



## **“Please Mind the Grey Digital Divide”**

An Analysis of Digital Public Policies in Light of the Welfare State

av

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# Abstract

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This thesis examines the grey digital divide and digital policies in the divergent welfare regimes of Sweden and Greece. The grey digital divide is a serious problem not only for the individual but also for society. The grey digital divide signifies the inability of older people to utilize digital technology. In academic circles, the emphasis is mostly on the technological aspects of the grey digital divide or on the individual characteristics of older people as (non)users of digital tools. However, the problem is more complex in nature and is interconnected with the aging process and experience.

The grey digital divide has multiple levels: the first concerns access, the second skills, and the third opportunities. This thesis concentrates mostly on the third level of digital divide because it touches on the welfare denominator. This particular level describes the encounters that older citizens need to have with the digital welfare state and the obstacles that they might face in doing this. Older digital “offliners” cannot take advantage of the welfare services that they need for their own well-being and cannot participate as equal citizens in digital space, which is expanding on a daily basis with new digital services.

This thesis is situated in the discipline of political science and draws on various disciplines, such as political science (welfare regime theory, neo-institutionalism, and path-dependency), public policy (active aging paradigm), gerontology (disengagement), sociology (exclusion via the digital-by-default approach), and ICT studies (the phenomenon of digitalization and the third-level of the digital divide). The thesis is a compilation of papers and consists of two qualitative case studies, a comparative study, and a scoping literature review. The key findings are as follows: 1) older people are a heterogeneous group and this applies in the digital world as well, with the appearance of heterogeneous digital profiles; 2) the welfare regime seems to affect the manifestation of the grey digital divide and there is a path-dependency pattern in this; 3) the more digitalized a society, the greater the chance that older people not using technology will be excluded from the digital and social spheres; and 4) digital policies indicate the priorities of every society and how older people are perceived as a social group.

*Keywords:* grey digital divide, welfare regimes, digital public policies, digital technologies, and older people.

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