Digitization presently focuses on technical aspects, such as autonomous driving, use of sensors in devices of daily life or use of artificial intelligence. Successful digitization, however, also requires analysis of the impacts of such innovations on individuals and society. This is to be accomplished by a new state-wide research alliance of Karlsruhe Institute of Technology (KIT), University of Mannheim that coordinates the project, University of Tübingen, and five non-university partners. The project “Gesellschaft im Digitalen Wandel” (society in digital change) is scheduled for a duration of three years and will be funded by the State Ministry for Science, Research and Art with more than EUR 2.1 million.

Other partners are the Fraunhofer Institute for Systems and Innovation Research (ISI), the Leibniz-Institut für Wissensmedien (IWM), ZEW – Leibniz Centre for European Economic Research, GESIS – Leibniz Institute for the Social Sciences, and the Leibniz Institute for the German Language (IDS).

“Excellent research institutions in Baden-Württemberg have established this alliance to generate scientifically substantiated orientational knowledge for all of us. The KIT, with its vast expertise in the fields of technology assessment and informatics, is an ideal partner in this high-quality research alliance. Cooperation of the institutions has already started. In this way, societal aspects of digitization can be analyzed jointly from several perspectives,” Theresia Bauer, Minister of Science in Baden-Württemberg says.

“It is the declared aim of KIT to contribute in solving the grand challenges facing society,” says the President of KIT, Professor Holger Hanselka. “Digital change with its impacts on all areas of society probably is the biggest of these challenges and, at the same time, a highly important task. In the end, it is about to ensure that the opportunities associated with digitization outweigh potential risks,” Hanselka adds.
The research alliance plans to identify and analyze in an interdisciplinary way the impact of digitization on humans and society and to develop design options on this basis. “We refer to socio-technical change, because of the mutual character of the influence. Social change influences technological development and vice versa,” says Michael Decker, Professor for Technology Assessment and Head of Division of Informatics, Economics, and Society at KIT. In Baden-Württemberg, this change is studied by high-ranking scientific institutions in the fields of the humanities, social sciences, law, economics, media and communication sciences, ethics, informatics, and interdisciplinary technology assessment. “We focus this expertise to generate interdisciplinary orientational knowledge and derive recommendations for action to shape this change,” Decker says.

Close dialog with the citizens is a central element of research to identify options of action desired by society. In doing so, the Center for Art and Media Karlsruhe (ZKM) plays an important role. It provides permanent opportunities for the dialog referred to the research alliance at its exhibitions and at a variety of meetings.

Being “The Research University in the Helmholtz Association“, KIT creates and imparts knowledge with and for the society and the environment. It is an essential objective to make significant contributions to the global challenges in the fields of energy, mobility and information. For this, about 9,300 employees cooperate in a broad range of disciplines in natural sciences, engineering sciences, economics, and the humanities and social sciences. KIT prepares its 25,100 students for responsible tasks in society, industry, and science by offering research-based study programs. Innovation efforts at KIT build a bridge between important scientific findings and their application for the benefit of society, economic prosperity, and the preservation of our natural basis of life.


This year’s anniversary logo recalls the milestones reached by KIT and its long tradition in research, teaching, and innovation. On 1st of October 2009, KIT was established by the merger of its two predecessor institutions: the Polytechnic School and later University of Karlsruhe was founded in 1825, the Nuclear Reactor Construction and Operation Company and later Karlsruhe Research Center in 1956.