

COSMOS PhD SCHOOL

ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE AND DEMOCRACY

Academic Year 2025/26

Art. 1

The Scuola Normale Superiore is organising for the academic year 2025/2026 - within the **MERITA Project, the network for talent**, with funding of the Piano Nazionale di Ripresa e Resilienza (PNRR) (NRRP, the National Recovery and Resilience Plan), Mission 4 – Education and Research, Component 1, Investment 3.4 "Advanced university training and skills" – "Reinforcement of the Scuole universitarie superiori (the university institutes of higher education)", Public notice pursuant to Director's Decree No. 594/2024 – a PhD School denominated: "Artificial Intelligence and Democracy".

The PhD School will be held in person from May 18th to May 22th 2026, at the Scuola Normale Superiore, Palazzone di Cortona (Arezzo, Tuscany), for a total of 32 hours.

The official language of the PhD School is English.

The PhD School will have a maximum of 25 participants.

Art. 2

Educational objectives

Over the past two years, generative artificial intelligence and its various and fast-evolving applications have been seizing the public debate and imagination, in particular for their potential of disrupting the labor market and eliminating qualified jobs in the publishing industry, education, film, music, design, fashion and programming, among others. Moreover, the threat of automation has extended to the political sphere, raising the possibility that unethical uses of AI may transform political campaigning or that specific political choices may be justified on the exclusive basis of AI-generated data. But how well-founded are these anxieties? And what is the impact of AI on the current crisis of representative democracy and political polarization in the digital public sphere? This PhD School examines these questions by examining critical issues at the core of the development of generative AI, including epistemological questions of representation, classification and fairness in the datasets used for the training models; automation and exploitation of labour; environmental impact of AI infrastructures; and AI governance. Secondly, the School examines how citizens, activists, artists or journalists are reclaiming democracy through creative uses of existing AIs and the development of AI applications that serve democratic and participatory purposes. We sum up with a view on the contours and prospects of the digital public sphere that is empowered and mediated by AI and modes of securing digital democracy through new forms of internet regulation and governance.

The PhD School welcomes papers on geographical areas and actors that are underrepresented in current research.

Art. 3

Those qualifying and admission requirements

The above described activities are suitable for Ph.D. researchers with an interest in visual analysis and the study of political conflicts on social media.

Art. 4

Organisation of the PhD School

The PhD School consists of three full days and two half days with lectures by prominent scholars in the field of AI studies and social and political impact in the morning and practical sessions in the afternoon. The students will have a theoretical session and a methodological session every day, followed by a lab in which they apply the methods that they learn. Students will also get feedback from experts in the field of AI studies about their own research projects.

The main topics of the PhD School include the relationship between AI and democracy, labour, the environment, warfare and the future of journalism.

Art. 5

Admission applications

Those intending to compete for admission to the PhD School must submit a curriculum vitae and a short cover letter (no more than 1 page) outlining how their research focus fits with the topic of the PhD School and how participation in the School would benefit their research. These materials should be submitted as one PDF by sending an email to Prof. Marco Deseriis (marco.deseriis@sns.it) and Prof. Hans-Joerg Trenz (hansjorg.trenz@sns.it) no later than **March, 15th 2026**.

All applications arriving late or in a form different from that stated in the article herein, for whatever reason, will not be taken into consideration.

False or mendacious declarations are punishable pursuant to the Penal Code and to the specific Laws, Arts. 75 and 76 of D.PR. 445/2000.

At any moment of the procedure, including after the start of the PhD School, the Scuola may carry out checks as to the veracity of the declarations submitted and the documents produced and may request to see the documents in the original. In the case of false declarations, the Scuola may invoke a special Rector's Decree for the exclusion of the applicant, except for any ensuing penal responsibilities.

Art. 6

Enrolment fees and benefits

There are no enrolment fees. Admission to the PhD School includes participation in the lectures, the educational material, lunch and coffee breaks.

Travel and accommodation costs for the duration of the stay are to be covered by the participants, who can take advantage of special discounted rates at selected hotels in Cortona.

Art. 7

Acceptance procedure

Accepted candidates will be notified not later than April, 1st 2026.

Art. 8

Certification issued

Successful participation in the PhD School will be awarded by the Scuola Normale Superiore a certificate of participation valid within the limits permitted by law.

Art. 9

Processing of personal data and manager of the procedure

EU Regulation 2016/679, the General Data Protection Regulation, is applicable to the candidates' personal data processing.

The Data Controller of the personal data provided by the interested parties is the Scuola Normale Superiore, a public university institute, located in Piazza dei Cavalieri, 7 Pisa - 56126, in the person of its Director and pro tempore legal representative.

Applicants' personal data will be collected by the Scuola for the purposes of the selection/admission procedure and will be processed for the fulfilment of the same, and, for successful applicants, for the subsequent career management of the PhD students and all connected activities.

Personal data are thus provided to the SNS for the performance of tasks of public interest or at any rate connected to the exercising of its public powers, including the purposes of archiving, historical research and analysis for statistical purposes. Personal data will be processed, also with automated tools (software and databases administered by the SNS and hosted by any contracting entities), in compliance with the principles of accountability, lawfulness, correctness, minimization, transparency, integrity, accuracy, confidentiality and proportionality..

The personal data collected will be communicated or transferred to third parties (public and / or private parties) in the context of institutional relations, for the fulfilment of legal obligations or regulations or of contracts, within the services required by the SNS (access to facilities, etc.).

The personal data collected may be communicated or transferred to parties established in third countries, but only if suitable data protection guarantees and conditions have been ascertained.

The personal data collected will be published on the official online register and on the SNS's institutional website if specified by the law and other regulations of the SNS.

The personal data collected will be processed and stored for the time strictly necessary to achieve the purposes for which they have been collected, with the application of the regulations concerning documentation storage by public institutions.

The data subject may at all times exercise the following rights:

- a) access to personal data, under the terms and conditions of Art. 15 of the Regulations;
- b) the rectification, erasure or restriction of the processing of personal data, under the terms and conditions of Articles 16-18 of the Regulations; erasure is not permitted for data included in any documents that the SNS is required to keep;
- c) the portability of data, under the terms and conditions of Art. 20 of the Regulations;
- d) objection to the processing of his or her data, under Article 21 of the Regulations;
- e) the right to submit a complaint to the Data Protection Authority, by sending a request to the e-mail address privacy@sns.it or via PEC (certified e-mail) to the e-mail address protocollo@pec.sns.it.

For any further information, please contact the Data Protection Officer (DPO), at the e-mail address dpo@sns.it

Art. 10.

Final provisions and referrals, information

The head of the Teaching Activities Service, Dr. Silvia Marcacci, is the administrative manager of the procedure.