Friedrich-Alexander-Universität Erlangen-Nürnberg (FAU) has established a new professorship focusing on digital sovereignty. The University is pleased to welcome a leading expert involved in shaping the digital transformation to the post, Johannes Helbig. With its new subject area, FAU is expanding its expertise in the area of digitalisation, data science and digital humanities, acting as a pioneer among German universities.

According to Johannes Helbig, ‘digitalisation is transforming our world. It is disruptive, all-encompassing and irreversible, and will change the fundamental structure of our economy, our society and our understanding of ourselves.’ For many years, Helbig was the Chief Information Officer and Chief Innovation Officer at Deutsche Post DHL, he is the chairman of the board at Cross-Business-Architecture Lab and has been heavily involved in shaping the German government’s forward-looking projects ‘Industry 4.0’ and ‘Smart Service World’. ‘Digital sovereignty addresses the question of how we can shape and guide this transformation, tailoring it to suit our intentions and values.’ This applies in particular to matters of freedom, social justice and economic performance in the new social and economic order.

The new subject area takes a multi-disciplinary approach. Located in the new Department of Data Science, its research covers a number of different academic disciplines, ranging from MINT, to business studies, social studies, law, philosophy and ethics. ‘Especially the humanities and social sciences have a guiding role to play with respect to digital transformation,’ emphasises Helbig. One of the aims pursued by the professorship is to encourage and guide discourse between the various disciplines not only within FAU but also across Germany and the whole of Europe. The research teams are made up of experts chosen flexibly on the basis of their expertise for the issue in question rather than strictly according to where they are based.

Just recently, at the research summit in Berlin, Chancellor Angela Merkel stressed the significance of digital sovereignty for the future. As a first concrete step under the Hightech Agenda Bavaria, FAU has incorporated this field of study into the Department of Data Science, thereby making a contribution towards tackling the technological and sociopolitical challenges currently facing us all.

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