in the dark, but also by extending, augmenting and partially revising existing theoretical models and empirical accounts.

As previously recounted, existing research has forcefully shown how social citizenship, understood in the sense given to it by T. H. Marshall (1992 [1949]), has become increasingly conditioned on labor market participation, individual responsibility and personal risks over the last three decades (Dwyer, 2000; Newman & Clarke, 2009; Newman, 2010). It has served to comprehensively demonstrate the profound institutional, political and ideational changes taking place since Marshall developed his original analysis in 1949. Indeed, as discussed earlier, the basic thesis defended by Marshall was that the expansion of social rights in the post-war welfare state was both a means of countering the fluctuations of the market (protecting citizens against its destructive capabilities) and a way of equalizing and de-commodifying the internal class structure of the welfare state itself. The contemporary “neoliberal” offensive has, in many ways, served to change not only the moral expectations tied to citizenship but also the very function of citizenship itself: no longer a way of social integration and class alleviation, citizenship is now imagined to work as a bulwark against the intrusion of the

state. Citizens should be guarded against the specter of the big, patronizing and infantilizing government. While actually existing neoliberalism has turned out to be far from this ideal, warranting not so much the coming of small government as it does a fiercely interventionistic and expanding one (Wacquant, 2009; Peck, 2010), the narrative still serves as a driver of political and institutional change. In a UK context, John Clarke (2005) has called this the coming of the ‘abandoned citizen’, signaled by “the dismantling of the protections and defences constructed in post-war welfare capitalism against the rigours, vagaries, demands and inequities of the market and the unconstrained powers of capital” (p. 452). As previously shown, this has been captured by notions such as active citizenship or activating welfare (Jensen & Pfau-Effinger, 2005; Pfau-Effinger, 2005; Johansson & Hvinden, 2007b,c). Scholars have moreover suggested that these developments have taken place together with wide-ranging changes within European welfare states *in general* (Jessop, 2002; Handler, 2004; Cerny, 1997) and the Danish welfare state *in particular* since the 1980s and 1990s (Pedersen, 2011; Petersen, 2014, 2016). This dissertation adds several pieces of new knowledge to our existing understanding of these developments. Indeed, the dissertation as a whole contributes to existing scholarship and debates in at least four ways.

First of all, *it showcases how new digital layers have been added to already existing modalities of citizenship since the 1990s*. By demonstrating the *specific* political and institutional changes prompted by digitalization reforms in Denmark, the dissertation shows how already existing forms of citizenship have been augmented and remade in significant ways. Indeed, the dissertation shows how political ideas often associated with active labor market policies have come to dominate the national digitalization agenda. Yet, more than simply rehashing already known tropisms, these reforms have also added new dynamics to the mix: most prominently, citizenship has started to become *premised* on the capacity to act and be digital. This has been articulated as both a personal responsibility *and* a collective duty. As shown in this dissertation, these discourses have been underpinned by new institutional spaces and forms of governance. Portraying these developments add to existing accounts of citizenship and welfare reform given by political scientists such as Newman (2001, 2010), Clarke (2005, 2009), Dwyer (2000, 2003), Johansson & Hvinden (2007a), Brown and Baker (2013) and others. It does by describing the concrete outcomes of an in many ways new form of political intervention (namely digitalization), showcasing how digitalized forms of citizenship both reproduce and extent policy initiatives and discourses found in other fields. The dissertation

thus demonstrates how ideas of activity, self-provisioning welfare and self-sufficiency have become increasingly intermingled with calls for digital competences and capabilities.

Secondly, *these arguments help expand on existing debates on citizenship and conditionality*. These discussions have focused on how social rights have become increasingly conditioned on certain types of (active) behavior in the last two decades (Dwyer, 2000, 2003; see also König, 2017). The dissertation shows how these forms of conditionality have taken on a new guise with the turn towards digitalized public sectors. Managing, requesting and navigating the welfare system has become conditioned on the individual's ability to use and operate digital technologies, mainly in the form of standardized governmental homepages and mail clients. Conditionality thus becomes digital, and the right to claim one's rights as a citizen becomes conditioned on the use of specific technologies. In the existing literature, few scholars have dealt with this new form of digital conditionality. One of the studies that comes closest to the present work is the one offered by Henman (2011, 2010). He has shown how digital technologies have served to extent already existing trajectories of conditional citizenship in Australia. Importantly, he has argued that the introduction of new technologies, "in concert with political discourse, [...] displaces rights and emphasizes responsibilities and obligations." A change that is "further overlaid by being unevenly or inconsistently applied to the citizenry" (2011, p. 14). For Henman (2011), this demonstrates "a dynamic that makes conditional citizenship an increasingly unequal experience within modern Western states. Consequently, these aspects of (social) citizenship become increasingly fractured. To the extent that e-government contributes to the new conditionality in public policy, e-government contributes to the increasingly fractured nature of contemporary (social) citizenship" (p. 15). The findings presented in this dissertation highlight similar, albeit also different, trajectories. It does so by showcasing how the use of and access to governmental platform, including the ability to navigate and utilize these, is becoming a *de facto* precondition for social rights. It is a conditionality that is premised on the individual's ability to be or become a digital citizen. Like Henman, the studies contained in the dissertation also show the unequal and fractured application of this logic. In this sense, the dissertation hopes to have showcased how the dynamics portrayed by Henman *in statu nascendi* have become progressively more totalized in Denmark.

Thirdly, *these arguments add to existing discussions on citizenship and exclusion*. As recounted previously in this dissertation, several scholars have argued that the turn towards a "compe-

tition state" (Pedersen, 2011; Petersen 2016) has meant a shift in how inclusion and exclusion from citizenship functions in connection to public and social policy. Whereas the post-war welfare state was often explicitly geared at fostering inclusion, the increasingly market-oriented and competition-focused state developing since the 1990s has reversed this order. Policymaking is now oriented towards the already included, while the 'dependent', the 'vulnerable' and the 'excluded' (Petersen, 2016, p. 273) are cast as scapegoats and moral deviants. This has also meant that political initiatives have come to take on a stratifying component (Pedersen, 2011), *deepening* already existing differences instead of combating them. The findings from this study suggest a similar development. While policymakers very much focused on questions of (digital) exclusion in the 1990s, often voicing a concern for the new divides that might be created due to the pervasiveness of digital technologies, this has been almost completely erased since the early 2000s. Meanwhile, the turn towards mandatory self-service and the idea of citizens being digital by default has meant that actual divides have come into being in this latter period. Somewhat paradoxically, the more digital exclusion comes to matter, the less political attention it seems to attract. This suggests that digitalized forms of citizenship not only add new layers of normative expectations and conditionality, but also act as instruments of stratification. This reinforces growing trends towards greater inequality and social exclusion, and puts into question the equalizing function often imagined to be at the core of social citizenship.

Fourthly, *it is my suggestion that these empirical findings on the changing form of citizenship have both theoretical and methodological implications that go well beyond the scope of Denmark alone.* As described in the introduction, the case study undertaken here can, in the language of Flyvbjerg (2006), be seen as an extreme or unusual one. Denmark has, in substantive aspects, pushed its calls for wide-ranging digitalization further than comparable Scandinavian and European countries. At present, there seems to be little evidence that the Danish model of digitalized citizenship is being adopted wholesale within comparable welfare states. Indeed, the turn towards similar coercive and forced forms of digitalization cannot be found in countries such as Sweden and Norway (cf. Joseph & Avdic, 2016; Jansen et al., 2016). These have opted for more voluntary and inclusion-focused models. In this sense, while digitalization has become important political projects in all three countries, there is little to support any kind of trans-national convergence at the moment. That being the case, there is also little evidence to suggest that digitalization is going away any time soon. Influential political actors, such as the European Union, the World Economic Forum and the OECD, continuously promote and applaud the use of digital technologies as integral to the future of nation-states,

corporations and citizens themselves (Schou & Hjelholt, 2018a). In many ways, the use of digital infrastructures and platforms is being branded as a necessary step in keeping up with the demands of the global economy and political landscape. In this current political climate, Denmark is being labeled and named as a frontrunner. Unusual as it may be, the country thereby provides an opportunity to understand how and in what ways digitalization reforms can serve to instill and create important changes to existing forms of citizenship and welfare state institutions. In seeking to understand the particularities of this case, the dissertation has sought to make several theoretical interventions that can and should be applied to other cases going forward. Starting out, it has argued for the need to go beyond the at times underdeveloped analyses of citizenship in the context of welfare institutions and public sector. While existing scholarship on citizenship and welfare state transformations in both a Danish (Pedersen, 2011; Petersen, 2014, 2016) and international context (Lessenich, 2015; Wacquant, 2009; Jensen & Pfau-Effinger, 2005) has often pointed to the ways in which personal responsibility and active citizenship have become increasingly pervasive tropes, less work has shown the concrete mechanisms and institutional logics intended to uphold and produce such moral tropisms. Indeed, all too often, political scientists and sociologists have been content with either unpacking this 'governmentality of the self' (Clarke 2005) through close inception of national policies *or* attended to the local practices of particular institutions. This dissertation showcases that there is a need to hold these lines together, attending to what is often a missing link: namely the precise ways in which ideas of individual responsibility come into being as particular governmental practices and institutional forms. By articulating these new links, the dissertation furthermore makes an empirical case for reconnecting the otherwise disconnected literature on citizenship, welfare state restructuring and digitalization. The apparent walls between these processes and intellectual domains are no longer feasible or desirable. Indeed, the dissertation advocates for political scientists and sociologists to reintegrate the study of digitalization within the wider research on citizenship and welfare states. More than that, it suggests that there is need for a both critical and historically-informed approach that can move beyond the technological hype often found in official political documents and look into the concrete changes taking place to citizenship.

### 6.3. Future research

The account provided in this dissertation is not final or settled. It is merely one sign-post in what can be thought of as a wider research program intended to question and interpret the gradual changes taking place at the intersection of citizenship, welfare reform and digitaliza-



tion. As a consequence, there are still a series of questions that remain unanswered and a number of new pathways opened up by the arguments presented here. These areas of future research need to be addressed going forward if we are to understand how and in what ways citizenship is being remade in our current era of intensified governmental digitalization.

Starting out, there is a need for *much firmer comparative work* dealing with the ways in which both similar and distinct welfare regimes have begun to incorporate and use digital technologies in governmental institutions, including the impact this is having on citizenship. So far, research has often remained tied to single national contexts or welfare states (this dissertation included) and few attempts have been made at *comparing*, let alone *generalizing*, the shape and outcome of policy trajectories and institutional changes. While case studies remain important, not least in their capacity to give new insights into still emergent phenomena, it seems to me that there is also a need for research trying to make sense of the broader picture and structural context. There are plenty of questions to be asked. Given that digitalization reforms are not just technical in nature, what kind of policy discourses have been crafted and discarded over time in different national settings? Have policy trajectories primarily been influenced by national path-dependencies or can transnational convergences be foregrounded? And, honing in more specifically on the topic examined here, how have citizens been constructed and imagined in different national contexts? Beginning to ask these questions simultaneously opens up for investigations dealing with the multiple levels of political power implicated in contemporary policy networks (Torfing, 2004). Indeed, rather than reifying the nation as a neat scalar distinction, we ought instead to see how discourses and citizens flow across nation-state borders, without becoming blind to the power still yielded by the nation-state (Siapera, 2017). How have transnational actors and forums, like the European Union, the OECD, and the World Economic Forum, for example, shaped and integrated otherwise disparate national policy agendas? And what role does powerful corporate actors from the technology industry play in shaping both transnational and national policy regimes? In other words: what is the full assortment of political actors involved in substantially influencing and impacting the development of digitalization? And are these similar or different across nation-state borders?

These political or (more precisely) policy-oriented vectors need to be developed together with close attention to the institutions and state spaces being constructed in the process of digitalizing public sector institutions and citizenship. By linking national and supranational

policy trajectories to the reorganization of state spaces, we can move beyond the realm of political ideas and into the ground of contemporary states. Yet, rather than thinking through these questions as a simple or even linear transition towards ‘digitally mediated institutions’ (Fountain, 2014) or ‘digital agencies’ (Dunleavy et al. 2006), it seems more productive to foreground the ways in which state spatiality is continuously evolving (often in contradictory ways) and not limited to the physical boundaries of particular welfare institutions. With this kind of theorization in mind, we might begin to further investigate the new relations being formed between frontline workers and citizens on a street level (Hansen et al., 2018; Buffat, 2015). How and in what ways does the impetus to make citizens into self-serving individuals translate into new governmental practices? Do new forms of conflicts, embedded in institutional histories, start to erupt internally within these institutional settings? Are counter-hegemonic projects formulated from within the state itself, concerned with questioning the dominant fraction of the political field? And how do different institutions link up into new geographies of state power? In other words: how and in what ways are institutional and state spaces both shaped by and actively shaping digitalization reforms?

Moving towards more integral approaches to state spatiality, we might also begin to inquire into how such reforms play out in terms of wider territorial and geographical developments within the nation state. To what extent does rural areas, perhaps disconnected to the informational grid due to a lack of public infrastructure, become new dead zones beyond the grip of the state? Will we see new infrastructural forms of power, imposed from a central level, demanding connectivity to all parts of the state’s territory in order to further push the vision of a digital citizenry?<sup>11</sup> And how does the introduction of new digital technologies allow for a reformulation of state spatiality itself, as bodies can now be tracked and surveilled in new and unforeseen ways? Beginning to ask these questions, we can develop much finer grained spatial analytics capable of theorizing the different modalities of state power forged through advanced digitalization.

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<sup>11</sup> The political economy of connectivity remains underdeveloped to say the least. The study of uneven peripheral and economic development of the Austrian “Waldviertel” by Fuchs (2015) constitutes an important contribution in this regard, showcasing how the generalized “exodus of young people from the Waldviertel” (p. 75) has both driven and been driven by the uneven development of technological infrastructure in this area. This highlights the links being made between existing spaces of economic power with new digital state spaces, giving further weight to Sassen’s (2006) suggestion that digital spaces are always embedded in political-economic and political spaces.

All of this leads straight into a series of questions concerning exclusion and stratification in connection to citizenship. It seems to me that there is once again a need for much firmer comparative work, detailing the precise mechanisms through which new and old forms of exclusion are reproduced and upheld. Yet, more than this, there is a need for qualitative research that is attentive to the lived experiences and subjective categories of those at the interventionist and disciplinary edge of the new regime of citizenship observed here. How and in what ways does the accelerated advance of digitalization reforms impact citizens already at the bottom of the material and symbolic class structure? What sense of citizenship – or lack thereof – does this lead to? How do excluded citizens navigate, negotiate and, potentially, circumvent the new conditions and expectations crafted by the state? And, finally, what is the concrete impact of digital exclusion for participation and inclusion in political communities, both local, national and beyond?

Taken together, these different questions point the way towards a fundamentally new way of understanding the increasingly widespread deployment of digitalization as a form of political intervention. Indeed, by moving beyond otherwise inherited ideas about the rationalizing effects of digital technologies, there is a serious and urgent need to push for critical and holistic social scientific research that seeks to systematically question the changes taking place to citizenship at our current conjuncture. As digitalization continue to exert its influence in more pronounced and forceful ways, social scientists can only ignore this area at their own peril. The question is: are we up for the challenge or will we continue to see digitalization as a simple, technical appendage to the welfare state?

### *Epilogue: challenges to social citizenship*

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The dissertation opened with a small prologue, recounting a scene from the Danish parliament in 2012. In this parliamentary scene, politicians from otherwise different political sides came together around a common project, namely the implementation of new legal mechanisms intended to make communication between the state and citizens digital by default. This was presented, openly and with little hesitation by the various spokespersons, as primarily being a question about economic gains. It was principally about saving money, cutting expenditure and optimizing public sector institutions. As a consequence, the various spokespersons argued, this development should not be seen as any major political or ideological change, but simply as a *necessary* step in trimming the welfare state.

This dissertation has in large part been concerned with arguing against this commonly held political view, currently perpetuated and diffused at great speed throughout the Western world. The substantive empirical argument raised by this work is that contrary to the seemingly neutralized and universal language used by policy elites, the turn towards increasingly coercive forms of governmental digitalization has had serious implications for citizenship and the organization of the welfare state. As demonstrated by the research publications presented in this dissertation, digitalization reforms have become deeply implicated in remaking citizenship in profound and often unexpected ways. Far from being simply about saving money, digitalization has been an inherently political project and continues to be so.

It is often said that both citizenship and the welfare state are resilient to sudden changes (Pierson, 2006). Welfare institutions are durable, path-dependent and sticky entities that do not transform in a moment's notice. Accepting this claim, we should do well not to give way to hyperbole and exaggeration, claiming that the coming of digitalization changes everything in one smooth swing. To do so would be to partake in the all too often techno-deterministic and revolutionary tales promoted by policymakers, tech-consultancies and big political players themselves. Yet, without falling prey to overtaking this kind of rhetoric, the present dissertation *does* suggest that a series of qualitative changes have taken place to citizenship in a relatively short time span. New normative demands have been forged alongside changes to existing institutional roles and the construction of new forms of exclusion. It is not for nothing that frontline workers themselves often told me that the turn towards digitalized public sector institutions had happened *much too fast* – both for them and for citizens. While it would surely be wrong to claim that these changes, however fast they might have taken place, have *only* led to more discipline and political domination, it would also be false to say that they have come free of issues and problems.

Throughout this dissertation, I have suggested that we (as scholars) should leave *a priori* conceptions of citizenship aside in favor of empirically grounded accounts. Yet, even so, it does seem to me that the findings presented in this work reflect troublesome dynamics and developments. Not only have policymakers moved towards increasingly coercive means of policymaking, often severely lacking in terms of democratic inclusion, they have also done so with little regard for those who do not conform to their normative expectations. The idea that all citizens should be digital has become such a strong driver for political and institutional change that anyone not conforming to these expectations are increasingly cast as de-

viant or outcasts. This poses serious problems: not just to citizens already at the fringes of the welfare state, but also to the funding idea of citizenship altogether. What happened, we might ask, to the notion of citizenship as an instrument of equalization proposed by Marshall more than half a century ago?

When T. H. Marshall delivered his lectures on *Citizenship and Social Class* in 1949, his perspective was undoubtedly shaped by the period in which he was writing. Within the post-war climate, Marshall stood on the verge of what was later to be named as the “golden age” of the welfare state. This was a time of economic prosperity and an expansion of social rights into new and previously unimaginable domains. To my mind, it is difficult to judge Marshall for being too optimistic because from his particular perspective there was a lot to be optimistic about. The state did take on a greater force as a counterbalance towards the inequalities caused by the market, and the pendulum did seem to swing in the direction of greater control over the capitalist economy. Yet, reading Marshall’s account today, one cannot but wonder whether the kind of implicit equality and equalization imagined by him to be at the heart of citizenship is not starting to become undone. Indeed, it would seem that the turn towards increasingly individualized and action-oriented forms of welfare provision seriously challenge claims to universality and equality. As citizenship becomes conditional on digital technologies, it seems new barriers to full citizenship are simultaneously erected and citizenship ends up adding to the very thing it was envisioned to combat.

Historical developments cannot be reversed and there is no sense in moaning the transformation of the welfare state. We cannot go back to the post-war welfare state, because doing so would require the entire social formation to be reversed. This is neither possible nor desirable. However, when all is said and done, it does seem fair to ask: given the developments described here, what happened to citizenship as “a kind of basic human equality associated with the concept of full membership of a community” (Marshall, 1992, p. 6)? What happened to the idea that citizenship could counterbalance the inequalities of the market? Is this vision all but gone or is it still there, lying dormant, waiting to be reactivated?

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## Appendix A: Collected governmental sources

*The following list has been sorted chronologically. See Section 4 for information about the collection of data.*

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Forskningsministeriet (Dybkjær, Lone og Lindegaard, Jørgen) (1999). *Det digitale Danmark - omstilling til netværkssamfundet*. København: Forskningsministeriet.

Forskningsministeriet, 2000, *Et net af muligheder: Netværksredegørelse 2000*. København: Forskningsministeriet.

Kommunernes Landsforening, Amtsrådsforeningen, Københavns Kommune, Frederiksberg Kommune, IT- og Forskningsministeriet, Erhvervsministeriet, Indenrigsministeriet, Økonomiministeriet, Finansministeriet (2001). *Digital Forvaltning*. København: Finansministeriet.

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## Part II. Publications

## Publication 1: Digitalizing the Welfare State

Schou, J. & Hjelholt, M. 2017. Digitalizing the Welfare State: Citizenship Discourses in Danish Digitalization Strategies from 2002 to 2015. *Critical Policy Studies*, 1-20, <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/19460171.2017.1333441>





# Digitalizing the welfare state: citizenship discourses in Danish digitalization strategies from 2002 to 2015

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ARTICLE



## Digitalizing the welfare state: citizenship discourses in Danish digitalization strategies from 2002 to 2015

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### ABSTRACT

As governments worldwide become increasingly reliant on digital technologies and e-government, 'digital citizenship' has become an important topic for research and policy-makers alike. While often described as the contemporary 'ideal' of citizenship, research has tended to downplay the normative dimensions of digital citizenship. Counter to such depoliticized approaches, this article argues that the digital citizen is a deeply political figure. Through a discourse-theoretical analysis of Danish governmental digitalization strategies from 2002 to 2015, the article shows how these have relied on a very particular image of the digital citizen. More specifically, we showcase how this figure has reproduced neoliberal conceptions of subjectivity, concerned with efficiency, productivity, individualization and collective responsabilization. By shedding light on these novel links between neoliberal and digital citizenship, the article challenges current views on digitalization. The article foregrounds how digitalization serves to reproduce and recast already-existing political rationalities and must be considered in relation to neoliberal hegemony.

### KEYWORDS

Citizenship; neoliberalism; discourses; digitalization; Denmark; e-government

### Introduction

Since the mid-1990s, the figure of the 'digital citizen' has increasingly emerged as a topic of both research and governance (Katz 1997; Mossberger, Tolbert, and McNeal 2008; Isin and Ruppert 2015). As novel forms of digitalized governance, often labeled under umbrella terms like 'e-government' or 'digital era governance' (Dunleavy et al. 2006), have been pushed to the front of political agendas worldwide, citizens have increasingly been expected to be and act digitally. Current research has thus described digital citizenship as 'the ideal of citizenship in the twenty-first century' (Mossberger, Tolbert, and McNeal 2008, 140), 'a fundamental concept for modern democracies' (Missingham 2009, 392), and the 'civic responsibility enabled by digital technology' (Papacharissi 2010, 103), meaning 'access to online technology is as binding to digital citizenship as national geography is to citizenship' (104). Yet, while arguments such as these are becoming common within the scholarly literature, the moral and normative dimensions of digital citizenship have all too often been forgotten or downplayed (Bjorklund 2016). Research has overlooked that digital citizenship partially functions through the production of collective 'imaginaries' (Isin and Ruppert 2015), concerned

with articulating certain normative visions for how citizens *should* and *ought* to be. It has moreover forgotten that such visions are produced through the accumulated knowledge work done by policy-makers and politicians in dialogue with industry partners, international collaborators, and (to a lesser extent) citizens themselves (Voß and Freeman 2016). In this article, we seek to restore these political and normative dimensions to the figure of the digital citizen. More specifically, we seek to showcase how novel links are being made between existing political rationalities (Brown 2015) and the digital citizen as an increasingly important political figure. We do this through a discourse theoretical study of Danish digitalization strategies produced from 2002 to 2015, with a particular focus on the normative ideas inscribed within these documents.

November 2014, it became mandatory for all Danish citizens to communicate with the Danish state through a digital infrastructure entitled ‘Digital Post’ (Henriksen 2015). This system was designed to act as an official digital mailbox and from this point on all Danish citizens were expected to be ‘digital by default’. This meant that they were forced to adopt the system if they were to stay in contact with core parts of the public sector and maintain their social welfare benefits. ‘Being digital’ no longer constituted an optional part of the welfare state, but became a mandatory legal and symbolic component in national citizenship altogether. The mandatory implementation of Digital Post was in many ways the culmination of several decades of digitalization and e-governance initiatives. It was ‘the final goal of 15 years of digital strategies for the Danish public sector’ (145). Thus, from the middle of the 1990s and onwards, the Danish state has invested large amounts of economic resources in large-scale political efforts to fully digitalize the Danish state and public sector (Johansson 2004; Jæger and Löfgren 2010; Andersen 2007). To this end, a range of different digital technologies has been implemented within and across major parts of the public sector. Coinciding with this turn toward mandatory digitalization, the welfare state has gradually transformed into what has been labeled as *the competition state* (Pedersen 2011b; see also Jessop 2002). This turn has had important consequences for how the Danish state has perceived and governed its citizens. Instead of seeking to shelter these from the cycles of accumulation and crises of the market, the state has instead sought to make citizens competitive, flexible, and active, relying in unprecedented ways on responsabilizing its citizenry. Yet, what has so far remained underexplored is how digitalization may play a key role in reproducing and recasting these novel forms of ‘neoliberal’ citizenship.

This article examines how the Danish state has legitimized the process of digitalization by drawing on and constructing certain discourses about how Danish citizens should and ought to act. Relying on analytical insights drawn from post-Marxist discourse theory (Laclau and Mouffe [1985] 2014), we investigate how citizenship has been discursively constructed within Danish digitalization strategies produced during the last 15 years. Which implicit normative claims, designating particular expectations toward the ways in which citizens should and ought to act, have these discourses contained? We depart from the underlying premise, presented with such great clarity by contemporary research on neoliberalism and citizenship (Dardot and Laval 2013; Brown 2015; Ong 2006), that the figure of the citizen cannot be seen as simply a juridical category endowed to particular subjects within a given state. Instead, governmental conceptions of ‘citizenship’ can and is used to express particular ideals about how citizens should and ought to be acting (Isin and Ruppert 2015). Moreover, such

ideals are actively produced by neoliberal states through governmental technologies, discourses, practices, and institutional logics (Dardot and Laval 2013). In this sense, the production of ‘proper’ citizenship is at the heart of contemporary statecraft (Wacquant 2009), while also serving as an engine for exclusion and peripheralization of those deemed outside the political community (Balibar 2015; Ong 2006). By attending to how neoliberal and digital citizenship are becoming intertwined and co-dependent political figures, we are able to open up for a broader discussion of how *neoliberalization* and *digitalization* may be seen as mutually reinforcing processes (Ahlqvist and Moisio 2014). The article adds to the existing research on digital citizenship and neoliberalism by showcasing how the construction of a ‘digital society’ has relied on and served to reproduce normative conceptions of citizenship. In doing so, our account highlights how digitalization is not merely the neutral implementation of technological infrastructures, but rather the negotiation of a set of deeply political questions concerning the ‘good’ society and the contents of ‘proper’ citizenship.

### Neoliberalism, citizenship, and policy-making

Neoliberalism has garnered widespread academic interest during the last decades (Brown 2015; Dardot and Laval 2013; Wacquant 2009; Davies [2015] 2017). Developing from the 1970s as a response to the perceived crisis of Keynesianism, neoliberalism has in many ways become the dominant political, economic, and normative regime in most of the western world (Springer 2016; Harvey 2005). Neoliberalism is, however, notoriously difficult to pin down as a concept, as it may refer to both ‘a political ideology, sometimes a theoretical paradigm, (...) [and sometimes] a social process’ (Jensen and Prieur 2016, 97–98). That being the case, Colin Crouch (2011, 7) has nonetheless suggested that it can be characterized by its ‘preference for the market over the state as a means of resolving problems.’ Keeping in mind that neoliberalism always becomes transformed when it ‘goes local’ (Ban 2016), this characterization does serve to capture the most common traits ascribed to neoliberal governance. Adding to this conceptualization, scholars have highlighted how neoliberalism strives toward privatization, economic deregulation (reregulation), and a remolding of the state in terms of the market. Yet, against folk conceptions of neoliberal statecraft as the coming of ‘small government’, Wacquant (2009, 307) has argued that the neoliberal state is a highly interventionist and proactive entity, concerned with actively implementing and forging its political ideals onto the social space.

Since the release of the so-called Bangemann Report by the European Union in 1994 (Gibbs 2001; Goodwin and Spittle 2002), research has highlighted the novel links being made between neoliberalism and digitalization. This has been shown through comparative studies of information and communication technology (ICT) policies in Sweden and the EU (Verdegem and Fuchs 2013), the Digital Agenda in India (Gurumurthy, Chami, and Thomas 2016), studies of Open Government Data in the United Kingdom (Bates 2014), and data policies in Italy (Franceschetti 2016). What is yet to receive a systematic attention within this literature, however, is the underlying conception of *citizenship* articulated within such digitalization policies. Notwithstanding a few existing studies (Bjorklund 2016), research on digitalization has tended to overlook that at the

heart of the ‘neoliberal stealth revolution’ (Brown 2015) lies the construction and subjectivation of particular images of the ‘proper’, ‘natural’, and ‘productive’ citizen.

While the concept of ‘citizenship’ has a complex historical legacy (Isin 2002; Balibar 2015), research drawing on particularly Michel Foucault’s pioneering work has shown how the crafting of an entrepreneurial citizen-subject has been at the center of contemporary neoliberal policies (Brown 2015; Lessenich [2009] 2015; Ong 2006). In *The New Way of the World*, Dardot and Laval (2013, 4) thus argue that neoliberalism cannot be reduced to a merely economic doctrine, but must rather be conceived as a normative system, a global rationality ‘that determine a new mode of government of human beings in accordance with the universal principle of competition’. This ‘universal principle’ has served as the foundation for a new conception of citizenship in the guise of the ‘neoliberal subject’. This new citizen has been modeled on the image of the individual as a personal enterprise: citizens are expected to be self-governing in order to maximize competitiveness, mimic the flexibility and attitude of modern enterprises, actively involved in self-work so as to become continuously more efficient and productive, responsabilized for the choices and risks they (are forced to) take, and portrayed as inherently entrepreneurial. As a range of scholarly interventions highlight, these emergent modalities of neoliberal citizenship have caused new forms of exclusion, stigmatization, and precarization (Kennelly and Llewellyn 2011; Standing 2011; Wacquant 2009), as individuals unable to fit within these forms of subjectivity will find themselves marginalized by the ‘rules’ of the game (Bourdieu et al. 2000).

Given that this image of the neoliberal citizen is integral to the recasting of contemporary states, the figure’s absence from research on digitalization is all the more conspicuous. Particularly as Isin and Ruppert (2015) have recently shown that the ‘digital citizen’ has emerged as a key problem of contemporary governance. As governments increasingly turn to e-government and digital era governance (Dunleavy et al. 2006), the governance of subjects as digital citizens, and the tacit set of assumptions attached to this political figure, becomes of primary importance. Thus, if we wish to investigate how and in what ways digitalization plays a part in reproducing and reforming contemporary states, it seems to us that the figure of the citizen must be brought back into view. This article adds to existing accounts of digitalization by focusing on how the figure of the ‘digital citizen’ has been discursively constructed within governmental strategies. Departing from Isin and Ruppert’s (2015) contention that digital citizenship is necessarily tied to *imaginary* or *discursive components*, we seek to understand the claims and normative ideals attached to this figure. The article consequently contributes to existing accounts of neoliberal governance by highlighting how digitalization, a process often considered to be merely ‘technical’, forms an important part in reproducing and recasting neoliberal rationalities. In bridging an empirical policy study with emergent scholarship on the ‘digital citizen’, the article showcases how this figure has become of central political concern and invested with normative ideals already circulating within the political field.

## The competition state and digitalization

The global diffusion of neoliberalism as a normative and political project can also be seen when looking at the Danish state. An influential strand of research has argued that

since the 1990s, the Danish *welfare state* has increasingly been transformed into a *competition state* (Pedersen 2011b; see also Jessop 2002). This diagnosis seeks to encompass a process by which the previously known ideals and political practices making up the welfare state have gradually become reliant on competitiveness as their underlying principle. At the core of these transformations lies a renewed conception of what it means to be a proper citizen. According to Pedersen (2011b, 12, our translation), the competition state seeks to ‘mobilize its population and businesses to participate in the global competition’, while the welfare state sought to protect these from the market. This has simultaneously meant that individual responsibilities have replaced previous conceptions of moral education and participatory democracy as some of the main tasks pursued by the state. In this way, the state no longer seeks to protect its citizens collectively from the market, but to give them a new form of freedom that is ‘identical with the freedom to realize one’s own needs’ (Pedersen 2011b, 12, our translation). The emergence of the competition state thus signals a reconfiguration of the concept of citizenship. Danish citizens have increasingly been molded and portrayed in a distinctly neoliberal register concerned with imposing market-like dynamics on all spheres of public and private life. With these descriptions, we can begin to see how neoliberal ideals are becoming internalized within governmental practices, and how these have served to create a novel image and portrayal of ‘proper’ citizenship. Yet, what often goes unnoticed in this account is how the 1990s and 2000s was also a period in which digitalization, e-governance, and digital reforms increasingly came into view as a means of policy-making (Johansson 2004; Jæger and Löfgren 2010).

While being awarded an increasingly prominent position within Danish policy-making during the 1990s, the development of a fully digitalized society and public sector goes all the way back to the beginning of the 1960s (Sundbo and Lund 1986; Johansson 2004). At that point in time, the first electronic databases and archives were introduced as a replacement for so-called ‘punch cards’, which had been used as one of the main technological devices within the state (Johansson 2004). These punch cards had been used for civil registration and to store key information about Danish citizens (Krogness 2011; Pedersen et al. 2006; Pedersen 2011a). In the 1950s, 1960s, and 1970s, however, a number of ‘large, standardized and central systems’ (Johansson 2004, 143, our translation) were introduced within the administrative parts of the public sector. These systems were used to manage and administer large amounts of data, such as information about citizens’ salaries and taxation. The introduction of these large databases was, as Jæger and Löfgren (2010, 257) observe, analogues to the developments found in a number of other industrial societies. It was a response to the growing complexity of the public sector, and a need to handle larger and more advanced forms of data.

From particularly the mid-1990s, a whole range of new digital technologies has been implemented within the Danish public sector. This has been both due to technological innovations, lower production and manufacturing costs, and to the increasingly widespread use of electronic communication among Danish citizens. Thus, in the 1990s, the ‘digitalization of the public sector reached the “front-office”’ (Jæger and Löfgren 2010, 257). Rather than being limited to an administrative tool used ‘within’ the Danish state, digital technologies were now employed directly within the relation between the Danish state and its citizens (Pors 2015b). From the beginning of the 2000s and onwards, there



has been a major political push toward the implementation of a number of new digital technologies within and across the public sector. This has entailed the implementation of digital invoice systems and online banking; digital accounts for all citizens; public homepages with information on taxation; various forms of ‘citizen’ portals, gathering data from the different parts of the public sector within one unified framework; new digital tools for education and learning; and various forms of digital technologies used for health care, such as electronic patient journals, unified health-care portals, and telemedicine. In this sense, there has been a tremendous focus, across the various strands of the public sector, on implementing, utilizing, and incorporating new digital technologies. As Igari (2014, 118) observes, ‘the Danish government has continually taken initiatives toward promoting e-government since the 1990s’, which has resulted in Denmark being ‘a leader in ICT usage’ (116).

Expressed through a wealth of official reports, policies, and strategies (Johansson 2004), politicians and policy-makers have attached a number of ideals, dreams, and hopes to what digitalization is and ought to do. In the 1990s, policy-makers tended to see digitalization as a key means of freeing information, enhancing democracy, making government transparent, and improving the opportunities for disadvantaged citizens (Jæger and Löfgren 2010; Johansson 2004). While policy-makers were partly inspired by ideals produced by the European Union, they nonetheless foregrounded how the digitalization of the Danish society should be based on so-called ‘Danish values’. In this way, it was important for policy-makers that existing ‘welfare state’ logics were not jeopardized by the creation of a digital society. As the national policy *The Digital Denmark* from 1999 states, ‘[t]he Digital Denmark is about how Denmark can become a leading IT nation in the network society, while we continue the best values in the welfare society’ (Forskningsministeriet 1999, 7, our translation).

From the 2000s, however, economic ideas have become increasingly more widespread within Danish digitalization strategies. This has been due to both a turn within the national government in 2001 (from a social democratic to a liberal coalition) and a consequence of the internal allocation of responsibilities within the Danish government. Thus, from 2001, the Ministry of Finance was de facto put in charge of digitalization policies (Jæger and Löfgren 2010). From this point on, the digitalization of the public sector came to be seen as a way of providing new business opportunities, making administrative processes more lean, and giving the private sector new potentials for innovation. Jæger and Löfgren (2010, 267) thus observe how there has been a shift from ‘the initial years full of experiments and a trust in public agencies’ capability of designing individually citizen-oriented systems’ to ‘a belief in economies of scale and centralisation.’ This, these authors argue, has simultaneously meant a shift toward ‘authority and control’ rather than ‘campaigns, dialogue’ as the main communicative instrument and choice of policy. Adding to this last argument, Andersen (2008, 316–317) has highlighted how there has been a gradual shift from the notion that digitalization must include all citizens to a focus on first and foremost serving the group of citizens who are willing and capable of taking advantage of these new technologies.

This article adds to current historical accounts of Danish digitalization policies (Jæger and Löfgren 2010; Johansson 2004) by highlighting how the figure of the ‘digital citizen’ has played an important component within the discourses produced by policy-makers. In bringing the tacit normative claims attached to this political figure to the front, the article

simultaneously showcases how novel links are being made between neoliberalization, the crafting of the competition state, and digitalization (Pedersen 2011b).

## Research design

### *Theoretical framework*

The analysis presented in this article is informed by insights from Ernesto Laclau's (1990, 2005) post-Marxist discourse theory. We have chosen to utilize discourse theory as it provides a particularly apt approach to study the construction and negotiation of political meaning. Within the context of critical policy studies (Fischer et al. 2015), discourse theory has increasingly been operationalized in order to investigate how particular strategies, policies, and juridical measurements contain certain implicit normativities and construct specific forms of meaning (Howarth 2010; Howarth and Torfing 2005; Hawkins 2015; Howarth and Griggs 2012). In this article, we follow these recent perspectives in order to specifically analyze how notions of citizenship have been articulated in the context of Danish governmental strategies. Discourse theory provides what Marchart (2007) terms a *political theory of signification*, which is well suited for a qualitative and textual analysis.

The basic premise of Laclauian discourse theory is that social reality is never given meaning a priori through immanent laws or essences. Rather, meaning is produced through the practice of *articulation* (Laclau and Mouffe [1985] 2014), which turns *elements* into so-called *moments* given as differential positions within a structured whole. This structured whole, comprised of relational moments of meaning given in an interplay of difference, is what Laclau terms a *discourse*. A discourse is a systematized whole of individual moments that stand in a particular relation to each other. In a linguistic sense, a discourse can be viewed as a particular way of understanding and giving meaning to events, objects, institutions, and subjects inhabiting the social world. A particular discourse, then, represents a particular way of making sense of and constructing the world, it functions as a particular interpretive and symbolic system. When used as an analytical approach, discourse theory provides a framework that seeks to understand, explain, and deconstruct the particular discourses operating in certain contexts, particularly vis-à-vis how such discourses reflect certain normative ideals and power relations (Laclau 1990; Howarth and Stavrakakis 2000).

Discourse theory awards a primary position to *the political* as the precarious and always lacking ground of the social. In this sense, discourses are never merely seen as neutral or simply given (Laclau 1990, 5). Instead, any given discourse is always the outcome of contingent and historical *decisions* (Laclau 1990, 34) that have distinguished between what should be included and what should be excluded. Laclau (1996, 38) maintains that discourses are always constructed in terms of exclusion, and any discourse will never be able to completely close off the construction of meaning in a self-sufficient and positive manner. Meaning, rather, is always interlaced with a *constitutive lack*, a radical negativity.

Based on these underlying premises, discourse theory offers a number of specific analytical concepts that can be used to analyze how discourses are able to partially stabilize and fixate meaning. This includes notions of nodal points, subject positions,



logics of equivalence/difference, and empty signifiers. While firmly committed to a constructivist, relational, and contingent perspective on meaning, post-Marxist discourse theory simultaneously stresses the need to engage in normative questions, critically scrutinizing hegemonic forms of subordination and oppression (Howarth 2000; Schou 2016). Though any such normative investigation can never be anchored in a firmly established ground or foundation, one should not give way to what Howarth (2000, 123) terms as ‘enlightenment blackmail’, in which ‘unless one has or invokes absolute foundations to defend a political project, then one has no ground whatsoever’. Discourse theory becomes both a way of understanding how social reality is produced as meaningful and a political toolbox that can be used to engage proactively with normative questions about how social reality should or can be re-negotiated. In deconstructing the ways in which discourses operate currently, discourse theory opens up a space for thinking how things could be (and could have been) otherwise.

### **Data and coding**

Governmental strategies form an important part in the implementation of large-scale digital infrastructures and social reforms. Rather than simply neutral means of explicating goals, governmental strategies form an active part in the negotiation and construction of particular discourses (Voß and Freeman 2016; Hjelholt and Jensen 2015; Hjelholt 2015). In the case of the Danish public sector, there has been produced a variety of digitalization strategies during the last two decades, including both long-term documents outlining strategic aims, evaluation reports assessing current trends and constructing milestones, and specific strategies aimed directly at the public health-care sector. In a similar way, strategies have been produced on national, municipal, and local levels, stretching beyond the state and into all levels of governance. Within this article, we specifically focus on large-scale strategies produced on a national level. These strategies have been produced on a two-to-three-year cycle from 2002 and onwards. In total, there has been produced four digitalization strategies, which have been used (by the shifting Danish governments) in order to outline and explicate the intentions, possibilities, and current status on the implementation and digitalization of the Danish public sector.<sup>1</sup> The documents were collected through the official homepage of the *Danish Agency for Digitisation* ([www.digst.dk](http://www.digst.dk)). Some of the strategies exist in both Danish and English versions. In these cases, where applicable, we quote from the English versions, while in all other cases the quotes have been translated into English by the authors. In the following analysis, we will, for the sake of simplicity, refer to each strategy by citing the period covered by the individual report. This means that we will reference each strategy in the following way: 2002–2004 (“På vej mod den digitale forvaltning”, 2002), 2004–2006 (“Strategi for digital forvaltning”, 2004), 2007–2010 (“Strategi for Digitalisering af den offentlige sektor 2007–2010”, 2007), and 2011–2015 (“The Digital Path to Future Welfare: eGovernment Strategy 2011–2015”, 2011).

The strategies were analyzed through a systematic qualitative coding using a discourse theoretical approach, as outlined earlier, and based on the guidelines proposed by Howarth (2000, 2005). Our coding entailed a two-step process in which the empirical material was first coded systematically by one of the authors using an inductive coding scheme. This part of the analysis was conducted with an emphasis

on how notions of citizenship and the citizen were articulated in the strategies. At this stage, textual pieces were grouped into overall discourses and key signifiers (nodal points) were noted down. During this coding stage, three overall codes emerged, which we named *citizens as businesses*, *citizenship as homogeneity*, and *citizenship as individuality*. These three codes frame the presentation of our findings in the following section. This initial inductive stage was followed by a deductive coding stage in which the data was analyzed using the codes constructed in the first stage. In an attempt to expand and nuance our initial codes, this entailed a second in-depth textual analysis of the empirical data. It is the outcome of this final analysis that is presented in this article. For the sake of clarity, it should be noted that in this article we do not seek to trace how the investigated discourses have changed over time. Instead, we have deliberately sought to analyze the discourses that have remained more or less consistent throughout the data. It is our empirical claim that when looking across the different strategies, a more or less coherent and stable image of the citizen can be found. While this citizen has been inserted into various other discourses over time, its core features have remained more or less constant. It is this relatively stable discourse that this article is intended to investigate.

## **The construction of citizenship in Danish digitalization strategies**

Following the three overall themes found during our coding, the following sections present our analysis of citizenship discourses within these strategies. We will argue that what emerges from this analysis is a relatively coherent image of a very particular digital citizen: a digital citizen that is constructed as an efficient and economic agent; that is part of more or less homogenous collective of ‘Danes’, each able and expected to utilize digital technologies on a daily basis; and that is highly individualized with particular needs and expectations. We will argue that what unifies these diverse claims is the adherence to and recasting of existing portrayals of the ‘neoliberal subject’.

### ***The efficient subject: citizens as businesses***

The first discursive logic used within the Danish digitalization strategies consists in articulating Danish citizens as economically driven subjects that seek to optimize both their own productivity and the efficiency of the services offered by the government. Thus, according to the 2011–2015 strategy, an exemplary articulation of this position, ‘Danes do not want to waste their valuable time on paperwork at their local government office. And taxpayers’ money must not be used on printed forms and postage when digital solutions can carry out these tasks more efficiently’ (2011–2015, 3). In this quote, ‘Danes’ are constructed as first and foremost being interested in optimizing their time. This leads to an economic rationale concerning the need to make government more effective. The coupling of the citizen’s supposed wish for efficiency with the need for more effective governance is broadly resonated in other pieces of the strategy, which states that ‘[t]he public sector needs to make sure that eGovernment results in financial benefits’ as ‘citizens continue to expect better and better public services’ in a time where the ‘global financial crisis has turned well-balanced state budgets into deficits’ (2011–2015, 4). Within these quotes, the Danish citizen is first of all articulated as an

efficient subject concerned with the optimization of his or her time. Yet, at the same time, this subject is also one that expects more and better services from the state. In this sense, the citizen is articulated as demanding efficient solutions both in order to optimize their personal time and also to improve governmental practices. Digitalization is seen as a way of fulfilling these double-sided demands.

The coupling of digitalization with notions of efficiency, economic growth, and financial gains runs throughout the strategies produced by the government. In 2002–2004, it is stated that '[t]he ambition is to utilize the potentials of a digital society across the state, counties and municipalities in order to organize the public sector more flexibly, more efficiently, and with greater quality for citizens' (2002–2004, 4). This is resonated in 2004–2006, where it is stated that 'digitalization must contribute to creating an effective and coherent public sector with a high quality of service, in which citizens and businesses are at the center' (2004–2006, 4). Similarly, in 2007–2010, it is also proclaimed that '[t]he Danish public sector must be among the best in the world to utilize technology in order to make problem solving more effective' (2007–2010, 15), and, finally, in the 2011–2015 strategy, it is stated that 'public sector authorities can save resources by using channels that ensure the most cost-effective service for citizens and companies' (2011–2015, 5), while the implementation of digital welfare services will 'provide citizens with services that target individual needs while reducing expenditure' (2011–2015, 6).

In this sense, there has been and continues to be very strong *economic justifications* behind the digitalization of the Danish public sector. Within and throughout the strategies, digitalization and efficiency are systematically equated. Yet, what is important to note in this context is not just how the digitalization of the public sector is legitimized using economic or financial justifications. Rather, it should be stressed how these economic ideals are justified by reference to what Danish citizens 'want' or 'expect'. It is *because* the Danish citizen is constructed as a first and foremost economic agent – concerned with efficiency and productivity – that the Danish public sector should also be fueled by economic ideals. The articulation of the citizen as an economic agent forms a part in the legitimization of a political vision that prioritizes economic logics.

The construction of the citizen as an economic agent can also be seen in the multiple ways in which citizens and businesses are more or less equated. Hence, within the strategies, citizens and businesses are constructed as driven by the same basic motivations and incentives. Specifically, this can be seen in the way in which the signifiers *citizens* and *businesses* are often used interchangeably. In 2002–2004, for example, it is stated that 'the public sector's services must be delivered in a coherent manner with citizens and businesses at the center' (2002–2004, 7), 'the goal is to reduce the public sector's expenditures, while giving citizens and businesses better access to public service' (2002–2004, 7), and '[i]t is an essential pre-condition for digital service and electronic communication that the public sector can handle information and data from citizens, businesses, and other authorities effectively' (2002–2004, 15). In both the 2004–2006 and the 2007–2010 strategies, these statements – constructing citizens and businesses as the same agent – are continued completely unaltered. The 2007–2010 strategy thus states that it prioritizes 'digitalization in the areas that have the greatest effect on both citizens and businesses and the public sector' (2007–2010, 6) and that '[c]itizens and businesses are the starting point for the public sector's work' (2007–2010,

10). Both citizens and businesses, then, are construed as ‘customers’ by policy-makers: they are driven by the same basic needs and should be met with the same governmental ‘offers’.

Overall, we find that Danish citizens have very consistently been articulated as economic and efficient subjects that prioritize economic justifications linked to productivity and optimization. These ideas are, moreover, linked not only to the individual, but also to his or her expectation toward the government and its administrative processes. In this sense, efficiency becomes both an individual trait, attributed to the citizen, and also a social or political imperative directed *from* the citizens *toward* government. Constructing citizens as driven by economic incentives and continuously striving to become more efficient is a core component of neoliberal citizenship (Dardot and Laval 2013; Brown 2015). Likewise, making efficiency and productivity into almost ethical imperatives, demanded by both the individual and society, is also a common trope within the neoliberal imaginary (Lessenich [2009] 2015). In this way, the discursive equation of citizens and businesses is not just an innocent practice, but serves to import very particular normative ideas about the subject.

### ***Homogeneity: citizenship as sameness***

The second discursive logic used within the strategies consists in articulating Danish citizens as a homogenous group of subjects that share particular beliefs, everyday practices, and expectations toward the ways in which government should function. We have already, however implicitly, touched upon this in the earlier discussion, yet we will explicate its precise contents in this section. This particular logic is achieved by utilizing the signifiers ‘Danes’ and ‘Danish Citizens’ in order to designate the ‘totality’ of the Danish population. Thus, according to the 2011–2015 strategy, as quoted earlier, it is ‘Danes’ who do not want to waste time (2011–2015, 3), ‘smartphones [that] provide Danish citizens with even better opportunities for communicating online with the public sector’ (2011–2015, 13), and while ‘[t]oday, all citizens have a letter box hanging by their gates or in the entrance to their apartment building’, they will, by 2014, ‘have a digital letter box (Digital Post) where they will receive letters from public authorities’ (2011–2015, 15). As can be seen from these passages, notions of ‘citizens’ and ‘Danes’ are used more or less interchangeably. The Danish citizens are articulated as a homogenous collective of individuals: all ‘Danes’ are constructed as acting in more or less the same way and the strategies are constructed *as if* they spoke on behalf of all citizens.

The effect of this particular construction, which collapses all Danes to a uniform, collective subjectivity, is twofold. First of all, it serves to couple Danes, citizens, and citizenship with a range of other normative expectations and signifiers through what Laclau and Mouffe ([1985] 2014) terms a *logic of equivalence*. This means that Danes (or Danish citizens) become the *particular* signifier that is used to express a range of other signifiers. The Danish citizen becomes what Laclau terms a *tendentially empty signifier* (Laclau 1996; 2005) that is suspended between fulfilling a both universal and particular position. While still being a particular signifier, ‘it also becomes the signifier of a wider universality’ (Laclau 2005, 96).

Second, through the articulation of this logic of equivalence, the construction of the Dane as a homogenous entity also serves to exclude the forms of subjectivity that fall

outside this particular constructed community. The articulation of Danes as an empty signifier serves to neutralize particular expectations toward the ways in which Danish citizens *should* and *ought* to be. This discursive logic – linking homogeneity with particular expectations – can be seen in the following quote: ‘Danish citizens use their computers, mobile phones and the Internet every day’ (2011–2015, 3). Within this passage, all Danes are articulated as using a particular set of technologies on an everyday basis. While this is articulated as a more or less factual statement concerning the empirical use of technologies, it could also be read as a normative statement concerning the ways in which Danish citizens *should* act: Danish citizens *should* use their computers, mobile phones, and the Internet every day. This also means that this particular construction rests on an implicit demarcation between Danish citizens, as avid technology users, and a ‘constitutive outside’ made up of non-technology adopters. In this way, the signifiers Danes and Danish Citizens become directly tied to being able to participate and access particular technologies, and being a technology user is articulated as the normatively desirable option.

This discursive logic can very consistently be traced throughout the strategies. Already in the 2002–2004 strategy, it is stated that ‘Danes are among the leading in the world to take new technological opportunities into use’ (2002–2004, 4) and that ‘[c]itizens must have access to digital media and use them in all parts of society’ (2002–2004, 4). This also means that the citizens who do not fit into these categories are explicitly articulated as the target of disciplinary measurements:

We must also take citizens who have trouble with or are simply unfamiliar with using digital channels into consideration. (...) Citizens with weak IT skills, such as frail senior citizens, will be able to authorize a family member so they can access their personal Digital Post. Furthermore, many people with disabilities will be able to use digital solutions without the need for personal assistance. (2011–2015, 14)

In this quote, the citizens who do not fit within the normative parameters constructed by the state are articulated as having or being linked to ‘trouble’, ‘weak IT skills’, ‘disabilities’, and being ‘unfamiliar’, ‘unable’, and ‘frail’. They appear as subjects that should be corrected and re-integrated through a number of disciplinary measurements. The normative demarcation on which this division rests – constructing particular forms of subjectivity as desirable, while others are constructed as weak or disabled – is not only made to seem neutral, but it is also linked to a range of mechanisms that seeks to (re-)include the excluded. The disciplinary re-integration that these included exclusions are facing is first and foremost driven by economic terms: ‘[c]itizens with different disabilities or a lower capacity for work should also be given the opportunity to use their skills in the labor market’ (2011–2015, 28). Even exclusion is framed in a monetary or economic vocabulary. Thus, whenever the strategies attempt to speak on behalf of the totality of the population, they are building this particular perspective on an implicit normative demarcation between different kinds of subjectivity. In this sense, the main line of demarcation revolves around technology adoption and use. The use of the signifiers ‘Danes’ or ‘Danish Citizens’ not only serves to link a range of signifiers to and around these, giving them a universal function within the discourse, but also to implicitly exclude those falling outside these parameters. Additionally, in using the category of ‘Danish citizens’, the strategies are actively targeting subjects with an official



status as citizens. This means that undocumented workers, immigrants, and other parts of the ‘precariat’ (Standing 2011) are rendered invisible within these documents. In this way, the strategies not only create an internal division between those who are counted as legitimate citizens, it also reproduces an external demarcation to those who are deemed as non-citizens or ‘denizens’ (see Anderson and Hughes 2015; Isin 2002). We can thus begin to see a series of graduations within the rights of digital citizens. While those deemed as ‘digital’ are considered to fulfill the normative expectations of the state, ‘non-digital’ citizens are targeted through disciplinary measurements, and undocumented individuals without formal citizenship are rendered completely invisible.

### ***Self-service, automation, and responsabilization: citizenship as individuality***

The third discursive logic used in the strategies consists in constructing the citizen as an individual with particular needs and conditions. This particular logic is tied to a double-sided argument in which the public sector is constructed as having to transfer responsibilities either to the citizens themselves (making them more or less self-serving) or to automatic, digital processes. Taken very broadly, one of the primary objectives of the Danish digitalization strategies has been to transfer the responsibilities from governmental employees, such as social caseworkers and administrative personnel employed at the ground level, to the citizens themselves (Pors 2015a). The digitalization of the public sector has been employed as a form of *responsibilization* (Lessenich [2009] 2015; Dardot and Laval 2013), in which the citizen should be in charge of his or her own situation. In the strategies themselves, this is stated very clearly as one of the primary goals. In 2015, the strategies states that ‘[a]ll citizens and companies use self-service on the Internet’ (2011–2015, 8). As a further milestone for this year, it is hoped that ‘all citizens are using the Internet to submit applications and correspondence to the public sector’ (2011–2015, 14). The introduction of self-service solutions cuts across a variety of governmental functions and initiatives, including welfare benefits, taxation, education, and so on. In the context of unemployed citizens, for example, the 2011–2015 strategy states that it is vital to ‘develop and improve self-service for people using Jobcenters. This includes developing self-service solutions that make it easier for unemployed people to register sick days, a return to work, and holidays’ (2011–2015, 29). And, the strategy states, ‘[o]nce these processes are digital and easy to use, both companies and Jobcenters will save time – and money’ (2011–2015, 28). Self-service is, in other ways, seen as yet another way to optimize government and make it more efficient. The articulation of citizens as self-serving, however, cannot be reduced to merely constructing them in economic terms. It also consists in articulating citizens as individualized and responsible for their own circumstances: as agent capable of being active. At the same time as citizens are increasingly expected to serve themselves through digital solutions, the strategies also articulate processes of automation:

Application forms, sworn statements, copies of pay slips, annual statements, and any printed forms required for citizens to receive benefits from the public sector, are all to be phased out. Instead, public sector authorities will use the data on citizens income already registered in central databases. Across the board, objective criteria will be used to automate as much administration as possible. (2011–2015, 28)

We argue that this signals a double-sided discursive logic in which responsibilities are transferred from *either* administration to citizens *or* from administration to automated processes. As the 2011–2015 strategy states, ‘our eGovernment initiatives have helped us transfer resources from administration to welfare and optimize and automate work procedures throughout the public sector’ (2011–2015, 8), and, going forward, ‘[m]ore and more procedures in the public sector will be automated and digitalized, saving resources and streamlining workflows’ (2011–2015, 18). This sentiment is resonated in prior strategies. Thus, in 2007–2010, it is noted that ‘it has to be made sure that the majority of administrative routines are either automated or simplified’ (2007–2010, 15). As stated, this simultaneous delegation of responsibility to citizens and automated processes is fueled by an articulation of the citizen as a unique individual with particular needs, everyday practices, and expectations: ‘[e]-government must also make sure that the citizen is met with more individual services that place their actual needs at the center’ (2002–2004, 4); ‘increased [economic] prosperity creates individual and therefore also diverse needs’ (2007–2010, 15), and ‘better digital service therefore means that public services increasingly must be individual and coherent in order to support the individual citizens and businesses’ everyday [practices]’ (2007–2010, 6).

Thus, within this third discursive logic, the citizen is constructed as an increasingly individualized subject that should be encountered on his or her own terms. At the same time, this articulation of the individual citizen is coupled with self-service solutions in which the citizen is made responsible for their own situation and circumstances. Placing the individual at the center of public service means transferring or delegating administrative tasks to citizens rather than governmental personnel. This decentering of the caseworkers’ responsibilities is also, on another front, achieved through the automation of particular tasks within digital systems. This, in turn, means that the responsibility for maintaining social welfare benefits, receiving annual taxation reports, and so on are at once distributed to the individual *or* delegated to digital systems that work autonomously from the individual. While these two movements may appear contradictory, as both delegating and taking responsibility from the citizen, they both serve the purpose of transferring responsibility from administrative staff to either an ‘economic’ subject or a ‘productive’ system. The main goal in constructing the citizen as an individual and responsible entity is to merit and legitimize processes of economic rationalization.

## Discussion and conclusion

Who is the digital citizen? Which normative claims have been attached to this figure as a problem and means of contemporary governance? Through a study of Danish digitalization strategies from 2002 to 2015, this article has shown how policy-makers have very actively produced the digital citizen as a contemporary ideal of governance. Yet, rather than a neutral figure, the digital citizen has been bound up with a very specific set of normative ideals. We have thus highlighted how an individualized and responsabilized citizen, using digital technologies as a part of productive and proper form of life, has been situated at the core of Danish digitalization policy-making. Assimilating some of the most common traits ascribed to neoliberal subjectivity, this digital citizen has acted as a revamped version of the ‘neoliberal’ subject (Brown 2015; Dardot and Laval 2013), linked to ideas of efficiency, flexibility, and responsabilization.

Foregrounding this ‘neoliberalized digital citizen’ highlights how existing neoliberal tropes are being reproduced within national digitalization strategies. It showcases how the digital citizen draws on and reproduces already existing visions of what citizenship is and ought to be.

In this way, our findings add to existing accounts of neoliberal governance (Dardot and Laval 2013; Brown 2015; Wacquant 2009) by showcasing how ‘being digital’ is becoming integral to neoliberal citizenship within the eyes of governmental policy-makers (Bates 2014; Ahlqvist and Moisio 2014). At the same time, the digital citizen is recasting existing neoliberal ideas, as being able to utilize digital technologies is becoming intertwined with being able to ‘perform’ neoliberal citizenship. Our account thus foregrounds some emerging transformations of neoliberal *and* digital citizenship. As these two terms increasingly converge and cross-pollinate each other within governmental policies, being digital and being neoliberal starts to coalesce and serve as mutually reinforcing narratives. In this sense, Ulrich Beck’s remark from 2002 rings partially true: ‘[t]he new neoliberal crusaders preach: “You must become streamlined, downsize, flexibilize and get on the Internet”’ (2002, 40).

It seems to us that these politicized transformations in digital citizenship are all too often obscured by the existing literature. In resorting to wide-ranging and de-contextualized narratives, concerned with the emergence of the digital citizen as a ubiquitous and transnational ‘ideal’, ‘concept’, or ‘responsibility’, the specific ways in which digital citizenship is both dependent on and recasting existing political ideals become forgotten. Drawing on insights from post-Marxist discourse theory (Laclau 1990), we have sought to reclaim the position of these normative dimensions. In this sense, this study gives further weight to Isin and Ruppert’s (2015, 19) assertion that ‘we cannot assume that this subject [the digital citizen] is without history or geography’. Indeed, our study empirically underlines that we must approach the digital citizen as a key political figure intermeshed with the hegemonic political narratives of our times. In order to develop this argument in-depth within this article, we have focused narrowly on the discursive components of digital citizenship. This has allowed us to carefully dissect and deconstruct the underlying rationales attached and kept within the figure of the digital citizen. While this limits our analysis, as we cannot tell the consequences of these discourses ‘in action’, it highlights the tacit normativities of policy-making.

Highlighting these novel links between neoliberal and digital citizenship, this study furthermore challenges accounts of e-government and digitalization that see these processes as primary concerned with providing the state with novel technical or calculative possibilities. It goes against views on digitalization that primarily portray this as having an enabling or productive ‘effect’, which have been particularly adamant within the field of ‘e-government’ (Heeks and Bailur 2007; Pors 2015a). Against these de-politicized views, circulating within the realm of policy-makers and scholars alike, our account underlines the deeply politicized discourses used to justify and legitimize digitalization and digital era governance. It showcases how, at the core of digitalization and e-governmental initiatives, there lies a concern for how citizens ought to be acting, their role in society, and the contents of proper citizenship. Beyond the technocratic surface of digital technologies, we find a whole normative microcosm concerned with the proper forms of life.



To our mind, this account opens the way for several paths of future research. First, as this article has principally focused on the discursive components of digital citizenship, there is a need for research that studies how such political discourses become inscribed, materialized, and encoded into the very fabric of digital technologies and organizational practices (Isin and Ruppert 2015). Indeed, as particularly the work done by Bowker and Star (1999), and others working within the field of Science and Technology studies, reminds us, infrastructures are not merely neutral objects, but work through their own logics of categorization and codification. In this way, citizens have been tied to the state through various forms of data collection and analysis over time (Bowker 2008; Kitchin 2014). The 'data citizen' is not a new invention as censuses, tax collection, and archives have relied on data practices for centuries. So how does the neoliberalized digital citizen lead to novel data practices? Are these ideas leading to new kinds of data citizenship?

Second, in studying how these governmental discourses traverse and permeate both governmental institutions and technologies, we may also begin to look at the kinds of subjectivities that are left out, excluded and marginalized. What happens when the digital citizen 'goes local'? As shown in our analysis, so-called 'weak' citizens have been framed as the target of novel forms of digital disciplinary measurements. They have been supposed to be transformed into 'proper' citizens through the relearning of certain competences deemed necessary by the state. Yet what about the kinds of subjectivity that do not even appear as excluded? How does the neoliberal digital citizen lead to novel forms of exclusion and marginalization of those already at the fringes of the governmental system? As research has already succinctly documented, the neoliberal 'transmogrification' (Brown 2015) of citizenship has served as a potent engine of exclusion. Do these logics of exclusion take on new forms when neoliberal citizenship becomes intertwined with digital citizenship? It seems to us that if we wish to tackle some of the novel forms of marginalization emerging as a consequence of digitalization, scrutinizing the claim attached to the neoliberalized digital citizen is a productive starting point. It allows us to foreground the moral, political, and imaginary ideals attached to contemporary citizens, and how this leads to production of certain 'deviant' Others.

## Note

1. The fifth strategy was released in May 2016. However, as this was after the analysis conducted in this article, it is not included in our investigation.

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No potential conflict of interest was reported by the authors.

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## Publication 2: Rolling out Digitalization

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## CHAPTER 4

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# Rolling Out Digitalization: Hegemonies, Policies and Governance Failures

**Abstract** This chapter traces the gradual rollout of national digitalization policies in Denmark from 1994 to 2017. It excavates the different ideas, ideals and visions that have been tied to these political efforts over time, showcasing how institutional path-dependencies have shaped this area of policymaking in distinct ways. The chapter argues that discourses centred on sustainability, equality, participation and democracy (present in the early years of policymaking) have gradually been replaced with a decidedly economic set of ideas. Efficiency, flexibility, innovation, competitiveness and citizens-as-customers have become increasingly hegemonic ideas since the early 2000s. The chapter thus showcases how different governmental actors have proposed different hegemonic visions over time. In doing so, the chapter seeks to reactivate the contingent foundations of this area of governance, emphasizing its imminently political, rather than technical, character.

**Keywords** Digitalization • National policies • Path-dependencies  
• Danish state • Cultural political economy • Hegemony

This chapter provides the first part of our case study of governmental digitalization efforts in Denmark.<sup>1</sup> Moving from the theoretical tools and historical trajectories developed in the first part of the book – concerned with articulating CPE as an analytical frame – we now zoom in on how



digitalization has been employed as a means of governance and policymaking in Denmark. More specifically, we are concerned with digitalization efforts in the context of what Henman (2010, p. 8) label as *e-service provision* and *e-management* respectively, namely “the use of electronic technologies for the delivery of public services” and “those activities which use digital technologies to allocate resources within government under the terms of existing governmental policy.” Investigating these policy efforts, we will also touch upon questions of “e-democracy” and broader societal visions of digitalization, but these issues do not constitute our main empirical focus. Indeed, as will be showcased in this chapter, the separation between these areas turns out to be a historical, rather than conceptual or *a priori*, distinction. Thus, while digitalization efforts started out in the early 1990s by deliberately linking questions of public sector restructuring, service provision, democracy and education into a unified policy frame, it has increasingly come to be separated into different streams. This is, in part, the story we will tell in this chapter.

Our case study falls in two halves. First, we investigate how different governmental actors have attempted to create a hegemonic vision for what digitalization should imply as an area of policymaking. Second, we then explore how these national policy trajectories have influenced and changed local welfare institutions in significant ways in the following chapter. Taken together, we hope that these two trajectories may help explain and foreground how digitalization has become an important means of statecraft and institutional restructuring – and why CPE provides a powerful entry-point for understanding these developments.

There are both substantive and more idiosyncratic reasons for choosing Denmark as our particular case in this book, the most obvious reason being that it is simply the case we know the best. We have, in collaboration and on our own, conducted research on digitalization efforts within the Danish state for a number of years now, focusing variously on questions of policymaking (Schou and Hjelholt 2017a; Hjelholt and Schou 2017a), marginalization (Schou and Hjelholt 2017b), local welfare institutions (Hjelholt 2015; Hjelholt and Schou 2017b) and citizenship (Hjelholt and Schou 2017b, 2018). The present work can be seen as our attempt to push these studies a bit further, showcasing how some of the arguments we have developed over the years might have some broader applicability and resonance.



Beyond sheer familiarity, however, there are also more substantive reasons for why Denmark might be a good entry-point if we want to understand some of the contemporary transformations of advanced capitalist states and public sectors in the face of digitalization. As this chapter will showcase, the Danish government has since the 1990s pushed for a very proactive digital agenda, investing both economic and political capital in promoting the use of digital technologies across the public sector and society. This has given way to not only the implementation of a large number of digital infrastructures, but also the creation of new legal measurements and institutional changes. In a European perspective, this has meant that Denmark is often lauded as a digital ‘forerunner’, ‘leader’ or ‘example’ to be followed, consistently scoring some of the highest marks on the European Union’s so-called *Digital Economy and Society and Index* (DESI). As stated in the introduction, we should be wary of these labels and the technological selectivities of measurements like the DESI. However, if anything, this does indicate that Denmark is *perceived* to be at the forefront of digitalization efforts. By looking at this particular case, then, we might get a sense of how digitalization has become a means of policymaking within a nation that is currently articulated as an international leader.

There is a fairly well-developed field of research dedicated to exploring governmental and public sector digitalization in Denmark. Existing scholarship has focused on questions of policymaking (Jæger and Löfgren 2010; Henriksen and Damsgaard 2007; Ejersbo and Greve 2014, 2017; Johansson 2004), institutional work and translation (Fedespeil 2015), municipal digitalization (Pors 2015; Andersen 2008), open data (Henriksen 2015), meta-governance (Jensen and Kähler 2007; Löfgren 2012) as well as providing more general overviews of digitalization efforts in Denmark (Andersen 2007; Henriksen 2017; Jæger and Pors 2017; Andersen et al. 2007). This book adds to and nuances these existing studies by focusing more explicitly on questions of politics, power and political economy. Indeed, advocating for a CPE-informed approach to this area allows us to not only re-connect digitalization to wider structural transformations within the capitalist state form. It also provides an opportunity to scrutinize some of the implicit theoretical and conceptual assumptions contained in large parts of the existing literature. Against purely technological or depoliticized readings, we want to showcase the political ambitions and institutional consequences of digitalization policies as these have developed over time.

## A BRIEF NOTE ON METHOD

Our entry-point in this specific chapter is on the *discursive selectivities* involved in crafting a hegemonic vision for what digitalization should include (and exclude) as an area of governance and statecraft. Reiterating the argument presented in Chap. 2, hegemony is best conceived as *hegemonies*, understood as several overlapping, unstable and tension-filled attempts to sustain particular forms of moral, cultural and political (self-) leadership (Sum and Jessop 2013). Crafting hegemonies is a complex process that often involves several competing visions, prolonged negotiations and various translations across institutional borders.

This chapter looks at the formation of hegemonies by excavating the different discourses that have been tied to digitalization policymaking over time. Our focus is on the ways in which language has been mobilized in certain normative ways by different governmental agencies, with an emphasis on the particular ideas that have been selected, retained and sedimented. To understand these processes, we examine official policy documents and national strategies produced by the Danish state since 1994. Spanning roughly 50 official documents, we have collected an archive that combines a wide assortment of strategies, policies, reports and annual reviews produced by different Danish ministries and governmental officials over time. All of these documents have, to varying degrees, sought to explicate, strategize and legitimize how and why the Danish society and state should be made digital. Our analysis of this corpus of data has followed a qualitative, interpretive and inductive scheme, most closely related to approaches found in critical policy studies (Fischer and Gottweis 2012; for a CPE perspective, see Sum 2009, 2015). This entails a close textual reading of each document, the construction of extensive notes describing their contents and the establishment of codes informing further analysis. We have thus traced how different ministries have articulated different ideas as to what public sector digitalization should and should not imply, focusing on the particular concepts, words and rationales used over time. We have translated all quotes from Danish to English.

In this context, we should remember that policy documents only tell part of the story: namely the part that has been deemed worthy to act on behalf of the state. It is, in other words, the ‘official’ narrative. This also means that all of the underlying negotiations and political struggles have been erased from the surface at the precise point in which a policy becomes official. As a consequence, the narrative presented in this chapter is *not*

intended to outline and excavate the complex set of differential positions, both dominant and dominated, within the Danish state itself. We are not looking for the micro-political power struggles involved in producing these policies. Instead, in a somewhat broader fashion, we look at how the official discourses have changed over time, making ideas that were seen as inherently good, productive and worthwhile at one point in time become gradually replaced by others. Additionally, this chapter does not examine the transnational networks implicated in influencing the Danish digitalization agenda. As has been emphasized by existing research (see e.g. Ejersbo and Greve 2014), international actors like the OECD and the European Union have played a key role in shaping the Danish policy agenda. While undoubtedly important, this is not the story we have set out to tell in this chapter.

### CONSTRUCTING HEGEMONIES: WHAT SHOULD DIGITALIZATION BE?

The Danish state has relied on various technologies for several centuries. Church books, paper documents, archives and letters, used particularly for censuses and civil registration (Pedersen 2011a), constitute early examples of how the state identified and attempted to measure its population. Land registers (*“jordebog”*) can be traced back to around 1300 and the first censuses were held from 1787 and onwards (Krogness 2011).

Following the immediate aftermath of the Second World War, so-called punch cards were used to store information about citizens. These are paper cards that were invented in the 1800s and are now generally considered as a proto-computing technology. Punch cards were used to store data on citizens in order to calculate various population statistics, measure taxes and other administrative tasks (Johansson 2004, p. 141). These cards represented the most prominently used technological infrastructure in Denmark for a number of decades. By the 1960s, however, due to both a growth within the size of the public sector and an increase in its organizational complexity, the Danish municipalities “reached a level where it was difficult for these manual index card registers to keep up with the ever-increasing demand for data” (Krogness 2011, p. 104). While some municipalities had begun automating and organizing punch cards into larger centrals (so-called *hulkortcentraler*, “punch card centrals”), they could no longer keep up with the increasingly large amounts of data produced

across the public sector. As a consequence, punch cards were gradually replaced in the 1960s and 1970s with new electronic systems and archives capable of storing larger quantities of information. As Johansson (2004) notes, this period was characterized by the introduction of a number of “large, standardized and central systems” (ibid., p. 143, our translation), used to manage and administer more information than ever before. The introduction of these databases in the 1960s and 1970s was, as Jæger and Löfgren (2010, p. 257) observe, similar to the development in a number of other (European) countries. Since then, technological developments within the Danish public sector have progressed rapidly: from the introduction of computers in the public sector in the 1970s and 1980s to having digital tools as an integrated part of both civic life and public sector administration in the 1990s and 2000s.

In a political context, the 1990s constitute an especially important time for governmental digitalization, as it is in this period that this area increasingly comes into being as a relatively autonomous field of policymaking and governance. It does so against wider political changes within the political system and state. In 1993, a social-democratic coalition, led by Poul Nyrup Rasmussen (prime minister, 1993–2001) and the Social Democrats (*Socialdemokratiet*), replaced the former conservative-liberal government headed by Poul Schlüter (1982–1993). As a response to the ideological-political crises of the welfare state (see Chap. 3), Schlüter had initiated a range of significant reform and modernization programs, broadly concerned with introducing new forms of marketization, competitiveness, decentralization and free choice into the public sector (Petersen et al. 2013, pp. 123–128). While the new social-democratic coalition discarded some of these political trajectories when they came into office, they continued and sustained many of the core political ambitions proposed by Schlüter and the previous government. In so doing, they played an important part in what has later come to be seen as the transition from a classical welfare state – the Keynesian Welfare National State (Jessop 2002) discussed in the previous chapter – to a new type of competition state (Pedersen 2011b; Torfing 1999; Genschel and Seelkopf 2015).

March 1994, the Danish government created a committee headed by Lone Dybkjær and Søren Christensen, two experienced Danish politicians coming from the Danish Social Liberal Party (*Det Radikale Venstre*) and the Social Democrats (*Socialdemokratiet*) respectively. They were tasked with creating an overall concept or framework for Denmark’s entrance into the so-called *information society*. This framework should, the com-

mittee's official mandate declared, contain "a picture of Danish citizens' possibilities in the coming information society", "create an overall Danish IT-policy" and "identify special areas for the coming years and point to the need for potential legislative changes" (Forskningsministeriet 1994, p. 3).

The construction of this committee in 1994 should be seen as a response to several overlapping circumstances and political choices. First of all, the committee coincided with the rise of the 'information society' as a transnational imaginary. In 1994, the so-called Bangemann report was published by the European Union (Gibbs 2001; Goodwin and Spittle 2002). This report put the idea of the information society high on the political agenda across Europe. In doing so, it served to promote the new capabilities, potentials and opportunities provided by digital technologies for reforming existing modes of governance. Like a number of comparable countries, such as Sweden and Finland (Hall 2008), Denmark was compelled to formulate its own strategy on the information society following these European recommendations. This historical path is important to keep in mind because it influenced the initial framing of the 1994 committee. Like the European Union, this Danish committee – and the secretariat and working group it assembled – treated digitalization in a fairly broad way: not only as a tool that might be used to optimize and change administrative practices and service provision, but as an area capable of transforming large parts of the Danish society as a whole.

Secondly, the committee provided a response to broader socio-technical changes within society at large. In the early 1990s, a combination of technological innovations and the internationalization of the division of labor had allowed for lower production and manufacturing costs, making digital technologies cheaper and more accessible. The number of Internet users among Danish citizens also increased significantly at this point in time. Although reserved for only a few people in the early 1990s, with 0.1% of the Danish Population being Internet users, by the year 2000, 39.2% had come online (The World Bank 2017). With the rapid growth in the number of Internet users, it became possible to use digital technologies for more than simply refurbishing the "back office" of the public sector. The direct relation between citizens and the state could now be digitalized in new ways (Jæger and Pors 2017).

Third and finally, the committee's work aligns with institutional changes within the Danish state itself. As a consequence of the national shift within the Danish government in 1993, the responsibility for information technology and digitalization was handed over to the Ministry of



Research. Prior to this point, policymaking had been divided into a number of separate domains, such as media, information, and telecommunication policies (Johansson 2004). The relocation of the responsibilities to the Ministry of Research served to merge several distinct policy areas into a more or less unified field. However, it did more than this, as there had in fact been produced digitalization policies before this point. Most significantly, the Ministry of Finance had produced the report *Efficient EDP [Electronic Data processing] in the State* in 1992 (Finansministeriet 1992). This report was formulated by an ‘EDP-political committee’ and had been tasked with “evaluating the need for a centrally created, state EDP-policy” (Finansministeriet 1992, p. 71). The 1992-report targeted the Danish public sector very directly and primarily framed digitalization as a means of making this “expensive” part of the government more efficient by optimizing labor practices and creating more flexible forms of organization. As the 1992-report summarizes, the “1990s *can* be the decade in which information technology (IT) really starts to create new, better and cheaper solutions in the public sector” (ibid., p. 9, original emphasis). When the Ministry of Research was put in charge of producing an overall policy in 1994, this also signaled that the Ministry of Finance was no longer responsible for this area. It was a subtle shift in the agential balance of power. For the next several years, the Ministry of Research would continue to be in charge of digitalization policymaking, delegating this task to various committees and working groups over time.

Taken as a whole, the Dybkjær-Christensen-committee thus signified the initial genesis of digitalization policies as a partially autonomous area of statecraft. 1994 marks the point in which digitalization came into being as a more or less unified governmental activity tasked with providing an overall vision for the Danish society as a whole. The formation of this new area had its initial culmination with the release of the report “Info-society year 2000” (Forskningsministeriet 1994) in 1994. This document, commonly known as the Dybkjær-Christensen report, contained a comprehensive vision for the transformation of the Danish society into an ‘information society.’ In assimilating political ideals circulating widely in Europe at the time, and shifting discussions from technical solutions to broader societal possibilities, it became very popular amongst Danish citizens and had to be reprinted several times (Johansson 2004).

### *Policy Visions from 1994 to 2001*

*Info-society Year 2000* (Forskningsministeriet 1994) opens in the midst of global transformations. The widespread diffusion of the Internet has, according to this report, caused nothing less than a “global short-circuiting of time, places, people and processes” (Forskningsministeriet 1994, p. 7). Within this new complex of time and space, Denmark is situated “in the middle of a revolution” (ibid.). If employed in the right way, the report argues, “information technology can be a source of economic development, enhanced life quality and better public and private service” (ibid.). It is therefore seen as vital that the Danish government produces “a strategy that can bring Denmark in front through a broad usage of IT” (ibid.). According to this report, “*the question is not* whether we want to be a part of the information society or not. [...] The question is instead: *How* do we want to be a part of it?” (Forskningsministeriet 1994, p. 23, original emphasis). Indeed, for policymakers at this point in time, opting out of the information society is perceived as a non-option. Instead, “the global short-circuiting, the explosion of information and the technological development are *facts* within the international society that we cannot escape” (ibid., our emphasis).

One of the major challenges constructed by policymakers at this point in time is how “traditional” welfare state ideals can be maintained within a transition towards an information society. The task is, policymakers emphasize, to develop an information society that is continuous with the ideational and normative foundations of the existing welfare state. For this to be realized, *Info-society year 2000* argues that so-called “Danish values” (Forskningsministeriet 1994, p. 26) must be prioritized and actively pursued. The notion of “Danish values” is used to hold together a number of particular ideas, including “values such as openness, democracy and responsibility for everyone in society, so that there will not be a division of Danes into an A- and B-team” (Forskningsministeriet 1994, p. 7). According to this report, then, information technology and digitalization must be used in order to secure “the free access to information”, “democracy and the individual’s ability to participate”, “personal development”, “the creation of an open public sector”, “[support for] the weakest [citizens] in society”, and “Danish businesses’ international competitiveness” (Forskningsministeriet 1994, p. 24). The Danish society is framed as being based on active democratic participation, the construction of open and transparent forms of governance, as well as solidarity

and equality for ‘weak’ citizens. It is in many ways this complex web of normative ideas that is collected within the notion of Danish values. And it is these values that should constitute the foundations for the Danish welfare state’s transformation into an information society according to policymakers at this point in time.

In these early years, policymakers tend to frame digitalization within a wider nationalistic discourse. Throughout the 1994-report, it is argued that many of the core values of Danish society are being put under pressure by a number of external dynamics, including the globalization of the economy, market and cultural production. The rise of global forms of communication and transmission of culture are seen as endangering the “national solidarity” of the welfare state. This also means that while Denmark, “as a nation”, cannot simply “quit the international economy” (Forskningsministeriet 1994, p. 23), the market should not be allowed to “steer strategizing” (ibid.). As the report makes clear, “it is interesting, though *not decisive* for Denmark, to utilize information technologies in the way the many suppliers on the market makes possible” (Forskningsministeriet 1994, p. 24, our emphasis). Indeed, one of the puzzles that policymakers are struggling with at this point in time is how the (imagined) external pressure on the welfare state can be counteracted through new policy interventions. Part of the solution, they argue, is to implement digital technologies in a specifically Danish way.

Within these formative policy visions – which are clearly displayed in the *Info-society year 2000* report, but may also be found in a number of similar documents at this point in time – citizens are encouraged to utilize digital technologies to take advantage of the new possibilities provided by the “digital revolution”. However, as *Info-society year 2000* makes clear, the use of digital technologies should be a choice, not an obligation (Forskningsministeriet 1994, p. 34). So-called “weak citizens” should be taken care of and helped through both public libraries and the educational system, serving as core elements of the Danish democracy. In this way, the question is how to take advantage of the new possibilities of digital technologies without producing new forms of division and inequality, maintaining solidarity and equality as core values: “all Danes must have access to the use of IT” (ibid., p. 25) and “all children should be equipped to master modern information technologies” (ibid., p. 57).

Overall, then, policymakers are articulating a very particular set of discursive selectivities in the early 1990s. They are trying to create an overall vision for how the Danish welfare society can be transformed into a more



or less sustainable information society. The core problem, according to policymakers, is how such a transition can happen without endangering pre-existing welfarist logics. In this sense, many of the ideational-political components of the Keynesian Welfare National State (KWNS) can be retraced within this newly created policy area: ideas of solidarity, equality, participatory democracy, and the safeguarding of weak citizens are placed high on the policy agenda. There is often a strongly democratizing and inclusionary set of discourses at play. This does, however, not mean that economic ideas are completely absent from the report. Indeed, not unlike the report *Efficient EDP in the State* crafted by the Ministry of Finance in 1992, *Info-society year 2000* also views information technologies as a means of creating a more flexible and efficient public sector. In health care, for example, the report argues that “better patient services, substantially shorter treatment periods [behandlingsforløb], and savings worth billions, which, among other things, can be used to shorten waiting lists, must be realized by creating a national health care net that can be used to exchange information between doctors, hospitals, pharmacies and health care administrations” (ibid., p. 8). Taken as a whole, this means “IT must open the public sector, make it more transparent and possible to deliver better services” (p. 24). While these ideas do not take center stage in these early years of policymaking, they are nonetheless present. In calling for enhanced efficiency, flexibility and economic savings, they resonate directly with the wider modernization programs that were being launched at the time.

*Info-society year 2000* became a genuine public success (Jæger and Löfgren 2010). It helped push digitalization policymaking onto the public and political scene, giving it a “much more central placement in the political arena” (Johansson 2004, p. 155, our translation) than before. Most of its initiatives were, however, never implemented. This is concluded by the second Dybkjær report, named *The Digital Denmark* (Forskningsministeriet 1999) in 1999. Picking up on several themes explored in *Info-society year 2000*, this second report showcases how the discourses present at the beginning of the 1990s are very much retained throughout the following years.

According to *The Digital Denmark*, the main question facing Denmark is how the country “can become a leading IT nation in the network society, while continuing the best values from the welfare society” (Forskningsministeriet 1999, p. 7). Like previous years, this question has first and foremost been actualized by the increasing globalization of social relations, emerging as a direct consequence of digital and internet-driven technologies. According to policymakers, “the Internet and new commu-

nication technologies are binding people and businesses all over the world into a global *network society*” (ibid., p. 8, our emphasis). Here, we can see how *The Digital Denmark* no longer uses the notion of the *information society*, but instead speaks of a *network society*. Even so, many of the core challenges facing policymakers remain basically the same: how can existing normative ideals governing the welfare state be preserved while transitioning to a network society?

With an even greater emphasis than in previous years, *The Digital Denmark* highlights that the transformation towards a network society must be based on “a sustainable development within the international society” (ibid., p. 9) using “values as our guiding thread” (ibid.). The question is “how we participate actively in the network society – at the same time as we keep the best values in our welfare society” (ibid., p. 82). The values connected to the welfare society are, to a large extent, similar to those expressed in 1994. Digitalization must give citizens the opportunity for “lifelong learning” (ibid., p. 8), protect them against surveillance and privacy invasion, and give “all citizens free access to information and exchange of information, and opportunities to expand citizens’ self-determination” (ibid., p. 9). The “transformation of Denmark into a network society must be based on an active, representative democracy, in which there are equal opportunities for all, and where solidarity binds the society together and secures help to those that need it” (ibid.). Condensing these arguments into a single idea, policymakers frame digitalization as a “democratic tool” (ibid., p. 79) that can facilitate “new forms of access and modes of communication between citizens and politicians” (ibid.), whilst “creating openness in the political system and a new closeness between citizens and politicians” (ibid.).

Continuing the discourses established in *Info-society year 2000*, Danish citizens are still not forced to adopt digital technologies. Indeed, the state should make sure that “citizens who do not have internet access [...] have improved opportunities for acquiring information from the public sector” (Forskningsministeriet 1999, p. 72). We can thus see how solidarity, equality and universal welfare are still perceived to be core components of policymaking at this point in time, perhaps even more so than in the beginning of the 1990s. Danish society is seen as being “fundamentally fair with welfare benefits made available to all citizens” (ibid., p. 33), based on “a large degree of harmony and relatively few tensions” (ibid.) and (as a consequence) the “Digital Denmark must be based on a sustainable development” (ibid., p. 32). Whether these somewhat idyllic descriptions

of the Danish welfare system hold true is to some extent beside the point: what is important to notice is how policymakers use these to imagine and articulate digitalization as a welfarist-democratic project.

Once again, neither economic nor market-like rationales are completely absent from this report. *The Digital Denmark* actually emphasizes that “Denmark must offer a competitive environment for companies in the network society” (ibid., p. 10). Yet, while digitalization is seen as a catalyst for economic efficiency and competitiveness, the market is explicitly kept at a distance: “Because of the tough international competition, we have to have a fast transition [to the network society] to ensure our welfare. *But the market alone should not be allowed to control the development*” (Forskningsministeriet 1999, p. 101, our emphasis). The market should be accommodated, but not on its own terms and it should not steer policymaking.

Within this 1999 report, the public sector remains decoupled from the wider discursive project articulated by policymakers. Drawing primarily on economic ideas of efficiency, optimization and flexibility, these still argue that “IT must contribute to the public administration optimizing their organization and work practices in a way that results in measureable rationalization benefits” (ibid., p. 73). Solidarity, equality and enhanced forms of democracy are reserved for domains outside the public sector, as this area is framed much more explicitly in terms of economic logics. However, according to *The Digital Denmark*, rationalizing the public sector through digitalization has shown itself to be “more difficult than initially assumed” (p. 73). While conceived as an almost magical way of remolding the public sector, digitalization has turned out to require more work than expected by policymakers at the outset of the 1990s. Phrased somewhat bluntly, policymaking runs into a series of governance failures and scandals, being unable to coordinate and translate national ideas into municipal initiatives. One example of these public scandals is the IT-system “Amanda”. This database was created with the purpose of matching the demands of the labor market with the competences of unemployed citizens (Johansson 2004). Initiated in 1996, Amanda was projected to cost 268 million Danish kroner and start running in 1998. However, the system was not used until April 2000 and ended up costing more than 412 million Danish kroner (Johansson 2004, p. 161). Moreover, productivity was cut in half when the system was finally implemented, causing large-scale public uproar and protest. As Johansson (2004) notes, it was Amanda that caused the Danish mass media to focus on digitalization and public sector IT as a source of controversy and scandals. And Amanda was not the only project

to run into both financial, organizational and public problems, as there emerged a number of scandals during the 1990s. This led, as Johansson (2004) notes, to a gradual shift within the political system, as policymakers demanded more control and better governance.

The period from 1994 to around 2001 can thus be seen as the initial consolidation of digitalization as a new regulatory and political instrument. Framed around guiding metaphors such as the “information” and “network” society, policymakers are laying out broader societal visions for the construction of a digitalized welfare state. In doing so, they weave together discourses and normative ideas from several different imaginaries and hegemonic projects. Policymakers assimilate and translate ideas of the information society typically associated with the rise of the knowledge-based economy, post-fordist accumulation regimes and new discourses of competitiveness (see Chap. 3). Yet, these ideas are also transposed and inscribed within the specific historical and ideological landscapes of the Danish welfare state. This means that several of the discursive tropes associated with the KWNS are emphasized and even accentuated by policymakers. Discourses of competitiveness, neoliberalization and marketization can, however, still be found within the strategies. These are to a large extent confined to the Danish public sector. In this sense, the policy discourse is decidedly hybrid in nature: it stands at the cross-roads of traditional welfarist ideas crafted in the post-war period and the new discourses of competitiveness that were being gradually instilled throughout the Danish state in the 1980s and 1990s.

### *Policy Visions from 2002 to 2017*

In 2001, there is a shift in the national government in Denmark. A liberal-conservative coalition replaces the former social-democratic. This means that prominent neoliberal voices are appointed as ministers and given a central placement within the state. As Jæger and Löfgren (2010, p. 258, original emphasis) succinctly argue, this implies a shift within the internal organization of the state itself: “Until that year [2001] all issues regarding new ICTs, information society and e-government were formulated by the MRIT [Ministry of Research and Information Technology]. In 2001, the political management of e-government issues was *de facto* transferred to the Ministry of Finance.”

The institutional-agential story is a bit more complex than this. One of the main challenges facing policymakers at the end of the 1990s was issues

in terms of coordinating national initiatives (Jæger and Pors 2017). As an example of these national coordination issues, Jæger and Pors recount how the 14 Danish counties had all worked on their own individual electronic patient journal in the late 1990s. This meant that they had developed 14 different solutions with little to no internal synchronization across the country. Adding to this, a number of public scandals started to emerge in the late 1990s as discussed above. Prominent flagship initiatives, often worth exceedingly large amounts of money, started to surpass deadlines, failed to meet their intended productivity goals or got discarded altogether because they never managed to go beyond the developmental stage. Against this backdrop, both politicians and policymakers across the political spectrum seemed to agree that digitalization policymaking had been riddled with too many failures. At the same time, it became increasingly apparent that the broader welfarist ideals tied to digitalization policies were becoming decoupled from the hegemonic state project pursued by the newly elected government in 2001. With these governance failures and crises conditions, there was a need for new discursive and agential selectivities.

The response to these governance failures came in the guise of a new, *networked* mode of governance. A so-called *Digital Taskforce* was established in 2001, consisting of five ministries, Local Government Denmark (the interest organization of the Danish municipalities), the association of counties, as well as the municipality of Copenhagen and Frederiksberg. The purpose was to coordinate tasks on a national level in a much more rigorous way than previously. As Jæger and Pors (2017, p. 156) argue, this networked taskforce was (in principle) an equal and leveled collaboration between all of the participants, though the head of the taskforce was from the Ministry of Finance. This signifies an agential restructuring that would be retained up until 2011 where these selectivities would once again be remade.

The first major result of these internal re-organizations was the national strategy “Towards e-Government: vision and strategy for the public sector” (Den Digitale Taskforce 2002). This strategy moves away from the broader societal and welfarist ideals expressed in the 1990s and early 2000s. Instead of working with either the information or network society as guiding concepts, this strategy specifically targets the Danish public sector and administration: “The vision for e-government is that digital technologies are systematically used to innovate and transform organizations and work processes to improve service quality and efficiency” (Den Digitale Taskforce 2002, p. 5). What this signifies, then, is a political separation between digitalization as a wider societal project (fusing concerns



about democracy, participation and public sector restructuring into a single policy area) and digitalization as a more specific political instrument aimed at transforming service delivery and public sector institutions.

Within this new line of policymaking, digitalization is construed as an important way of making the internal parts of the state more efficient by optimizing existing work processes. *Towards e-Government* argues that “Denmark [...] must be among the nations that utilize the global digital development to create growth and welfare” (ibid., p. 4), while businesses “must utilize digital technologies [...] to strengthen their competitiveness in an increasingly global world.” In this new framing, citizens are portrayed as “already active in the digital network society” (ibid.) and they should “have access to digital media and use them in all parts of societal life – from shopping on the Internet to new offers within education and culture” (ibid.). While globalization was previously articulated as endangering the core values of the welfare state, it is now cast as a mainly economic process: “In a globalized world, the nations that can utilize the possibilities of the network society will have the best [economic] position” (Den Digitale Taskforce 2002, p. 6). This also means that the articulation of the market changes considerably. Whereas in previous years, the economy and global market were seen as external dynamics that should not guide strategizing, they are now seen as entities to be accommodated and nurtured. Digitalization should, policymakers argue, provide the grounds for new forms of growth and competitiveness by making way for increased flexibility, efficiency and the continuous optimization of (governmental) labor processes.

These discursive changes impact the way in which the public sector is conceived, though many of the ideas expressed in the 1990s are carried on. With the advent of digital technologies, policymakers claim, it becomes possible to blur the “boundaries between institutions [which have] in many ways functioned as walls” (Den Digitale Taskforce 2002, p. 4) and create a “flexible handling of specific tasks across institutional boundaries” (ibid., p. 8). In this way, ‘flexibility’ is highlighted as a key component of a more efficient public sector. Yet, digital technologies do not simply facilitate the creation of a flexible way of organizing the public sector by delegating tasks to units deemed most capable of solving them. Instead, digitalization should be seen as a continuous process of self-critical scrutiny within the public sector: “public institutions [should] continuously and systematically optimize their efficiency through the reconfiguration of work processes and organization, supported by digital tools” (ibid., p. 12). In this way, constructing the flexible organization is imagined to be an ongoing

achievement that should be continuously re-enacted by individual governmental institutions. Flexibility, change and innovation become generalized conditions, as digitalization must be part of on-going attempts to rethink, recreate and reimagine the public sector in light of global competition.

In the following years, these ideas are retained in a more or less unaltered way. Along the way, however, there are some important *agential* changes. Starting out, a number of the problems of coordination and control faced during the 1990s continue to haunt digitalization policies and initiatives. Despite adopting a more networked approach, there are issues with realizing the projected economic savings. This leads to several agential re-adjustments. *The State's IT* [Statens IT] is created as an agency under the Ministry of Finance in 2009. This is done in order to centralize the development, maintenance and support of the digital technologies used within the Danish state, including ministries, agencies and other governmental branches. Adding to this, the Danish Agency for Digitisation is created as a governmental agency directly under the Ministry of Finance in 2011. The Danish Agency for Digitisation takes over the formal responsibilities previously handled by The Digital Taskforce, which was shut down in the wake of the former's establishment. With this institutional development, the Ministry of Finance is once again put in charge of digitalization policymaking. After a long detour, first in the Ministry of Research and then in the networked Digital Taskforce, the Ministry of Finance is given the political mandate that was "taken away" from it in 1993.

These agential selectivities do not, however, signal any profound discursive changes, as most of the discourses created after 2011 have followed those produced since the early 2000s in substantive aspects. In major national strategies, such as "Strategy for Digital Administration 2004–06" (Regeringen et al. 2004), "Strategy for the Digitalization of the Public Sector 2007–2010" (Regeringen et al. 2007) and the national strategy from 2011 to 2015, called "The Digital Path to Future Welfare" (Regeringen et al. 2011), ideas of efficiency, optimization, the accommodation of the market, and competitiveness continue to be dominating logics. In this way, the articulation of digitalization as a means of rewiring the public sector in order to make it more flexible and innovative has largely become sedimented over time. There has been, we might say, a gradual retention and de-politicization of these ideas, as it now appears self-evident that digitalization is primarily a tool for ordering (economic) activities in terms of discourses of competitiveness, flexibility and innovation. This also means that the ambivalence found in the 1990s and early

2000s – manifested as a continuous oscillation between welfarist ideas and new discourses of competitiveness – more or less disappears. Digitalization policies become much more firmly embedded within the wider state project. In being so, this area comes into view as a key political instrument, useful for transforming public sector institutions and service delivery in profound ways.

Despite the sedimentation of this hegemonic vision from the early 2000s and up until the present day, there are some developments worth noticing. The notion of the “digital society” starts to take over as the guiding frame instead of “digital administration” (used in the early 2000s). This means that digitalization policies once again start to cover wider portions of the Danish state and society. What has to be constructed now is not just a digital *administration*, but a digital *society*.

Introducing new technological selectivities, in the form of measurements and annual reviews, there has since 2009 been produced an annual series of reviews called *The Digital Society* with the purpose of measuring the impact of digitalization through mainly quantitative metrics (IT- og Telestyrelsen 2009, 2010; Erhvervsstyrelsen 2013). Since 2013, these have been relabeled as *Reviews on Denmark’s digital growth* (Regeringen 2013). Functioning as a governmental technology, in the Foucauldian sense (Sum and Jessop 2013), these reviews have served to measure and index the progress of digitalization through relatively simple graphs, figures and statistics. They have served to underline how and in what ways digitalization is creating new forms of (economic) value.

The image of the citizen has also evolved over time (see also Schou and Hjelholt 2017a; Hjelholt and Schou 2017a, b). Since the 2000s, a decidedly different normative image of the citizen emerges than the one articulated in the 1990s. Citizens have increasingly been cast as *customers* seeking to acquire certain goods from the state. The public sector must, policymakers argue from the early 2000s and onwards, “analyze its own service in collaboration with the users and following their users’ needs” (Den Digitale Taskforce 2002, p. 13), while “representatives from the users should evaluate needs” (ibid.). In the national strategy from 2011 to 2015, citizens are furthermore construed as being already “familiar with digital technologies”, suggesting that they must now “contribute to the public services in new ways” (Regeringen et al. 2011, p. 4). Not only will this accommodate their individual needs, it will also make sure that they can serve themselves “whenever it fits the citizen” (Regeringen et al. 2011, p. 5). This means that everyone is more or less construed as being *digital*



*by default*. “Danish citizens use their computers, mobile phones and the Internet every day” (Regeringen et al. 2011, p. 3).

Breaking with the discourse of the 1990s, digital technologies are no longer seen as a choice, but as an almost ethical obligation. The new strategic term selected for this is *mandatory self-service* (Regeringen et al. 2011, p. 16). Everyone must be self-serving, self-governing and self-leading. According to policymakers, digitalization is *the* way to achieve this goal. In this sense, we can see how digitalization starts to be discursively configured as a means of responsabilization: a way of mitigating tasks and responsibilities previously carried by formal institutions onto citizens. The reason for this, the strategies argue, is that citizens do not want to “waste time” (Regeringen et al. 2011, p. 3), as such time could be used “developing the business and creating growth” (ibid., p. 18). Within the official political narratives, being self-serving is connected to normative ideas of living an active life, contributing to the societal economy and being able to fulfill individual wishes: “Most citizens want to live an active life, where they can take care of themselves and they have the freedom to do the things they want. Digital welfare solutions play an important part in realizing this wish” (Regeringen et al. 2016, p. 28). This means that “digital citizenship” starts to be conceived as the normatively desirable form of citizen-subjectivity. Connected to a whole set of ideas about the proper forms of life, digital citizens are (imagined) to be highly individualized, active and participating individuals who demand more “lean” forms of government so that they may realize their individual freedom and sovereignty. At the core of the current hegemonic project, then, is not just a set of discourses seeking to regulate how the public sector should adopt digital technologies. There is also a fairly comprehensive set of ideas about how citizens ought to act in order to be considered proper, active and good members of the political community.

Taken together, we can begin to see how the period from 2002 to 2017 represents a shift in the overall policy discourse. Tropes of marketization, individualization, liberalization and privatization start to be increasingly widespread, as digitalization takes on renewed importance as a regulatory instrument capable of transforming public sector intuitions and recreating the relation between citizens and the state. In this way, this area of governance has come to be much more closely aligned with broader political-economic restructurings within the Danish state. At least from an ideational point of view, digitalization has been gradually enrolled within the dominant state project, intended to construct a more competitive, flexible and lean state.

## CONCLUDING REMARKS

With this chapter, we have sought to lay out the historical development of digitalization policies in Denmark from 1994 and up until the present day. Taking discursive selectivities as our entry-point, we have scrutinized the specific ideas and ideals that have been tied to these policymaking efforts over time. In retelling this story, we have also shown the agential selectivities involved in this process, highlighting how different ministries, task-forces and working groups have been enrolled over time. Rather than a simply linear process, crafting a hegemonic vision for what digitalization is and ought to be has involved policy failures, (dis)continuities and tensions. The current hegemonies should, in this sense, not be conceived as inevitable or monolithic power blocks, but rather as the contingent outcome of highly complex developments.

The chapter showcases how digitalization policies have shifted considerably since the early 1990s, as different discourses have been selected, discarded or retained over time. While in the 1990s, policymakers very much focused on how existing welfare logics, centered on notions of universal rights, solidarity and equality, could be maintained within a coming transition to an information society, these concerns have gradually disappeared over time. No longer a question of preserving so-called ‘Danish’ (welfare) values, digitalization policies have more and more come to rely on tropes of international competition, flexibility and optimization. Concepts such as ‘solidarity’, ‘equality’, ‘participatory democracy’ and the safeguarding of the ‘weakest citizens’ have been gradually replaced by economic ‘efficiency’, ‘optimization’, ‘innovation’ and ‘flexibility’. Digital technologies have, from the early 2000s and onwards, been considered mainly as a means of cutting expenditure, heightening competitiveness and securing the continuous optimization of governmental labor processes. This has simultaneously meant a new set of normative ideas about how citizens ought to act. Being digital has come to be considered the norm, and citizens have increasingly been framed as (self-)responsibilized individuals that must take care of themselves through digital interfaces. Doing so, it would seem, is a prerequisite for creating the kind of flexible, efficient, agile and innovative society that policymakers have come to strive for. Table 4.1 summarizes these changes in a schematic fashion.

These developments resonate with many of the trajectories discussed in Chap. 3. We can begin see how digitalization, as a distinct area of policymaking and governance, has increasingly come to be enrolled within a

neoliberalized, marketized and competition-oriented vision of society: no longer concerned with digital technologies as welfarist tools of inclusion and democratic participation, digitalization has increasingly become an instruments useful for fostering the kind of innovative, entrepreneurial and flexible public sector required in the “knowledge-based economy.” Governmental digitalization efforts have, from an ideational and political point of view, sought to push these developments on two fronts: on the one hand by calling for the refunctionalization of existing public sector institutions, either by delegating work to technological infrastructures or mandating more efficient, lean and flexible organizational structures. On

**Table 4.1** Overview of main developments within Danish digitalization policymaking

<i>Period</i>	<i>Discursive selectivities</i>		<i>Agential selectivities</i>	
	<i>Key concepts</i>	<i>Core policy visions</i>	<i>Primary actors</i>	<i>Governance form</i>
1994–1999	Network society and information society	Solidarity, equality, access to information, local democracy, participation, “Danish” values, rationalization of public sector	Ministry of Research	Centralized policymaking and decentralized implementation
Late 1990s (failures)	<i>Discursive decoupling between hegemonic state project and specific policy area</i>		<i>Failure to coordinate on national level; failure to translate national ideas to local initiatives</i>	
2001–2011	Digital administration	Efficiency, optimization, growth, flexibility, competitiveness	Digital Taskforce, Ministry of Finance	Networked mode of governance uniting key actors across the country
2011–	Digitalization, digital society	Efficiency, optimization, growth, flexibility, competitiveness, responsabilization, self-service, digital technologies as part of an efficient, self-governing and productive life	Ministry of Finance	Centralized policymaking (Agency of Digitisation), centralized and decentralized development, and functional specialization of policymaking

Source: Compiled by authors

the other hand through a partial reformulation of how citizens ought to act as members of the political community. As described above, ideas of national solidarity, equality and community have gradually made way for an atomistic image of the citizen as a self-serving, efficient and flexible individual. Not unlike the kinds of subjectivities deemed fit for the post-Fordist accumulation regime, these new types of citizens are seen as (always) active and entrepreneurial beings that do not have time to waste waiting in line at a local governmental office.

In the next chapter, we shall move from this initial discursive entry-point to consider some of the wider implications of these political and ideological changes. More specifically, we shall explore how these ideas have become translated into particular legal, economic and technological measurements before zooming in on citizen service centers as a specific institution that has formed an essential component in the digitalization agenda. Doing so will allow us to showcase the profound institutional changes caused by these national efforts within the frontline of the Danish state. At the same time, we will foreground how new counter-hegemonic projects may be forming against the hegemonic visions crafted by the state itself.

## NOTE

1. The chapter builds on and incorporates arguments previously presented in Schou and Hjelholt (2017a) and Hjelholt and Schou (2017a, b).

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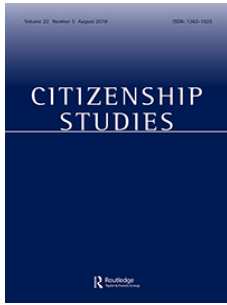
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# Digital citizenship and neoliberalization: governing digital citizens in Denmark

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## Digital citizenship and neoliberalization: governing digital citizens in Denmark

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### ABSTRACT

Digital citizenship is becoming increasingly normalized within advanced democratic states. As society and governmental institutions become reliant on digital technologies, citizens are expected to be and act digitally. This article examines the governance of digital citizens through a case study of digitalization efforts in Denmark. Drawing on multiple forms of data, the article showcases how digital citizens are governed through a combination of discursive, legal and institutional means. The article highlights the political, but also institutional work that goes into making citizens digital. Providing this case study, the article contributes to current critical perspectives on the digital citizen as a new *political figure*. It adds new insights into digital citizenship by connecting this figure to wider processes of neoliberalization and state restructuring, pushing for a more pronounced focus on governmental practices.

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## Introduction

Digital citizenship has become an increasingly important area of research for the past two decades (Isin and Ruppert 2015; Mossberger, Tolbert, and McNeal 2008; Couldry et al. 2014). With the near ubiquitous spread of digital technologies, the saturation of daily practices by internet-driven platforms and the widespread uptake of mobile technologies, it has largely become a ‘truism’ to argue that digital technologies have impacted contemporary societies in profound ways (Isin and Ruppert 2015). While enduring digital divides still exclude large portions of the world population from access to the internet (Ragnedda and Muschert 2018), being digital is a reality for many citizens within western countries. Digitalization has also made its way into governmental practices, with new forms of so-called ‘e-government’ and ‘digital era governance’ making states increasingly reliant on digital technologies to deliver state services to citizens and reconfigure work practices within public sectors (Dunleavy et al. 2006; Henman 2010). With governmental services becoming premised on digital technologies, digital citizenship has taken on renewed importance (Isin and Ruppert 2015).

This article seeks to unpack and examine these new modalities of digital citizenship. It does so by responding to a recent *turn* within digital citizenship studies. While research has been conducted on this topic for almost two decades, it is only recently

that a critical stream of scholarship has emerged (Isin and Ruppert 2015; Isin and Ruppert 2017; Vivienne, McCosker, and Johns 2016). This work has stressed how the digital citizen must be seen as the product of discursive, technological, legal and political practices. It has sought to bring back questions of power and politics to a field of research otherwise dominated by fixed definitions and pervasive normative assumptions. Challenging the established underpinnings within the existing literature, this research has emphasized that a situated and contextual account is needed if we wish to understand the implications of this new political figure (Isin and Ruppert 2015; McCosker, Vivienne, and Johns 2016).

Our aim with this article is to push these recent interventions further on two fronts. First, we want to place questions of digital citizenship within the context of wider political-economic changes. To do so, the article situates itself in the interface between critical studies of digital citizenship (Isin and Ruppert 2015; McCosker, Vivienne, and Johns 2016) and the bulging literature on neoliberalism and state restructuring (Jessop 2002; Peck 2010; Brown 2015; Wacquant 2009; Dardot and Laval 2013). We seek to embed the existing literature on digital citizenship more firmly within the context of historical changes in the capitalist state and its modes of governance. Doing so, we want to suggest that there is a need to integrate these strands of research in order to produce a more coherent outlook on the digital citizen as a new political figure. All too often, research on digital citizenship has detached this figure from these broader developments. This goes for the dominant approaches to digital citizenship, but also applies in lesser scale to the critical stream of research driving this paper. By coupling the recent focus on digital citizenship as a situated set of practices with wider political economic processes, the article contributes to further clarifying the impact and consequences of this figure for contemporary forms of statehood and governance.

Second, we use these theoretical coordinates to provide an empirical study that examines the practices implicated in the governance of digital citizens. More specifically, we provide a study of digital citizenship in Denmark, showcasing how links are being made between existing forms of governance and this new political figure. Denmark is often constructed as an European forerunner in terms of digitalizing its public sector (Igari 2014; Schou & Hjelholt 2018). Drawing on multiple forms of empirical data, we trace how digital citizens are governed through a combination of political imaginaries, legal measurements and governmental institutions. How and in what ways, the article asks, are Danish citizens being governed as digital citizens? And to what extent do these governmental practices overlap and rework existing 'state projects' (Jessop 2015)? Advancing these simultaneously theoretical and empirical vectors, we hope to deepen our understanding of the connections being made between existing modes of governance and the digital citizen as a new subject of state intervention.

### **The digital citizen as a key political figure**

Digital citizenship constitutes a 'highly contested notion' according to McCosker, Vivienne, and Johns (2016, 1) that is 'primed for critical scrutiny'. Reading the existing literature on this topic, it quickly becomes apparent that the concept has been used in a number of different ways (Choi 2016). In this article, we take our conceptual point of

departure in what may best be termed as a *turn* within the international scholarship on digital citizenship. We want to suggest that this turn has implied a move from thinking through questions of digital citizenship in terms of certain predefined characteristics to situating this new figure in the context of historical power relations, governmental practices and geographies.

In the late 1990s, Jon Katz (1997), a writer for the magazine *Wired*, argued that a new kind of political subjectivity had started to emerge. Situated within a specifically American context, he hypothesized that the digital citizen heralded the coming of a more engaged, committed and informed citizenry. This image of the digital citizen was subsequently taken up, and criticized quite unanimously, by a number of scholars. Warnick (1999) for example argued that Katz infused his arguments with too many positive traits, connecting the digital citizen to ‘optimism, confidence, vision, and engagement’ as if these were inherent properties of this new figure. Whatever the merit of these debates, the figure of the digital citizen nonetheless stuck in the academic literature. Since then, especially two dominant positions have stood out.

One position has sought to define the digital citizen within the specific context of the educational system. In 2001, Gurstein argued that ‘the question should be how to train effectively for “digital citizenship” [...]. In this context there is a need to identify what the elements of “digital citizenship” might be’ (Gurstein 2001, 280). Two years later, Oakley (2003) posed a very similar conundrum, arguing that the ‘education system of most member states [in Europe] will now include an ICT component – but we are less confident perhaps of what it means to be a digital citizen’ (Oakley 2003, 37). These calls for research were taken up, if not directly then in spirit, by scholars such as Ribble, Bailey, and Ross (2004, 7), who argued for an understanding of digital citizenship in terms of ‘the norms of behavior with regard to technology use’, identifying nine areas of behavior as requirements for the ‘proper’ forms of digital citizenship. These included concepts such as ‘etiquette’, ‘responsibility’, ‘rights’ and ‘safety’. This line of research has since then been taken up by a fairly large body of literature (see e.g. Borko et al., 2009; Ohler 2011; Jones and Mitchell 2016). What unites this work is its basic conceptualization of digital citizenship as a set of competences that should delineate proper forms of behavior. Framed as a set of normative guidelines, these should be used to teach citizens how to behave online.

The second position that has emerged since the 1990s has mainly turned to concepts such as access, participation and societal integration. Writing in 2006, Mossberger, Tolbert, and Gilbert (2006, 585) argued that ‘[d]igital “citizenship” [...] enables individuals to participate fully in society’. Underpinned by the idea that ‘digital citizenship is a prerequisite for participation and engagement in society’ (Shade 2002, 2), this research has sought to map out, often using quantitative instruments, how digital citizenship correlates with different degrees of political engagement, economic activities and democratic participation. To do so, it has worked with a fixed definition of digital citizenship as being ‘the ability to participate in society online’ (Mossberger, Tolbert, and McNeal 2008, 1). Not unlike the first position sketched above, this second conceptualization also emphasizes digital citizenship as a ‘desirable’ and ‘proper’ form of citizen-subjectivity. Making its way into the works of a number of different scholars (Mossberger 2009; Oyedemi 2014; van Deursen and Helsper 2015), digital citizenship

has even been seen as ‘a fundamental concept for modern democracies’ (Missingham 2009, 392) or ‘the ideal of citizenship in the twenty-first century’ (Mossberger, Tolbert, and McNeal 2008, 140).

Scrutinizing the implicit assumptions governing this research, recent scholarship has problematized both of these dominant positions (Isin and Ruppert 2015; McCosker, Vivienne, and Johns 2016). It has done so by highlighting concepts such as *power*, *practices* and *socio-technical configurations* as central for understanding this political figure. To our mind, this amounts to nothing less than a genuine *turn* that reconnects questions of digital citizenship to the broader critical scholarship concerned with citizenship studies (Isin and Turner 2002).

Isin and Ruppert (2015) thus argue that researchers cannot simply assume digital citizenship to already *mean something* and then study how and to extent reality aligns with these assumptions (Isin and Ruppert 2015, 19). Instead, there is a need for research that examines how this new form of political subjectivity is made and governed with a focus on its embeddedness within particular contexts and geographies. These authors have suggested that research ought to investigate how and in what ways digital citizenship is constructed by different actors, institutions and socio-technical ensembles. Placing the digital citizen within such a view forces us to look at how this figure is intertwined with relations of power. It furthermore means, in the account provided by Isin and Ruppert (2015) at least, holding together the different forces of subjectivation involved in the production of citizen-subjectivity.

This article seeks to advance these scholarly dialogues on the figure of the digital citizen. Following from the intervention providing by Isin and Ruppert (2015), but also scholars like McCosker, Vivienne, and Johns (2016), we too view the digital citizen as a situated and ultimately *political figure*. Rather than working with fixed definitions of who this figure *is*, we search for the mechanisms that goes into the construction of these new citizen-subjectivities. We do so with a particular focus on governmental practices. While existing scholarship has often pointed to the relation between digital citizenship and governance, research is yet to produce a coherent outlook on how digital citizens are actually governed and managed. Despite calls for more situated research, it is as if this figure has been detached from wider forms of governance and statehood. Indeed, as research has turned its gaze on private actors like Google and Facebook (Isin and Ruppert 2015), surveillance (Hintz, Dencik, and Wahl-Jorgensen 2017) or performative rights claims (Isin and Ruppert 2017), more traditional state institutions have been somewhat neglected. We see ample opportunity for using the theoretical groundwork provided by the latest research within a more pronounced focus on governance and state restructuring. As critical researchers have rightly emphasized: digital citizenship does not emerge within a political and historical vacuum. If this is the case, then it also seems pertinent to link this figure to the dominant governmental rationalities promoted by political decision-makers.

### Neoliberal governance and (digital) citizenship

An expansive body of literature has sought to capture the political and economic transformations taking place in advanced capitalist states across the western world since the 1970s and 1980s (Jessop 2002; Peck 2010). These changes have often been

conceptualized as the accelerating expansion of ‘neoliberalism’ as a political and economic project (Harvey 2005; Wacquant 2009). While ‘neoliberalism’ has become an increasingly unruly or even ‘rascal’ concept (Peck 2010), used to denote everything that is deemed deplorable about the current political conjuncture (Birch 2017), it may still serve as a useful heuristic for thinking through wider transformations within citizenship and statehood.

Without diving into the complex historical legacy of neoliberalism, we take this concept to imply, in its most rudimentary form, a combined promotion of ‘the extension of markets and logics of competitiveness with a profound antipathy to all kinds of Keynesian and/or collectivist strategies’ (Peck and Tickell 2002, 381). As scholars like Jamie Peck (2010) have emphasized, neoliberalism should not be considered a monolithic or fixed block, but is better conceived in terms of *neoliberalization*, understood as a continuously unfolding process that is variegated, layered and multi-scalar. That being the case, certain ‘family resemblances’ can still be foregrounded.

The neoliberalization of advanced capitalist states has thus entailed a ‘refunctionalization’ (Jessop 2002) of existing public sector institutions, as these have been faced with political calls for increased competitiveness, marketization and efficiency. Politicians have demanded a more lean, flexible and international state that is able to accommodate the shifting conditions of the global market. At the same time, scholars inspired by the work of Michel Foucault in particular, such as Brown (2015) and Dardot and Laval (2013), have argued that neoliberalism must be considered as a particular normative rationality or mode of governance. Doing so, they have showcased how the coming of the neoliberal state is a *constructivist project* concerned with actively forming and governing citizens based on particular ideals. What is at stake is the construction of certain forms of ‘proper’ citizen-subjectivity. According to these authors, neoliberalized forms of citizenship have largely been modelled on the figure of the ‘entrepreneur’, as citizens have been expected to be inherently market-oriented, involved in continuous self-work (in order to optimize their competitiveness), responsabilized for otherwise collective risks and highly individualized. Critical researchers highlight how these new modes of governance have simultaneously given way to novel inequalities and forms of stratification, as those unable to follow along these new demands become the target of disciplinary strategies (Wacquant 2009).

These structural changes, articulated at an ideal-typical level by international research, can also be found when looking at the specific context for this article, namely Denmark. Scholars like Pedersen (2011) and Torfing (1999; 2001) have argued that the universalistic welfare state that developed in the post-war period – characterized by a commitment to the extension of welfare services, an emphasis on universal rights rather than duties and an ambition to mitigate the market’s cycles of ‘boom and bust’ – underwent significant changes during the 1990s and 2000s. As a response to the crises of Fordist-Keynesianism in the 1970s and 1980s (Jessop 2002; Harvey 1989), political decision-makers sought to create a more competitive and market-oriented state, focusing on marketization, privatization and liberalization as important mechanisms of change. This has entailed a shift in the articulation and governance of Danish citizens (Pedersen 2011). Channelling ideological tropes associated with neoliberalism, citizens have been expected to act as flexible and competitive beings that can (and should) take part in the global competition. This has, amongst other things, meant that what was previously seen as universal rights are



increasingly cast as active duties. Making citizens responsible for tasks and risks previously handled by collective structures, public sector institutions have to help citizens become active and self-leading beings. In this sense, the new 'competition state' (Pedersen 2011) expects its citizens to be more market-oriented, individualized and entrepreneurial than did the welfare state.

What has often been left unnoticed in these accounts, however, is how these developments have taken place alongside and together with the emergence of new forms of digital citizenship. With this article, we want to bring the critical literature on digital citizenship into contact with the wider field of research dedicated to exploring state transformations and neoliberal governance. By working in the interface of these two bodies of literature, we can begin to see how digital citizenship both reproduces and intervenes within existing forms of governance and statecraft. Doing so contributes to nuancing our current understanding of this political figure, showcasing how the digital citizen has served as a subject of governance and institutional changes in both continuous and discontinuous ways.

### Governing digital citizens in Denmark: a case study

Denmark is a small Scandinavian country that is often considered to be a digital leader in terms of digitalizing its public sector. For the last number of years, Denmark has consistently scored the highest marks on the European Union's *Digital Economy and Society Index*, being ranked the most digital society across the continent. While electronic archives have been employed within the Danish public sector since the 1970s and 1980s, policy efforts really took off in the early 1990s. Inspired in large part by the European Union's work on the so-called *information society*, Danish politicians sought to formulate a comprehensive vision for the transformation of the Danish state into a fully digital society. Since then, rapid changes have turned large parts of the Danish state and public sector into digital institutions, pushing digitalization to the front of the political agenda (Ejersbo and Greve 2014; Schou and Hjelholt 2018). These changes have taken place alongside wider modernization programs and reforms intended to introduce market-like mechanisms into the public sector. Relying on neoliberalized policy-visions, these changes have been subsumed as the gradual transition from a welfare state to a competition state (Pedersen 2011), as noted above.

In the specific context of digitalization reforms, the underlying ideas driving policy-making have changed considerable over time. In the 1990s, Danish policymakers emphasized that the transition to an information society should be a broad societal project focused on retaining welfarist ideas of solidarity, equality, local democratic participation and education. However, as Henriksen (2017) remarks, 'since 2001, [...] there has been a continuous effort in getting more service out of a limited public budget. The driver for the digitization agenda has been increased efficiency and effectiveness'. Partly as a response to a series of governmental failures in the 1990s, digitalization has come to be seen as a means to optimize existing work processes, make governmental institutions more efficient and replace manual forms of administrative labor with digital interfaces (Schou & Hjelholt 2018). This has also implied the implementation of a wide range of digital 'self-service' solutions, promoted to make citizens interact with the state without the need for governmental officials.

In the following sections, we investigate the governance of digital citizens in Denmark. We proceed to do so in three steps. First, we examine how Danish citizens have been constructed within national digitalization strategies, with a focus on the particular normative ideas tied to this figure. Second, we showcase how these political imaginaries have been translated into legal and technological components. Third, zooming in on one particular governmental institution, we showcase the practices that go into the governance of citizens as digital subjects, especially citizens that cannot conform to the normative rationales produced by the political system. In doing so, we can begin to see how the governance of digital citizens – as a simultaneously normative and institutional set of practices – has come to modulate and overlap with wider governmental changes. Before turning to our analysis, however, some brief methodological remarks are in order.

### **Methodological remarks**

To explore the governance of digital citizens, the paper draws on different empirical sources. We use these to produce a multilayered picture of the processes involved in governing these new forms of citizen-subjectivity. Most substantially, the article investigates national policies and strategies produced by the Danish government *and* draws on a set of qualitative interviews conducted in 2017 with welfare state professionals in municipal citizen service centers (called ‘*Borgerservice*’ in Danish).

For this paper, we have mainly analyzed the five national digitalization strategies that have been produced by shifting Danish governments since 2002. Enrolling various actors, ministries, organizations and experts over time, these national strategies have attempted to articulate and formalize certain visions, initiatives and strategic aims for what digitalization ‘ought’ to do and how the Danish society ‘should’ be changed. They have also contained a more or less stable image of how Danish citizens ‘ought’ to act as digital individuals (see also Schou & Hjelholt 2017). Through a document analysis, we zoom in on the normative and moral ideals of citizenship expressed in these political documents. How have citizens been expected to act as digital individuals? And what has defined what is considered to be ‘proper’ forms of digital citizenship?

This analysis is combined with qualitative interviews with 17 welfare professionals from citizen service centers conducted in early 2017. The purpose of these interviews was to investigate how and in what ways welfare institutions are being redefined through governmental digitalization. Guided by the previous work of other scholars (Pors 2015), we identified citizen service centers as an important site of change within the context of digitalization. We conducted semi-structured interviews with both front-line workers and managers from seven different municipalities. Denmark has since 2007 been split into five regions and 98 municipalities. For this paper, we choose a broad selection of different municipalities. Taking geographical, socio-economic and demographic characteristics into account, our data contains both ‘urban’ municipalities with a high average income per citizen and ‘rural’ municipalities with a relatively lower average income per citizen. The interviews lasted approximately one hour each and were supplemented by guided tours of each center, as well as informal observational studies. In this article, we have anonymized all names and places, emphasizing the findings that cut across the different municipalities.



### *Digital citizenship as a normative rationality*

The changes associated with the neoliberalization of advanced capitalist states have in large part been fueled by the influx of new normative ideas about how citizens ‘should’ and ‘ought’ to behave (Dardot and Laval 2013). Generalizing this argument somewhat, Bjorklund (2016) has suggested that citizenship always involves a moral component in the form of certain values and imperatives ascribed to this figure. In a Danish context, shifting networks of policymakers have sought to formulate visions for how (and why) core parts of Danish society and the public sector should be made digital since the early 1990s. Through policies, annual reviews and white papers, state officials have selected and retained particular political imaginaries concerned with how Danish citizens *ought* to act as digital individuals (Schou and Hjelholt 2017).

Within the national digitalization strategies, Danish citizens are first of all articulated as a more or less homogenous group of subjects. Indeed, throughout these documents, it is generally assumed that all ‘Danes’ behave in more or less the same way. The implicit idea promoted by policymakers has been that all Danish citizens are increasingly becoming *digital by default*: ‘Danish citizens use their computers, mobile phones and the Internet every day’ (Regeringen, KL & Danske Regioner 2011, 3), making ‘[t]he internet [...] the primary gateway to public administration for the majority of Danes’ (The Government, Local Government Denmark & Danish Regions 2016, 6).

The national strategies do mention that not all citizens are able to use digital solutions. Yet, according to these documents, most citizens are in fact already digital. In this way, being able to use digital technologies is systematically articulated as the desired and proper norm. In one passage, dealing with ‘citizens who have trouble with or are simply unfamiliar with using digital channels’ (Regeringen, KL and Danske Regioner 2011, 14, our translation), citizens who deviate from these normative expectations are described as being ‘[c]itizens with *weak* IT skills, such as *frail* senior citizens’ (Regeringen, KL and Danske Regioner 2011, 14, our translation). This showcases how being digital is constructed as the proper mode of citizen-subjectivity, as any deviance is seen as a subtraction or negation of this. The normative yardstick used to measure citizens thus works with a binary distinction between those who *are* digital and those who *are not*.

Being digital is linked to a number of normative ideas within the national strategies. Digital citizens are framed as individualized subjects, ‘who do not want to waste their valuable time on paperwork at their local government office’ (Regeringen, KL and Danske Regioner 2011, 3, our translation). Indeed, the strategies often argue that these digital individuals require more efficient and lean forms of government: ‘With digital solutions becoming ever more widespread, citizens and businesses have high expectations for digital public services that are up-to-date and add value to everyday life’ (The Government, Local Government Denmark & Danish Regions 2016, 10). As individualized beings, digital citizens are furthermore portrayed as *customers* with particular expectations that the public sector should deliver on. As citizen-customers, digital citizens are imagined to have distinct needs and requirements that the public sector should accommodate. ‘Digitalization’, a strategy produced by the Danish Ministry of Finance in 2002 thus states, ‘will serve as a basis for service improvement for “customers” in the form of access to self-service systems and information at all times of the day, faster handling and less bureaucracy’ (Finansministeriet 2002, 15, our translation).

To meet these new requirements, national policymakers suggest implementing digital self-service solutions across the public sector. The idea is that as digital citizens, all subjects should be able to serve themselves through digital means: ‘Danes have to serve themselves on the internet in a large number of areas. This is practical and it saves time for the citizens, businesses and the authorities’ (The Government, Local Government Denmark & Danish Regions 2016, 21). Digital citizens should, according to these normative ideas, be responsible for filing their own requests and handling their own administrative problems. Within these official political narratives, being self-serving is connected to ideas of living an active life, contributing to the societal economy and being able to fulfill individual wishes: ‘The majority of citizens want to live active lives, be able to cope on their own and be free to do the things they enjoy. Digital welfare solutions play an important role in making this possible’ (The Government, Local Government Denmark & Danish Regions 2016, 28).

When taken together, we can begin to see how a very particular image of Danish citizens *as* digital citizens have been contained within the political documents crafted by policymakers. Based on an overarching division between digital and non-digital citizens – where being digital is articulated as the normatively desirable form – digital citizenship has been connected to a whole set of ideas about the proper forms of life. Digital citizens are collectively seen as individualized, active and participating beings that demand more lean and efficient forms of government. These citizens must carry responsibilities and duties previously handled by governmental organizations through digital self-service solutions. In doing so, new ‘energy’ will be released from the public sector, making it possible to create more competitive and flexible institutions. Returning to our discussion of neoliberalism and state restructuring, we can begin to see how many of the ideals typically tied to neoliberalization (Peck 2010; Wacquant 2009) have been continued and extended in the construction of these new images of digital citizenship. Individual responsibility, personal flexibility and market-like logics have been coupled to the digital citizen, translating neoliberal ideas into a digital register.

### ***Digital citizenship as legal and technological ensembles***

These normative constructions of digital citizenship have not been confined to the articulation of certain political imaginaries, but have also been translated into new legal frameworks and technological solutions. In a legal perspective, the so-called *Law on Digital Post* was put into effect in November 2014. Codifying many of the normative assumptions laid out above, this law implied that all Danish citizens above 15 years of age should now conduct all their communication with the Danish state and public sector using a digital mail infrastructure called Digital Post. ‘Physical persons’ the law states, ‘that are 15 years or more, and who live in Denmark or have a permanent residence in Denmark, must use Digital Post’. The Law on Digital Post meant that the capacity to use digital technologies to communicate with the Danish state was tied to citizenship as such. For all intents and purposes, being digital became the default mode of citizenship, as all citizens now had to communicate and interact through digital means. If not, they would have to ‘opt-out’ of the system. Citizens can thus be exempt

from using digital self-service solutions like Digital Post if they do not have access to digital technologies or are otherwise deemed unable to use them.

These legal measurements have been implemented in conjunction with a number of new technological infrastructures. Across the public sector, a number of digital technologies have been put in place. Directly linked to the imaginaries discussed above, these technologies have been premised on the notion that citizens should solve their own administrative problems using self-service platforms. Often, these solutions have been in the form of governmental homepages where citizens can manage and administer their cases. This includes pages such as *borger.dk* [citizen.dk], *skat.dk* [tax.dk] and *virk.dk* [work.dk]. These have been implemented together with NemID [EasyID], a physical keycard tied to the individual citizen's social security number. Using this card, citizens can sign into governmental systems in a 'secure' way. This physical keycard can be seen as the direct materialization of the Law on Digital Post: as an object, it signifies the individual citizens status as a digital citizen.

These developments showcase how the normative ideas tied to digital citizenship have been constructed together with new legal and technological forces. These have served to actualize these political visions by tying digital citizenship to formal citizenship and make citizens responsible for carrying out their own administrative tasks through digital means. In the following section, we zoom in on one of the particular institutional sites in which these complex changes have been most visible. Turning to Danish citizen service centers (*Borgerservice* in Danish), we will explore how Danish citizens are governed within the 'frontline' of the Danish state. Doing so, we want to showcase how the normative ideas explored above have led to the refunctionalization of existing institutional spaces and the emergence of (partially) new modes of governance.

### *Digital citizenship as a governmental practice*

Citizen service centers began to spread across Danish municipalities in the mid 1990s (Pors 2015, 624). At the time, these centers were labeled under different names across the Danish municipalities. That being the case, they nonetheless constituted a relatively coherent setting across the country, handling more or less the same set of administrative tasks. In 2005, these centers were officially made the 'entrance-point' to the Danish public sector, taking care of casework, administrative guidance and handling of official documents. The idea was to create a 'one-stop shop' for all interactions between citizens and the public sector. With national digitalization efforts, however, these service centers have been transformed significantly. Many of the tasks previously handled within these spaces have been gradually transferred to digital platforms and online webpages, as citizens are expected to administer and take care of such requests online. This has implied profound institutional changes across the different municipalities. A manager condensed these trajectories in the following way:

**Interviewer:** How has Borgerservice changed in the past 10 years?

**Manager:** Radically. It can be answered that easily. [...] Before, in Borgerservice, we only stood and took tasks more or less on demand from the citizen. We were the specialists. And then gradually as the digital Denmark also got changed, amongst other things through the mandatory self-service

waves, well, then the role of a *Borgerservice* employee also took on a whole new character. Now, you had to be more on the general level, you had to be a tutor, a guide, a teacher.

These changes were voiced across our interviews. Both frontline workers and daily managers recounted how the roles and responsibilities of citizen services had shifted in conjunction with the increasingly pervasive digitalization agenda. As captured by the quote above, frontline workers used to constitute specialized administrative workers in the 1990s and early 2000s, capable of helping citizens with filling in standardized requests and handling administrative problems. Yet, as these tasks have moved online, the role of frontline workers has changed accordingly. These workers now have to help citizens use the official digital platforms and become self-serving. The point is to make citizens help themselves. As one frontline worker explained, ‘citizen services want citizens out of the “store”. They *must* serve themselves’.

Making citizens their own ‘caseworkers’ was narrated by both frontline workers and managers as implying a turn towards ‘guiding’ and ‘coaching’ citizens. Frontline workers have to teach citizens how to navigate the standardized governmental platforms. They have to guide them through the official digital platforms. These changes have been underpinned, in the municipalities we studied, by a refurbishing of the institutional space itself. While citizen service centers were previously organized around an administrative desk, clearly demarcating between citizens in need of help and frontline workers helping them, the centers had all implemented new ‘computer environments’. Partially dispelling with the administrative desk – and its clear division of labor – these ‘environments’ included open computers in the middle of the room that citizens were free to use. While doing so, particular frontline workers would circulate amongst these, guiding citizens as to how they should use the official platforms. Standing shoulder to shoulder, frontline workers would tell the citizen where to click, help them login and guide them through the official platforms. ‘We firmly believe that it is not *us* who should press the keys’, a frontline worker explained, ‘It is the citizen [that should do it]. We’ll probably stand by and help, but it’s the citizen who is going to operate the computer’.

According to frontline workers, these changes have meant that they have to relate to citizens in new ways. ‘You have to be a good communicator’, one frontline worker explained, ‘as it [helping citizens] demands a different way of relating to the citizen. It boils down to whether you have understood what they come in with and what they want help with’. These new ways of ‘relating’ imply a closer *physical proximity*, as citizens and frontline workers have to stand or sit shoulder to shoulder. ‘I have some colleagues... They don’t like it’, a frontline worker told us, ‘Because you have to be okay with being closer [to the citizen]’. Indeed, this new form of physical proximity was often described as a significant change in our interviews. A manager explained how some frontline workers ‘hated sitting next to citizens in our computer environment. Their personal boundaries were being crossed. They needed [...] the distance, and the physical desk between them’.

These new ways of relating to – and governing – citizens also imply a shift in the focus within the encounter between frontline workers and citizens. While the main object used to be particular administrative problems, it is now the citizen herself – as an

individual being – that comes into focus. It is the citizen that has to be transformed. And doing so requires governing the citizen as an individual being with particular psychological, emotional, personal and physical abilities. ‘You try to create a picture’, a frontline worker told us, ‘of the *person* in order to see what it makes sense’. Frontline workers thus have to relate to each citizen as individual beings. Relaying the normative ideas proposed by policymakers, being unable to use digital technologies is seen as a *personal* deficit. As a consequence, what needs to be transformed through governmental practices is the citizen herself.

In helping citizens who are unable to use the official governmental platforms, citizen service centers start to become the place where ‘non-digital’ citizens gather. It is the citizens that do not conform or follow along with the dominant policy visions that enter these spaces in order to acquire assistance. This signals a quite profound change in the group of citizens using this space, as one frontline worker told us:

- Interviewer:** Did it used to be other types of problems you helped with?
- Frontline worker:** Yes, I would say so, because everybody came here. It wasn’t possible to do it digitally, 10 years ago. So, it was everybody that came down here. No matter what class you belonged to. [...]
- Interviewer:** What about today then?
- Frontline worker:** Well today, it is... Everybody comes for passports and their driver’s license. And the rest of the person group we have here are those that need help. Else they would not be here. [...] The people we have now, it is the heavy ones that take a lot of time.

Particularly among frontline workers, there was often a sense that the citizens using these centers were already at the fringes of the welfare state. Indeed, as one frontline worker explains, ‘we need to help those who find it difficult. And now there might be some who were already in a tough position, but have gotten it even tougher because they have been pushed out and cannot use the digital platforms’. Throughout our interviews, both managers and frontline workers would often explain how these citizens felt like ‘second-class citizens’ or ‘b-citizens’.

What we can begin to see, then, is how certain normative ideas about digital citizenship, crafted by national policymakers over time, become the foundation for new governmental practices within existing welfare institutions. Citizen service centers, previously responsible for helping the entire population with administrative requests, increasingly have to handle the subjectivities that do not conform to the dominant normative ideas. Doing so, they have to transform citizen-subjectivities through new forms of ‘guidance’ and ‘coaching’. What is at stake is not just the individual’s ability to use a certain platform, but the entirety of their subjectivity. Contrary to the narratives provided by policymakers, who describe the national digitalization agenda as driven by citizen demand, the governmental practices found in these citizen service centers form a murkier picture. Rather than citizens demanding digital services, it is administrative personal that have to actively create citizens *as* digital beings. This showcases the constructivist and interventionist ambitions of the neoliberal state: digital citizens are not simply there. They have to be actively created through new governmental and disciplinary practices.



## Concluding remarks

This article has sought to deepen our current understanding of the digital citizen as a key political figure. It has done so by combining insights from recent scholarship on digital citizenship (Isin and Ruppert 2015; McCosker, Vivienne, and Johns 2016), advocating for a more situated and contextual approach, with literature on neoliberalization and state restructuring (Dardot and Laval 2013; Jessop 2002; Peck 2010; Wacquant 2009). We have tried to connect these bodies of literature in order to push for a more pronounced focus on the links being made between existing governmental practices and the rise of the digital citizen. Doing so, this article has sought to contribute with new insights on the construction of digital citizenship within governmental digitalization practices using Denmark as our particular case study. We have traced the specific normative ideas attached to digital citizenship by national policy-making, shown how this has manifested itself in legal and technological developments, and examined the new governmental practices this gives way to within existing public sector institutions. Taken together, we want to suggest that this study highlights some of the novel links being made between wider state restructurings and the coming of the digital citizen as a particular site of intervention and governance.

In focusing on the connections between citizenship and neoliberal governance, this article treads well-worn ground (Hindess 2002; Suvarierol and Kirk 2015; Charles 2013). However, as argued earlier, existing research on *digital* citizenship is yet to make these connections in any sustained manner. Our case study may begin to foreground these relations by exploring how neoliberal tropes (Peck 2010; Wacquant 2009) have been appropriated and selectively mobilized by Danish policy-makers in their normative constructions of ‘proper’ digital citizenship. Being a digital citizen intermingles with wider political calls for personal responsibility, flexibility and optimization. Nuancing this further, we have shown how these normative rationales have warranted new forms of legislative and governmental practices. Far from being a mechanical application of (big N) ‘Neoliberalism’ (Ong 2006), new and partially unforeseen forms of governance have emerged around the neoliberalized digital citizen. Public sector institutions, such as citizen service centers, have been refunctionalized in order to accommodate the perceived ‘failures’ of the national policy agenda. The citizens that do not conform to the normative ideas have to be transformed through new forms of ‘coaching’, ‘tutoring’ and ‘guidance’ intended to actualize their digital potentialities.

These trajectories showcase how digital citizenship and neoliberalization start to cross-pollinate and influence each other. ‘Being digital’ is becoming a genuine concern for the neoliberal state, as being able to use digital technologies is seen as a prerequisite for competitiveness and inclusion in the political community. In this way, neoliberal governance and digital citizenship combine and mutually influence each other. Developing the links between digital citizenship and neoliberal governance can thus help to further challenge the depoliticized narratives voiced by policymakers as well as the pervasive normative assumptions of existing research on digital citizenship. Far from simply an ‘ideal’ or ‘fundamental concept’, digital citizenship is part of wider political projects intended to change the very shape and form of the state itself.

Pushing these trajectories forward, the article also points to new forms of exclusion and marginalization. As discussed earlier, the coming of the neoliberal state (Wacquant 2009) has signaled new forms of penalization of those deemed unable to fit the demands imposed by this rationality. Our study extends this point by showing how digital citizenship – or lack thereof – is becoming a novel engine of exclusion. Going forward, we would do well to consider how new types of ‘monsters’ (Haraway 1992) or ‘digital outcasts’ (Schou & Hjelholt 2018) are being created, displacing and further excluding those already at the fringes. Recalling Isin’s succinct argument, formulated in his *Being Political* from 2002, ‘citizenship and its alterity [have] always emerged simultaneously in a dialogical manner and constituted each other’ (Isin 2002, 4). To speak of the others of digital citizenship, then, simultaneously means to speak of the group that ‘makes citizenship possible by their very formation’ (Isin 2002, 4).

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## Publication 4: Digital State Spaces

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*Territory, Politics, Governance.*

# Digital State Spaces: State Rescaling and Advanced Digitalisation

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**Abstract:** Over the past decades, advanced capitalist states have increasingly used digital technologies to deliver state services and restructure public sector institutions. This practice has had profound institutional as well as political consequences. So far, however, little research has been conducted that examines the forms of statehood and governance the use of digital technologies gives rise to. To fill this research gap, this article examines governmental digitalisation through the lens of political economies of state rescaling. In doing so, the article engages with the production of state spatiality, ultimately advancing the concept of digital state spaces, which links scholarship on state restructuring with work in digital geography. Drawing on several years of empirical research, the article demonstrates the connection between these fields with an in-depth case study of digitalisation efforts in Denmark, a country that is often cited as an example of a highly digitalised European state. It traces how national policy efforts have created new digital state spaces in Denmark and examines the local consequences these state interventions have had. Taken together, these conceptual and empirical insights contribute to a more nuanced understanding of governmental digitalisation as a regulatory instrument implicated in the production of new spaces of governance.

**Keywords:** digitalisation; state space; political economy; technology; governance

## Introduction

This article examines the new forms of state spatiality that have emerged in advanced capitalist states as a result of national policies intended to digitalise public sector institutions. The concept of digital state spaces is presented to describe the ways in which pre-existing state spaces and modes of governance are reconfigured through the use of digitalisation as a nascent regulatory instrument. The article thus aims to relate existing scholarship on the 'political economy of state rescaling' (Jessop, 2002, p. 172; Brenner, 2004a) to the domains of digitalisation and digital geographies (Ash, Kitchin & Leszczynski, 2018; Jefferson, 2017; Ash et al., 2018), demonstrating how

historical forms of statehood are being reconstructed through the increasingly pervasive use of digital technologies. This conceptual work is combined with an in-depth case study of digitalisation efforts that have been undertaken in Denmark. European indexes intended to benchmark and rank countries' digital performance have repeatedly named Denmark as a frontrunner and leader (Schou & Hjelholt, 2018a). The country began pursuing wide-ranging and systematic digitalisation reforms to public services in the 1990s, and has since made digital self-service solutions the standard mode of communication between citizens and public institutions. Utilising both qualitative interviews and policy analysis, we aim to demonstrate how Denmark's digital agenda has produced new digital state spaces and identify the impact these new spaces have had.

The issue of governmental digitalisation has become increasingly relevant in light of recent developments in the practices of advanced capitalist states. In the last several decades, governments have increasingly used digital technologies as a means of both delivering state services to citizens (Eriksson, 2012) and restructuring public sector institutions (Henman, 2010; Henman & Dean, 2010). Characterising this trend under such diverse labels as 'e-government' (Margetts, 2009), the 'virtual state' (Fountain, 2001), 'digital governance' (Milakovich, 2011), 'digital era governance' (Dunleavy et al., 2006) and 'digitalisation' (Hansen, Lundberg & Syltevik, 2018), a growing body of research has examined the accelerating use of digital technologies within state institutions. Dating back to the early 1950s (Margetts, 2009), government officials have often thought of digital technologies as offering simple, technical solutions to complex organisational problems. Such officials have touted digitalisation as an almost magical means of making public institutions more flexible, innovative and efficient. Existing research on 'e-government' and 'digital era governance', however, has tended to neglect questions of statehood, politics and spatiality. To borrow a phrase used by Peck and Theodore (2012, p. 23), this research can be characterised as 'normatively positive and methodologically positivist.' Researchers in this field have generally taken questions of state spatiality for granted, treating state institutions as reified spatial containers and technological infrastructures as simple mediators or technical solutions.

This neglect of spatiality stands in stark contrast to the work of radical geographers and critical sociologists. Such scholars have consistently emphasised that state spatiality is a continuously unfolding, variegated and conflictual set of processes (Brenner et al., 2003; Brenner, 2004a; Jessop 2002, 2016; Peck, 2001; Lefebvre, 2009); in addition, researchers in this area are producing a growing body of work concerned precisely with the new digital geographies that are now being constructed (Ash, Kitchin & Leszczynski, 2018). Exploring phenomena such as ‘Smart Cities’ (Vanolo, 2014; Tironi & Valderrama, 2018) and surveillance technologies for mapping urban crime (Jefferson, 2018; Wiig, 2018), this research has demonstrated how new spaces of discipline, intervention and state power are coming into being. Our aim in this article is to contribute to the ongoing conversation regarding the spatiality of capitalist states *in general* and the emergence of digital spaces *in particular*. We wish to do so by focusing on some of the more mundane forms of state spatiality that are currently being constructed through processes of public sector digitalisation. In advancing the concept of digital state spaces, we hope to demonstrate how digital infrastructures, political discourses, public sector institutions and citizens are collectively forming new and layered spatial configurations. In addition to providing important insights into contemporary processes of state restructuring and rescaling, the articulation of this new concept paves the way for further conceptual and empirical work on the state spaces forged under contemporary conditions of entrenched neoliberalism and advanced digitalisation.

### **State spaces and the new political economy of scale**

Throughout the past decades, spatial turns have taken place within a number of disciplines in the social sciences. In 1989, Edward Soja (1989) argued that a ‘reassertion of space in critical social theory’ (Soja in Jessop, Brenner & Jones, 2004, p. 398) had already started to take place. Around that time, critical political economists and radical geographers were beginning to view space and spatiality as deeply relevant to questions of statehood and governance (Jessop, 2002, 2008, 2015; Peck, 2001, 2004), often writing in direct dialogue with advocates of the so-called regulation approach (Boyer & Sailliard, 2002). In a recent interview, influential spatial theorist Neil Brenner reflected on how, in the mid to late 1990s, ‘Bob Jessop, Jamie Peck and other

regulationist-inspired scholars were leading the way towards a reflexively spatialised approach to state theory in the context of newly emergent localisms, regionalisms and systems of multilevel governance' (2017, p. 268).

Although difficult to condense into a neat set of propositions, the central aim of a geographically-informed approach to statehood has been to challenge static, fixed and one-dimensional approaches to spatiality and state rescaling (Brenner, 2004a; Jessop, 2002). Rejecting the inherited assumption that state spaces merely act as containers within which social and political relations are formed, this approach instead understands state spatiality 'as a dynamic, transformative process' (Brenner, 2004b, p. 450). According to Brenner, conceiving of spatiality and state spaces as processual requires that we recognise how state space is a 'socially produced, conflictual and dynamically evolving matrix of sociospatial interaction. The spaces of state power are not simply "filled," as if they were pre-given territorial containers. Instead, state spatiality is actively produced and transformed through sociopolitical struggles in diverse institutional sites and at a range of geographical scales' (ibid., p. 451).

Viewing state spatiality in this way entails forfeiting the relatively simplistic idea of state spaces as fixed entities and instead foregrounding the historical, contextual and situational dimensions of different scales and spaces. As Brenner goes to great lengths to demonstrate, we are perpetually thrown into state spaces that are always-already there. Different state spaces carry their own (conflictual and polymorphous) legacies and histories. 'For this reason', Brenner argues (2004b, p. 455),

the restructuring of state spatiality is uneven, discontinuous and unpredictable: it is best conceived as a layering process in which newly projected spatial arrangements are superimposed upon entrenched morphologies of state spatial organization. The organization of state space at any historical conjuncture represents a multilayered territorial mosaic in which political geographies established at different moments of historical time are tightly interwoven.

Adopting such an approach to state spatiality opens new possibilities for the exploration of the ways in which power, politics and governance take place within, against and as part of the spaces of the capitalist state. In the panoramic introduction to their *State/Space Reader* (2004), Brenner, Jessop, Jones and MacLeod (2004; see also Brenner 2004a,b) argue that state space may be understood as having three key dimensions corresponding to three different senses of the term: (a) state space in a *narrow* sense, referring to the state's 'distinctive form of spatiality' (ibid., p. 6), which includes the state's internal political, administrative and juridical institutions and external demarcations to other territories and states through borders and frontiers; (b) state space in an *integral* sense, relating to the ways in which state intervention and spatiality are used to regulate and organise social and economic processes; and (c) state space in a *representational* sense, referring to the various spatial imaginaries, discourses and ideas that relate to the state's production and habitation of space.

In this article, we focus primarily on state spaces in a narrow sense, since we aim particularly to demonstrate how national policies are redefining and restructuring the forms, roles and responsibilities of established institutions. We are concerned with what spatial theorists have called the 'internal geographies of subnational administration and regulation' (Brenner et al., 2004, p. 9). Against this theoretical backdrop, we wish to trace how contemporary processes of state digitalisation are creating new forms of spatialised power and governance. We do so by examining how new state spaces are emerging in the interaction between pre-existing institutional forms and the developing use of digitalisation as a political instrument. In describing these new relations, we propose the concept of digital state spaces as a means of capturing the intersection between state spatiality and 'the digital' as a specific site of state intervention. The significance of this concept, however, hinges on our understanding of 'the digital' and its relation to spatiality.

### **The digital and the spatial**

A large body of research has been produced by scholars of political and critical geography on the intersection between digitalisation, datafication and space (Kitchen, 2011; 2014; Amin & Thrift, 2002; Castells, 2010 [1996]; Kitchin & Dodge, 2011). Studies

in this area have explored the production of digital geographies within and through such diverse technologies as search engines (Ford & Graham, 2016), crime databases and registers (Jefferson, 2017), Smart Cities (Tironi & Valderrama, 2018; Wiig, 2018; Vanolo, 2014; Coletta & Kitchen, 2017), data centres (Hogan, 2015; Maguire & Wintheriek, forthcoming) and digital interfaces (Ash et al., 2018). Indeed, Ash, Kitchin and Leszczynski (2018) have even argued that a *digital turn* is currently taking place within geography, as the relationship between digital infrastructures and spatiality becomes an increasingly prominent topic of research. Important lessons can and should be drawn from this body of work, as it provides significant insights into the ways in which state spatiality is being reformed and recreated through digitalisation.

One of the most important questions addressed by digital geographers concerns the ontology of 'the digital' as an object of study. Here, recent geographical research provides compelling arguments against conceptions of the 'the digital' as either purely immaterial spaces, smooth flows of data or static containers. All too often, notions of 'the cloud' or 'the virtual' have served as mythologising narratives (Hu 2015) suggesting that algorithms, code and digital devices somehow operate in a separate realm of reality. Drawing on insights from the last twenty years of scholarship, Ash, Kitchin and Leszczynski (2018) have proposed a much more critical understanding of 'the digital' as a product and producer of new forms of spatiality. They argue that 'the digital' should not be thought of solely in terms of computational technologies reducible to binary operations of 1s and 0s. Instead, they propose using 'the digital' to refer to:

material technologies characterized by binary computing architectures; the genre of socio-techno-cultural productions, artefacts, and orderings of everyday life that result from our spatial engagement with digital mediums; and the logics that both structure these ordering practices as well as their effects. To this we add a fourth dimension, that of digital discourses which actively promote, enable, secure, and materially sustain the increasing reach of digital technologies. (p. 26)

According to these authors, understanding how 'the digital' impacts and is impacted by the production of space requires attending to the wide variety of material



infrastructures (including cables, interfaces, protocols, APIs, visualisations and algorithms), everyday engagements (of designers, citizens, politicians and policymakers), discourses, bodies, affects and political-economic processes that mutually influence and constitute one another within the production of space. Adopting such a perspective allows us to push the theoretical arguments presented above concerning state spatiality into the domain of 'the digital', as it suggests that 'the digital' is not just a simple property that is added on to pre-existing state spaces. Instead, what is at stake is a heterogeneous assemblage of processes in which 'the digital' and state spaces reconstitute one another. This is far from a merely technological process. As Saskia Sassen has convincingly argued, 'understanding the imbrications between digitization and politico-economic processes requires recognising the embeddedness of digital space and resisting purely technological readings of the technical capacities entailed by digitization' (Sassen, 2006, p. 329).

Taking these arguments seriously also forces us to recognise the ways in which 'the digital' is involved in producing new modes of calculation, categorisation and sorting that are used for governmental purposes. In a study of digital crime mapping technologies used in Chicago, Jefferson (2017) has demonstrated how geographic information systems (GIS) not only allow police to map crime via new technologies of visualisation and knowledge production, but are also recursively involved in producing state space itself. The introduction of these technologies has thus given rise to a range of knowledge practices that, according to Jefferson (2017), serve to uphold and reproduce racialised forms of carceral power. In a similar vein, Wiig (2018) has presented a study of data-driven policing technologies used in Camden (New Jersey) that highlights how efforts at urban revitalisation have been carried out through the deployment of new surveillance technologies. These technologies have served, Wiig argues, as a means of 'tracking bodies' through space in order to control, govern and discipline subjectivities deemed unsafe or deviant. These studies help illustrate how epistemological questions of visibility, knowledge and power are critically related to the study of the intersection between digital technologies and governmental practices. Spaces of intervention, discipline and control are created as (existing) spaces, bodies and subjects are visualised and technologically configured in new ways. Referencing

the work of Michel Foucault, Ash, Kitchin and Leszczynski (2018) remark that '[d]iscipline and control are increasingly being dispensed through forms of automated management wherein governmentality is enacted through automated, automatic and autonomous systems' (2018, p. 31; see also Vanolo, 2014; Braun, 2014).

Focusing on the intersection between political economies of state rescaling and the growing literature on digital geographies, our aim with this article is to better understand how state space is evolving in an era of intensified digitalisation. Turning to processes of state spatialisation in Denmark, we hope to highlight how new digital state spaces are emerging from the interplay of shifting political discourses, legal mechanisms, technological infrastructures, bodies and institutional settings. Such spaces are the outcome of digitalisation policies that have effectively recast not only the relationship between state institutions and citizens, but the very spatiality of the state itself. We wish to argue that these policies are part of a wider pattern of changes in the political economy of the Danish state (a pattern typical of neoliberal state restructuring efforts), but that the spatial, political and technological effects of these policies are novel and specific. To this end, the article poses three interrelated questions: How are state spaces made and unmade through digital means? What does 'going digital' mean for the geographies of the capitalist state? And in the use of digitalisation as a regulatory instrument, what are the scalar forms and historical power relations that are being (re)constructed?

### **Constructing digital state spaces in Denmark**

Having established a theoretical framework, we now turn to an in-depth case study of digitalisation efforts in Denmark. Denmark has often been referred to internationally as an example to be followed for its digitalisation policies, which are heralded, for example, in the European Union's *Digital Society and Economy Index*. In this manner, Denmark serves as a productive entry-point for understanding wider processes of digitalisation and politico-economic restructuring. Denmark began making efforts to implement digital technologies in its public sector in the 1990s, investing large amounts of economic and political capital in regulatory changes. In studying digitalisation and politico-economic restructuring in Denmark, we hope to

demonstrate how national policies, technological infrastructures, legal mechanisms and local municipal institutions have combined to create new digital state spaces. As we showcase below, these state spaces are not determined by fixed institutional boundaries, but are shaped by a myriad of diverse forces. Simultaneously technical, juridical, political and material, digital state spaces reveal themselves to be fragmented and hybrid in nature.

Our analysis draws on research conducted for the last number of years concerned with the formulation of national policies, their implementation within local municipalities and the implications of these policies for issues of statehood and citizenship (Schou & Hjelholt, 2018a, 2018b). The paper combines a historical policy study of national digitalisation strategies undertaken in Denmark between 1992 and 2017 with interviews conducted with welfare professionals in seven municipalities. The analysed policies cover national strategy documents, annual reviews, reports and white papers that have been produced by several Danish governments since the early 1990s. All of the strategies and policies seek, in some capacity, to explain *how* and *why* the Danish public sector ought to be digitalised. Our interviews, meanwhile, focus on the institutional consequences of these national policies in their local contexts. In 2007, Denmark was divided into 98 municipalities and five main regions. The seven municipalities included in this study cover all five regions and represent a variety of geographical and political-economic settings. From urbanised municipalities with high per capita incomes and low percentages of citizens on state subsidies, to rural municipalities with lower per capita incomes and higher percentages of citizens on state subsidies. In each municipality, we focused our research on citizen service centres (*Borgerservice* in Danish), as these centres are a cornerstone of the Danish digitalisation agenda (Pors, 2015). We interviewed frontline workers in the centres who are responsible for dealing directly with citizens on a day-to-day basis, as well as key representatives of the municipal management, including managers of citizen services. In total, we interviewed 17 welfare state professionals. The information gathered in the interviews was supplemented with informal observations of the centres and guided tours of each citizen service centre. All interviews, names and

places have been anonymised in this study. We have furthermore translated all quotes from Danish into English.

### *National policy visions: from local institutions to digital platforms*

The Danish digitalisation agenda truly took off in 1994, when the Danish Ministry of Research was put in charge of developing a formal vision for Denmark's entrance into the so-called 'Information Society' (Forskningsministeriet, 1994). While electronic archives and digital systems had been used prior to this point, the decision to hand formal responsibility for digitalisation efforts over to the Ministry of Research signalled a much more pronounced interest in this area of governance than ever before. In the 1990s and early 2000s, one of the main challenges addressed by policymakers was how existing welfarist logics of governance, focused on notions of universal rights, solidarity and equality, could be maintained in the supposedly 'inevitable' transition to an information society. According to policymakers of the time, Denmark faced 'a revolution. A global short circuit of time, place, persons and processes' (Forskningsministeriet, 1994, p. 7). The idea of the information society had become central to political agendas across Europe by that time, due in no small part to the strong political push made by the European Union in the form of the 1994 Bangemann Report. In Denmark, policymakers understood the information society as a largely external phenomenon that was going to challenge traditional so-called 'Danish values' from the outside. 'The information society challenges the values and rights we, as Danes, have acquired over the past 150 years,' policymakers argued, as '[f]undamental rights such as freedom of expression, property rights and personal freedom are affected by the Internet and will become indispensable themes in the coming years' (Forskningsministeriet, 1997, p. 5). As a consequence, there was a need for the creation of new 'political spaces' (ibid., p. 3) in which the consequences and implications of these changes could be discussed. To counteract the erosion of the welfare state, policymakers argued that digital technologies ought to be used to strengthen participatory democracy, include all citizens, encourage new forms of solidarity and equality, and make possible the equal distribution of information, as 'the transformation of Denmark into a network society must be based on active, representative democracy, where there are equal opportunities for all and where

solidarity binds society together and ensures help for those in need' (Forskningsministeriet, 1999, p. 9). In short, the vision of the information society that was crafted in this early period was shaped by an inclusionary, democratising and participatory discourse. As policymakers had a sense that new societal forms were starting to emerge, they articulated their task as aligning the existing structures of the Danish welfare state with the coming transformation.

In 2001, however, a new era of policymaking began. Elections caused control of the national government to shift from a social-democratic to a liberal-conservative coalition, and the responsibility for setting the country's digital agenda was *de facto* assigned to the Danish Ministry of Finance, signalling a subtle political and ideological turn (Jæger & Pors, 2017). This decision not only implied the narrowing of digitalisation's role within the field of policymaking, as the policy agenda began to focus exclusively on streamlining public services at the expense of collective social values. It also meant an influx of 'neoliberal reason' (Peck, 2010) into policymaking, as principles of solidarity, equality, participatory democracy and the protection of vulnerable citizens lost sway to ideals of economic efficiency, optimisation, growth, flexibility and personal responsibility. While policymakers had been arguing that digital technologies should be used to rationalise and modernise the Danish public sector since the early 1990s, these goals now became the primary driver of digitalisation policies.

This new approach to policymaking, which has focused first and foremost on making public sector institutions more efficient and cost-effective, has relied on particular spatial metaphors and ideas. Policymakers have continually framed digital technologies as a means of 'breaking down walls' between otherwise distinct and demarcated institutions. 'The state, counties and municipalities have organised their administrations following practical constraints that will not exist in future digitalised management,' the national strategy from 2002 stated; 'Physical proximity to documents, cases or expertise has been decisive for how and where tasks have been solved. The boundaries between institutions have served in many areas as walls because the cost of sharing knowledge and distributing knowledge has been great.

This will not be so in the future if the full potential of digital management is exploited' (Den Digitale Taskforce, 2002, p. 4-5). When information and digital data is allowed to 'flow' across institutional boundaries, it becomes possible to delegate tasks in market-like fashion to the units deemed most fit to carry them out. At the same time, policymakers have used spatial metaphors in describing the nation's citizens. 'Danes do not want to waste their valuable time on paperwork at their local government office,' policymakers have argued, '[a]nd taxpayers' money must not be used on printed forms and postage when digital solutions can carry out these tasks more efficiently. Applications, reports, letters and all other written communication with both citizens and companies must by default be digital' (The Danish Government, Danish Regions & Local Government Denmark, 2011, p. 3). Liberated from spatial and temporal constraints, citizens (according to policymakers) will want to serve themselves whenever and wherever they please: 'instead of being confined to office hours, citizens will be able to correspond with the public sector when it suits them' (ibid., p. 5). Allowing citizens to carry out tasks that were previously tied to the locations of particular state institutions not only increases the efficiency and flexibility of the public sector; in addition, making citizens responsible for these tasks will supposedly allow them to live active and more enjoyable lives: 'The majority of citizens want to live active lives, be able to cope on their own and be free to do the things they enjoy. Digital welfare solutions play an important role in making this possible' (The Government, Local Government Denmark & Danish Regions, 2016, p. 28).

These policy discourses, crafted over the last twenty years, have served to legitimise a series of technological as well as juridical developments. One of the most prominent changes that has followed this rhetorical shift has been an increasing reliance on the use of self-service solutions. Citizens must increasingly log in to governmental websites to request state subsidies and welfare benefits, complete their tax returns, apply for pensions and view their health records. As the latest national strategy states, '[t]he internet is today the primary gateway to public administration for the majority of Danes. Individuals and businesses have their own digital mailbox. Online self-service has been made mandatory for more than 100 administrative procedures' (The

Government, Local Government Denmark & Danish Regions, 2016, p. 6). Access to many of these procedures is made available on the website [borger.dk](http://borger.dk) (*'borger'* being Danish for 'citizen'), which is referred to as citizens' 'single-point of access to all digital public services' (ibid., p. 13). The website includes a visual layout that helps connect users to various governmental databases, information sources and automated calculations. In an effort to further consolidate digitalisation as a critical element of public sector institutions and mandatory component of government-citizen interaction, the Digital Post Act was put into effect in November 2014. This law mandated that all citizens above 15 years of age must communicate with the public sector through a common public mailbox called Digital Post (or *'e-boks'*). The implementation of the law was underpinned by the so-called NemID (or *'EasyID'*) system; a 'federated user management' system (ibid., p. 13) that functions as a common infrastructure for accessing official governmental homepages. Providing each citizen with a physical code card with unique one-time passwords, this identification system allows citizens to log in to government webpages, as well as online banking services and websites of private companies. While citizens can still be exempt from using these self-service solutions, the widespread adoption of Digital Post and NemID nonetheless signalled that digital solutions had become the new norm, as all citizens were now expected to be 'digital by default' (see also Schou & Hjelholt, 2018b). This expectation stands in stark contrast to the ideas promoted by policymakers in the 1990s, where principles of choice, trust and lack of coercion played important roles in policymaking.

Taken together, these developments – comprised of shifts in political discourses, technical infrastructures and legal mechanisms – have served to actualise the idea that citizens should serve themselves *whenever* and *wherever* they want. They have done so by transferring tasks that were previously performed within local institutional spaces to digital platforms. This change entails much more than the simple introduction of government websites; it involves the development of new infrastructures, governmental agencies, technical standards and identification systems. The aim of these developments has largely been to make digital platforms the unique or primary entrance-point for citizens to interact with the state. The public sector no longer wants

to be met face-to-face: it wants be encountered through mediated and platformed infrastructures.

The political changes entailed in making digitalisation the focus of public sector reforms have been embedded within wider changes to the political economy of the Danish welfare state. Like other advanced capitalist states (Brenner, Peck & Theodore, 2010; Peck, 2010; Wacquant, 2009), Denmark has undergone a series of neoliberal restructurings since the 1980s. These restructuring efforts have been largely premised on what we might, using the words of Peck and Tickell (2002, p. 381), call a double commitment to 'the extension of markets and logics of competitiveness with a profound antipathy to all kinds of Keynesian and/or collectivist strategies.' Contrary to the universal ambitions of the post-war welfare state, policymakers and politicians have increasingly come to promote the idea that public sector institutions should be driven by market-like mechanisms, free choice, flexibility and continuous processes of organisational self-optimisation. Citizens, meanwhile, have increasingly been framed as self-sufficient, active and responsabilised individuals, who not only *can* but *must* take on responsibilities and risks previously handled by collective state institutions (Pedersen, 2011). The state spaces imagined and constructed through public sector digitalisation not only rely on these political tropes; they also reproduce them in new ways.

### *Citizen service centres as state spaces: digital platforms and local institutions*

One of the spaces where the national digitalisation agenda has been most visible is that of municipal citizen service centres. Initially created in the mid 1990s, the specific purpose of these centres was codified in 2005, as larger structural reforms established an overarching framework for citizen service centres' governmental and administrative functions (Pors, 2015). Citizen service centres should serve as a unified entrance to the public sector for citizens, able to handle light administrative requests and tasks across various areas of welfare provision. When these centres were conceived in the early 1990s, the public sector did not rely on digital technologies to the extent it does today. Consequently, the space of each service centre was organised to allow frontline workers to efficiently carry out tasks such as handling paperwork,



official documents and casework files following standardised schemes. In principle, all citizens, irrespective of their social or economic status, had to physically present themselves at a service centre if they required contact with or help from the public sector. However, as digital self-service platforms – together with new political imaginaries and legal mechanisms – have gradually come into being, these centres have been significantly repurposed. One frontline worker encapsulated the changes service centres have undergone by explaining her current work as a so-called citizen guide as follows:

*Interviewer:* Can you try to describe your work as a citizen guide?

*Frontline worker:* It works in the following way: citizens come and contact you, saying, ‘I need help’. And then we go with them to the computer. And then there are big differences in terms of the citizens who are down here. How much help do they need? Some just need to stand next to us and have us look over their shoulder. Others need us to guide them in what they should do. And then we also have citizens who can hardly use the computer.

*Interviewer:* Are there different ways of helping them?

*Frontline worker:* Yes, there are. For the citizens whose shoulders we just have to look over, we do not need to do anything in principle. We just stand and look. And for those who have to be guided, depending on what they need guidance with, we guide them through it and help them with what they have to enter, reviewing the calculations with them. We do not do anything that they do not participate in. They should direct the mouse and enter the things. We do not do it for them.

In each of the municipalities we conducted empirical work in, the idea of a citizen guide had been introduced as a way of defining the new forms of administrative work that would be expected of frontline workers in their dealings with citizens. Indeed, prior to the implementation of digitalisation policies, frontline workers were viewed first and foremost as specialised administrative staff, able to solve citizens’ specific administrative problems. However, as the handling of such problems now takes place largely on digital platforms, frontline workers have come to act less as administrative bureaucrats and more as administrative guides. ‘We firmly believe that we should not

be the ones to press the keys', a frontline worker reported; 'We'll probably stand by and help, but it's the citizen who is going to operate the computer.'

These new work practices, premised on guiding citizens, are carried out in work environments that are more or less open. Such environments often include a table placed in the middle of the municipal room with three to four computers. In some locations, using the computers requires entering a password, meaning that citizens must wait in line and ask a frontline worker to help them access the computer. In other municipalities, computers are freely available for citizens to use, and one or two frontline workers wait in or around the computer area should the citizens need guidance. The number of citizens who used these computers during our visits varied significantly. In some municipalities, these areas were filled with citizens, while in others only a few citizens sat at the computers, clicking through official webpages. Frontline workers told us that helping citizens is very much a collaborative effort that involves sensing who each citizen is and what they are capable of. 'Then when you come forward [as a citizen],' one frontline worker explained, 'it's a matter of what digital... or what kind of problem you have with the self-service solutions. Is it your NemID or is it the use of borger.dk? [...] If it is a self-service solution, then we go over and help and say: "Can we – along with you – solve this problem?" But it's always a collaboration. [...] It's all a process where you as a citizen are with us.' Another frontline worker described this manner of relating to citizens and figuring out how they can and should be helped in the following way:

*Frontline worker.* We try [to help] people who have some will to learn a little. Then we sit down beside them and we guide them through it. We don't do it *for them*. And then you try to get some idea of whether it makes sense to spend time on this or not, because [if not] you exempt them from the Digital Post. And we have done that for some.

In the interviews we conducted, both managers and frontline workers said that these ways of governing citizens constitute a radical and far-reaching change when compared to how public services were previously administered. Indeed, one frontline

worker even said that citizens today have a hard time identifying citizen service centres with the delivery of citizen services. 'You can't call yourself citizen service because you do not do anything,' this worker said, mimicking the voice of a citizen; 'Well, you might think that they are quite right. There is not that much service anymore. It is guidance to [allow you] to do it yourself. Guidance for self-service. You could say that this is also a service. Somehow you help them to empower themselves. But it is not the same service. It is another service.'

These changes to the function of citizen service centres have been accompanied by shifts in the material configuration of these spaces and the types of bodies that frequent them. As stated above, so-called computer environments have in many cases supplemented or replaced the administrative desks that used to demarcate the space between citizens and state professionals. Indeed, instead of standing on opposite sides of a large piece of administrative furniture that clearly distinguishes citizens from frontline workers, the two groups now stand shoulder-to-shoulder next to the same computer. This change has also meant that new kinds of citizen-subjectivities have become the primary users of these spaces. One manager explained this development in the following way:

*Manager:* When citizens cannot use self-service solutions provided by the municipalities or the state in general, they need to see someone [face-to-face]. They simply need to sit down beside them at a computer and receive thorough guidance. [...] So those who come here to us do not come because they want something social or because they think it's nice to see a person [face-to-face]. They come because there is a *need*.

The citizens that visit citizen service centres are those who cannot face the state where it wants to be faced – namely, online. Those who cannot or will not use the official digital self-service platforms thus become the primary users of citizen service centres. In official policy narratives, it has often been assumed that it is mostly elderly citizens who cannot use the standardised self-service solutions provided by the state. When interviewing frontline workers, however, it became clear that the elderly are not the

only group excluded by the adoption of new digital platforms. Instead, frontline workers often highlighted the class or socioeconomic characteristics of the citizens who visit their centres. They described many of the individuals using citizen service centres as being homeless, poor, ill, physically or cognitively disabled, unemployed with little to no formal education, or immigrants. A worker who had been employed in the municipality for almost two decades noted the following: 'Ten years ago, everybody came here. No matter what class you belonged to in society. [...] Well, today it is [...] the heavy ones that take a lot of time.' Another worker added, 'we need to be here for those who are having trouble. And now, there might be some who are already in a tough situation but have gotten it even tougher, as they feel excluded because they can't use digital technology.'

### *Visibility and displacements: from local institutions to private zones*

What we can begin to see from these descriptions is how citizen service centres have become new spaces of discipline and intervention. The task of frontline workers is increasingly to make citizens become digital beings. What happens in these spaces is in many ways similar to the forms of governmentality and discipline observed by other scholars researching digital geographies. The purpose of these spaces is to make citizen-subjectivities fit within certain normative boundaries. This is done by making each citizen an object of intervention. However, whereas scholars like Jefferson (2017), Wiig (2018) and Vanolo (2014) have described how these disciplinary processes take place through the introduction of technologies of visibility and knowledge, the disciplinary practices of citizen service centres are of a different kind. They do not use new modes of calculation and data capture to intervene in citizens' lives; instead, the purpose of these practices is to enable citizens to operate within *other* state spaces. What is at work is a project of *spatial displacement* intended to move citizen-subjectivities from the confines of citizen service centres to what are described, in the political imaginary, as the free, smooth and de-bounded spaces of digital platforms.

This spatial displacement, which aims to move citizens' bodies from one space to another, has taken place alongside a displacement of visibility within citizen service centres themselves. The governmental practices carried out in these centres rely

heavily on the materiality of the technological infrastructures that have been introduced as part of national digitalisation initiatives. Standardised digital platforms have the effect of making certain relations visible while rendering others invisible. In so doing, they help bring into existence particular ways of understanding and creating space itself. One of the major changes that has resulted from the turn towards self-service platforms is that frontline workers no longer hold a privileged informational view of the citizen. In many cases, they can only see what the citizen can:

*Frontline worker:* We can only see what the citizen can see. So, if you do not have your NemID with you, then we can't help you. Because we haven't, as we had before, access to tax records and access to these different domains of welfare. They are completely closed down. We can see what the citizen can see. And often we have more experience with the use of it and can guide them that way. So, it is a form of collaboration with the citizen.

Frontline workers no longer have direct access to any systems that citizens do not also have access to, or at least not in the way they did before. The privileged perspective and knowledge previously held by frontline workers has consequently been shifted or displaced. These workers are now primarily distinguished from the citizen because they are *experienced users* who are accustomed to navigating the official systems, not because they can access data or information that is invisible to the citizen herself. In this manner, digital self-service platforms have become an integral part of governmental practices in citizen service centres, as these platforms help bring into existence new relations between state professionals and the state. These are premised on the notion that digital platforms should be the main, if not the only, space in which the citizen encounters the state.

In some municipalities, enabling citizens to enter the online spaces they are expected to is not always possible within the confines of the citizen service centre. 'The vulnerable [citizens] do not come here,' one manager explained; 'quite a few cannot stand this building [the town hall].' Because of this, the municipal city council chose to make social inclusion of vulnerable citizens a strategic focus, particularly in relation

to the use of digital self-service technologies. The city council's aim, the manager explained, was to enable vulnerable citizens to 'enact their rights and duties' and partake in 'active citizenship.' More concretely, the initiative entailed the implementation of new forms of state intervention. Frontline workers who usually worked in the local citizen service centre were relocated to homeless shelters or drop-in centres one or two days a week. There they carried out the same tasks as they would have within the municipal centre (guiding citizens through digital solutions), only they did so within spaces that are usually distinct from the administrative and juridical forces of the state. 'The motto has been,' the same manager told us, 'that the citizens who *can* manage themselves, *must* manage themselves. And those who just need to get comfortable with these things, we try to push them a bit. It might be that they come here, or [they might get comfortable] through events. But it might also be that we have "John" over [working] at a shelter. And he will be there until the citizens are comfortable enough to come and ask him about something digital.'

The need to move beyond the physical confines of citizen service centres was identified by a number of managers as a vital step in managing to help *all* citizens. One manager explained:

We are there exclusively for the citizens. And we know that well. Therefore, we should also offer the help that may be needed. It may be that it does not take place here at the town hall. We may have citizens who are in a nursing home, who have no opportunity to get help because they may not have any relatives, and the care workers do not have the time or knowledge [to help]. Well, we have an employee who goes 'out of the house.' She also likes to visit citizens in their own homes. [The problem] is often not related to the actual IT solution. [In that case] we have assessed that the citizen is not able to use IT so we make a 'secondary channel' and that's the traditional paper forms citizens used before.

As forms of citizen service are carried out outside the citizen service centre, we can begin to see how the spatiality of these centres is continuously transforming. While most activities are still bound to the physical confines of the local town hall (or library, in some municipalities), frontline workers are modifying and reworking these

boundaries by moving into spaces otherwise distinct from the state. The spatial displacement of citizens thus takes place together with the spatial displacement of frontline workers. Not only does this demonstrate the fluidity of the new digital state spaces we have examined; it also illustrates how spaces otherwise seen as personal and private can overlap with state spaces. As frontline workers enter into the homes of citizens classified as vulnerable in order to help them use official digital platforms or so-called secondary channels, we can see how state power and intervention infiltrate what would seem to be the most personal and private of spaces.

### *Digital state spaces as hybrid spaces of intervention*

We have now illustrated how national policy agendas, technological infrastructures, legal measurements and local institutions coalesce to create what we propose to call *digital state spaces*. For the majority of citizens, who are capable of using the standardised platforms issued by the state, administrative tasks and welfare services have moved from the institutional spaces in which they were previously carried out and have been delegated to the individual citizen. It is now the individual who has to solve problems previously handled within local state spaces. In the political imaginary conjured up by policymakers, citizens should be able to perform these tasks *wherever* and *whenever* they want. By shifting roles and responsibilities, the implementation of standardised digital platforms has made such visions of a flexible and responsibilised citizenry concrete. For these citizens, digital state spaces are to be found online, accessed through standardised platforms and government webpages. These online spaces, however, should not be thought of as smooth or somehow detached from material, situated practices. Meeting the state online entails the use of specific digital devices, physical key cards, internet connections and other infrastructures. It means clicking through homepages, filling in information and reading official messages on screens.

At the same time, we have shown how citizens that do not conform to these expectations have to some extent become located within citizen service centres. Citizens of lower socioeconomic class in particular must now actively present themselves at their local citizen service centre if they have trouble using a particular

digital solution. For this group, becoming digital entails a series of deeply local encounters that are generally bounded within the physical confines of their municipal service centres. Within these refunctionalised state spaces, citizens are turned into digital individuals by frontline workers who help citizens help themselves. In most cases, these encounters take place in local town halls. Yet in some municipalities, caseworkers are increasingly entering into citizens' homes. As new modes of citizen service are carried out outside of established service centres, the spatial boundaries of the state are being transformed. The national ambition of turning the entire population into digital beings reaches into the most private and intimate areas of citizens' lives.

We wish to argue that the concept of *digital state spaces* provides a productive framework for understanding the heterogeneous scalar and political forms that are constructed through governmental digitalisation. Digital state spaces are discursive, material, legal, political, infrastructural and corporeal. They are as much about national technological platforms as they are about the movement of bodies. In the present case, we wish to suggest that the simultaneous delegation of public service tasks to digital platforms and local institutions must be understood within a unified theoretical framework, as these developments are two sides of the same coin. The use of online platforms and local training complement each other and support the same political project through different scalar forms. They form centres of differentially distributed and classed state spaces, regulating the flow of bodies and allocation of responsibilities. These digital state spaces are differentially distributed because they do not work the same for everyone. Digital state spaces imply the use of digital interfaces *for some* and local guidance *for others*, the use of national infrastructures *for some* and local computers *for others*, (supposedly) de-bounded practices *for some* and deeply bounded discipline *for others*. In this way, the production of digital state spaces is part of a common and multi-layered socio-spatial configuration, reworking and extending established forms of neoliberal state restructuring: interventionist in the lower strata of the class hierarchy and laissez-faire at the top.



## Discussion and concluding remarks

This article has taken its lead from the increasingly pervasive digitalisation of advanced capitalist states around the world. Drawing on studies of state rescaling and literature on digital geographies, we have sought to understand and examine how new state spaces are created, negotiated and produced through the process of digitalising core public sector institutions. To do so, we have advanced the concept of *digital state spaces*, a useful tool for understanding and unpacking the forms of state spatiality that emerge through and within processes of governmental digitalisation. We have suggested that thinking through the intersections between state spaces and ‘the digital’ requires us to adopt an approach that treats each of these domains as relational, conflictual and situated. Neither state spaces nor ‘the digital’ can be reduced to static entities or containers, as each is constituted by and within highly heterogeneous ensembles of devices, bodies, political discourses, institutional forms and everyday practices.

Applying these theoretical arguments to a study of digitalisation efforts in Denmark, we have illustrated how new digital state spaces are starting to take form. These new spaces serve to regulate and govern how citizen-subjectivities interact and come into relation with the state. For some bodies, this involves the voluntary use of digital platforms; for others, particularly those already on the fringes of the welfare system, it entails disciplinary encounters in local municipal offices. Focusing in particular on citizen service centres, we have shown how this work of spatial displacement is carried out and how it includes new governmental spaces, professional practices and relations of visibility. This study thus helps bring out the *layered* and *multiple* composition of digital state spaces. Such spaces are far from monolithic entities, as they encompass forms of power and governance that are differentially distributed. Considering these from a spatial perspective allows us to recognise the complementarity of different spatial forms and highlight the way in which seemingly distinct state spaces can be related to one another.

Thinking through questions of governmental digitalisation from the perspective of state spatiality also allows us to depart from the overly neat spatial assumptions that

shape existing research on this topic. Against ephemeral ideas of the cloud (Hu, 2015), we would like to suggest that governmental digitalisation serves as the foundation for important spatial restructurings that are embedded in wider political-economic processes and social structures. In our view, too much work that is conducted on statehood and digitalisation fails to take account of the new spaces that are constructed by and through the implementation of digital technologies. Such work fails to do so precisely because it is unable to theorise state spaces as continuously unfolding, processual and interlaced with historical power relations. Even the most advanced work in this regard, such as Jane Fountain's (2014) research on 'digitally mediated institutions', understood as 'government organization[s] characterized by a high degree of digital infrastructure and widespread use of digital applications and tools' (p. 471), tends to take the spatiality of organisations and the state for granted. As we have demonstrated in this article, focusing on the physical boundaries of institutions as if these were fixed, settled and demarcated frontiers, hinders our ability to understand the profound changes caused by digitalisation. The physical boundaries of digital state spaces are continuously being displaced, negotiated and overridden. What is more, such spaces function differently for different segments of the population. In adopting such a perspective, this article pushes existing geographies of 'the digital' further by developing a set of conceptual tools for unpacking the seemingly mundane spaces and technologies of contemporary states. The article highlights how processes of state restructuring and neoliberalisation, which are central to existing political economies of state rescaling, are increasingly taking place with and through the use of digital technologies.

Becoming aware of the forms of state spatiality that are created with and through digitalisation paves the way for several new research trajectories going forward. It first of all allows more rigorous comparative studies to be conducted dealing with processes of state rescaling across national boundaries and contexts. By placing different state projects in relation to one another, we might begin to develop a more nuanced understanding of the variegated and multiple forms of digital state spatiality that are currently being constructed. A comparative approach might also allow us to see how transnational policy networks and supranational institutions are attempting

to create and intervene in new geographies of statehood across national boundaries. Powerful political actors such as the European Union, the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) and the World Economic Forum are currently pushing for the digitalisation of industries, states and markets. It is up to researchers to unpack how and in what ways new geographies of digital capitalism are being created as such digitalisation efforts develop. Finally, we would like to note the way in which a greater appreciation of spatiality also guides our attention to the flow of bodies across scalar boundaries. What kinds of subjects are beginning to move into the digital state spaces that are currently being produced? Who has access to what spaces? And to what extent do these movements mirror existing forms of stratification and exclusion? In our view, these are pressing questions that scholars of territory, politics and governance ought to be asking.

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## Publication 5: Digital by Default?

Schou, J. & Pors, A. in review. Digital by default? A qualitative study of exclusion in digitalised welfare. In review for *Social Policy & Administration*.



# Digital by default? A qualitative study of exclusion in digitalised welfare

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**Abstract:** Digitalisation reforms have become increasingly pervasive across European welfare agencies and public sector institutions. As welfare provision becomes premised on the use of digital technologies, often in the form of ‘self-service’ solutions, new demands are imposed on citizens, including already disadvantaged groups. While existing research has showcased how digitalisation often reproduces existing lines of stratification, little to no work has been conducted on such processes in the context of welfare provision and public administration. Through a study of citizen service centres in Denmark, based on ethnographic observations and qualitative interviews, this article analyses the new exclusionary mechanisms that emerge at the frontline of the digital agenda. The article argues that digitalised welfare agencies simultaneously sustain existing lines of social stratification and enhance these by producing new forms of digital exclusion. Taken together, the article contributes with new knowledge on the impact of digitalisation policies and their exclusionary consequences for disadvantaged citizens.

**Keyword:** Digitalisation, exclusion, welfare agencies, reform, public sector, social citizenship

## 1 INTRODUCTION

Information and communication technologies (ICTs) have become increasingly important for public sector institutions and welfare agencies across European welfare states (Chini, 2008; Margetts, 1999, 2009; Dunleavy et al., 2006; Fountain, 2008, 2014). With the pervasive use of digital technologies in society in general, policymakers have intensified their calls for implementing and adopting technologies within governmental institutions (Buffat, 2015; Janson & Erlingsson, 2014). They have done so not least in pursuit of more ‘flexible’ and ‘cost-effective’ welfare institutions *and* as a means of making citizens responsible for provisioning welfare services themselves

(Henman, 2010). Today, citizens are increasingly seen as a central part of the solution to complex governance problems in which improved 'efficiency' and 'quality of service' are expected to go hand in hand. This paper is concerned not so much with the political processes that go into the production and implementation of digitalisation policies and reforms. Instead, it focuses on the consequences of such reforms for citizenship in practice. As welfare services become increasingly digitalised, citizens unable to use standardised digital technologies start to face new forms of exclusion. This paper attends to the emergence of such forms of exclusion arising alongside the use of ICTs in welfare agencies.

The paper addresses this issue by presenting insights from qualitative studies of so-called *citizen service centres* in Denmark. This country provides an in many ways instructive case for understanding the impact of digitalisation as a new policy instrument. Not only has Denmark been continuously framed as a "leading" European nation within international benchmarks, the policy trajectory adopted in this country also stands out. In contrast to comparable welfare states, such as Sweden and Norway, Danish policymakers have adopted a more centralised, top-down and coercive form of policy implementation (Joseph & Avdic, 2016; Janson et al., 2016). Municipal welfare institutions have been obliged to adopt national digital infrastructures, and from November 2014 all citizens above 15 years have been mandated by law to conduct all their communication with the public sector using a digital mailbox named Digital Post (Henriksen, 2015). In contrast to other Scandinavian countries, Denmark has thus pursued a strategy based on citizens being 'digital by default.' In light of these new policy trajectories and institutional changes, the article seeks to understand the consequences of these wide-ranging digitalisation reforms for disadvantaged citizens and marginalised populations.

Despite the increasing use of digitalisation across European welfare states, few scholars have researched how digitalisation has impacted welfare institutions and professional practices (Pollitt, 2011; Löfgren & Sørensen, 2011). As Hansen, Lundberg & Syltevik (2018, p. 67) have rightly argued, "there have been relatively few studies on service user experience with ICT and whether and in what manner this transforms

the relationship between citizens and the welfare state.” Indeed, all too often both scholars and policymakers have tended to depoliticise digitalisation, turning it into a merely technical issue and downplaying its political contents and consequences (Hall, 2008; Lofgren & Sorensen, 2011). This current neglect is especially pronounced in the context of social exclusion and marginalisation. While research has been conducted on questions of ‘digital exclusion’ and the so-called ‘digital divide’ since the 1990s (Norris, 2001), less research has turned to the intersection between welfare provision and digital exclusion. This is despite studies showing that already existing forms of social exclusion and stratification are often reproduced through digital means (Watling, 2011; Murphy, 2017).

This paper contributes to our current understanding of these issues. It does so by providing a qualitative study of a specific welfare institution, namely citizen service centres, showcasing the exclusionary consequences of national policies in action. Doing so, we show how existing forms of social stratification are reproduced and enhanced in the transition to digital forms of welfare provision. As digital self-service solutions are implemented across the welfare state, demanding that citizens can and must obtain important information and apply for welfare services online, the groups of citizens already at the fringes of the welfare system risk being further excluded. They do so because they either do not have access or competences to navigate in official governmental domains. Not only does this pose problems to the basic idea of social citizenship, premised on equality and social rights for all (Marshall, 1992 [1950]), it also means that already excluded citizens are pushed further to the fringes of the welfare system.

## **2 DIGITALISATION AND WELFARE REFORM**

The use of digital technologies within public administration – or what has often been called ‘e-government’ – is not a new phenomenon and can be traced back to the early 1950s (Margetts, 2009). However, with the technological advancements in the 1990s and 2000s (including the widespread adoption of internet-driven platforms), digitalisation policies intensified amongst advanced democratic states. In line with public sector reforms in general, digitalisation can be understood as a “comprehensive

political intervention” (Bejerot & Hasselbladh, 2013) that seeks to introduce new institutional logics and regulations (Schou & Hjelholt, 2018). In European welfare states, such interventions have to a large extent sought to automate public administration and transform public service organisations into “digital agencies” (Dunleavy et al. 2006, p. 225) aimed at “making (able) citizens do more” (Margretts & Dunleavy 2013, p. 6). In this sense, digitalisation encompasses a fundamental change of both normative and operational elements in public sector practices, which is often made visible in the concrete tasks and routines of practitioners’ daily practices (Power, 1999; see also Pors, 2015; Janson & Erlingsson, 2014).

The digitalisation of welfare services and institutions has often taken place through the introduction of self-service solutions, making citizens responsible for actively seeking out services previously administered by welfare professionals (Schou & Hjelholt, 2018). In this context, Henman (2010, p. 216-217) has argued that this turn to self-service solutions has served to push market-oriented strategies of state restructuring: “This shift to self-service by governments [...] is part of the neoliberal strategy that combines cost cutting with customer service. This strategy contrasts with paternalistic welfare states, whereby welfare subjects are conceived as passive. Instead, self-service provision involves active welfare subjects taking their own initiative to engage the welfare state without bureaucratic assistance and to ensure that they obtain the benefits and services they need and to which they are entitled.” This normative shift – moving citizenship from being primarily rights-based to being activity or obligations-based (Brown & Baker, 2013) – is broadly resonant with changes within welfare states from a demand-oriented to a supply-oriented perception of service. So-called ‘active’ citizenship, premised on self-provision strategies, has thus been labelled as the ‘new face’ of welfare (Jensen & Pfau-Effinger, 2005) or as signalling the coming of an ‘activating’ welfare state (Lessenich, 2009).

Denmark has in many ways pursued a highly proactive digitalisation agenda since the early 1990s. This policy agenda has, however, shifted quite substantially over time in terms of its political content, not least due to changing allocations of responsibilities within the Danish political field. From the early 1990s to the beginning of the 2000s,

the Danish Ministry of Research was in charge of formulating national policy visions, emphasising ideas of inclusion, free choice, democracy and participation as key to the formation of an 'information society' (Jæger & Pors 2017; Hjelholt & Schou 2017). From 2001, the responsibility for this area was *de facto* given over to the Ministry of Finance (Jæger & Löfgren, 2010), due in large part to a series of policy and governance failures taking place in the late 1990s. With this shift, policymakers increasingly came to promote the use of digital technologies as an instrument for rationalising the Danish public sector, providing a means of optimising existing administrative processes, automating routine work-tasks and creating more flexible forms of service delivery. Additionally, policymakers came to push the idea that digitalisation should change the direct relation between citizens and the state. In 2011, the Danish Government established the Agency for Digitisation under The Ministry of Finance and the concept of 'mandatory digital self-service' was introduced:

By 2015, it will be mandatory for citizens to use digital solutions to communicate in writing with the public sector. Once printed forms and letters have been phased out, all citizens will have to use online self-service. [...] This major step towards eGovernment will require considerable changes to the way public authorities work, and a certain degree of acclimatization from citizens. However, the transition will take place gradually, as user- friendly eGovernment solutions are introduced in more and more areas. Help will be available for citizens who find it hard to use the new solutions. (The Danish Government et al., 2011, p. 5)

Since then, digital self-service technologies have been implemented across a wide variety of welfare areas, making citizens responsible for actively provisioning services. Citizens have, moreover, increasingly been framed as being "digital by default" by policymakers, implying that citizens unable to adopt these new systems have been construed as departing from the dominant expectations and norms. These new forms of 'moral' citizenship have served to discursively legitimize the turn to *mandatory* self-service, where the ability to communicate with the Danish public sector has been formulated as a legal expectation.

With this paper, we examine how the turn towards self-service solutions and mandatory digitalisation influences already excluded citizens. We do so by providing a qualitative study of the daily tasks and routines in bureaucratic encounters in Danish citizen service centres where welfare services are increasingly replaced with public servants 'teaching' and 'supporting' citizens in the use of self-service solutions. Doing so contributes to enhancing our understanding of the impact of digitalisation on social policy and public administrations. It showcases not only the institutional transformations caused by digitalisation policies, but also the impact these have on the relation between the state and citizens.

### **3 DIGITAL EXCLUSION AND STRATIFICATION**

Scholars have since the late 1990s pointed to the exclusionary impact of digital technologies (Norris, 2001; Mossberger et al., 2003; Warschauer, 2004; Henman, 2010; Ragnedda & Muschert, 2018). Using terms such as the "digital divide" and "digital inequalities", researchers have shown how differences in access to and use of digital technologies can create and sustain inequalities in society at large. Whereas research in the 1990s particularly looked at the difference between the so-called "haves" and "haves-not", scholarship has increasingly foregrounded the complex set of social, cultural, economic, and psychological factors involved in such inequalities (Ragnedda & Muschert, 2018). As Min (2010, p. 24) remarks, "research has focused on what some have termed the 'second-level' digital divide [...] which is a divide that concerns 'multiple layers of access and use' of ICTs." In this sense, the digital divide(s) literature has evolved significantly since its original inception and is today firmly embedded within the social scientific tradition (Ragnedda & Muschert, 2013; Ragnedda, 2017).

More recently, the notion of "digital exclusion" has been proposed as a useful frame. This concept has particularly been used in studies on the relation between (dis)abled bodies and digital technologies, not least in the work of Sue Watling (2011, 2012). In her studies of (dis)abilities, she notes how "dividing lines of digital exclusion are closely aligned to those associated with social exclusion, for example income, age, ethnic minority, location and disability" (2012, p. 126). Adding to these discussions, the idea of a "digital underclass" has also been suggested. In a comparative study of

Britain and Sweden, Helsper and Reisdorf (2017) thus conclude that “non-users in Sweden and Britain are increasingly older, less educated, more likely to be unemployed, disabled, and socially isolated” (p. 15). This means, according to these authors, that “exclusion and economic disadvantage have become stronger determinants of digital disengagement than they were when research into digital divides started, indicating the emergence of a digital underclass” (p. 13).

These new disadvantages are particularly important in the context of welfare agencies and public sector institutions, not least because the users of these institutions are often those who are already excluded or marginalised in terms of income, educational level and so forth. In this sense, the increasingly pervasive coupling between welfare agencies and digital technologies might pose problems to already disadvantaged groups. If, indeed, digital exclusion reproduces existing forms of social and economic exclusion, as existing research underlines, then this suggests that already disadvantaged groups might encounter new barriers to inclusion. As Murphy (2017, p. 4) underlines, “[d]igitalisation offers opportunity and threat, with potential to overcome old forms of social cohesion while also threatening the possibility of new forms of social exclusion.” At the present moment, however, questions of ‘digital divides’ and ‘digital exclusion’ have almost solely focused on areas outside social policy and public administration. Indeed, little research has been conducted on the ways in which digitalised welfare agencies might produce new forms of digital exclusion.

In a Danish context, policymakers have addressed questions of digital exclusion since the early 1990s. The specific solutions and problematisations regarding this issue have, however, shifted over time alongside the political changes noted above. Within the policy discourse promoted in the early 1990s, ideas of ‘solidarity’, ‘equality’ and ‘protection’ of so-called “weak” citizens played important parts. Policymakers emphasised that digital technologies should not be forced on anyone, that they should constitute a free choice and that citizens unable to use digital technologies should have improved, if not equal, access to information. With the gradual shift towards a market-premised policy line, the response to digital exclusion has also altered. Being digital

has become the underlying norm and the inability to use official technologies has increasingly become an almost moral deficit or failure on part of the individual subject (Schou & Hjelholt, 2018). Against this backdrop, policymakers have advanced two different responses to questions of exclusion. First, they have allowed citizens to “opt-out” of mandatory services. This was, for example, the case when “Digital Post” was implemented as a nation-wide public mailbox in 2014. Citizens who are unable to use digital means of communication can be formally opted-out and will then continue to receive their governmental information through paper and letters. However, citizens must actively choose to opt-out from digital solutions. The other response, which will be the focus of our empirical analysis below, has been to create new institutional spaces meant to handle the citizens that cannot use official platforms.

**Table 1.** Adoption rates for Digital Post (% of total population)

<b>Date</b>	<b>Signed-up</b>	<b>Opted-out</b>
January 2014	69,6%	30,4%
November 2014	89,5%	10,5%
March 2015	89,0%	11,0%
June 2015	89,0%	11,0%
January 2016	89,0%	11,0%
October 2016	89,8%	10,2%
January 2017	89,8%	10,2%
June 2017	90,2%	9,8%
November 2017	90,7%	9,3%
March 2018	90,9%	9,1%

*Note:* When Digital Post became mandatory in November 2014, citizens were automatically signed-up for the platform. This explains the large jump at that point in time.

*Source:* Compiled by authors based on official statistics from <https://digst.dk/it-loesninger/digital-post/om-loesningen/tal-og-statistik/>

This latter response has been implemented together with the introduction of official governmental statistics and measurements. The Agency for Digitisation has released a monthly national statistic on adoption rates of “Digital Post” since 2014. These statistics have, in line with the official policy, worked with a binary distinction between citizens who are ‘signed-up’ or ‘opted-out.’ From these statistics, it currently appears that 90% of the population has signed-up for Digital Post (see Table 1). These statistics do, however, not include socio-economic variables, but only age, gender, municipality and employment status. Moreover, as will become clear from the study provided below, the division between ‘signed-up’ (digital) and ‘opted-out’ (non-



digital) does little to capture processes of inclusion and exclusion. As will be shown, the citizens who are facing the most severe difficulties are often included and 'signed-up' in the official material, while still being unable to access, use or otherwise participate in the mandatory digital systems, being excluded *in practice*. With this paper, we seek to showcase how qualitative and ethnographic observations might provide a more adequate view of digital exclusion in the welfare system. We want to foreground a series of mechanisms that are not easily captured by official statistics, but instead require a different empirical entry-point, namely the daily practices found in the frontline of the digitalised welfare state. By providing this empirical material, we contribute to current knowledge on the impact and consequences of digitalisation reforms on excluded citizens and disadvantaged populations.

#### **4 FINDINGS: CITIZEN SERVICE CENTRES AND EXCLUSION**

Having outlined the backdrop to our research, we now turn to citizen service centres. Based on our qualitative study, we will showcase how new forms of exclusion become visible in this particular welfare agency as public sector institutions become increasingly reliant on digital self-service solutions. Our analysis is structured in four main parts. First, we describe the methodological aspects of this study, outlining how we have employed a combination of ethnographic observations and qualitative interviews to examine citizen service centres and exclusion. Second, we provide a description of how citizen service centres have changed their function and institutional role over time. In doing so, we describe how these centres increasingly have to handle citizens unable to use standardised, digital platforms. Third, we zoom in on this group of citizens. We show how it is mainly already excluded and marginalised citizens who frequent citizen service centres in need of help. This suggests that digitalisation policies are reproducing existing lines of social exclusion. Finally, we describe the consequences that these new means of exclusion have in terms of welfare benefits and experiences of exclusion.

##### **4.1 Methodology**

The empirical material for this paper is based on qualitative work conducted in 2013-2014 and 2017 respectively. In order to gain insights into the everyday practices found

in Danish citizen service centres, we have chosen to combine ethnographic participant observations with in-depth qualitative interviews. As we primarily wanted to focus on professional encounters between welfare state professionals and citizens, we opted for this type of qualitative approach, focused on new professional practices and the meaning attributed to these by frontline workers themselves. The ethnographic observations were conducted in one citizen service centre in 2013-2014 by shadowing (Czarniawska, 2007) frontline workers as they interacted with citizens. This started out as open explorative shadowing and gradually became more focused and structured observations in the context of “walk-in referrals.” These are cases where citizens come in from the street without a prior appointment and are then helped by frontline workers, either at a front desk or in a so-called “co-service” area. Service provided at the front desk lasted approximately three to five minutes, while “co-service” took an average of 20 minutes. Approximately 80 hours of explorative and more structured observations were conducted and extensively documented through field notes. These observations included ongoing dialogue, for example clarifying questions in order to understand the observed practices, between the observer and frontline workers. Observations were moreover followed by interviews with the observed employees later the same day. By combining observations with interviews, it became possible to both observe frontline practices as these actually took place and allow for frontline workers to reflect on these afterwards. This helped us go beyond some of the inherent limitations of interviewing, as we were able to not only gather information on welfare encounters based on frontline workers’ own narratives, but observe these encounters directly. This also meant that we were able to base our interviews on observations of encounters and other activities in the citizen service centre. In 2017, these ethnographic observations and interviews were complemented with semi-structured interviews with frontline workers and daily managers in seven different citizen service centres. The interviews were conducted in municipalities spread out across the five main Danish regions and lasted between 40 and 90 minutes. Each interview focused on daily work practices and encounters between citizens and welfare professionals. 17 welfare professionals were interviewed. The profile of the frontline workers in both our ethnographic material and interviews was quite diverse in terms of age, gender, education and experience with frontline work and digital

solutions. There was, however, a relatively higher percentage of female frontline workers, and most of the informants had several years of experience in welfare work, some even decades. In this paper, we use the interviews conducted in 2017 to further flesh out the themes being addressed in the initial ethnographic material. This not only allows us to dive deeper into the initial themes found in the ethnographic observations, but also provides a means of exploring issues that can be found *across* different municipal settings. Both the individual and group interviews followed guidelines for semi-structured interviewing and were recorded, transcribed, coded and categorized. All places and names have been anonymised in all the material.

The empirical material was analysed through an iterative and inductive coding scheme that took place in two main steps. First, the transcribed field notes, interviews and observations were collectively read through, while noting down key themes emerging from the material. The recurrent topics emerging from this first phase revolved around the encounter between frontline workers and citizens as well as issues such as exclusion, non-use and marginalised groups of citizens. Second, using the codes established in the first phase, particularly those linked to questions of exclusion and marginalised citizens, we re-read the empirical material and further fleshed out our inductive categories. The analysis developed in this paper reports on the results of this coding process, presenting the findings that cut across our empirical material.

#### **4.2 The changing function of citizen service centres**

As a local municipal unit, citizen service centres started to emerge in the mid 1990s across Danish municipalities. Frontline workers employed in these centres constituted specialised, administrative staff, taking care of casework, issuing of official documents and guidance in the context of welfare requests. For all intents and purposes, citizen service centres were conceived as the citizen's main entrance to the public sector and welfare system. With the gradual implementation of self-service solutions across the Danish public sector, however, many of the administrative duties previously handled in these have been delegated to citizens themselves. Indeed, from the late 2000s and onwards, self-service solutions have been implemented across many of the areas

previously administered by citizen services. This has meant that the tasks and responsibilities of frontline workers in citizen service centres have changed accordingly. These are no longer, at least not primarily, expected to be specialised administrative staff, tasked with solving administrative problems for citizens. Instead, these workers increasingly have to help citizens use the ‘proper’ self-service solutions in order to make them carry out a given task themselves. The following ethnographic field note provides a description of one of these centres, showcasing the particular forms of work taking place in these.

“The citizen service centre occupies part of the ground floor of a large office building housing a variety of local government departments. When the service centre opens at 10:00 a.m., a large crowd is invariably waiting outside. The citizens enter the building and queue up at the front desk. The staff at the front desk typically ask: ‘How may I help you?’ or simply ‘Yes?’ In some cases, such as the issuing of keys and codes for digital transactions, the tasks are completed immediately at the front desk, while, in other cases, the citizen is given a number and asked to wait. Front desk staff must instantly assess citizens’ level of “digital literacy.” To this end, the staff member asks a few questions about familiarity with using a computer, such as whether the citizen has a computer at home. Depending on the answer, the staff estimate whether the citizen has the capacity to use digital solutions right away, can learn to use them after receiving guidance in the “co-service” area or needs classic, dialogue-based face-to-face consultation. A flat screen on the wall informs the citizens that number 630 is currently receiving co-service. Three out of the ten workstations in the co-service area are occupied by an employee (a so-called “citizen guide”), each of whom is assisting a citizen in using digital self-service solutions. After ending a session with a male senior citizen, an employee in her forties walks over to the waiting area and calls out the next number. A young man of about 20 reacts, his number being 631, and follows the employee to one of the workstations. His slightly older looking friend follows as well, and they both face the employee on the opposite side of the high table. ‘How may I help you?’ she asks. ‘I need to activate my digital mailbox’ he responds in Danish with a low voice and a thick accent. ‘Come over here on this side of the table at the computer, so you can do the typing,’ she tells him, continuing, ‘OK, start typing ‘borger.dk’ [citizen.dk].’ The employee waits a bit, and then spells the URL, ‘B-O-R-G-E-R-DOT-D-K, and then you sign in and enter your civil registration number and your personal code.’ She steps aside and averts her gaze for a

few seconds [...] 'And you can enlarge the image by clicking there.' She points at the screen. 'And I can see you've already signed up for e-Boks.' E-Boks is a digital mailbox used by public sector institutions and private actors such as insurance companies, banks, supply and utility companies. 'Try to open it. It seems that you have 17 unopened letters in your inbox.' [...] The employee explains further, looking at the computer screen: 'The most important thing is that you know you are required to keep an eye on your mailbox. You are required to read it just as if you had received a letter in your mailbox at the entrance to your home. By ticking here, you accept that no authority will send you physical mail anymore, and that you are required to read your mail, for example, regarding notice to the court, or if you are applying for public support for education.' (Field note from observation, 2014)

This field note captures the new institutional logics and roles found in citizen service centres. As shown in this, frontline workers have to help citizens help themselves. They do this by guiding citizens in using standardised self-service solutions within open 'computer' or 'co-service' environments. In these, citizens and frontline workers stand or sit shoulder to shoulder, with the frontline worker guiding the citizen through the self-service solution. As one frontline worker explained in this context: *"You meet the citizen in a different way. You're in another environment up there. You see things differently. Well, I think it's because you stand there side by side with the citizen"* (Interview, 2014). Frontline workers thus have to teach individual citizens how to navigate and use digital solutions. *"It is not something where we take over the task"*, a frontline worker told us, *"and say 'well, we will fix that and call you when the problem is solved.' It is all a process where you, as a citizen, must take part"* (Interview, 2017). This also means that the focus of the welfare encounter has shifted. It is no longer a specific administrative problem, formula or request that is the focus, but the citizen *herself*. The citizen is the object of change. He or she is supposed to become self-serving and digital. This means that if the encounter has been a success, the citizen should not return. As one frontline worker formulated it: *"citizen services want citizens out of the 'shop.' They have to serve themselves"* (Interview, 2017).

As citizen service centres change their function, turning from being traditional administrative institutions towards having to help citizens 'become' digital, so the

group of citizens using these centres also shift. Prior to the implementation of digital reforms in public services, the broader population had to show up in these centres if they had requests related to welfare. Today it is increasingly only the group of citizens who, in one way or another, have trouble using official digital platforms that frequent these centres. This also means that in substantial aspects, citizen service centres become the place where the exclusionary consequences of mandatory digitalisation appear most visible. It is in this institutional space that citizens unable to follow along the state's new demands are supposed to learn and change into becoming a digital citizen.

#### **4.3 The users of citizen service centres**

Which groups of citizens, then, start to use citizen service centres in need of help with digital self-service solutions? As suggested in the text above, national policymakers have often framed questions of digital exclusion through a division reminiscent of early research on the digital divide. In so doing, policymakers have categorised citizens into those who are either 'signed-up' for digital solutions and those who have 'opted-out.' However, conducting research in citizen service centres, it became apparent to us that these categories did not map onto our observations of the practices or experiences of frontline workers. Indeed, these would often tell us of several different groups of citizens visiting the centre. In one municipality, a frontline worker told us that they had worked with (at least) three categories of citizens: *"We were all on a course. [...] At that point in time, we talked about three groups of citizens. Group one, who were self-reliant and who would never come here because they would figure it out themselves. Group two, who was on the verge of self-help but just needed a push or someone to show them. And then the last group of citizens who would be... We would not be able to help them digitally"* (Interview, 2017).

This categorisation resonates with the experience voiced in the different municipalities where our empirical work was conducted. There was a large group of citizens who used to visit these institutions, but now managed their problems through digital self-service solutions. This was designated by one of the frontline workers as *"the ideal citizen"* (Interview, 2014). Then there was a middle-group who, although

signed up for official digital systems, either had trouble using these or did not have the technology at their disposal. According to the frontline worker quoted above, these citizens were originally envisioned to simply need 'a push' to become digital. However, as had become increasingly clear over time, making citizens able to use digital self-service technologies was far from just a gentle push. Finally, there was a third group of citizens who were formally opted-out and used paper formulas instead. Across the municipalities we researched, it was primarily the second group that constituted the largest and most work-intensive set of users. Indeed, as several frontline workers told us, the citizens who were "opted out" of digital systems were often primarily elderly citizens with both social and economic resources. Fleshing out these descriptions a bit more, the frontline worker quoted above gave the following characterisation of the 'three' groups of citizens:

*"We do not see the first group at all. And we may feel that there are more of them. Of course, there will be more of them when everything is digitalised. The middle group is very middle-aged I think. [...] And I think many of them have some kind of... They are homeless, have been homeless, are addicts of some kind, or alcoholics, or have had difficult, maybe on social benefits. [...] I think that those in the middle group are middle aged, who are having difficulty or have had a hard time. [...] And the last group contains those where we already know when they come in that they are "on dispensation." Because we know we have exempted them from Digital Post, and we also gave them a form last time they were here. It's basically only older people where they would never be able to sit with a mouse or click through." (Interview, 2017)*

This quote resonates with the narrative we were told across the different municipalities we visited. The "middle" group of citizens was broadly said to be composed of already excluded or marginalised citizens. These citizens did not fit within the distinction between being *either* digital (signed-up) or *not* (opted-out) but were articulated as the ones that experienced the most trouble with the standardised self-service solutions. Some frontline workers named this group as "the heavy ones":

**Frontline worker #1:** We do have many of the 'heavy ones' down here, no doubt about that.

**Frontline worker #2:** That is to say many older citizens, but also younger citizens who are not well functioning in regards to ‘the digital.’

**Interviewer:** Is this group composed in a certain way? Can you say more about them?

**Frontline worker #2:** [...] Well, it is mostly those who are socially vulnerable or excluded in some way.

**Frontline worker #1:** I don’t know how to describe it, but you are right. [...] They stand out in some way. It is difficult to say... But yes, socially vulnerable. (Interview, 2017)

Other frontline workers told us that citizens with (dis)abilities or psychological “disorders” were also visitors of citizen service centres. In this sense, the narrative expressed by frontline workers was that the group having trouble with digital self-service solutions were often composed of citizens who were already in a precarious situation. Indeed, across our interviews and observations, homeless, addicts, poor immigrants, unemployed and otherwise disadvantaged citizens, such as for example dyslexics, were articulated as and observed to be the main users of assistance in citizen service centres. This suggests that the implementation of digital technologies serve to further exclude citizens who are already on the margins. In this sense, digital technologies are added to already existing patterns and mechanisms of exclusion. This is consistent with both quantitative and qualitative research conducted in other settings, which has documented that access, competences and use of digital technologies is dependent upon wider socio-economic characteristics (Min, 2010; Watling, 2011).

#### **4.4 Consequences of not being “digital by default”?**

Conducting research in citizen service centres, we became aware that having trouble using standardised self-service solutions was not just a minor practical or administrative problem. Instead, the “inability” to use official welfare systems in the intended ways could have a number of both economic, psychological and social consequences for citizens. Across our qualitative material, frontline workers described how the citizens that showed up in citizen service centres would at times be uncomfortable with getting assistance. Often, frontline workers explained, these citizens would be very emotionally impacted by their inability to use digital platforms.



*"[I]t means a lot to them", a frontline worker thus explained, "some will say: 'I have tried to log in and see, but I am afraid to do something wrong or what the consequences might be.' So yes, it does influence them a lot" (Interview, 2017).* This insecurity was also present in citizens' often hesitant attitudes and behaviour, as shown in the field note in section 4.2, and it would sometimes be labelled in our interviews as an additional source of exclusion:

*"The citizens we've got here, they're so cautious ... They're unsure what to do [...] Some of them may be in a very vulnerable situation: 'I've just moved, my husband has left me, I have three children and I need help. I'm unhappy.' And so, on top of that, not everyone can manage to seek help digitally, to find out what to do, what to complete, or send." (Interview, 2014)*

Some frontline workers said that citizens would even be unable to sleep or feel very anxious about using digital solutions. *"Some are really affected by it"* one frontline worker said, *"because they feel like they have become b-citizens, a bit second class"* (interview, frontline worker, 2017). These experiences of exclusion also have a more direct impact on individual citizens. All communication received through "Digital Post" is considered legally binding and citizens are expected to be able to read it digitally. If citizens do not respond to requests made through digital means of communication, they could risk losing their welfare benefits. This is particularly a problem for citizens who are the primary users of social welfare *and* unable to use digital platforms. In many of the municipalities we conducted work in, this was voiced as a problem:

*"If you do not make sure you get exempted from digital post, and there is a target audience that is registered as receiving digital mail but has never been in and opened the mailbox, then they also receive all their digital mail through it, then it's their support and everything that is impacted." (Interview, 2017)*

As one manager said in this context: *"We sometimes find ourselves in contact with a citizen too late. There are some citizens who simply do not feel well"* (Interview, 2017). In this way, the inability to use digital solutions might pose very real problems to citizens. This is, furthermore, accentuated by the shifting administrative practices themselves. The

turn towards digital self-service and the new administrative practices this necessitates means that citizens are no longer guided in terms of their wider social and economic situation. Instead, the focus is on the citizen's use of a particular technology or platform: *"You're on, you're off, you know. And sometimes my intention is to dig deeper into things in her life situation after finishing the application, but it's difficult to handle. Maybe I just turn around for a moment, and she's gone [...]. So she never got the advice I would've given her if we had been sitting at my desk"* (Interview, 2014). Frontline workers would often explain that their ability to help citizens in terms of welfare benefits was being problematised by the focus on the use of technologies and the institutional setting of welfare encounters.

Taken together, we argue that these observations showcase that the "inability" to use digital self-service solutions pose a number of different problems: citizens not only feel excluded and insecure, they also risk losing their welfare benefits. This is being further problematised insofar as frontline workers can no longer give specialised guidance on individual citizens life situation. Instead, they have to focus on making citizens capable of using digital platforms in order to transform the citizen into the idealised digital citizen.

## **5 DISCUSSION AND CONCLUDING REMARKS**

This paper has used ethnographic observations and qualitative interviews to showcase how already excluded and vulnerable parts of the Danish population are further excluded within digitalised welfare encounters. As citizens are increasingly expected to be or become 'digital by default', new patterns of exclusion also start to emerge. Zooming in on citizen service centres, we have shown how citizens visiting these centres are primarily in need of help navigating the welfare system and using the self-service solutions designed to make them do so. This group is, in many ways, made up of citizens who are already partially excluded or at the fringes of the welfare state. Homeless, addicts, poor pensioners, unemployed and (dis)abled citizens are thus further disadvantaged through digital forms of exclusion. We have argued that these exclusionary effects can have very real repercussions on citizens: not only do disadvantaged citizens experience a sense of exclusion, they also risk losing their

welfare benefits. Taken together, these findings point to the new exclusionary effects of mandatory digitalisation. They showcase how the move towards policies premised on citizens being 'digital by default' has stratifying consequences, as already marginalised groups of the population are further excluded. With the transition from a rights-based to an obligations-based and active form of welfare provisioning, those unable to be active in the way imagined by the state increasingly face new barriers to full inclusion.

These exclusionary effects pose problems to traditional notions of social citizenship. In his famous essay, *Citizenship and Social Class*, T. H. Marshall (1992 [1950]) argued that citizenship has been and should be about giving all citizens equal rights and opportunities. This "equality [that is] implicit in the concept of citizenship", Marshall (1992 [1950], p. 19) argued, "undermined the inequality of the class system." Marshall was, however, aware that equality *in principle* did not necessarily translate into equality *in practice*, and that citizenship might reproduce existing (class) inequalities. He even went as far as to argue that, under certain circumstances, "citizenship operates as an instrument of social stratification" (p. 39). With the gradual rollout of digitalisation policies, premised on turning citizens into active and self-reliant individuals, such stratifying effects once again seem to be at play. Citizens are divided into new groups depending on their ability to use digital platforms. This is done in a way that both implicitly and explicitly favours citizens who "are" digital. Claiming one's rights to welfare becomes conditional on the ability to use and navigate official digital systems (Henman, 2010). These stratifying effects tread similar terrain to broader changes within social policy and welfare reforms. Scholars like Pedersen (2011) have thus argued that since the 1990s, the Danish welfare state has largely abandoned its universal ambitions and now "accentuates existing social inequalities by distributing rights and duties depending on where in the social hierarchy the individual is (administratively) placed" (Pedersen, 2011, p. 278, our translation). Digitalisation policies seem to follow this general trajectory, deepening already existing divides rather than alleviating them.

In showcasing the links being made between social and digital forms of exclusion, the

article further substantiates the argument that digital inequalities both depend on and reproduce existing social, economic and cultural inequalities. Indeed, not unlike the work conducted by Helsper and Reisdorf (2017) and Watling (2011, 2012), we have also showcased how already marginalised citizens are being further pushed to the fringes of the welfare system. Contrary to existing research, however, we are not certain that these processes are best captured by the notion of a “digital underclass.” Indeed, while the concept does point to deep-seated forms of inequality, it also seems to presuppose that the group of citizens being excluded is more or less homogenous. Yet, rather than any one group, our study points to how digital exclusion impacts several groups of citizens. These citizens are often disenfranchised or marginalised in very different ways. In this sense, there is a need to see how digital inequalities might cut across already existing groups of citizens, merging these together in new forms of exclusion without presupposing too much unity. We cannot presume that digitally excluded citizens all face the same set of problems or share the same experiences of exclusion. This also speaks against the official labels currently used in a Danish policy context, not least in official statistics. By looking at the use of digital platforms as merely a question of being signed-up or opted-up, policymakers and politicians seem to miss the complex ways in which exclusion actually takes place. The group of citizens described in this paper often become invisible in the official statistics: they are formally signed-up but unable to actually use official platforms. Formally included, but excluded in practice.

The findings presented in this article should not be generalised to encompass all processes of public sector digitalisation in Denmark or in a transnational perspective. Indeed, as argued in the introduction, Denmark is a quite unique case insofar as it has pushed the policy agenda much further than comparable countries such as Sweden, Norway and Finland (Joseph & Avdic, 2016; Janson et al., 2016). The dynamics reported in this paper should, as a consequence, be seen as the specific outcome of particular historical trajectories and institutional changes. That being the case, there are good reasons to take note of these issues in Denmark. This country is often branded as an example of one of the most digitalised public sectors and societies, scoring the highest marks on the European Union’s “Digital Economy and Society

Index” (see Schou & Hjelholt, 2018). In this sense, the policy option adopted by this country is constructed as a pathway to be followed by others. The present paper challenges the narrative promoted by these indexes. It does so by documenting how digitalisation does not just serve to create more efficient and streamlined public administrations, but that it might also exclude already precarious groups of citizens further.

In this light, there is need for more in-depth research examining the ways in which digitalisation policies might serve to both extend and reproduce existing forms of exclusion. As argued in the introduction, there has so far been a very limited set of discussions around digitalisation and public administration (Pollitt, 2011). This has, not least, been due to a tendency to reduce these reforms to merely technical issues. In this paper, we have tried to showcase that this is far from being the case, and that digitalisation reforms demand new expertise of not only citizens but also welfare professionals. Going forward, we would do good to proceed through a combination of quantitative and qualitative studies. In this paper, we have relied exclusively on qualitative observations and interviews. These have served as a means of going beyond official policy narratives and into the concrete practices of welfare encounters. However, many of the arguments put forth in this paper could be systematically fleshed out using either national or municipal level surveys, showcasing how the patterns observed here might be different or similar across a larger sample of cases. Moreover, our account has mainly focused on exclusionary patterns from the perspective of frontline workers and public administration. In the future, it will be important to also include citizens’ narratives and experiences. Doing so, we can gain new knowledge on the complex reasons for not being able to use standardized governmental technologies. We can also start to understand how digital exclusion is experienced and the consequences it has on everyday life. All of this might pave the way for a more nuanced and complex understanding of the profound impact of digitalisation reforms on public administrations and social policy.

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