

Digital rentiership and asset-making in higher education and beyond

Academic workshop (invitation-only)

17-19th May 2023, Lancaster, UK

Agenda

17 May 2023

9.30 – 10.00	Participants gather, tea and coffee
10.00 – 10.30	Welcome and introduction Janja Komljenovic, Lancaster University
10.30 – 11.45	Presenter: Kean Birch, York University, Canada Discussant: Susan Roberston, University of Cambridge Chair: Janja Komljenovic Followed by Q&A and open discussion
11.45 – 12.15	Coffee break
12.15 – 13.30	Presenter: Sam Sellar, University of South Australia Discussant: Ka Ho Mok, Lingan University, Hong Kong and Chair: Morten Hansen Followed by Q&A and open discussion
13.30 – 14.30	Lunch
14.30 – 15.45	Presenter: Morten Hansen, Cambridge University Discussant: Juan Pablo Pardo Guerra, University of California San Diego, USA Chair: Kean Birch Followed by Q&A and open discussion
15.45 – 16.00	Coffee break
16.00 – 17.15	Presenter: Janja Komljenovic, University of Lancaster Discussant: Charlie Eaton, University of California Merced, USA (TBC) Chair: Sam Sellar Followed by Q&A and open discussion
17.15 – 17.45	Reflection on the day and the UU project Susan Robertson, University of Cambridge Simon Marginson, University of Oxford Chair: Janja Komljenovic
19.00 -	Dinner at the Lancaster House Hotel

18 May 2023

9.30 – 11.00	<p>Panel (60-70 min), followed by discussion (20-30 min):</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ngai Ling Sum, Lancaster University • Joe Deville, Lancaster University • Steve Fuller, Warwick University • Seppo Poutanen and Anne Kovalainen, University of Turku <p>Discussant: Katy Mason, Lancaster University Chair: Kean Birch, York University, Canada</p>
11.00 – 11.30	Coffee break
11.30 – 13.00	<p>Panel (60-70 min), followed by discussion (20-30 min):</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • David Tyfield, Lancaster University • Karen Gregory, University of Edinburgh • Bob Jessop, Lancaster University • Sveta Milyaeva and Daniel Neyland, University of Bristol <p>Discussant: Rebecca Eynon, University of Oxford Chair: Janja Komljenovic, Lancaster University</p>
13.00 – 14.00	Lunch
14.00 – 15.30	<p>Panel (60-70 min), followed by discussion (20-30 min):</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lluís Parcerisa, University of Barcelona • Gernot Grabher, HafenCity University Hamburg • Anne Helmond, Utrecht University • Pier Luc Nappert, Université Laval, Quebec, Canada <p>Discussant: Ben Williamson, University of Edinburgh Chair: Sam Sellar, University of South Australia</p>
15.30 – 16.00	Coffee break
16.00 – 17.30	<p>Panel (60-70 min), followed by discussion (20-30 min):</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Annika Bergviken Rensfeldt, University of Gothenburg • Carlo Perrotta, Monash University • Joe Noteboom, University of Edinburgh • Niels Kerssens, Utrecht University <p>Discussant: Bob Lingard, University of Queensland, Australia Chair: Janja Komljenovic, Lancaster University</p>
19.00 - late	Dinner at the PDR, Lancaster University

19 May 2023

09.00 – 10.30	Structured discussion on theories and empirics of assetisation and rentiership
10.30 – 11.00	Coffee break
11.00 – 12.30	Continuation of the structured discussion
12.30 – 13.00	Wrap up and goodbye
13.00 – 14.00	Lunch

About the workshop

Rentiership has become the driver of contemporary capitalism, with the ascendance of the asset form. Assets are both resources and property; they generate future benefits and can be valued and sold on the basis of capitalising those future benefits when suitably discounted. Recently, researchers have focused on how different things are being turned into assets, defined as a process of assetisation. As a process, assetisation entails not just the transformation of things into techno-economic objects (i.e. assets). Assetisation also shapes the governance of our futures through the construction of expectations and the practices that materialise those expectations in the present.

The digital economy, in particular, is increasingly governed via rentiership arrangements where the interests of investors and companies are now trumping democratic decision-making. Global digital cloud infrastructures are owned and controlled by a small number of tech giants, digital platforms plugged into these infrastructures are important assets, and the personal and other data extracted by these digital platforms are controlled by platforms owners and made valuable through various forms of data aggregation, processing, and analytics.

We are witnessing the emergence of digital rentiership beyond the usual monopolies and digital asset-making in search of future value. These processes, however, are mostly hidden from the public eye, often legally operated via private, contractual relations. Since most of our social lives are now either digital or digitally mediated, it is key that we democratically discuss what kind of governance we want for the digital world. Alternative ideas are being generated, such as data commons, relational data governance, and data trusts. But more needs to be done to understand the implications of digital rentiership, empirically and conceptually, so as to influence change in the future.

The purpose of this workshop is to push assetisation studies further by considering assetisation as a both a transformative process and a mode of governance. We are specifically interested in digital rentiership and assetisation, but also in rentiership beyond 'the digital'.

About the project

This workshop is part of the "Universities and Unicorns: building digital assets in the higher education industry" (UU) project. It is funded by the Economic and Social Research Council (UK). It investigates digital higher education and new forms of value via the creation of digital assets.

The project aims to develop a new paradigm to study the higher education industry and its digitalisation. Moreover, it aims to contribute to the studies of assetisation beyond higher education. Its interdisciplinary nature and team allow us to pursue our ambitious agenda to contribute to higher education studies and sociology, STS, and political economy.

UU Team:

- Principal Investigator: Dr Janja Komljenovic, Lancaster University, UK
- Co-Investigator: Assoc Prof Kean Birch, York University, Canada
- Co-Investigator: Prof Sam Sellar, University of South Australia

See the [UU webpage](#) for more info about the project.

This workshop is the final event of the project, which finishes at the end of June 2023.

Aims of the workshop

We bring together 30 key scholars and thinkers on (digital) rentiership and assetisation from different disciplines, including STS, sociology, political economy, geography, economics, and higher education studies.

We aim to allow space and time for participants to engage with each other, thoroughly discuss empirical evidence and conceptual repertoire of rentiership and assetisation, and allow for theoretical advancement. We hope that future avenues of research will be identified.

The workshop will allow networking for possible future collaboration between participants.

Participants come from around the world, which makes this workshop a rare opportunity to engage with other scholars from different disciplines.

Structure of the workshop

The workshop is 2.5 days long.

The first day focuses on the UU project. The research team will present key findings and questions coming from the project. Members of the UU's Academic Advisory Board will act as discussants to presentations. There will be ample time for open debate among all participants.

On the second day, we invite our guests to present their work and think about rentiership and assetisation.

The final day is dedicated to an in-depth discussion with the aim of theory advancement.

Steps after the workshop

After the workshop, the UU team intends to work towards an edited book on (digital) rentiership. Participants will have an opportunity to contribute with chapters following the workshop.

Practicalities

- The project covers travel, accommodation, and subsistence costs of invited participants
- Accommodation: Lancaster House Hotel – on the campus of Lancaster University
- Event venue: Lancaster University, UK

Venue:

Lancaster House Hotel

Green Lane

Ellel, Lancaster

Lancashire

LA1 4GJ

The support of the Economic and Social Research Council (UK) is gratefully acknowledged.

This hotel is located at the Lancaster University Campus. When you arrive to Lancaster, you can take a bus to the university campus, which is quick and easy. There is also a taxi stand outside of the train station. See more information about travelling to the university here:

<https://www.lancaster.ac.uk/about-us/maps-and-travel/#>

The workshop will be held at the Lancaster House Hotel. Dinners will be on campus too.

Breakfast is included in the hotel stay. Food is included in the workshop and is provided as per the agenda.

You can find more about the [campus outlets](#) and [other information](#) on the university website.