Digitalised Welfare: Systems for Both Seeing and Working with Mess

Authors : Amelia Morris, Lizzie Coles-Kemp, Will Jones
Abstract : This paper examines how community welfare initiatives transform how individuals use and experience an ostensibly universal welfare system. This paper argues that the digitalisation of welfare overlooks the complex reality of being unemployed or in low-wage work, and erects digital barriers to accessing welfare. Utilising analysis of ethnographic research in food banks and community groups, the paper explores the ways that Universal Credit has not abolished face-to-face support, but relocated it to unofficial sites of welfare. The apparent efficiency and simplicity of the state's digital welfare apparatus, therefore, is produced not by reducing the 'messiness' of welfare, but by rendering it invisible within the digital framework. Using the analysis of the study's data, this paper recommends three principles of service design that would render the messiness visible to the state.
Keywords : welfare, digitalisation, food bank, Universal Credit
Conference Title : ICST 2021 : International Conference on Sociology of Technology
Conference Location : Barcelona, Spain
Conference Dates : March 04-05, 2021