



DSI Roadmap 2026/27

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1. Introduction

1.1 Background

Digitalization challenges existing paradigms, enables new forms of research and teaching, and requires new skills in a rapidly changing social reality. The UZH [Digital Society Initiative](#) (DSI) aims to help shape the digital transformation of society and science. UZH's goal is to be recognized nationally and internationally as a center of excellence for issues related to digitalization.

The DSI developed as a bottom-up initiative and was conceived in 2015 by a working group of professors from all seven faculties at UZH. After the concept was finalized, the DSI was launched in September 2016 at an official ceremony attended by Dr. Silvia Steiner, Director of Education for the Canton of Zurich, and Johann Schneider-Ammann, President of the Swiss Confederation.

In its first year (2016), the DSI focused on developing its formal aspects, and in its second year, it focused on establishing the associated structures. During this phase, the procedural rules, structure, and thematic focus of the DSI were defined in a bottom-up process, and its key committees were established. At the same time, the DSI network grew to more than 180 researchers at UZH (as of October 2017). On May 17, 2017, the DSI was officially founded by the University Executive Board (UL).

In the following three years (2018–2020), the DSI's activities increasingly focused on reflection and research into issues relating to the digitization of society, with emphasis on interdisciplinary and interfaculty structures and projects. These aimed to generate new synergies within UZH. During this time, the [Digitalization Initiative of the Zurich Higher Education Institutions](#) (DIZH) project was also launched and implemented. This project was officially launched in 2020, and the DSI contributes significantly to UZH activities within the DIZH.

From 2021, the activities of the DSI were consolidated, as reflected in a target agreement with the UL updated in May 2021. Activities were strengthened in key areas of research (by focusing funding activities on communities), education (implementation of the Digital Studies and PhD Excellence Program; introduction of the «DSI Minor Digital Skills» concept), communication (new concept), and strategy (various ongoing projects). The DSI

also coordinates until now most of the UZH activities of the DIZH research cluster (including the DSI Post-Doc Call and the DSI Infrastructure/Lab Call).

In the period 2024–2025, a report entitled «The Future of the DSI» was prepared on behalf of the DSI Steering Committee, outlining development options for the DSI after 2029. The report was presented to the Steering Committee in May 2025. Various activities are currently underway within UZH that will affect the future of the DSI after 2029. The latest roadmap outlined here outlines the new activities planned for the period 2026–2027, which are based on the established foundation. The key points for the future development of the DSI will also be defined during this period; however, the corresponding decisions are beyond its authority. The DSI will provide further input at the request of the UL.

Formally, the DSI was affiliated with the Office of the Vice President Faculty Affairs and Scientific Information in August 1, 2018, and thus exists as a faculty-independent and cross-faculty unit. Since January 2022, it has been affiliated with the Office of the Vice President Research. In November 2022, two additional members were added to the [DSI Board of Directors](#), meaning that all seven UZH faculties were represented. The DSI's organizational structure as a cross-faculty unit allows it to flexibly advance innovative projects.

All seven UZH faculties and the UL are represented on the DSI Steering Committee. Currently, around 1,400 researchers from UZH and other institutions are involved in the DSI, including more than 300 UZH professors (as of September 2025).

1.2 Motto

The motto of the DSI can be summed up in one sentence: *We shape the digital future – The UZH Digital Society Initiative.*

1.3 Main objectives

The starting point for the DSI is the rapid pace of digitalization, which is fundamentally transforming society, the economy, and science. Digitalization challenges existing patterns of thinking and behavior, enables new forms of research and teaching, and requires new skills in a rapidly changing society. The DSI's mission is to critically reflect on these processes, identify the associated risks and opportunities and shape the digital transformation of society and science. With interdisciplinary activities in research, education, and public relations, the DSI is UZH's center of excellence for digital change.

To achieve its mission, the DSI works in the following three areas:

- **Research:** The challenge areas and cross-cutting topics defined in the DSI's roadmap outline the main themes of its research. Specific research topics are currently (2025) being addressed in 14 [DSI communities](#). Furthermore, the DSI sees itself as a think tank that addresses and discusses developments in digital transformation that are relevant to society and science. The DSI therefore contributes to social debate through position papers and media contributions. Since 2021, it has worked on a socially relevant digitalization topic each year as part of the [DSI Strategy Lab](#) and published a position paper on it (2021: Regulation of AI; 2022: AI in medicine; 2023: AI in education, research, and innovation; 2024: Disinformation; 2025: A future with quantum technology). In addition, the DSI identifies the strategic needs of UZH researchers in connection with digital transformation and develops solutions up to the prototype stage. Examples of such strategic projects include the [Data Protection & Ethics Self-Assessment Tool](#) (DESAT) and a survey of UZH researchers' needs relating to the data life cycle. The latter led to the design of [Z-Pool-Tool](#), a technology platform for building and managing a pool of test subjects for (online) research. DESAT was integrated into the new UZH standard process for third-party funding management in April 2023, and Z-Pool-Tool has been managed by the DSI since fall 2025. Finally, the DSI helps shape research topics through its involvement in selection processes for DSI professorships and postdocs, DSI infrastructures/labs, and PhD Excellence Program students.
- **Teaching:** Since 2021, the DSI has offered the [Studium Digitale Program](#) for bachelor's students and the [PhD Excellence Program](#) for doctoral candidates. Studium Digitale is an online course that has been

incorporated into the curriculum of [the School for Transdisciplinary Studies](#) at UZH. It teaches fundamental digital skills from an interdisciplinary perspective and is attended by over 1,500 students annually (either the entire course or modules integrated into comparable lectures). The PhD Excellence Program for doctoral students is a supplementary curriculum to a doctoral program at UZH and prepares students from all disciplines for a world in which interdisciplinary collaboration on digitalization issues is a top priority. As of the end of 2025, 94 doctoral students will have been accepted into the program, 35 of whom will have scholarships (the last cohort with scholarship recipients began in fall 2025). In summer 2022, the first cohort completed the supplementary program. Finally, the curriculum for the [DSI Minor/LAO Digital Skills](#) has been developed since fall 2021, and the program was officially offered for the first time in fall 2024. This study program comprises 30 ECTS at the master's level, and the modules should be open to all UZH students in principle. So far, 30 students have enrolled in the entire program; the core modules of the DSI Minor Digital Skills (including the technical modules) have attracted a total of just under 400 enrollments in the fall semester of 2024, spring semester of 2025, and fall semester of 2025.

- **Public relations:** The DSI supports informed dialogue on all issues relating to digital transformation in society, both in the canton of Zurich and throughout Switzerland. Through its communications activities, it ensures that various stakeholders, particularly from the fields of research, society, media, politics, and business, perceive *DSI as UZH's center of excellence for digital transformation*. The tools used for these activities include Digital MasterClasses (in collaboration with Parldigi and with support from the Mercator Switzerland Foundation) for the Federal Parliament and cantonal parliaments, and DSI media workshops. Details on the communication strategy (including events) are outlined in the DSI's communication concept and annual plan.

In addition to these activities, the DSI is strengthening its collaboration with other UZH departments in the context of digital transformation. Particularly noteworthy are:

- **UZH Innovation Hub:** The DSI and the [UZH Innovation Hub](#) contribute to ensuring that the results of innovative research and teaching in the DSI areas are adopted by business and society more quickly through mutual support and joint projects. Under this division of tasks, all activities to promote innovation are based at the UZH Innovation Hub, including related communications with the target groups of companies/start-ups. When the focus is on social or scientific aspects, responsibility lies with the DSI. Accordingly, politics, administration and NGOs are the DSI's primary communication target groups; however, the business community is also addressed when social and scientific issues are at the forefront. In particular, the DSI is supporting the creation of the Digital Innovation Cluster, which is being developed under the leadership of the UZH Innovation Hub. It is also a member of the Data Innovation Alliance and supports DSI researchers in submitting innovation and AI booster projects.
- **Digital teaching/School for Transdisciplinary Studies (STS):** The [School for Transdisciplinary Studies](#) (STS) and the DSI cooperate in the area of digital teaching. The DSI supports the activities of the STS in teaching of topics related to digitalization (e.g., in the period 2021–2024 as part of the [Digital Skills for You](#) project). The STS supports the coordination of studies for the Studium Digitale bachelor's program and the DSI Minor/LAO in Digital Skills at master's level.
- **Digital Strategy Board action lines:** Since 2024, the DSI has been providing conceptual and operational support for two action lines of the [Digital Strategy Board](#) («UZH.ai» and «AI buddy»). The relationship between these action lines and the future structure of the DSI is currently under discussion by the university management.

2. Structure of the Digital Society Initiative

2.1 Subject area

The «thematic space» in which the DSI is active is characterized by two dimensions. The **DSI challenge areas** are clusters of research topics based on different societal challenges arising from digitalization. The number of challenge areas is limited to prioritize research. When the DSI was launched, these were communication, democracy, health, mobility, and work. Each challenge area is broad, enabling research into a wide range of issues. Challenge areas may change if research priorities—represented by the activities of the communities—change in the long term. Corresponding decisions are made at the DSI general meeting. The **DSI cross-cutting topics** cut across the challenge areas. These concern both methodological issues and topics that are relevant to all challenge areas. To support the other structural elements, cross-cutting topics must offer certain benefits to other researchers (e.g., technical expertise, access to data). The number of cross-cutting topics is flexible and should respond to the methodological needs of DSI researchers.

The **DSI communities** are organized within this thematic space. These are groups of DSI researchers whose work is related to the DSI challenge areas or cross-cutting topics. They organize themselves and are given access to the DSI's premises as well as funds for initiating or implementing research projects, inviting fellows, or organizing events. These funds are allocated annually by the Board of Directors on the basis of proposals from the communities. There is no automatic entitlement to financial resources. As of October 2025, there are 14 communities: AI, Culture & Society; AI and Law; Communication; Cybersecurity; Democracy; Digital Humanities; Education; Ethics; Gaming; Health; Libraries; Mobility; Sustainability; and Work.

2.2 Structures

DSI topics are addressed within the following organizational structures of the DSI, which are described in its rules of procedure:

- **DSI professorships** in disciplines relevant to the DSI are included in the UZH's development and financial plan and promote independent reflection and research capacity. The DSI supports faculties in positioning new professorships that are aligned with its general objectives. These can be assistant professorships without tenure track (APNTTs), assistant professorships with tenure track (APTts), full professorships, and DIZH bridge professorships. In addition, five permanent positions are co-financed by the DSI. As of 2023, all topics for professorships have been defined; as of September 2025, 27 appointments have been completed and four are still in progress; a total of 31 professorships are being created through these processes. In addition, full professorships at UZH faculties related to digitalization are listed as «associated DSI professorships». As of 2025, there are seven such professorships.
- **Independent interdisciplinary DSI research groups (typically in the form of DSI bridge postdocs)** are assigned to individual challenge areas and/or cross-cutting topics of the DSI. The research groups are established primarily through the postdoc program (funded by the DIZH), which is intended to give young scientists the opportunity to lead a research group. The most recent postdocs in the program began their work in 2025. A total of 11 research groups and one postdoc position for an AI buddy have been created as part of the DSI postdoc program; the corresponding research will continue (depending on the group) until 2029. In addition to the program for DSI bridge postdocs, other researchers can obtain third-party funding administered by the DSI with the approval of the DSI Board of Directors if they are a good fit. As of 2025, eight projects are ongoing at the DSI. Among other projects, the DIZH structure [Cyber Resilience Network For The Canton Of Zurich](#) (CYREN^{ZH}) is based at the DSI.
- **DSI infrastructures/labs** consist of several researchers from the DSI network who have successfully raised funds through the DSI infrastructure/lab call. At the end of 2025, 10 such infrastructures/labs will be in operation and 11 will have been completed.

- **[DSI partnerships](#)** are formal agreements between the DSI and other UZH or external organizations. There are currently 12 such partnerships with the Center for Legal Data Science, the Center for Information Technology, Society, and Law (ITSL), Citizen Science Zurich, the Data Innovation Alliance, the Healthy Longevity Center, Operation Room X (OR-X) at Balgrist University Hospital, the School for Transdisciplinary Studies, the Economic Development Agency of the Canton of Zurich, the UZH Blockchain Center, the UZH Innovation Hub, and the UZH Science Lab.
- **[DSI Fellows](#)** are UZH scientists or invited external fellows affiliated with a specific DSI community for a limited time, who collaborate on a DSI-supported project of their community.

2.3 Development of the thematic focus

Previous DSI roadmaps

The thematic focus of the DSI has been regularly discussed and updated every two years, with members of the DSI network participating in the roadmap process. To date, the following four documents have been produced. (Details on the topics and the process can be found in the previous roadmaps; in 2023, it was decided to rename all roadmaps with the periods they cover rather than the year of adoption.)

- ***DSI Roadmap 2018/19:*** The roadmap process began in 2017, including the definition of challenge areas and cross-cutting topics.
- ***DSI Roadmap 2020/21:*** In 2019, the approximately 330 network members were invited to submit their ideas for research topics to be addressed within the DSI. In this process, 41 topic areas were identified.
- ***DSI Roadmap 2022/23:*** In 2021, the approximately 500 researchers in the DSI network were invited to participate in updating the list of topics. Among other things, this led to the formation of the Cybersecurity and Libraries communities and the identification of 21 additional topics.
- ***DSI Roadmap 2024/25:*** In view of the rapidly growing list of topics and the large network, a new procedure was chosen in 2023: DSI members assessed the relevance of the topics in a survey and contributed further ideas. Based on the survey results and the subsequent involvement of the communities, the topics were regrouped and refined, with those having very low priority removed from the list.

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The same procedure as in 2023 was chosen for this roadmap in 2025. The current list of topics can be found in the appendix; this list is not exhaustive and leaves room for further topics.

2.4 Financing of funding priorities

Until 2020, DSI funds were available to all DSI network members to promote projects and outreach activities. Since 2021, only DSI communities have had access to these funds. The DSI communities apply annually for financial support within a program. The DSI managing office supports the functioning of the communities with appropriate resources. The eligibility criteria for funding strategic projects can be found on the DSI website. The Executive Board decides annually on the allocation of funds, subject to the total funds available at the time.

In addition to DSI funds, the calls published or financed by the DIZH (innovation program, DSI infrastructure/lab call, DSI post-doc call) provide funds for financing the DSI's priorities in the coming years. These funds are allocated in a competitive process.

2.5 Services provided by the DSI office

The DSI [managing office](#) supports the DSI objectives with the following activities:

- ***Support for communities:*** Supporting DSI communities and partnerships in preparing successful funding applications on digitalization topics, managing research projects, and communicating events.

- **Research coordination:** Facilitating and supporting collaboration between researchers in the DSI network through various activities (speed dating events, coordination of research groups, organization of internal colloquia, etc.).
- **Teaching coordination, curriculum development, and faculty development:** Developing and maintaining DSI teaching offerings within the DSI framework.
- **Communication & events:** Implementing outreach activities in accordance with a separate communication concept. The DSI communication channels are adapted as needed; for example, in 2020, the DSI website was relaunched and the DSI image was further developed with consideration of its logo. The DSI image concept encompasses the design of documents, presentation templates, and the DSI website.
- **Interface with stakeholders:** Mediating between science and the media, companies, politics, NGOs, and public administration bodies. The DSI managing office organizes contacts, is represented on various committees with stakeholder representatives, and also takes on specific assignments from stakeholders (e.g., AlgorithmWatch), provided they fit within the DSI general activity profile. The [Digital MasterClass](#), which was first offered and implemented for the Swiss Parliament in 2021 in collaboration with Parldigi, proved to be a successful tool and was continued in 2023–2025 both at the national level and in the cantons of Bern, Geneva, and Zurich. The program will continue from 2026 to 2028 with the support of the Mercator Switzerland Foundation. In 2024, a new program called «Media Workshop» was launched, in which media professionals can receive training on topics related to digital transformation twice a year; this program will also be continued.
- **Implementation of support projects:** Designing and supporting targeted projects that will support the activities of UZH researchers. Examples include the [Data Protection/Ethics Self-Assessment Tool](#) (DESAT) and [Z-Pool-Tool](#) for building and managing a pool of test subjects for online research (see above).

Appendix: Research topics

The topics identified using the procedure described in Section 2.3 are listed below. This list outlines the range of topics of interest within the DSI that are being addressed in various ways; it is neither exhaustive nor exclusive. The topic clusters are based on the names of the communities but do not fully reflect them. The topics are listed in alphabetical order; the corresponding numbering does not reflect any prioritization.

Communication

Com-1: Accessibility in a digital society

Com-2: Communication in digital spaces

Com-3: Digital media use and communication across generations

Com-4: Digital transformation of cultural and religious communication

Com-5: Disinformation and hate speech in digital public spaces

Com-6: Human–computer interaction modes (audio, visual, etc.)

Com-7: Impact of online (mass) media on society and the future of journalism

Com-8: Political communication and its development in the digital context (e.g., the influence of algorithmic platforms on political communication)

Cybersecurity

Cyb-1: AI and cybersecurity

Cyb-2: Cybersecurity and human behavior

Cyb-3: Cybersecurity education and awareness

Cyb-4: Cybersecurity management (e.g., handling difficult decisions in cybersecurity operations)

Cyb-5: Digital trust

Cyb-6: Post-quantum cybersecurity

Cyb-7: Security and privacy

Cyb-8: System security (e.g., attack prevention and mitigation, security in networks and blockchain)

Democracy

Dem-1: Civic tech: tools for and governance of digital participation (e.g., distributed ledger technology, decentralized autonomous organizations)

Dem-2: Digital communication in the policy cycle

Dem-3: Digital sovereignty

Dem-4: Impact of digitalization and surveillance on public opinion formation

Dem-5: Political economy of Big Tech (e.g., interplay of digital tools, economic power, and democratic processes)

Dem-6: Role of algorithms in political processes

Digital Humanities

Hum-1: Digital editions, open research data, and FAIR principles

Hum-2: Digital religions

Hum-3: Digital transformation of social theory

Hum-4: Digital visual studies

Hum-5: Digitalization of cultural heritage

Hum-6: Digitally assisted text and language analysis and interpretation

Hum-7: Histories of digital technologies

Hum-8: Infrastructure, methods, and tools for data use

Hum-9: Spatial humanities

Education

Edu-1: Conceptualization, measurement, and quality assessment of digital skills

Edu-2: Digital education and (in)equality

Edu-3: Institutional frameworks of digital education (e.g., actor constellations, interests, and power relations)

Edu-4: Learning tools and environments (e.g., serious games)

Edu-5: Lifelong learning/development of digital skills/literacy

Edu-6: Role of education in the AI era and related skills

Ethics

Eth-1: Big data and surveillance

Eth-2: Fairness and AI/algorithms

Eth-3: Manipulation in the digital realm (e.g., ethics of affective computing)

Eth-4: Role of ethics guidelines and their relation to the legal system

Eth-5: Trust in and control of algorithmic/autonomous systems

Eth-6: Value-sensitive innovation

Health

Hea-1: Decision-making in the digitalized healthcare system

Hea-2: Digital health literacy (e.g., growing digital divide; changing professional roles)

Hea-3: Digitalization of the healthcare system and the impact of AI

Hea-4: Digitally enabled health stakeholder collaboration

Hea-5: Health state measurement and prediction

Hea-6: Human-centered digital health interventions

Hea-7: Implementation science in digital health

Hea-8: Mobile health apps and sensors: design and use

Hea-9: Prevention through digital tools

Information (Libraries)

Inf-1: Access to information (discovery), including methods (e.g., visualization)

Inf-2: Curation and long-term archiving of information

Inf-3: Information usage

Inf-4: Infrastructures (e.g., data providers for source data and metadata)

Inf-5: Uses and implications of AI for discovery, information processing, cataloging, and knowledge production

Law

Law-1: Data governance

Law-2: Data protection and research

Law-3: Legal tech

Law-4: Regulation of AI (e.g., intellectual property, liability)

Law-5: Regulation of blockchain

Mobility

Mob-1: Autonomous, automated, connected mobility technologies and their impact (e.g., on spatial learning)

Mob-2: Enhancing health through mobility

Mob-3: Ethical and sustainable mobility

Mob-4: Human mobility in smart cities

Mob-5: Inclusive and shared mobility

Mob-6: Secure, private mobility

Science, Methods, and Data

Sci-1: Data integration and reuse of data

Sci-2: Data-driven modeling of complex systems, agent-based modeling, and social networks

Sci-3: Design thinking and other participatory methods

Sci-4: Digital tools for citizen science and public engagement

Sci-5: Efficient machine learning and AI

Sci-6: Future computing paradigms (e.g., quantum and neuromorphic computing)

Sci-7: Human–AI interaction and collective intelligence

Sci-8: Impact of AI and AI tools on scientific research practices

Sci-9: Open and synthetic data/text/media

Sustainability

Sus-1: Bridging digital education and education for sustainable development

Sus-2: Digital sufficiency

Sus-3: Digitalization and biodiversity

Sus-4: Sustainability beyond greenwashing, reliable sustainability measures

Sus-5: Sustainable digital economy

Sus-6: Sustainable digitalization with respect to energy and materials

Work

Wor-1: Corporate social responsibility in the digital age

Wor-2: Crowdfunding and platform economics

Wor-3: Data-intensive organizations and people analytics

Wor-4: Digital leadership

Wor-5: Impact of AI on the future of work

Wor-6: Management & work enhancement with AI & data

Wor-7: New digital economies with collective utilizations and rightful sharing