



Delft University of Technology

**Document Version**

Final published version

**Licence**

CC BY-NC

**Citation (APA)**

Burke, F. Z. A. E., & Bauer, K. (2026). Exploring designing for dignity in the context of digital community platforms. In *Proceedings of the Design Research Society (DRS)* (pp. 1-20). (Proceedings of DRS; Vol. 2026). Design Research Society. <https://doi.org/10.21606/drs.2026.400>

**Important note**

To cite this publication, please use the final published version (if applicable).  
Please check the document version above.

**Copyright**

In case the licence states "Dutch Copyright Act (Article 25fa)", this publication was made available Green Open Access via the TU Delft Institutional Repository pursuant to Dutch Copyright Act (Article 25fa, the Taverne amendment). This provision does not affect copyright ownership.  
Unless copyright is transferred by contract or statute, it remains with the copyright holder.

**Sharing and reuse**

Other than for strictly personal use, it is not permitted to download, forward or distribute the text or part of it, without the consent of the author(s) and/or copyright holder(s), unless the work is under an open content license such as Creative Commons.

**Takedown policy**

Please contact us and provide details if you believe this document breaches copyrights.  
We will remove access to the work immediately and investigate your claim.

*This work is downloaded from Delft University of Technology.*

Jun 8th, 9:00 AM - Jun 12th, 5:00 PM

## Exploring designing for dignity in the context of digital community platforms

Fatima-Zahra Abou Eddahab-Burke

*Faculty of Technology, Policy and Management, Delft University of Technology*

Katharina Bauer

*Erasmus School of Philosophy, Erasmus University Rotterdam*

Follow this and additional works at: <https://dl.designresearchsociety.org/drs-conference-papers>



Part of the [Art and Design Commons](#)

---

### Citation

Abou Eddahab-Burke, F., and Bauer, K. (2026) Exploring designing for dignity in the context of digital community platforms, in Simeone, L., Gray, C. M., Verhoeven, A., de Götzen, A., Bakırlioğlu, Y., Zohar, H., Stead, M., and Buwert, P. (eds.), *DRS2026: Edinburgh*, 8–12 June, Edinburgh, United Kingdom.  
<https://doi.org/10.21606/drs.2026.400>

This Research Paper is brought to you for free and open access by the DRS Conference Proceedings at DRS Digital Library. It has been accepted for inclusion in DRS Biennial Conference Series by an authorized administrator of DRS Digital Library. For more information, please contact [library@thedrs.org](mailto:library@thedrs.org).

# Exploring designing for dignity in the context of digital community platforms

Fatima-Zahra Abou Eddahab-Burke<sup>a\*</sup>, Katharina Bauer<sup>b</sup>

<sup>a</sup>Faculty of Technology, Policy and Management, Delft University of Technology, the Netherlands

<sup>b</sup>Erasmus School of Philosophy, Erasmus University Rotterdam, the Netherlands

\*Corresponding author e-mail: f.aboueddahab-1@tudelft.nl

doi.org/10.21606/drs.2026.400

**Abstract:** Digital community platforms have transformed civic participation, enhancing social belonging and shared responsibility. Yet, they intensify the digital divide between people. This can be a risk to their fundamental human value of dignity. This paper explores designing for dignity within digital community platforms through a qualitative study conducted in South Holland, The Netherlands. Twenty citizens participated in semi-structured interviews to investigate their understanding, experiences, frustrations and expectations of dignity in digital interactions. The study confirmed dignity's multifaceted nature (14 distinct definitions), varied expectations of respectful treatment, and common challenges in using government digital services. Only 30% of participants felt these platforms respected their dignity, the rest expressed negative experiences such as feeling helpless, stupid, frustrated, anxious, etc. Participants emphasized needs such as language support, clarity, and navigation assistance, as well as design requirements. The findings will be validated in participatory design sessions of co-creating a dignified digital community platform.

**Keywords:** Design for dignity; Community platform; Design for values; Participation.

## 1. Introduction

We are living in the digital era, which emerged in the late twentieth century and continues to evolve at an unprecedented pace, transforming how people live, work, and interact (Muthuraman, 2023). Driven by digitalization, the integration of digital technologies into all aspects of life (Gruia, 2020), this era represents a major technological trend reshaping society, business, human interactions and traditional practices (Kasharaj et al., 2024). Today, nearly everyone is digitally connected for communication, employment, learning, or accessing essential services (Schinzel, 2025). The COVID-19 pandemic further accelerated this transformation, encouraging researchers and practitioners to explore how digital technologies can address emerging social and civic challenges (Slingerland et al., 2024). Digital tools, particularly digital community platforms (DCPs), have opened new opportunities for participation and collaboration (Cortés-Cediel et al., 2021). Citizens increasingly use DCPs to communicate, access information, navigate urban life, and engage



This work is licensed under a [Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial 4.0 International Licence](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc/4.0/).

in social and political activities (Tokovska et al., 2023). At the same time, governments have expanded their online presence by providing digital services, also referred to as government-to-citizen e-services, through dedicated digital platforms (Gil et al., 2022). In this context, DCPs have become key facilitators of civic engagement (Martinez-Gil et al., 2020), providing spaces for collaboration, knowledge sharing and collective action on social issues (James, 2022). They can promote a sense of community among people supporting social cohesion (Boulianne, 2023) and enhancing citizens' sense of belonging and responsibility toward collective well-being (Smith, 2014). However, access to and proficiency with DCPs remain uneven (Gonçalves et al., 2024). Digital illiteracy, defined as insufficient skills to navigate digital environments, continues to exclude certain groups, reinforcing social inequalities and limiting civic participation (De Filippi et al., 2020). Such exclusion widens the digital divide and may ultimately threaten individuals' sense of dignity (Dalessandro & Lovell, 2025). Dignity is widely recognized as a fundamental right (Weber, 2024) and as a core human value forming the foundation of all human rights (Mikulina et al., 2024). It serves both as a guiding principle and as protection against violations such as humiliation or degradation (Bauer, 2022). In civic contexts, researchers argue that a "commonwealth of human dignity" emerges when citizens can equally participate in shaping their community's welfare (Wang, 2023). This implies that dignity is both individual and collective (Ponce, 2016), requiring a society that guarantees each person's sense of dignity (Rao, 2011).

Ensuring that dignity is not compromised by societies, systems, individuals, or technologies requires examining how DCPs can be designed to uphold it while enabling civic participation. Designing DCPs for dignity, however, is challenging because the meaning of dignity is complex, context-dependent (Abou Eddahab-Burke & Okur, 2025), culturally bound (Grotsky, 2017) and evolving over time (Lee, 2023). As a result, universal design approaches may not be able to capture citizens' diverse understandings and expectations. This study therefore focuses on a community in the Greater Rotterdam-Rijmond Region (GR<sup>3</sup>) in South Holland, the Netherlands, to investigate how DCPs can be designed with dignity in mind. Specifically, it explores with citizens what dignity means to them, which factors may threaten it, and what it entails to design DCPs that support it.

The rest of this paper is organized as follows: Section 2 reviews relevant literature on human dignity, civic participation and digital community platforms. Section 3 outlines the interview method and its objectives. Section 4 describes how the interviews were structured. Section 5 presents their outcomes. Section 6 discusses the results. Finally, Section 7 concludes with key insights and implications for future research.

## **2. Literature investigation**

Human dignity is a fundamental guiding value of social and institutional arrangements (Hoggan-Kloubert & Hoggan, 2025). It is often understood as the inherent worth of every individual that requires respect, equality, freedom and protection from discrimination (May & Daly, 2022), and closely connected to individuals' ability to exercise autonomy and participate meaningfully in social and civic life (Delmar, 2013). These are only few definitions of dignity as there is a worldwide lack of convergence regarding its actual meaning (Bagaric & Allan, 2006).

As digital technologies increasingly mediate everyday interactions, researchers have begun to explore how technological systems influence the conditions under which dignity can be preserved or undermined. Although the specific term “digital dignity” is not widely used in academic literature, discussions about dignity in the digital era have become more prominent (Kadioglu Kumtepe & Riley, 2024). In digital contexts, dignity has been described as the respect, honour, and recognition individuals maintain while engaging in online interactions and digital activities (Zhai & Sun, 2023). Maintaining dignity in these environments requires that individuals retain control over personal information and decisions made by technological systems acting on their behalf (Inverardi, 2022). However, technological infrastructures may also challenge these principles when algorithmic processes reproduce social inequalities or reduce human autonomy (Mittelstadt et al., 2016). This phenomenon has been described as the “digital dignity divide”, referring to situations in which individuals’ perceived technological competence shapes their sense of dignity (Dalessandro & Lovell, 2025). This perspective extends earlier discussions of the digital divide by emphasizing how differences in digital skills influence social outcomes and experiences of dignity (Ragnedda, 2020). As digital technologies increasingly shape everyday life, researchers highlight the importance of incorporating human values into technological systems and examining the interaction between technological systems and human dignity (Groves et al., 2024). One influential framework is Value Sensitive Design (VSD) integrating human values into technological development (Friedman et al., 2013). VSD proposes an iterative methodology combining conceptual, empirical, and technical investigations to identify stakeholder values and translate them into design requirements (Friedman & Hendry, 2019). Complementing, participatory design emphasizes the involvement of users and stakeholders in the design process to ensure that technologies reflect their needs and experiences (Ehn, 2008). Building on this tradition, the field of design for social innovation conceptualizes design as a collaborative process through which communities develop solutions to shared societal challenges (Manzini, 2015). In this perspective, designers act as facilitators who support collaboration and experimentation among diverse actors.

Within this broader context, researchers have increasingly examined DCPs as socio-technical infrastructures supporting communication and knowledge exchange within online communities. Digital communities consist of groups of individuals who share interests or objectives and exchange knowledge for collective benefit (Ye et al., 2015). Through forums and collaborative tools, these platforms enable the dissemination and retrieval of knowledge in virtual environments (Hung & Cheng, 2013). DCPs are used across domains including healthcare, education, commerce, and public administration (Apostolou et al., 2017). In civic contexts, they can facilitate citizen interaction and participation in addressing public issues (Wei et al., 2024). However, participation remains shaped by inequalities such as limited access to digital technologies and insufficient digital skills (Fredericks & Foth, 2013). These barriers contribute to digital exclusion, restricting citizens’ opportunities to participate in civic processes (De Filippi et al., 2020).

Despite the recognition of dignity as a core value in ethical and design research, limited work provides practical guidance on operationalizing it in digital systems. Design literature often frames dignity as a foundational principle “the first principle of design on which our work is ultimately grounded and justified” (Buchanan, 2001), linking it to goals such as

empowerment, comfort, privacy, justice, and trust (Kim, 2021). However, practical insights mainly appear in domains like healthcare and law. In healthcare, preserving dignity involves designing around users' needs and fostering empathy among designers (Strickfaden & Devlieger, 2011). In the law, dignity-oriented design supports autonomy through self-service and transparent decision-making (Hagan & Kim, 2018). Though not specific to DCPs, these examples emphasize incorporating users' choices into the design process, reflecting its central role in dignity (Abou Eddahab-Burke & Okur, 2025). This aligns with participatory dignity, understood as enabling individuals to engage with others, belong to a community, and participate in collective decision-making (Daly, 2022).

Taken together, existing research shows that digital technologies shape community participation while raising concerns about preserving dignity in digital contexts. Although value-based and participatory design offer tools to embed human values, empirical understanding of defining and operationalizing dignity in DCP design remains limited.

### **3. Method**

The literature investigation highlights that, although dignity is widely recognized as a fundamental value, its meaning and implications in digital contexts remain context-dependent and insufficiently operationalized in the design of DCPs. Given that dignity is shaped by social factors, this study focuses on a specific community to enable a context-sensitive exploration of how dignity is understood and experienced in relation to DCPs. To address this, a qualitative research approach was adopted.

Following this reasoning, interviews were conducted with citizens from GR<sup>3</sup> to explore what dignity means to them, what may threaten it, and how it could be supported in DCPs. Twenty participants took part in the study (13 women, 7 men; ages 19-61). Given the dynamic and context-dependent nature of dignity, and recruitment constraints, the sample was intentionally kept small to enable a focused exploratory inquiry. While the number of participants is limited, this is consistent with the exploratory scope of the study, which seeks to develop a nuanced understanding of dignity as experienced by individuals rather than to produce generalizable findings. This approach is particularly appropriate given the conceptual complexity of dignity, where multiple interpretations and meanings may emerge and require careful exploration (Creswell, 2013). Interviews followed a semi-structured, conversational format to allow flexibility while ensuring comparability. They consisted of four successive parts (see Figure 1): (1) participants' digital experiences, (2) their understanding of dignity, (3) their experiences with government digital services and how these affect their sense of dignity, and (4) reflections on how dignity could be operationalized in the design of a DCP. Interviews lasted 50-60 minutes and were conducted either in person or online to accommodate participants.

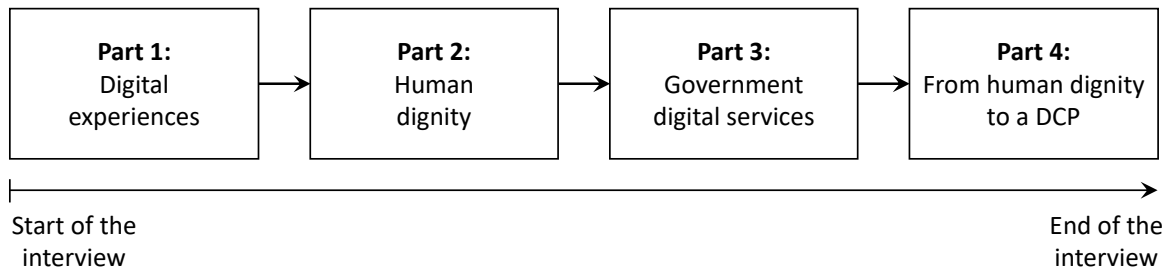


Figure 1. Interview flow of the study

The interview procedure was reviewed, and ethical approval was granted by the relevant institutional review board. Participants were informed about the study purpose, confidentiality measures, and voluntary participation, and provided informed consent prior to the start of the interviews.

#### 4. Structuring of the interviews

The interviews were structured to encourage participants to reflect on their digital experiences, their understanding of dignity, and their interaction with e-services and DCPs (see Figure 2). Questions progressed from concrete experiences to abstract reflections, supporting participants articulate opinions before engaging with design reflections. As articulated in the Method section, the interview guide comprised four interconnected parts, each one with a distinct purpose. The first part, Digital experiences, explored everyday interactions with platforms, their uses, and feelings of comforts or support, with follow-ups inviting elaboration. The second, Human dignity, explored participants' conceptual and emotional understandings of dignity, including familiarity with the term (with definitions provided if needed), its meaning, relevance, recognition in practice, and whether its inherent, earned, or socially shaped.

The third part, Government digital platforms, examined experiences with Dutch e-services, addressing familiarity, satisfaction, barriers, and impacts on dignity. It also explored autonomy and accessibility, key dignity-related values, with autonomy seen as central to dignity (Hagan & Kim, 2018) and accessibility as essential for inclusive participation and information access (Chapman et al., 2024). The final part, From human dignity to a DCP, invited participants to imagine how dignity could be embedded in future DCPs for GR<sup>3</sup>, including supportive features and design considerations. Overall, interviews progressed from concrete (Part 1) to conceptual (Part 2), reflective (Part 3) and imaginative thinking (Part 4), helping participants link experiences to broader understandings of dignity and future design insights.

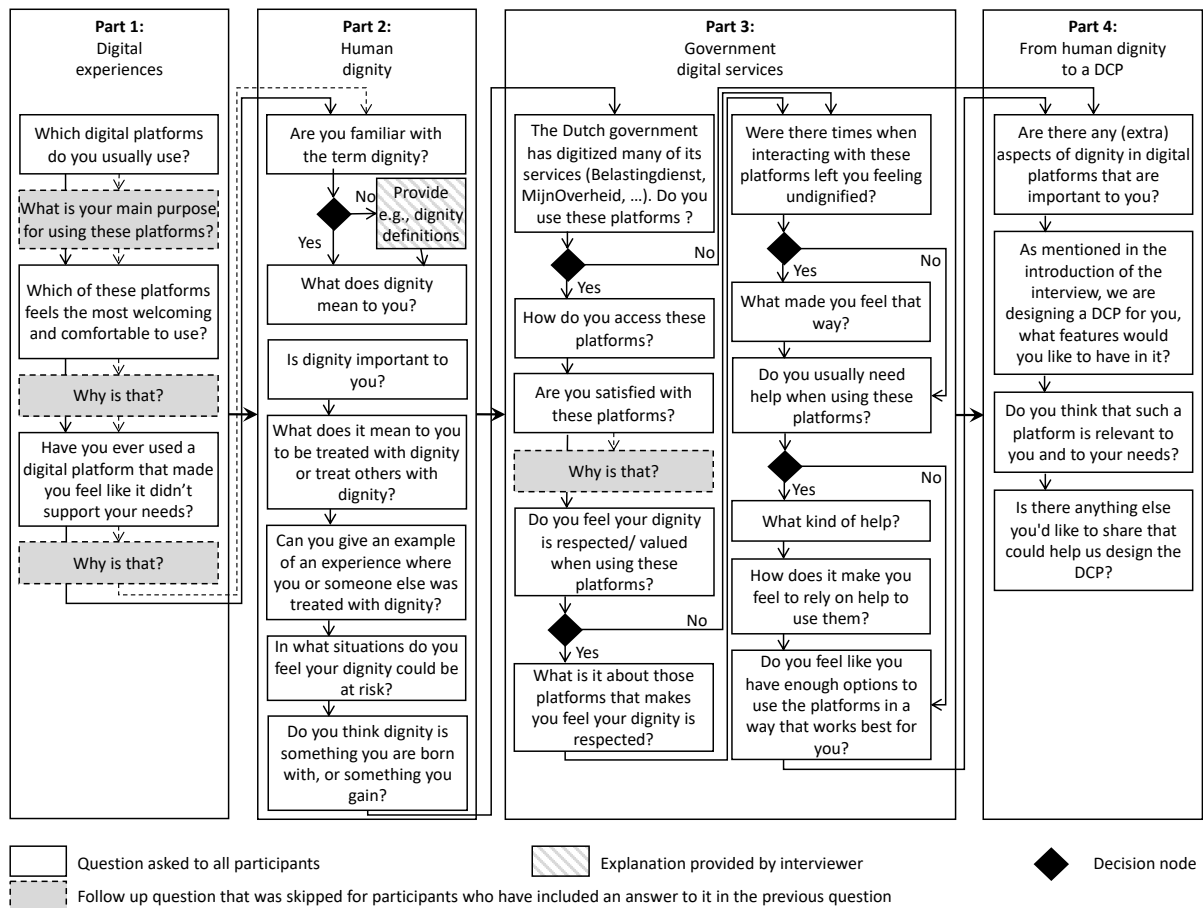


Figure 2. Structure of the interview

## 5. Description of the outcomes

To interview outcomes from 20 citizens of GR<sup>3</sup>, including 14 Generation Z participants, 5 millennials and 1 Generation X participant, are reported below following the same structure as Figure 1.

### 5.1 Part 1: Digital experiences

Participants reported using a wide range of digital platforms, including Instagram, WhatsApp, YouTube, Facebook, TikTok, Spotify, LinkedIn, Snapchat, X (formerly Twitter), Reddit, and various news applications. Clear age-related patterns emerged. Participants under 30 used Instagram, TikTok, and Spotify more frequently, while those over 30 years relied primarily on Facebook and WhatsApp. Usage purposes varied, with participants using digital platforms for entertainment (65%), communication (60%), news (20%), and professional tasks (15%). When asked which platforms felt most welcoming, participants under 30 favoured Instagram, whereas those over 30 preferred WhatsApp. These platforms were described as “easy to use”, “visual”, “straightforward”, “comfortable”, “personalized”, “tailored”, “intuitive”, “simple”, and “not overwhelming”. In contrast, platforms perceived as less supportive included Facebook, X, and some banking applications. Reported reasons for this perception included “too much going on”, “complex”, “feels uneasy ... losing some level

of privacy”, “I didn’t understand how to navigate”, and “I didn’t understand ... deleted them.”

## 5.2 Part 2: Human dignity

To explore how dignity is understood among GR<sup>3</sup> citizens, all participants were first asked about their familiarity with the concept. All reported some level of awareness. 13 expressed clear confidence (“Definitely”, “Yes, I am”), while the remaining 7 described partial or uncertain familiarity (“I think so”, “I’ve heard it many times... but can’t define it precisely”, “It’s such a broad word”). When asked to define dignity in their own terms, participants provided fourteen distinct interpretations (Figure 3). The most frequent definition centred on respect, both towards oneself and others (“... respect towards the others and towards yourself”), self-worth (“it has a lot to do with self-worth and how you feel about yourself ...”), and understanding people’s needs and problems (“... be acceptable and like understanding of other people's needs and like problems”). Other meanings included freedom (“the power to do what you want and that’s freedom”), being equal (“acknowledge the other as equal”), human right (“dignity means human rights. To me it means acknowledging that I am human and my dignity is a live experience if I have human rights that are recognized by the system”), pride (“dignity has a lot to do with pride”), being humble (“... it also means being humble and stay grounded”), being safe (“... finding yourself safe in some space”), being treated fairly (“everyone should be treated fairly”), compliance with God’s words (“dignity is to comply with god's words. If you comply with god's words and do good then you have dignity”), self-correspondence (“it's kind of connected to your ego ... I would say it's based on your perception of how you think the world looks at you”), (“dignity has to do with respect and honour”), and independence (“it's respecting each person's independence”). Overall, 90% of participants confirmed that dignity holds personal importance.

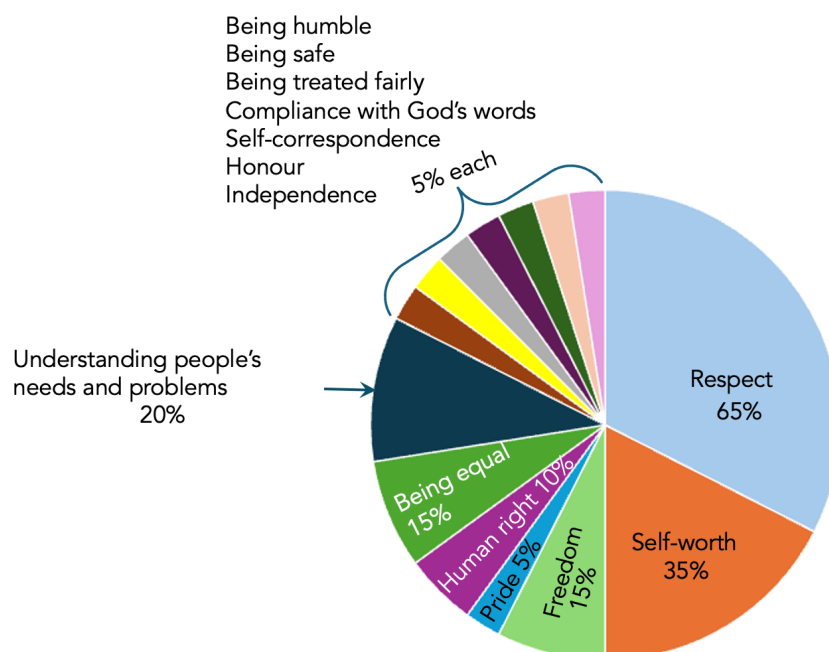


Figure 3. Definitions of dignity as reported by the participants

Participants were then asked what it means to be treated with dignity or to treat others with dignity. Their answers expanded the previous definitions. Figure 4 presents the various answers to this question, with word size reflecting their relative prominence in participants' responses. When asked to recall specific experiences, examples recalled these definitions.



Figure 4. Meanings of dignity as expressed through participants' lived experiences of treating and being treated with dignity

To explore the opposite perspective, participants were asked to identify situations in which their dignity felt at risk. The most frequently mentioned threats were disrespect (50%), discrimination (45%), abuse of hierarchy power (30%), stereotypes (20%), being ignore or excluded (20%), and being unequally treated (10%). These responses mirror the definitions of dignity reported earlier, reinforcing a consistent understanding of supports or undermines one's sense of dignity. Finally, participants were asked whether they consider dignity as innate or acquired. This distinction affects how dignity is understood, protected, and promoted in everyday life. Answers varied considerably. 40% considered dignity as innate ("everyone is born with dignity"), 30% believed it is acquired through life experiences ("dignity is something you gain growing up and during your life"), 25% described it as both ("it's definitely socially constructed ... but it starts when you're born"), and 5% viewed it as neither ("I would say dignity is something you choose").

### 5.3 Part 3: Government digital services

After exploring how participants understand dignity in daily life, the discussion turned to their experiences with government digital platforms. Nineteen out of twenty participants (95%) reported using such services, and the analysis below is based on their responses. To understand how participants engage with these platforms, they were first asked how they access them. Most (11) used a laptop, one used only a mobile application and four alternated between both. Laptops were preferred for clarity ("Websites (via laptop) because it's more clear") and the ability to translate content ("a lot easier to translate stuff on my laptop"), whereas phones were valued for quick access ("definitely the app, because you can log in easily with it"). When asked about satisfaction, ten participants expressed being satisfied with these platforms ("I had a very positive experience with the digital platforms, so yes"), six partially satisfied ("I think I'm not fully satisfied"), two dissatisfied ("not really"), and one remained neutral ("not so much, I mean I find it neutral"). Positive comments emphasized that these platforms serve as good substitutes for paperwork, become easy to use once familiar, and save time by allowing users to manage processes from home. Negative remarks focused on quick timeouts, unclear navigation, limited language options,

and the need for technical skills. Some added that finding information required excessive effort and that guidance was lacking.

Participants were then asked whether they felt their dignity was taken into account while interacting with governmental digital platforms. Six answered yes, two partially, and two no, three did not answer, and five reported seeing no connection between dignity and platform use. Those who felt their dignity was considered in a way or another mentioned reasons such as privacy and protection of personal information (“I feel like I have privacy with my information and therefore I feel respected as a citizen”), (personalized) user support (“having the information filled out already ... annoying work has been done for me”), absence of excessive notifications, and a perceived sense of empathy and care behind the design of certain platforms (“it feels easy ... I feel like there was a lot of empathy and caring behind developing the website so overall I’m happy”), non-discriminatory treatment (“I haven't noticed any discrimination towards me as an international person”), ease of use (“I think overall it's just because it's a really nice user experience and it feels easy”) and clarity of interaction (“the instructions are clear”). To capture the opposite experience, participants were asked if they had ever felt undignified when interacting with these platforms. Thirteen participants said yes, four said no, and two did not provide an answer (both of whom had also refrained from responding to the previous two questions). Those who responded affirmatively reported reasons such as frustration when answers could not be found (“... navigate through the whole website to do one thing that really annoys me and makes me feel frustrated”), inability to contact support and the limited FAQs (“the impossibility of getting in contact and also the FAQs that are really limited”), complex or confusing language (“some of the platforms use very complicated language and even when you translate it, I still am confused ... I feel like it's kind of on purpose to make me feel marginalized”), and feelings of discrimination (“It feels discriminatory almost and that makes me feel frustrated and I guess takes away my dignity”). Technical issues, such as system maintenance, or platform downtime also contributed to frustration (“when they are updating the platforms or doing the maintenance and I can't do anything, so I have to wait, and it makes me feel a little bit frustrated”).

Participants were next asked whether they required help to use these e-services. Ten used them independently, three mostly independently, two mostly with help, and four alternated. Those needing assistance mentioned language barriers, understanding instructions, and navigating the platforms. Many relied on browser translation tools (“I need the help of the translate tool on Google... the first time I had to fill in my taxes, I had to sit down with my mom because I didn't know how it worked”), friends, family or colleagues (“my roommate and I do it together because we both don't really know what's going on”). Some participants referred to challenges faced by newcomers or non-Dutch speakers (“It's almost impossible for immigrants to navigate these websites if they don't speak the language or know where to go”). Some used help desks or chatbots when information was unclear. Others described the process as collaborative problem-solving (“It's like a two-person process to understand the Dutch and what they want from us ... we were mostly together to double-check if the translations were correct”). Following this, participants who needed some sort of assistance were asked how this made them feel. Their feelings are summarized in Figure 5 ((x2) in the figure represents that the feeling was expressed by two different participants).

The final question of this section asked whether participants felt they had enough options to use the platforms in ways that worked best for them. Ten participants said yes, eight said no, and one did not answer. Those who answered no explained that they lacked needed options and were forced to adapt to the system. Others expressed ongoing difficulties and desire for simpler, more user-centred design (“It’s just a struggle. I wish it was easier”, “I’m lacking the human element... I wish they would ask people how to design ...”). Feelings of inadequacy were also mentioned (“I feel useless sometimes ... if I knew the language, it would probably be easier”). Some suggested integrating multiple services into a single, more accessible platform (“combine all those apps into one and have everything in one place... in terms of accessibility, it would also be easier”).

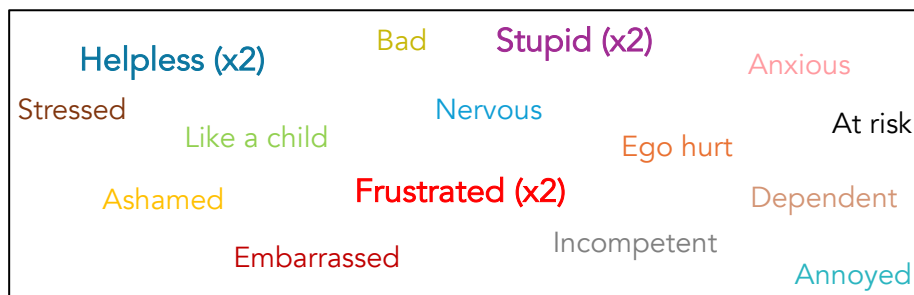


Figure 5. Reported feelings associated with relying on help when using governmental digital platforms

#### 5.4 Part 4: From human dignity to a DCP

This final section aimed to guide participants from reflecting on dignity to imagining how it could be operationalized and embedded in a DCP. To begin, they were asked whether there were any additional aspects of dignity in DCPs that they considered important. Twelve participants (60%) responded “no”, stating that these aspects had already emerged in Part 3. The remaining eight highlighted specific elements. Two emphasized the need for more language options, especially English (“If they improved their digital platforms like having English options then my dignity wouldn’t take so much of a hit”), two mentioned privacy and transparency (“I think privacy ... I just don't know what's happening to my personal data ... I think being transparent is also a part of acknowledging someone's dignity”), and two highlighted indiscrimination as essential (“... needs to work on that more and not discriminate citizens through an algorithm”). One participant suggested incorporating a chatbot to support answering user questions (“Having a chatbot ... if I have questions ... at least this chatbot can answer, and for me, it's a moment of dignity ...”), and another emphasized diversity and inclusion, noting the simpler and more accessible design for people with different backgrounds and education levels (“I'm really an advocate for diversity and inclusivity ... not everyone speaks the same language, not everyone has the same level of education which would mean that sometimes you have to make things more simple and also more accessible to everybody.”).

Building on these reflections, participants were then invited to translate their needs into concrete design input/ requirements for the DCP for their community. They were reminded that although the researchers are responsible for designing the DCP, they remain facilitators in this participatory approach. This means that the purpose and content of the DCP are entirely for their community to define. No requirements or constraints were imposed by the

researchers. Participants were therefore asked to describe features they would like the platform to incorporate. Thirteen types of answers were provided and later grouped into seven thematic clusters: (1) community events, news and updates, (2) language, (3) community support, (4) clarity and simplicity, (5) visibility and networking and (6) voting. Details and representative quotes for each cluster are provided in Figure 6.

Since the platform is intended for the same community represented in this study, participants were also asked whether they considered it relevant to them and to their needs. All twenty participants (100%) answered yes. Finally, participants were invited to share any additional suggestions to support the DCP's design. Only a few added remarks. One suggested including "different kinds of events for everybody's taste in Rotterdam or even different community projects," noting that this could encourage volunteering and strengthen the city "join volunteering opportunities and contribute to Rotterdam". The same participant recommended adding practical city information, such as "alerts throughout the city... for example, when the tram is not working". Others emphasized the importance of making the platform "clear for people to understand and not overload them with information". Inclusion was also mentioned, with one participant noting the need to "include people from different backgrounds... different neighbourhoods and different experiences". Some suggested creating a platform that feels less formal than government websites, explaining that "government platforms are usually very serious... if you want people to use them more regularly, it could be a little bit more fun". Another participant concluded by highlighting visibility and accessibility "just make sure that it's something that's easy to find, and that people can have awareness of its existence."

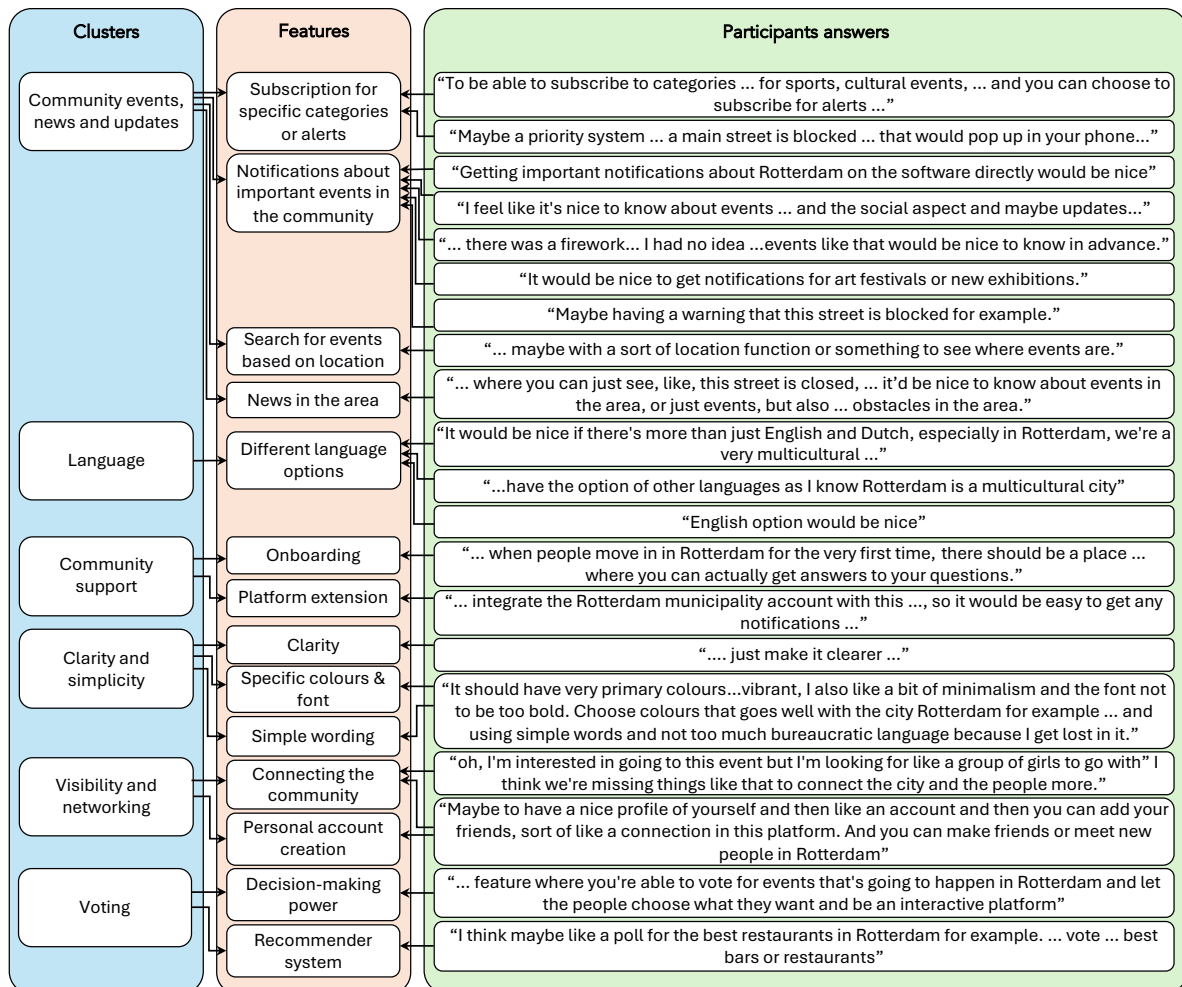


Figure 6. Participants' proposed features for the DCP and their corresponding clusters and quotes

## 6. Discussion of the results

Based on the answers of the semi-structured interviews conducted with 20 participants from GR<sup>3</sup>, it was observed that although it is a relatively small set of participants, they had different needs, different understanding and interpretation of dignity and how it could be operationalized in the digital space. Across all four parts of the study, the findings show that dignity is not expressed as a single, stable value but as a set of interrelated meanings emerging from participants' experiences, definitions, and interactions with different digital systems. Rather than converging toward a unified understanding, participants articulated dignity through multiple, sometimes overlapping interpretations, indicating that dignity operates as a context-dependent and experience-driven value.

Most participants are aware of the value of dignity and its importance, yet half of them found it difficult to explain. This is aligned with the literature, as researchers claim that although dignity is challenging to define, it still holds an important significance in our lives (Mozaffari, 2011; Kretzmer & Klein, 2021). Participants provided a total of fourteen definitions of dignity (see Figure 3) and thirteen definitions of dignified treatment (see Figure 4). This is aligned with researchers claim that dignity does not have a fixed meaning (Abou

Eddahab-Burke & Okur, 2025). It is an umbrella concept that intertwines with several values and remains challenging to scope and precisely define (Rolston & Lanigan, 2009). Importantly, these definitions are reflected consistently in participants' reported experiences of both dignity and indignity, suggesting that individuals draw on similar underlying value structures when interpreting and evaluating digital interactions. Consistent with existing literature, participants indicated that their dignity could be threatened by experiences of disrespect, discrimination, hierarchical abuse, stereotyping, inequality, and social exclusion (Waldron, 2012; Boso, 2017). This suggests that a dignified DCP (DDCP) should be designed to actively prevent such forms of harm and marginalization.

In relation to digitalization, most participants are well integrated in the digital space and use digital tools regularly for both personal and professional purposes. They also make frequent use of governmental e-services, that more than half access via laptop, which is opposite to what is claimed in the literature, that after COVID-19, "most users of digital community platforms prefer accessing these platforms through their smartphone applications" (Albeshir & Alhussain, 2021). They generally view these platforms as timesaving and an effective substitute for paperwork. They are satisfied when these platforms are intuitive, personalized, easy to use, as well as have a clear layout and only few advertisements. However, many are concerned in terms of privacy and transparency and encounter challenges such as complex platform structures, unclear navigation, and difficulties finding answers to their questions, or lacking introductory guidance making it difficult to find information, often resulting in significant time loss and frustration. While  $\frac{1}{4}$  of the participants could not see a direct link between digital platforms/ e-services and dignity, the majority did perceive it. On the one hand, their dignity felt considered via privacy, user support and absence of excessive notifications, empathy, and indiscriminate. On the other hand, their dignity was put at stake through the lack of support (language support, technical support, answering questions), and the lack of empathy leading to frustration, and to feeling marginalized and discriminated. These findings indicate that dignity in digital contexts is not only linked to system functionality, but also to how users interpret the responsiveness and intentions of the system. This highlights the relational and experiential nature of human dignity in digital interactions. For almost half of the participants, using certain digital platforms required assistance in platform navigation, translation, and explanation of instructions. This lack of autonomy touched upon their sense of dignity and made them experience a wide range of negative feelings (see Figure 5). The need for assistance reveals how dignity is closely tied to users' ability to act independently within digital environments, and how reliance on others can negatively affect self-perception and confidence.

The perceived positive and negative experiences linked to participants' dignity were translated by them into opportunities for building a DDCP tailored to their needs. Participants within the same community have different needs in terms of user experience, DCP (clusters of) features and DCP characteristics, summarized in Figure 7. The diversity of proposed features further reinforces that dignity cannot be addressed through a single design solution, but requires flexible and adaptive approaches that accommodate varying user needs, capabilities, and expectations. Accordingly, these findings indicate that designing DDCPs requires moving beyond predefined value frameworks toward context-sensitive, participatory design approaches in which dignity is continuously interpreted and negotiated with the community.

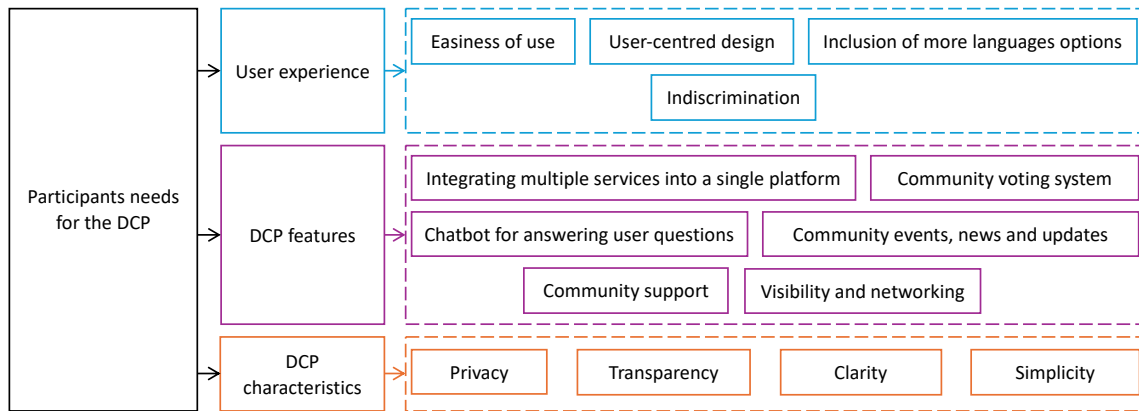


Figure 7. Participants' needs for the DCP

## 7. Conclusions and future work

This study explored how dignity can be understood and designed for within the context of DCPs. Through interviews with citizens from the Greater Rotterdam-Rijnmond region, the findings revealed how participants define dignity, how they experience it in digital interactions, and which conditions and situations support or threaten it. Participants' wide range of dignity definition (respect, self-worth, freedom, pride, being equal, understanding people's needs and problems, being humble, being safe, being treated fairly, compliance with God's words, self-correspondence, honour, and independence) confirmed the complex and dynamic nature of the common understanding of dignity. They associated dignified digital experiences with clarity, empathy, accessibility, fairness, privacy, independence, and indiscrimination, while indignity was linked to exclusion, language barriers, unclear navigation, and lack of responsive support. Designing for dignity thus requires attending not only to usability but also to the social, emotional, and relational dimensions of digital interactions.

Findings highlight the importance of dignity in everyday interactions, showing the need to prioritize it in digital design and avoid compromising users' dignity. Participants' experiences reveal dignity as a lived condition that can be reinforced or diminished through the ways digital systems are constructed. They challenged dominant narratives in digital innovation, emphasizing not computational performance, "smarter" designs or automation, but the need to restore aspects of social connection and community that digitalization has potentially eroded. They envisioned DCPs that enable engagement, connection, and belonging, underscoring the need to keep the human dimension central in digital transformation. Key needs for a DDCP include simplicity, diversity, inclusion, and transparency to support participation and connection.

This research is exploratory and based on a relatively small sample of twenty participants, which limits the generalizability of the findings. Recruitment constraints may have influenced the diversity of the final sample. Additionally, as dignity is context-dependent, individual interpretations may vary. Relying on self-reports, it captures perceptions rather than real-time interactions. Future research should therefore expand diversity and explore additional communities to examine how dignity may be differently understood across contexts.

Building on this exploratory research, future work will focus on participatory co-creation. The next step involves organizing participatory sessions with citizens of the GR<sup>3</sup> in which the findings of this study are shared back with the participants. During these sessions, participants will be invited to reflect on the research team's understanding of their needs, collaboratively translate these insights into concrete design requirements, and prioritize or rank these requirements to determine what features matter most to them. Following this, the research team will develop an initial prototype of the DCP. Participants will then be involved again to evaluate and co-enhance the prototype in iterative cycles, ensuring that their perspectives continue to augment the design. This process will result in a DDCP that can be offered to the broader community of GR<sup>3</sup> and, more importantly, it acknowledges a central insight from this study that designing for dignity means restoring participation, accessibility, equality, and inclusion to digital spaces that have too often diminished them.

**Acknowledgements:** The authors acknowledge the trust and the financial support provided by Resilient Delta – Convergence, which made this research possible. We also sincerely thank all the participants who shared their time and experiences during the interviews. Their valuable contributions were essential to the completion of this study.

## 8. References

- Abou Eddahab-Burke, F., & Okur, Ö. (2025). Dignified Engineering Education: An Introduction. Proceedings of IEEE EDUCON 2025: 16th IEEE Global Engineering Education Conference, London, April 22-25, 2025. <https://doi.org/10.1109/EDUCON62633.2025.11016624>.
- Albesher, A. S., & Alhussain, T. (2021). Evaluating and comparing the usability of privacy in WhatsApp, twitter, and snapchat. *International Journal of Advanced Computer Science and Applications*, 12(8), 251-259. <https://doi.org/10.14569/IJACSA.2021.0120829>.
- Apostolou, B., Bélanger, F., & Schaupp, L. C. (2017). Online communities: Satisfaction and continued use intention. *Information Research*, 22(4), 774.
- Bagaric, M., & Allan, J. (2006). The vacuous concept of dignity. *Journal of Human Rights*, 5(2), 257-270. <https://doi.org/10.1080/14754830600653603>.
- Bauer, K. (2022). 'Do not make yourself a worm' – Reconsidering dignity as a duty towards oneself. *Studies in Law Politics and Society*, 88, 23-40. <https://doi.org/10.1108/S1059-433720220000088002>.
- Boso, L. A. (2017). Dignity, inequality, and stereotypes. *Washington Law Review*, 92(3), 1119-1128.
- Boulianne, S. (2023). Standby ties that mobilize: Social media platforms and civic engagement. *Social Science Computer Review*, 41(3), 1001-1016. <https://doi.org/10.1177/089443932110676>.
- Buchanan, R. (2001). Human dignity and human rights: Thoughts on the principles of human-centered design. *Design Issues*, 17(3), 35-39. <https://doi.org/10.1162/074793601750357178>.
- Chapman, K., Dixon, A., Ehrlich, C., & Kendall, E. (2024). Dignity and the importance of acknowledgement of personhood for people with disability. *Qualitative Health Research*, 34(1-2), 141-153. <https://doi.org/10.1177/10497323231204562>.

- Cortés-Cediel, M. E., Cantador, I., & Bolívar, M. P. R. (2021). Analyzing citizen participation and engagement in European smart cities. *Social Science Computer Review*, 39(4), 592-626. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0894439319877478>.
- Creswell, J. W. (2013). *Qualitative inquiry and research design: Choosing among five approaches*. Sage Publications.
- Daly, E. (2022). Judicial Activitydemocratic Activity: The Democratising Effects of Dignity. In Bedford, D., Dupré, C., Halmi, G. & Kapotas, P. (Eds). (2022). *Human Dignity and Democracy in Europe*, 19-35. <https://doi.org/10.4337/9781789902846>.
- Dalessandro, C., & Lovell, A. (2025). The digital dignity divide: Work, technology, and well-being outcomes among US employees. *Social Currents*, 12(4), 370-388. <https://doi.org/10.1177/23294965251356407>.
- De Filippi, F., Coscia, C., Cocina, G. G., Lazzari, G., & Manzo, S. (2020). Digital participatory platforms for civic engagement: a new way of participating in society?: Analysis of case studies in four EU countries. *International Journal of Urban Planning and Smart Cities*, 1(1), 1-21. <https://doi.org/10.4018/IJUPSC.2020010101>.
- Delmar, C. (2013). The interplay between autonomy and dignity: summarizing patients voices. *Medicine, Health Care and Philosophy*, 16(4), 975-981. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11019-012-9416-6>.
- Ehn, P. (2008). Participation in design things. *Proceedings of PDC'08: Participatory Design Conference*, Bloomington Indiana, October 1 – 4, 2008.
- Fredericks, J., & Foth, M. (2013). Augmenting public participation: Enhancing planning outcomes through the use of social media and web 2.0. *Australian Planner*, 50(3), 244-256. <https://doi.org/10.1080/07293682.2012.748083>.
- Friedman, B., & Hendry, D. G. (2019). *Value sensitive design: Shaping technology with moral imagination*. MIT Press.
- Friedman, B., Kahn, P.H., Borning, A., Huldtgren, A. (2013). Value Sensitive Design and Information Systems. In: Doorn, N., Schuurbijs, D., van de Poel, I., Gorman, M. (eds) *Early engagement and new technologies: Opening up the laboratory*. *Philosophy of Engineering and Technology*, Vol 16, 55-95. [https://doi.org/10.1007/978-94-007-7844-3\\_4](https://doi.org/10.1007/978-94-007-7844-3_4).
- Gil, O., Cortés-Cediel, M. E., & Cantador, I. (2022). Citizen participation and the rise of digital media platforms in smart governance and smart cities. In Khosrow-Pour, M., Clarke, S., Jennex, M. E. & Anttiroiko, A. (Eds.) (2022). *Research Anthology on Citizen Engagement and Activism for Social Change*, 1186-1202. <https://doi.org/10.4018/978-1-6684-3706-3.ch065>.
- Gonçalves, J. E., Ioannou, I., & Verma, T. (2024). No one-size-fits-all: Multi-actor perspectives on public participation and digital participatory platforms. *Philosophical Transactions A*, 382(2285), 20240111. <https://doi.org/10.1098/rsta.2024.0111>.
- Grodsky, B. (2017). From Lenin to Wałęsa: Communists, anti-communists and the common call for human dignity. *East European Politics and Societies*, 31(01), 115-136. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0888325416674069>.
- Groves, K. S., Margolis, J., & Gibson, C. (2024). Cultivating the experience of dignity at work during digital transformation: Protective & proactive strategies for leaders and organizations. *Organizational Dynamics*, 54(2025), 101103. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.orgdyn.2024.101103>.

- Gruia, L. A., Bibu, N., Nastase, M., Roja, A., & Cristache, N. (2020). Approaches to Digitalization within Organizations. *Review of International Comparative Management/Revista de Management Comparat International*, 21(3), 287-297. <https://doi.org/10.24818/RMCI.2020.3.287>.
- Hagan, M., & Kim, M. (2018). Design for Dignity and Procedural Justice. In Chung, W. & Shin, C. (Eds.). (2018). *Proceedings of AHFE 2017: Advances in Intelligent Systems and Computing*, Vol. 585. 135-145. [https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-60495-4\\_15](https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-60495-4_15).
- Hoggan-Kloubert, T., & Hoggan, C. (2025). Democracy and human dignity. In Hoggan-Kloubert, T., & Hoggan, C. (Eds.), *Learning for democracy*. Palgrave Studies in Adult Education and Lifelong Learning. Palgrave Macmillan. [https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-032-05269-8\\_1](https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-032-05269-8_1).
- Hung, S.W. and Cheng, M.J. (2013). Are you ready for knowledge sharing? An empirical study of virtual communities, *Computers & Education*, 62, 8-17. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.compedu.2012.09.017>.
- Inverardi, P. (2022). The Challenge of Human Dignity in the Era of Autonomous Systems. In: Werthner, H., Prem, E., Lee, E.A., Ghezzi, C. (eds) *Perspectives on Digital Humanism*. Springer, Cham. [https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-86144-5\\_4](https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-86144-5_4).
- James, P. (2022). Civic technology: A chutes and ladders analysis of transformative potential. *Journal of Smart Cities and Society*, 1(1), 3-15. <https://doi.org/10.3233/SCS-210117>.
- Kadioglu Kumtepe, C. C., & Riley, S. (2024). Digital dignity: The shibboleth of digitalization in Europe?. *Law, Technology and Humans*, 6(3), 156-169. <https://doi.org/10.5204/lthj.3547>.
- Kasharaj, K., & Maione, G., Üç, M. (2024). Digitalization in Accounting and Audit: Exploring the Relationship of Perceived Behavioral Control, Trust in Digital Technologies, and Perceived Value of Technology. In Visvizi, A., Troisi, O., Corvello, V. & Grimaldi, M. (Eds.). (2024). *Proceedings of RIIFORUM2024: Springer Proceedings in Complexity*, 869-879. [https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-031-78623-5\\_66](https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-031-78623-5_66).
- Kim, M. (2021). A study of dignity as a principle of service design. *International Journal of Design*, 15(3), 87-100.
- Kretzmer, D., & Klein, E. (2021). *The Concept of Human Dignity in Human Rights Discourse*. Brill.
- Lee, Y. L. (2023). *The transformative evolution of human dignity in Asia's modern state-building projects-human dignity in Asia: Dialogue between law and culture*. Edited by Jimmy Chia-Shin Hsu. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2022. 386 pp. US \$140.00. *Asian Journal of Law and Society*, 10(3), 550-552. <https://doi.org/10.1017/als.2023.17>.
- Martinez-Gil, J., Pichler, M., Turkanović, M., Beranič, T., Gradišnik, M., Lentini, G., ... & Belet, C. (2020). Framework for Data Analysis in the Context of the Smart Villages. In Kó, A., Francesconi, E., Kotsis, G., Tjoa, A. & Khalil, I. (Eds.). (2020). *Proceedings of EGOVIS2020: Electronic Government and the Information Systems Perspective*, Vol. 12394, 31-45. [https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-58957-8\\_3](https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-58957-8_3).
- May, J. R., & Daly, E. (2022). Introduction to Dignity Law. *Journal of Disaster Research*, 17(3), 301-307. <https://doi.org/10.20965/jdr.2022.p0301>.
- Mikulina, M., Mikulin, V., & Pogrebytskyi, M. (2024). Human dignity as a person's projection of integrity. *Trans/Form/Ação*, 47(2), e02400183. <https://doi.org/10.1590/0101-3173.2024.v47.n2.e02400183>.
- Mittelstadt, B. D., Allo, P., Taddeo, M., Wachter, S., & Floridi, L. (2016). The ethics of algorithms: Mapping the debate. *Big Data & Society*, 3(2), 2053951716679679. <https://doi.org/10.1177/2053951716679679>.

- Mozaffari, M. H. (2011). Human dignity: An islamic perspective. *An International Journal of Academic Research*, 54(4), 2-15.
- Muthuraman, D. S. (2023). Rejuvenate the digital marketing strategies. *International Journal of Research and Innovation in Social Science*, 7(6), 869-874. <https://doi.org/10.47772/ijriss.2023.7669>.
- Ponce, S. (2016). Knowledge Workers and Creativity Class: From Hopes and Ideals to Day-to-Day Reality. In Davila Gomez, A. M. & Crowther, D. (Eds.). *Human Dignity and Managerial Responsibility*: Routledge, 97-126.
- Ragnedda, M. (2020). Traditional Digital Inequalities: Digital Divide. In: *Enhancing Digital Equity*. Palgrave Macmillan, Cham. [https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-49079-9\\_3](https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-49079-9_3).
- Rao, N. (2011). Three concepts of dignity in constitutional law. *Notre Dame Law Review*, 86, 183-271.
- Rolston, H., & Lanigan, B. T. (2009). Human Uniqueness and Human Dignity: Persons in Nature. In Lanigan, B. T. (Ed.), *Human Dignity and Bioethics*: Nova Science Publishers, 93-110.
- Schinzel, U. (2025). Online dating platforms-and their link to responsible leadership and uncertainty avoidance-the key impact of imagination. *Global Business and Economics Review*, 33(3-4), 321-338. <https://doi.org/10.1504/gber.2025.10062214>.
- Slingerland, G., Mikusch, G., Tappert, S., Paraschivoiu, I., Vettori, B., & Tellioglu, H. (2024). The role of digital technologies in urban co-creation practices. *Human Technology*, 20(2), 244–284. <https://doi.org/10.14254/1795-6889.2024.20-2.3>.
- Smith, J. (2014). Civic engagement tools for urban conservation. In Bandarin, F., & van Oers, R. (Eds.). (2014). *Reconnecting the City: The Historic Urban Landscape Approach and the Future of Urban Heritage*, 221-248. <https://doi.org/10.1002/9781118383940.ch9>.
- Strickfaden, M., & Devlieger, P. (2011). Empathy through accumulating techné: Designing an accessible metro. *The Design Journal*, 14(2), 207-229. <https://doi.org/10.2752/175630611X12984592780041>.
- Tokovska, M., Ferreira, V. N., Vallušova, A., & Seberíni, A. (2023). E-Government—The inclusive way for the future of digital citizenship. *Societies*, 13(6), 141. <https://doi.org/10.3390/soc13060141>.
- Wei, H., Yang, C., Wen, C., & Wang, Y. (2024). Design of a digital platform for carbon generalized system of preferences communities based on the TAO model of three-way decisions. *Applied Sciences*, 14(16), 7423. <https://doi.org/10.3390/app14167423>.
- Waldron, J. (2012). *Dignity, Rank, and Rights*. Oxford University Press.
- Wang, G. (2023). Human Dignity in International Law from a Chinese Traditional Cultural Perspective. In Reisman, W. M. & Pati, R. (Eds.). (2023). *Human Flourishing: The End of Law*, 69-94. [https://doi.org/10.1163/9789004524835\\_006](https://doi.org/10.1163/9789004524835_006).
- Weber, A. (2024). Human Dignity. In Babeck, W. & Weber, A. (Eds.). (2024). *Writing Constitutions*: Springer. [https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-031-39622-9\\_3](https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-031-39622-9_3).
- Ye, H.J., Feng, Y. and Choi, B.C. (2015). Understanding knowledge contribution in online knowledge communities: a model of community support and forum leader support, *Electronic Commerce Research and Applications*, 14(1), 34-45. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.elerap.2014.11.002>.
- Zhai, S., & Sun, H. (2023). On the Influence of Online Conversations: A Human Dignity Perspective. *Proceedings of PACIS 2023: Pacific Asia Conference on Information Systems*, Nanchang, July 8–12.

About the Authors:

**Fatima-Zahra Abou Eddahab-Burke** is an Assistant Professor at the Faculty of Technology, Policy and Management at the Delft University of Technology. Her research focuses on integrating the value of human dignity in the design of interactive systems and learning pathways.

**Katharina Bauer** is an Associate Professor at the Erasmus School of Philosophy, Erasmus University Rotterdam. Her research focuses on experiential dimensions of dignity and on the impact of current societal, technological, and ecological challenges on ethical ideals and moral agents.