

Digital Geographies

National PhD Course

Fall 2025, 7.5 ECTS

Course Organizers:

Natasha A. Webster (course convener), Department of Human Geography, Örebro University, natasha.webster@oru.se.

Cornelia Branter (course co-organizer), Department of Geography, Media and Communication and Centre for Geomedia Studies, Karlstad University cornelia.brantner@kau.se

Danielle Drozdowski (course co-organizer), Department of Human Geography, Stockholm University, danielle.drozdowski@humangeo.su.se

Qian Zhang (course co-organizer), School of Natural Sciences, Technology and Environmental Studies, Södertörn University, qian.zhang@sh.se; Department of Human Geography, Stockholm University, qian.zhang@humangeo.su.se

Sponsoring Universities: **Örebro University**, Karlstad University and Stockholm University

Course Aim and Description:

Digital technologies have rapidly changed how we work and socialize. So too, have our geographies changed as more and more of our everyday lives are mediated and practiced in, through and by the digital. This course is an introduction to the rapidly emerging and changing field of *Digital Geographies* and draws on a range of geographic perspectives from individual experience of affect and emotion, societal relationships to non-human world, to the role of the state in planning and national sovereignty.

The primary focus of the course will be to explore and discuss debates, conceptualizations and methodologies in contemporary digital geography. We will focus on the geographic social-technical-spatial changes made possible through technological innovations. We will begin the course with an overview of key concepts and the development of the field with a special focus on questions of individual experience, gender approaches, power and inequalities. We will then turn to exploring the digital in intersected changes of lived experience, socioeconomic development and society-nature relationships. The spatiality of these thematic interventions will be discussed through attention to global urban and rural settings, for example on the production of a rural digital geography and the datafication of day-to-day life. In the final theme, we will explore the risks and politics of digital geography, including environment, infrastructure and accompanying vulnerabilities.

Interwoven will be the overarching question of spatiality, framed here as a process of digital lives. The digital will be explored as continuum that is fluid, in process, shifting and as material and symbolic. The goal of this course is to approach digital geographies by linking together geographic and spatial theories, case studies and empirical work and student's own reflections and experiences as emerging researchers.

Course Structure:

The course will consist of 3 modules and 1 final day for presentations for a total of 4 learning moments. The structure of each module will focus thematically on key issues in digital geography. Each module will build on the course organizers' research and methodological expertise but will center on discussions and applied learning of participants rather than lecturing.

We envision four meetings (Table 1), and each meeting follows a general format illustrated in Figure 1 below. Each module will consist of a theoretical lecture by one of the course organizers and will be complemented by guest presentations with an empirical or case study focus. Each module will also have an applied method component where participants will test and discuss digital geographic methods and approaches. Meeting 2 will also have a workshop using the newly developed platform, QualNotes, for doing geographic research.

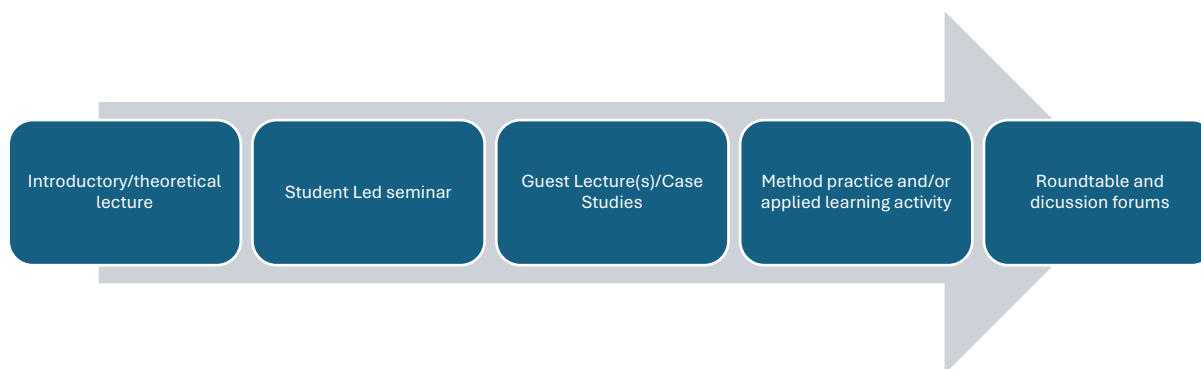


Figure 1. The general format of each meeting

Meeting topics and schedule:

The course will convene over four themed meetings in the fall term of 2025 and in the three departments of the course organizers. Details are listed in the following Table 1.

A detailed schedule will be forthcoming in spring 2025. Please note dates are tentative and subject to change until final version is posted in Spring 2025.

Table 1. Meeting topics and schedule

Event	Time	Topic	Location
Meeting 1	September 9 -10 2025	Introduction to digital geographies, changing perspectives	Örebro University, Department of Human Geography
Meeting 2	October 7 - 8 2025	Urban, rural and nature perspectives on digital geographies + QualNotes workshop/Field excursion	Stockholm University, Department of Human Geography
Meeting 3	November 18 -19 2025	Sovereign Streams and Green Dreams: Navigating Environmental Impacts in the Pursuit of Digital Communication Infrastructure Autonomy in Nordic Welfare States	Karlstad University, Center for Geomedia Studies

Meeting 4	January 16 2026	Panel and presentation of participant's course project	Online Forum
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Learning Outcomes:

Upon successful completion of the course, *Digital Geographies*, students should have demonstrated the ability to:

1. Describe, discuss and critically reflect on digital spaces and places from geographic perspectives and reflect on how these digital processes are spatialized.
2. Connect literature and case studies to field, methodological and ethical considerations.
3. Critically evaluate how digital geographies can be used and/or considered in relation to participants' own research projects.

Examination:

The course will be assessed as pass/fail. Active and in-person course participation is required to pass the course. Participants will be required to submit an individual preparation assignment, for example a small piece of reading reflection, before each meeting. The final assessment will be in a written/oral form such as a roundtable discussion paper. More details will follow.

Students meeting the examination criteria will receive a certificate of completion.

Course Literature (preliminary):

Ash, J., Kitchin, R., & Leszczynski, A. (2018). Digital turn, digital geographies? *Progress in Human Geography*, 42(1), 25-43. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0309132516664800>

Brantner, C. (2024, in progress). Approaching digital infrastructure sovereignty in different disciplines. A literature review.

Drozdzewski, D., (2021) The role of a politics of memory and the digital, in reframing the commemoration of Polish independence, in Sumartojo, S., (ed) *Experiencing 11 November 2018: Commemoration and the First World War Centenary*, Abingdon: Routledge, pp. 57-70.

Drozdzewski, D., Sumartojo, S., and Waterton, E., (2021) *Geographies of Commemoration in a Digital World: Anzac@100*, Singapore: Palgrave MacMillan.

Drozdzewski, D., (2024) [Mobile Mapping](https://doi.org/10.4135/9781529696295), Sage Research Methods: Diversifying and Decolonizing Research, Video Resource, Sage Publications, <https://doi.org/10.4135/9781529696295>.

Drozdzewski, D., and Berengueres, J.O.L. (2024) Developing QualNotes: A Collaborative and Cross-Disciplinary Ethnography, *Digital Geography and Society*, accepted 8 March, 2024.

Elwood, S., & Leszczynski, A. (2018). Feminist digital geographies. *Gender, Place & Culture*, 25(5), 629-644. <https://doi.org/10.1080/0966369X.2018.1465396>

Faxon, H. O. (2022). Welcome to the digital village: networking geographies of agrarian change. *Annals of the American Association of Geographers*, 112(7), 2096-2110. <https://doi.org/10.1080/24694452.2022.2044752>

- Haraway, D. (1985) A Cyborg Manifesto: Science, technology and socialist feminist in the 1980s. *Socialist Review*, 80: 65-108.
- Jiwasiddi, A., Schlagwein, D., Cahalane, M., Cecez-Kecmanovic, D., Leong, C., & Ractham, P. (2024). Digital nomadism as a new part of the visitor economy: The case of the “digital nomad capital” Chiang Mai, Thailand. *Information Systems Journal*, 1–43. <https://doi.org/10.1111/isj.12496>
- Kitchin, R. (2023). *Arts-based methods for researching digital life*. Working Paper. Data Stories Project, Maynooth. (Unpublished) <https://mural.maynoothuniversity.ie/16870/>
- Kitchin, R. (2023). *Digital Timescapes: Technology, Temporality and Society*, Polity Press.
- Lai, S. S., & Flensburg, S. (2023). Gateways: Comparing digital communication systems in Nordic welfare states. Nordicom, University of Gothenburg. [selected chapters]
- Leszczynski, A. (2020). Glitchy vignettes of platform urbanism. *Environment and Planning D: Society and Space*, 38(2), 189-208. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0263775819878721>
- Liu, C., Chen, J., & Xue, D. (2023). Daily mobilities with smartphone apps and their failures: A study in urban Guangzhou. *Cities*, 143, 104574. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.cities.2023.104574>
- Luque-Ayala, A., Machen, R., & Nost, E. (2024). Digital natures: New ontologies, new politics?. *Digital Geography and Society*, 100081. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.diggeo.2024.100081>
- Mejias, U. (2023). Sovereignty and its outsiders: Data sovereignty, racism, and immigration control. *Weizenbaum Journal of the Digital Society*, 3(2), Article 2. <https://doi.org/10.34669/WI.WJDS/3.2.7>
- McMillan Cottom, T. (2020). Where Platform Capitalism and Racial Capitalism Meet: The Sociology of Race and Racism in the Digital Society. *Sociology of Race and Ethnicity*, 6(4), 441-449. <https://doi.org/10.1177/2332649220949473>
- Nelson, I. L., Faxon, H. O., & Ehlers, M. H. (2024). Feminist political ecologies of agrarian technologies: knowing the digital differently. *The Journal of Peasant Studies*, 1-28. <https://doi.org/10.1080/03066150.2024.2308637>
- Nelson, Ingrid L., Roberta Hawkins, and Leah Govia. "Feminist digital natures." *Environment and Planning E: Nature and Space* 6.3 (2023): 2096-2109. <https://doi.org/10.1177/25148486221123136>
- Odendaal, N. (2021). Platform urbanism and hybrid places in African cities. *Shaping Smart for Better Cities* (pp. 203-219). Academic Press.
- Osborne, T. and Jones, P. (eds.) (2023). *A Research Agenda for Digital Geographies*. Edgar Elgar Publishing. UK: Cheltenham.
- Pasek, A., Vaughan, H., & Starosielski, N. (2023). The world wide web of carbon: Toward a relational footprinting of information and communications technology’s climate impacts. *Big Data & Society*, 10(1), 20539517231158994. <https://doi.org/10.1177/20539517231158994>
- Searle, A., Turnbull, J., Hartman Davies, O., Poerting, J., Chasseray-Peraldi, P., Dodsworth, J., & Anderson-Elliott, H. (2023). Glitches in the technonatural present. *Dialogues in Human Geography*, 1-5. <https://doi.org/10.1177/20438206231174633>
- Sjøvaag, H., & Ferrer-Conill, R. (2024). Digital communication infrastructures and the principle of universality: Challenges for Nordic media welfare state jurisdictions. In P. Jakobsson, J. Lindell, & F.

Stiernstedt (Eds.), *The future of the Nordic media model: A digital media welfare state?* (pp. 201–222). Nordicom, University of Gothenburg. <https://doi.org/10.48335/9789188855893-9>

Wang, W., Xu, H., & Liu, Y. (2022). Platform ruralism: Digital platforms and the techno-spatial fix. *Geoforum*, 131, 12-19. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.geoforum.2022.02.009>

Webster, N. A. (2024). Storytelling as connectivity: expanding the digital geographies of the gig economy. *Social & Cultural Geography*, 1–19. <https://doi.org/10.1080/14649365.2024.2367417>

Zhang, Q., Webster, N. A., Han, S., & Ayele, W. Y. (2023). Contextualizing the rural in digital studies: A computational literature review of rural-digital relations. *Technology in Society*, 75, 1-14. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.techsoc.2023.102373>

Zhang, Q., & Webster, N. A. (2024). Positioning rural geography into platform economies: Why we need to ask new questions when researching the rural platform economy, in Vale, M., Ferreira, D., and Rodrigues, N. (eds.) *Geographies of the Platform Economy: Critical Perspectives*. Springer Nature.

List of potential instructors and topics (preliminary):

Drawing our Swedish and International networks, we will have several visiting lectures online with a priority on topics and locations from the global South and representing different career stages. Invited lecturers ideally will have an empirical and case study perspective to complement the other learning activities.

This list will be updated in Spring 2025.

Environmental and Diversity Considerations:

All participating departments are easily accessible through public transit. Participants will be encouraged to use public transit and sustainable transportation forms. Catering will be vegetarian with accommodations for dietary needs. Communications will be digital and materials for the course will be provided digitally as much as possible and where appropriate.

The reading list represents a gender balance as well as a balance of topics from and about the global North and South. Guest lecturers will be invited online, and consideration will be given to gender and geographical balance as well as different career stages. Further the content of the course will address these issues, for example in meeting 1 on power and digital and meeting 4 looking at environmental issues such as cloud storage.

Fee

The costs incurred for participating doctoral students from Swedish geography departments which are part of the national program are paid by the respective department. If places are available, the course is also open for students in other departments and disciplines. Please contact Natasha for information.

Admission and application:

All PhD students enrolled in participating PhD geographic and related studies are welcome to attend. Dissertation topics do not need to be related to digital geographies. PhD candidates interested in participating in the course should send a statement of interest and a brief CV to Natasha Webster at natasha.webster@oru.se by June 15, 2025.

Course Organizer Biographies:

Cornelia Brantner is Professor at the Department of Geography, Media and Communication and Coordinator of the Centre for Geomedia Studies at Karlstad University, Sweden. She has participated as a project leader, manager, and researcher in various research projects and networks. Currently, she is PI of the VR-funded project 'Digital infrastructure sovereignty: Towards a public value-based media policy for the datafied Swedish welfare state.' Her teaching portfolio and research profile cover communication infrastructures, visual communication, geomedia, (digital) public spheres and (in)equalities, science communication, as well as qualitative and quantitative methods.

Cornelia holds a PhD in Journalism and Communication Studies (University of Vienna, Austria) and a MA in Journalism and Communication in combination with Political Science and Psychology (University of Vienna, Austria). She worked at the Austrian Academy of Sciences, was (temp.) Professor of Media and Communication Studies at ZeMKI at the University of Bremen and at the TU Dresden. Prior to that she was a post-Doc assistant at the University of Vienna and has spent time as a visiting scholar at Carnegie Mellon University in Pittsburgh, PA.

Danielle Drozdowski is an Associate Professor in Human Geography. She specialises in the interactions of people and place, with specific expertise in memory, identity and migration. Danielle's overarching research theme is the examination of the geographies of remembrance. She investigates how memories of culture and of place are integral to the formation and maintenance of identities, from the personal to the supranational. Allied to these investigations is the study of migration, through which she has focused on what motivates people to move, the outcomes of such mobilities, to better understand interactions between people and places. She investigates these themes using qualitative methods.

Natasha Webster is a Senior Lecturer at the Department of Human Geography at Örebro University, Sweden. As a feminist geographer, Natasha is interested in the complexities of social-technical-spatial relations in work(ing)-life practices. Her recent research falls within economic and digital geography by exploring the role of women-led entrepreneurship and platform-work in migration and integration. She is interested in the role of emotions and affect in everyday common activities in work and play. Natasha is a researcher in a VR funded project (2022-05314) exploring the digital geographies of rural areas and practices with her particular work package focusing on the beekeeping hobby and industry sectors. She was PI of a Formas project (2019-00445) examining the digital geographies of the Swedish gig economy.

Natasha is an Associate Editor at the journal, *Emotion, Space and Society* ([Emotion, Space and Society](#)) and is on the editorial board for *Digital Geography and Society* ([Digital Geography and Society](#)). Natasha holds a PhD in Human Geography (Stockholm University), M.Sc.Pl Specialization in Urban Planning (University of Toronto), BA Honours in Human Geography (Queen's University, Canada).

Qian Zhang is a Senior Lecturer at the School of Natural Sciences, Technology and Environmental Studies at Södertörn University, and a researcher at the Department of Human Geography, Stockholm University, Sweden. Qian holds a PhD in Human Geography (Stockholm University). Her research seeks critical geographic understanding of inequalities and sustainability. This exploration has been done under and at the intersection of a range of themes including labour migration, environmental migration, environmental governance, rural/agrarian transformation, and recently digital geography and the gig economy. Her studies have mainly focused on Sweden and China. She has published in different forms and in high-quality journals such as *Digital Geography and Society*, *Technology in Society*, *Journal of Rural Studies*, *Geoforum*, *Journal of Political Ecology*, *Applied Geography*, and *NORA: Nordic Journal of*

Feminist and Gender Research. She has been a reviewer for several reputed journals and is on the editorial board of the peer-reviewed journal *Rural Landscape: Society, Environment and History*.

In a FORMAS funded research project (2019-00445), Qian worked as a key investigator with the Primary investigator Natasha Webster and pioneered digital geographic approaches of understanding the gig economy and migrants' experiences in Sweden. Currently, Qian is leading a VR-funded research project (2022-05314) which aims to explore changing social-technical-spatial relations embedded in the digital everyday rural work and life in Sweden, primarily in nature-based industries, and further the implications for sustainability and equality. Qian has well established research networks, in Sweden and internationally, concerning digitalization, rural studies, agriculture and political ecology.