



Co-design session

# Toward a digital rights label

Digital Rights Day | 9th of December 2022



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# Introduction

Websites placing cookies on your computer to track your browsing behavior. TikTok stores your personal data in China. Are you aware of what products, services, and organisations do with your personal data? It is often not obvious.

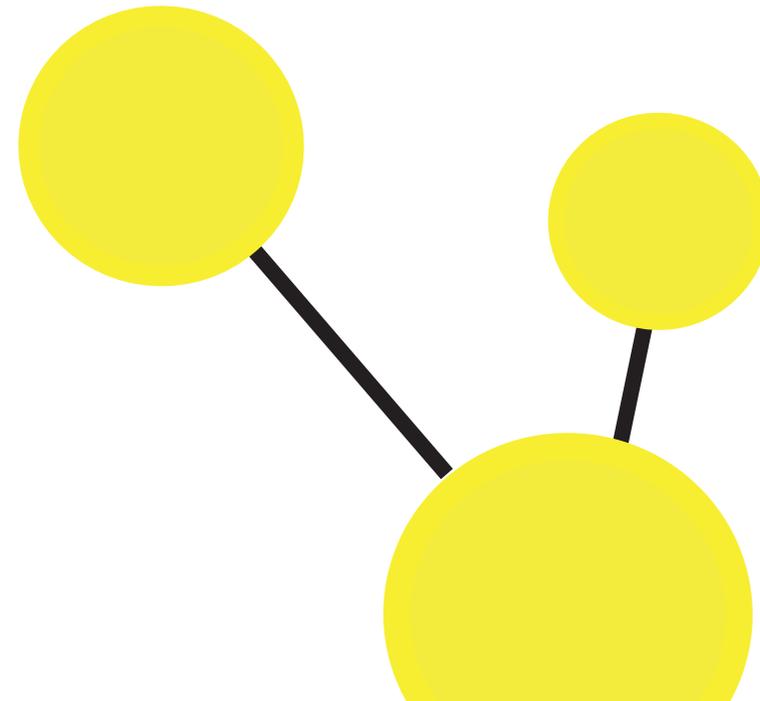
## Societal Challenge

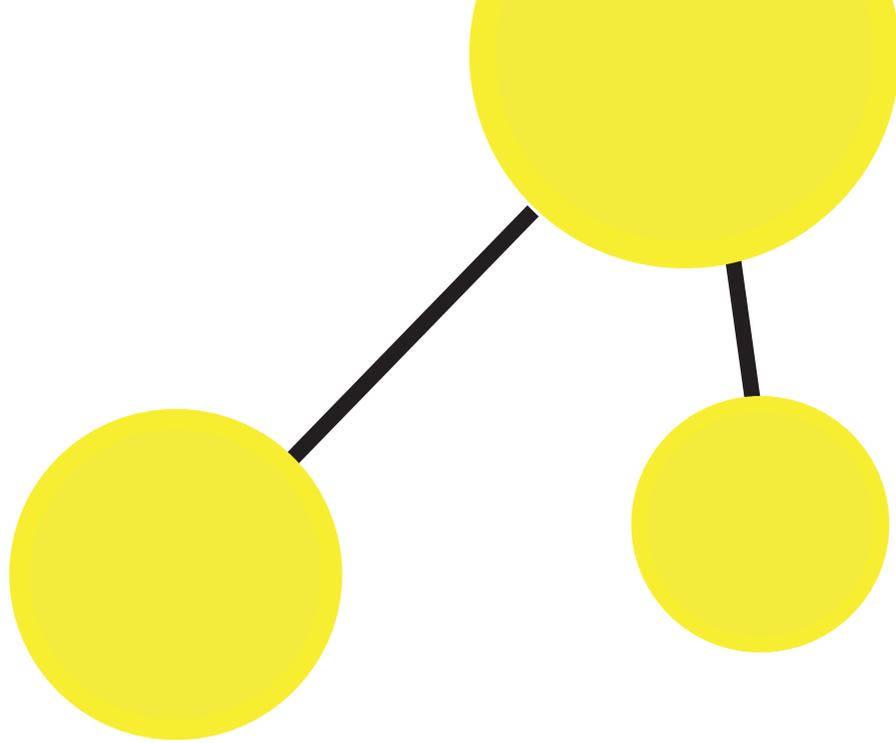
Our digital lives are becoming more and more prominent. We are now meeting each other virtually for work and leisure, and are spotted and traced without our knowledge, both in physical places (public areas and streets) and in virtual spaces. Technology is developing rapidly and policy makers are not able to keep up, resulting in unknown threats for citizens in modern society. Moreover, technology can lead to inequality and exclusion, as demonstrated in the Dutch childcare benefits scandal. The aim of the Inholland Digital Rights Research Team, co-founded by Professors [Wina Smeenk](#), [Ander de](#)

[Keijzer](#) and [Ben Wagner](#), is to focus their work on the social, economic, cultural, communication, design and technological elements that can lead to a digitally responsible society. This means that we want to be part of the debate and research on how technology in our digital age can contribute to the quality of peoples' lives: how can people benefit from the digital society and how are they hindered, or even worse, excluded from partaking in our digital society. We do this in our research lines, as well as in the sustainable media lab courses and the data-driven minor.

## Digital Rights House

To achieve these goals, we also work with [Digital Rights House Amsterdam](#). This nonprofit is dedicated to the protection of citizen's digital rights, has many projects in the pursuit of that goal: conducting independent research into the status of the protection of citizens' digital rights (human rights), producing reports, providing solicited and unsolicited (critical constructive) advice on digital rights to policymakers, and publicly sharing knowledge through events they organize. Jake Blok founded Digital Rights House (DRH), and Wina has partnered with him to establish the foundation Digital Rights House Amsterdam (DRHA). Rosa Louwse is project manager at the foundation Digital Rights House.





## Working with multiple disciplines

Didi Baas, a third-year student in [Creative Business](#), is building a 'planetary system' of digital rights together with a Media College student and an Information [Technology student](#). "A student who is doing an ICT course thinks very differently to me – based on their expertise – than a student who is doing a creative course" says Baas. "It clashes and causes

*friction sometimes, but you learn a lot from one another. You explore together; and ask questions such as 'what happens if we do this?' That produces great results. I am surprised that there is so little legislation and regulation around digital rights," Baas continues. "It's kind of a Wild West even though it's related to human rights. That's why working on guidelines is so important."*



## Co-design session

Can we design a 'label' that shows how companies or government respect and guarantee the digital human rights of their users, customers, employees, clients, citizens and all humans?

### Towards a Digital Rights 'label'?

In a design pressure cooker of approximately two hours, we co-researched and co-created possible Digital Rights 'labels'. A 'label' as a concept could make it easier for citizens to better understand and evaluate the difficult subject of digital rights and the 'relationship' they aspire with the respective organization. Moreover, a digital rights label can be seen as an opportunity for the respective organization to invite and involve people to provide feedback and to help improve their products, services and systems.



We all know the colorful labels that grade the energy efficiency of buildings and electrical products, or the nutritional quality of food. But we don't yet have a method to make visible how an organization (business, non-profit, government, knowledge institute etc.) respects our rights with their products, services, or systems. This is probably because we do not have clear parameters to measure this yet. In a co-design session, we therefore wanted to explore what a Digital Rights 'label' could be like and what parameters it might use. A 'label' -as a concept- could make it easier for citizens to better understand and evaluate the difficult subject of digital rights.

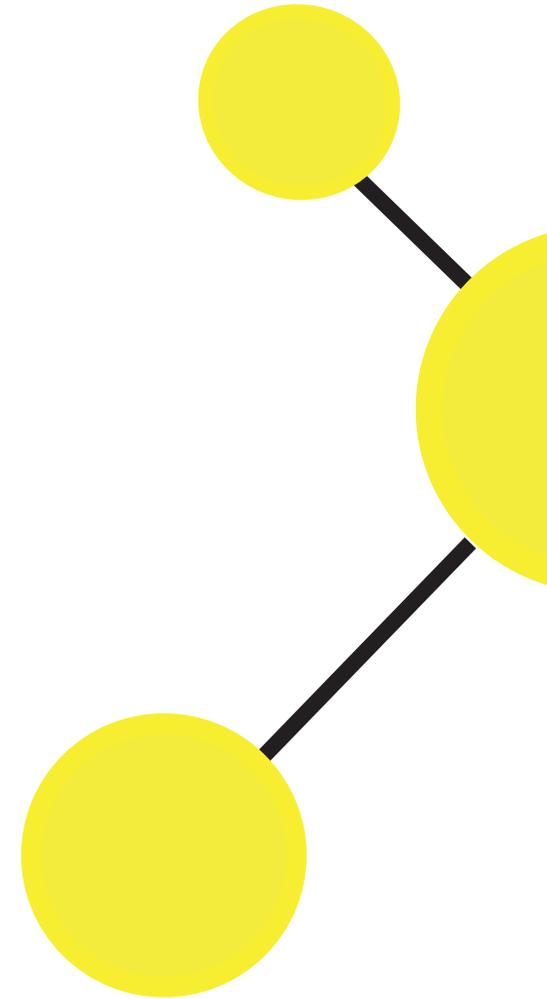
Four multi-disciplinary teams existing of applied university Inholland domains TOI<sup>1</sup> and CrB<sup>2</sup> and multi-media<sup>3</sup> students of the Media College, working field partner Digital Rights House Amsterdam, tutors and researchers, searched for possible digital rights label design opportunities in a co-design session. Moreover, they thought about whom should own this 'label'. This workshop was facilitated by Wina Smeenk using the methods from her [book Design, Play, Change](#) (2022).

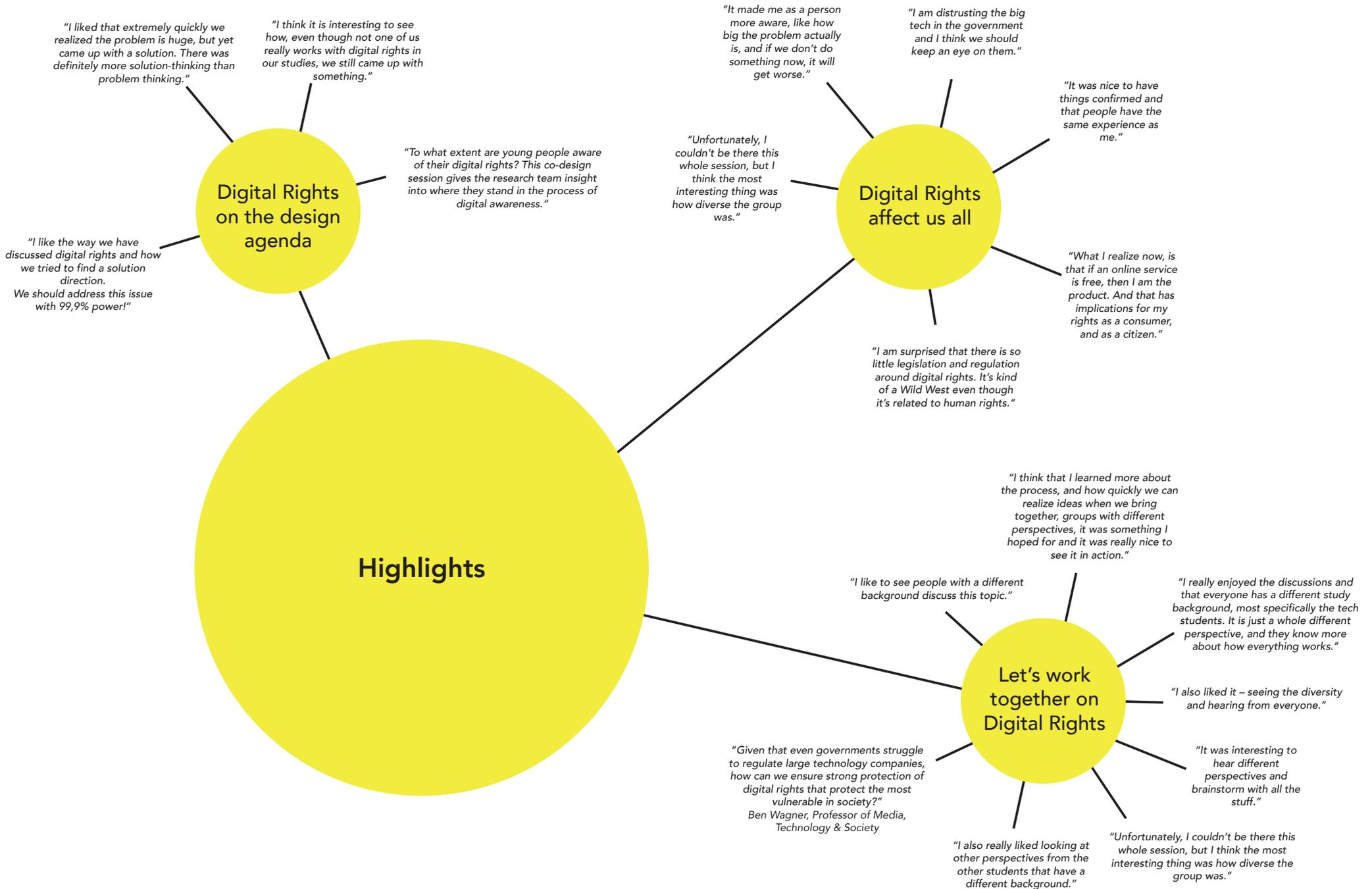
1 TOI= HBO Technology, Design & Informatics  
2 CrB= HBO Creative Business  
3 MM= HBO multi media



## Important labels

Think about the colorful labels that reveal how energy-efficient a building is or how healthy certain foods are. How your digital rights are respected is not (yet) so transparent. [Wina Smeenk](#) is Professor of [Societal Impact Design](#), a founder of the Inholland Digital Rights Research Team (DRRT), and a board member of [Digital Rights House Amsterdam](#). She is also the person leading this session. *"We want to learn where students and young people stand on this issue, and how far along they are in their digital awareness process" says Smeenk. "We will take the outcomes from today's session, and the Digital Rights Research Team and the Digital Rights House will use them to further investigate the possibilities for a label."*

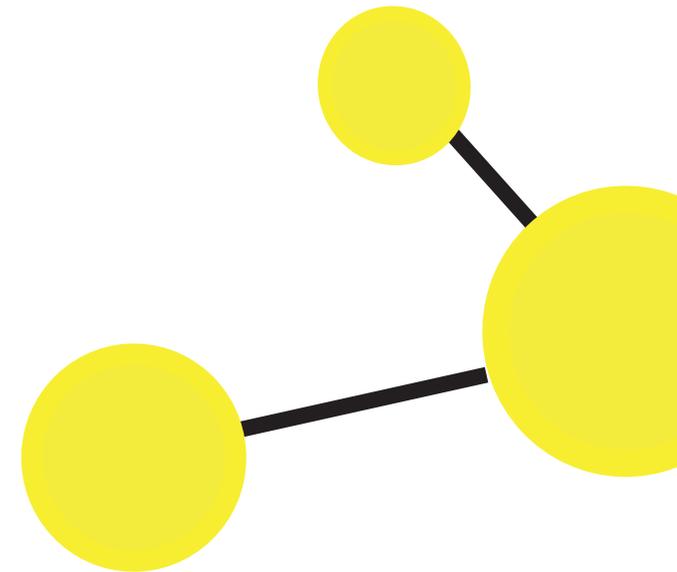






## A better foundation for digital rights

[Digital Rights House Amsterdam](#) focuses on protecting citizens' digital rights by conducting independent research, providing advice, and sharing knowledge. The kick off of the State of Digital Rights initiative is due for release in May 2023. *"Citizens are often unaware that their data can remain online forever or that personal data are linked,"* says board member Jake Blok. *"In the State of Digital Rights, we present the state of protection of citizens' digital rights in the Netherlands and the effects that digitalization has for citizens."*





## Sharing knowledge with one another

The busy conversations, sketches, and model constructions have generated plenty of ideas among the students present about the protection of digital rights. Jim Bezuijen, a third-year Media Designer at [Media College Amsterdam](#) acts out a situation relating digital cookie legislation using Legos™. *"I know quite a lot about the digital trail I leave behind and am pretty aware of what my rights are"* says Jim. *"But it is nice to be able to talk about this with others. Then you can share knowledge with one another, and you are even more aware."*

# Presentations of concepts

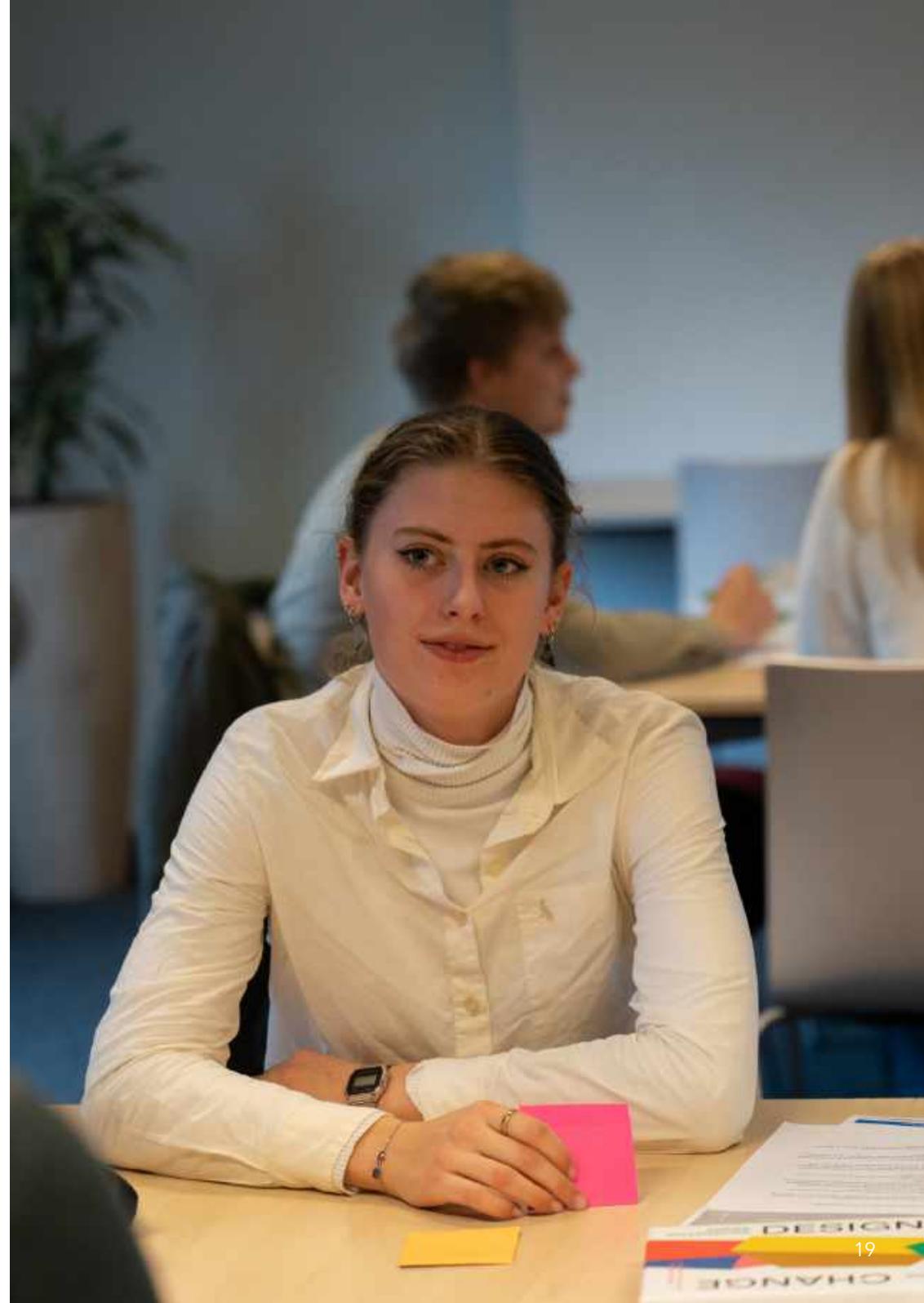
## Protecting our digital rights

### Participants

Researchers from the [Digital Rights Research Team](#), along with students from various programs at Inholland University of Applied Sciences and the Media College Amsterdam took part in a co-design session exploring the idea of a digital rights label, and some of the wider issues of digital rights.

### Co-Design Methodology

With help of the method cards of the [book \*Design, Play, Change\*](#), a playful introduction to design thinking with serious chances for change (Smeenk & Willenborg, 2022), four multidisciplinary teams of students and researchers worked on this digital rights challenge. They first explored the current system regarding digital rights and discussed what risks are involved. Then, they focused on what new rituals, habits, and traditions they could create for these problematic situations. Then, the students presented their concepts to each other followed by a plenary discussion.



The tables are full of colored Post-it™ notes, Lego™ models, Styrofoam™ balls, and the room is strewn with yellow crime scene barrier tape. Students following creative or technical studies mix with professors, researchers, and field partners such as the design collective idiotēs.

Drawing on their own backgrounds, knowledge, and experiences, the participants visualize and analyze how governments, organizations, and citizens relate to digital rights. Importantly, they discuss what needs to happen to make those rights more recognizable and tangible.

## Concept 1

### Green, Orange or Red?

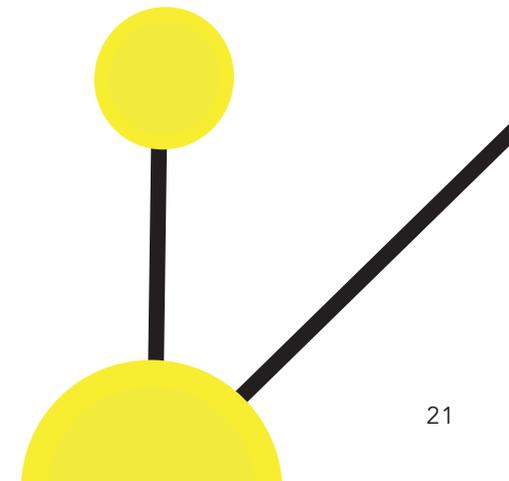
A simple traffic light system

#### Exploring the system

The team started the exploration by mapping out the ecosystem around digital rights in a physical prototype of the ecosystem: a planetary system of digital rights, see picture on the left. Their exploration led to three main clusters.

#### Technology

The first discussion of this team was about which organizations or networks are involved. Which technology firms and which technologies are important at the moment? Should there be a focus on Virtual or Augmented Reality, or perhaps ChatGPT, which debuted just before the workshop took place? Moreover, they discussed the Wi-fi networks and technology who is listening to our phones without us knowing. Finally, they summarized this discussion in a technology cluster.



## Law

Then, they discussed that lots of technology is phoning home to China and other countries without our knowledge. This brought up a discussion about awareness and visibility. People are consumers in their behavior, and they want the simplicity and ease of use without asking difficult questions. So, they identified a cluster about law, think about the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) and other similar regulatory approaches.

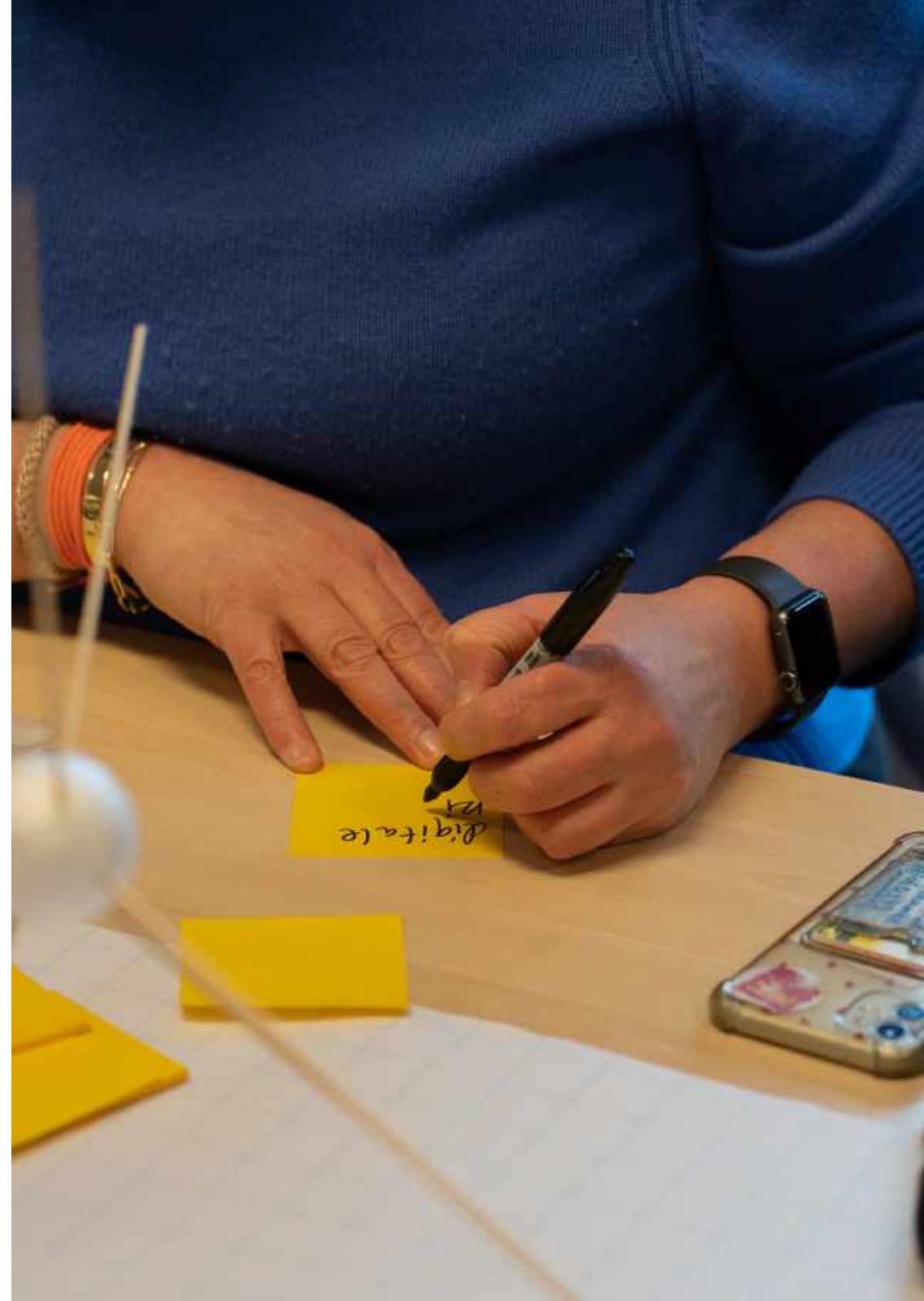
## Human rights

Last, they discussed that digital rights are human rights in a digital world. In their prototype, this team has put a wondering user in the middle, see picture on the right. Technology such as an algorithm and code is a black box. Users have no awareness of what harm it might do, or even how big the box is. Leading to a loss of freedom in the public space and people lost is in the digital world.

## Creating new rituals

The prototype of this team focused on above three clusters: human behavior prioritizing ease-of-use and simplicity, technology and the criminal data business models depending on interaction transactions, profits and efficiency. In creating new rituals, this team identified that right now every single user is asked to read all legal notices on internet. They considered that weird. Because why should everyone individually read this? They then wondered if Artificial Intelligence (AI) could read through these terms and conditions documents for them and give them a clear and meaningful grade? So, the team proposed a color system traffic light

The concept: Green meets some agreed-upon standards; Orange means be careful, maybe you can use this or maybe it's better to avoid depending on the context; and Red is a major warning, encouraging users to consider what you're selling with your data by using this product, service, or system.



## Discussions

### Green, Orange or Red? A simple traffic light system

Expert

*The teams' idea direction is straightforward and simple. There will be knowledge in the background, but it's not complicated.*

Expert

*So, if you go for something like a 'label', then it should not be something that is not so precise, because it can cause confusion. Moreover, there was a suggestion to take a look at the TOS, the 'terms of service' that nobody reads. They have a similar three-level labelling. Yet, this concept goes beyond civil society approaches and does not only focus on governments' responsibility. It is about the collaboration between civil society and government.*

*You mentioned health experts, civil society, and the government. They should all interact together to create some kind of like yellow, green, red because right now it is like different little technical projects throughout the site. Basically, it is not just a thing that like you can get. But nobody uses it. It makes it like a normal thing. That it is normal when you use these items.*

Expert

*Sounds like citizen science?*

### Next steps

- Prevent confusion by a label
- Collaboration between policy makers and society
- Normalisation of digital rights

Team

*Take the nutrition code for instance. Sometimes you are totally flabbergasted by what it says. Freshly pressed orange juice is C while some pizza's are A!*

Team

*Are you familiar with Bianca Wylie, a public speaker, and digital rights activist? She brought up in a lecture the metaphor about entering a Cathedral: when entering an historic building you almost never think of its safety, because buildings have already so many regulations that define safe access. You do not wonder if it has a proper foundation. Like our concept: we need such a system in the digital realm as well.*

*The team loves the idea of that metaphor. Why should we put the responsibility at every single user? You have much more power against large digital firms if you had such a system in place. Another example is open-spending, a platform where you can read governments contracts. The platform shows the PDFs and citizens can read and help getting the errors out. This already saved government lots of money.*

Team

*Indeed, citizen science. They give citizens access to the contracts from suppliers to the government and they are validating this for errors and mistakes. This brings transparency and supports government. It works really well, they have a big banner showing the public money not spent.*

*If it is a new ritual, you can use AI-technology, some really elected professionals who can moderate that on a platform and provide this simple three-color system. This product should not be on the market run by business. Neither citizens should have to make the choices, but it should be more a guideline by government such as 'kijkwijzer' is for citizens.*





## Concept 2

### Centralized Authority Agency

Better Access, Trust, and Control

#### Exploring the system

The green team first addressed the vulnerability problems they experience in the digital world: they shared their own perspectives. From ring doorbells with cameras that record everything and everyone on the streets without consent to annoying cookie pop-ups at every website you visit. Moreover, they discussed a common feeling that devices are listening to us.

#### Creating new rituals

The team discussed that it would be handy to tell Google your preferences upfront. They thought of a new preference 'button' where you click on and say: accept these or all cookies of website visited or check this for every website separately. At present, most people just accept all cookies for comfort and easy access. Therefore, the team proposed a more general profile that contains your preset preferences and can be used for every website.

They visualized their concept idea in the picture on the next page. In this picture, you can see an user who owns his/her data. The user expects a protecting wall between him or herself and the websites visited. Yet, in-reality the website can always check on the user: there is no real wall. It knows everything. Therefore, the team added a controller to the scene. This controller checks the websites. And the user can give his/her preferences through this profile manager. The idea is to provide users with a more private profile on internet, to check and know what websites know about you and to have a separate authority that checks these. The team herewith assigns a big role to the government to create guidelines around digital rights.

## Discussions

Green, Orange or Red? A simple traffic light system.

Expert

*Does this concept introduce a new problem with trust: who should we trust there? Since all trust is put into a new controlling agency? This is not going to be Google or Microsoft, right?*

Expert

*In a way, you showed how the land registry works in the Netherlands. Moreover, you mentioned the fact that sometimes people are not aware of privacy issues. The doorbell camera is owned by a neighbor. How does that affect this concept? You might have a specific profile, but your neighbor, who is the owner of the doorbell, will have a different profile?*

Expert

*The concept touches on key elements, because cookies are one of the annoying things every user has to deal with. The concept is very practical and directly relevant for people. A recent project with Max Schrems was trying to do similar things, see videos online. It is called automating cookies. The challenge is who to trust to protect your privacy. A lot of people now also just use browser plug-ins. Yet, this concept does not do a very good job at saying what people actually want in terms of likes, cookies, etc. So, you are working on a real challenge. We expect that big tech companies will be forced by governments to move in this direction.*

## Next steps

- Prevent annoyance
- Trust versus control
- Ownership of violating privacy products

Team

*It should be an independent company. But it's difficult. It's always the question what they know about you. What are they going to do with your data? It should not be free, because if it is free, money is made by a company and your data will always be sold. If you pay for it, you get more control. In that way, your data might be used more careful and might not be shared.*

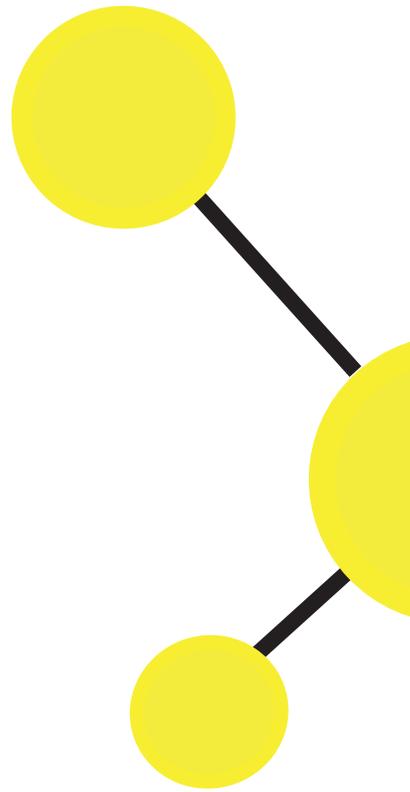
Team

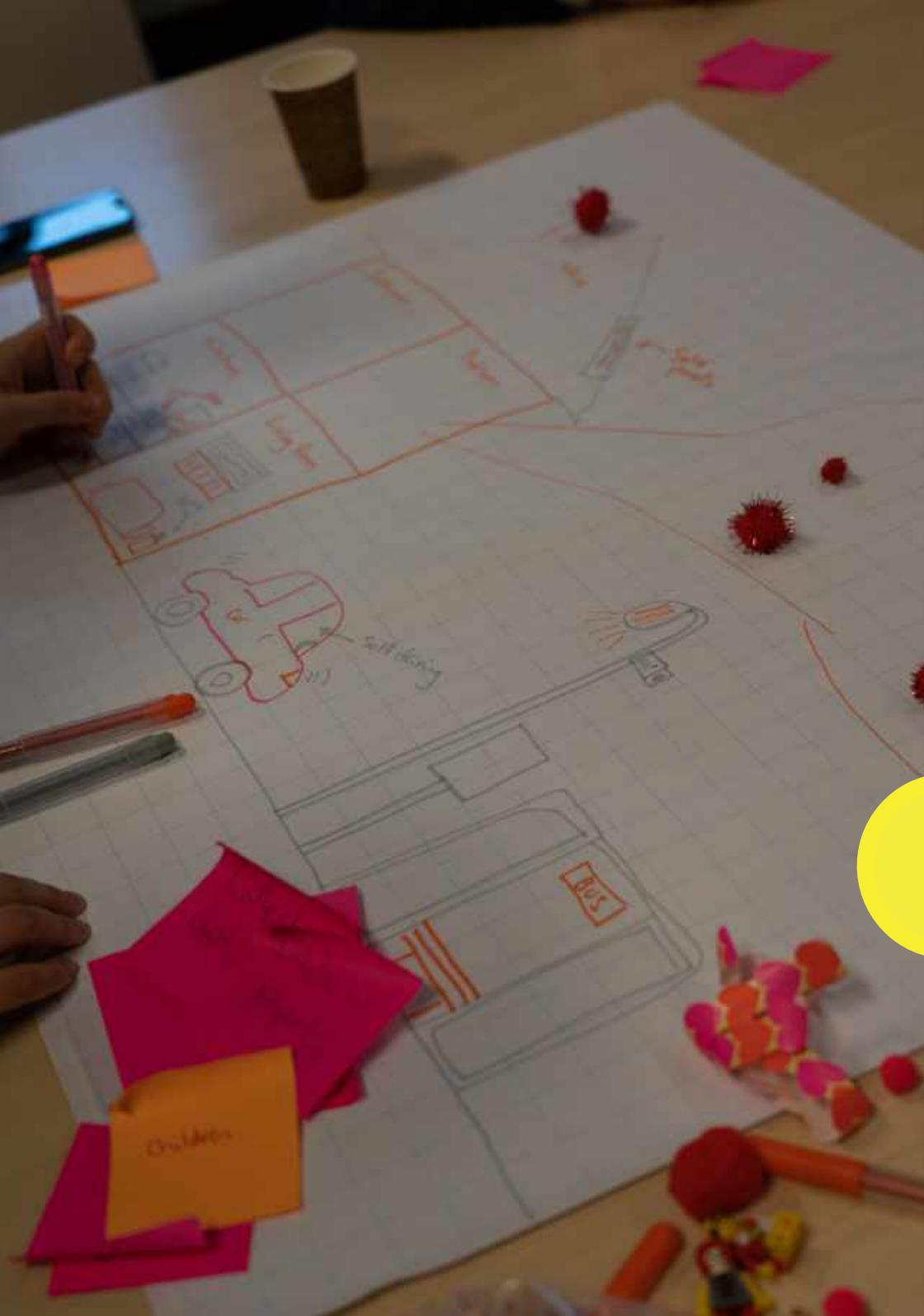
*We don't have a solution for that yet.*



## Awareness is the first step

[Ander de Keijzer](#), Professor of Data Driven Smart Society and co-founder of the Digital Rights Research Team, engages in lively discussion and is filling colored Post-it™ notes with his thoughts on digital rights. Ander de Keijzer sees awareness among students as one of the first steps towards protecting their digital rights. *“To your phone, to Google home – to all your digital devices actually – you are constantly giving away information about yourself. At the very least, you need to be aware of the digital trail you are blazing and what the consequences are of that,”* says Ander de Keijzer.





## Concept 3

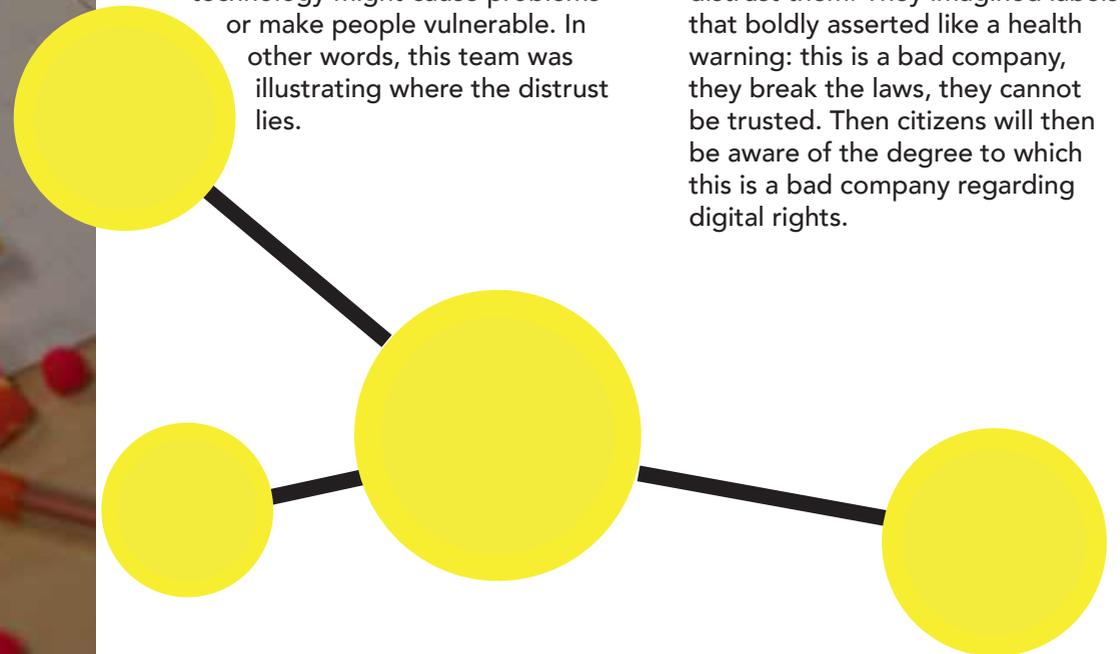
Distrust pop-ups  
to create awareness

### Exploring the system

What do digital rights look like in our everyday life? The red team started with visualizing a simple cross section of society: a house, a family, a car, a bus stop (see picture). The team observed places where technology might be located in the house. Together the team identified the (kind of) data that was collected and shared by devices at home. Subsequently, they took note of how that technology might cause problems or make people vulnerable. In other words, this team was illustrating where the distrust lies.

### Creating new rituals

The red team found that building trust in designing applications is a cultural approach. Since processing of the data is done outside of the scope of the user - and he/she can neither intervene, nor check in this process- trust is a difficult subject. One approach in designing a digital rights 'label' then is to concentrate on distrust. It is not about how much you can trust people and systems, but how much you should distrust them. They imagined labels that boldly asserted like a health warning: this is a bad company, they break the laws, they cannot be trusted. Then citizens will then be aware of the degree to which this is a bad company regarding digital rights.



# Discussions

## Distrust pop-ups to create awareness

Expert

*It is very provocative to say 'distrust this system': is this a provocation on purpose?*

*And when you were thinking of new rituals, what came out?*

Expert

Expert

*A label can be very practical and you make it very easy for the users to engage with. What you are referring to is the normalization in which companies break the law. It is kind of difficult for the user to respond to that. It just becomes normal and accepted that laws are broken and we are all used to it. So, the challenge is how to make that clear?*

*For example, with airlines you have very strong rights as a passenger, but nobody knows about these rights. What would happen when the airline was forced to handout an informative document about who will support and sue the airline for you and will get your money back. I wonder what will be the positive digital version of that? Then, you organize collective action against your privacy being abused, where somebody will fight for you. That provides an optimistic perspective; companies have broken the law and invaded your privacy, here is what you can do about it!*

### Next steps

- Prevent vulnerability
- Focus on everyday life
- Concentrate on trust concept

Team

*Trust and distrust is a cultural problem. We have rapidly developed technology over the years and we often took no time to consider what we were getting into. Therefore, it is crucial that we take a few steps back and find the right track to continue to move forward. Yet, we are incentivized to keep using the same stuff over and over again, actually trapping ourselves in all these big tech data traps and (unknowingly) consenting to the theft of our data. So, a label saying something about how much you can trust a company does not guarantee anything. You can be an expert professor on the matter, you can be a lawyer, yet you still would not know everything companies are doing.*

Team

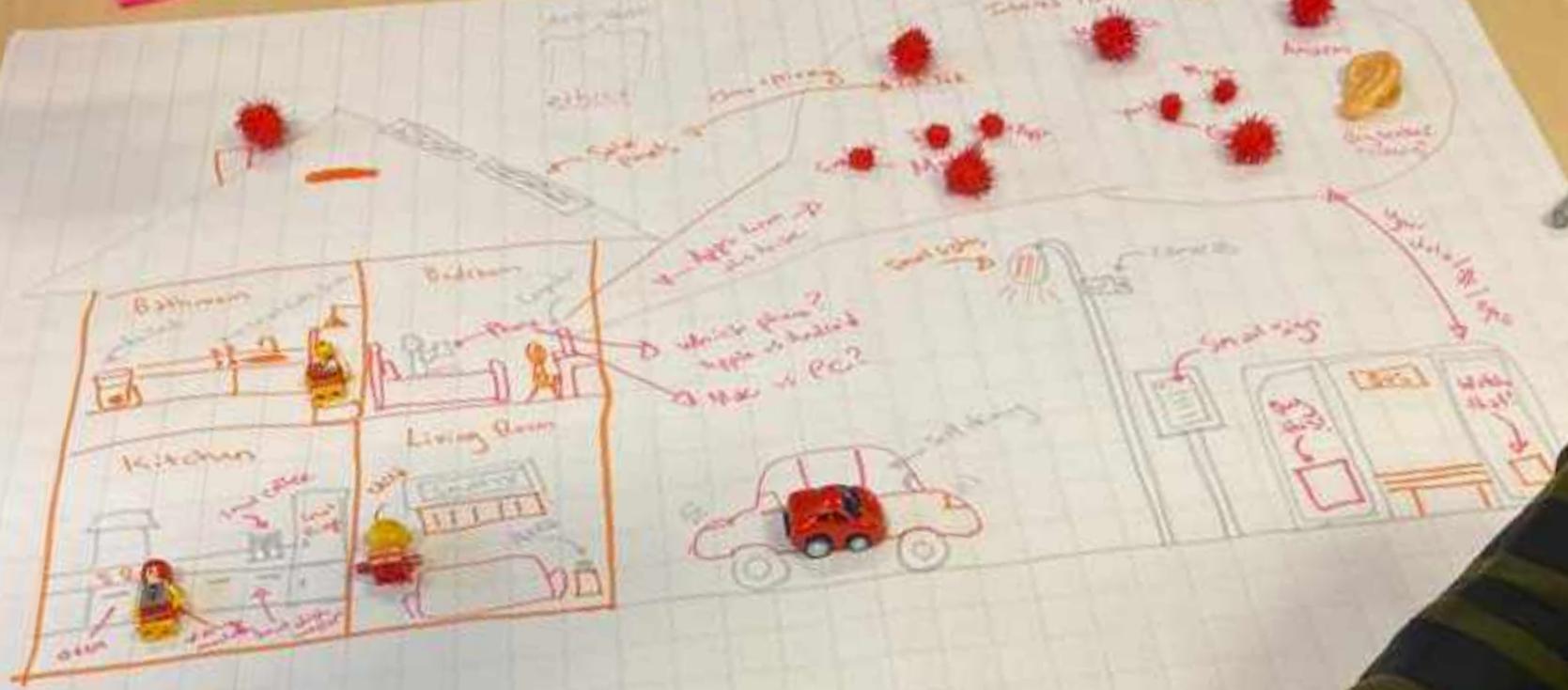
*When purchasing an app, you could have a label that states: I do not know whether this app is trustworthy. Imagine the label on a game for kids and it indicates 12+. The concept could be something like that. That is pretty easily understandable and visible before you purchase an item. Then again, of course the question with trust comes in, but it could be something that another party has evaluated. The team imagined a pop-up picture or box when you enter a website with very little text, not like cookies, and maybe with colors as well so you really know 'okay this is good or bad or medium'. Then, you can make your own decision if you consent or not.*

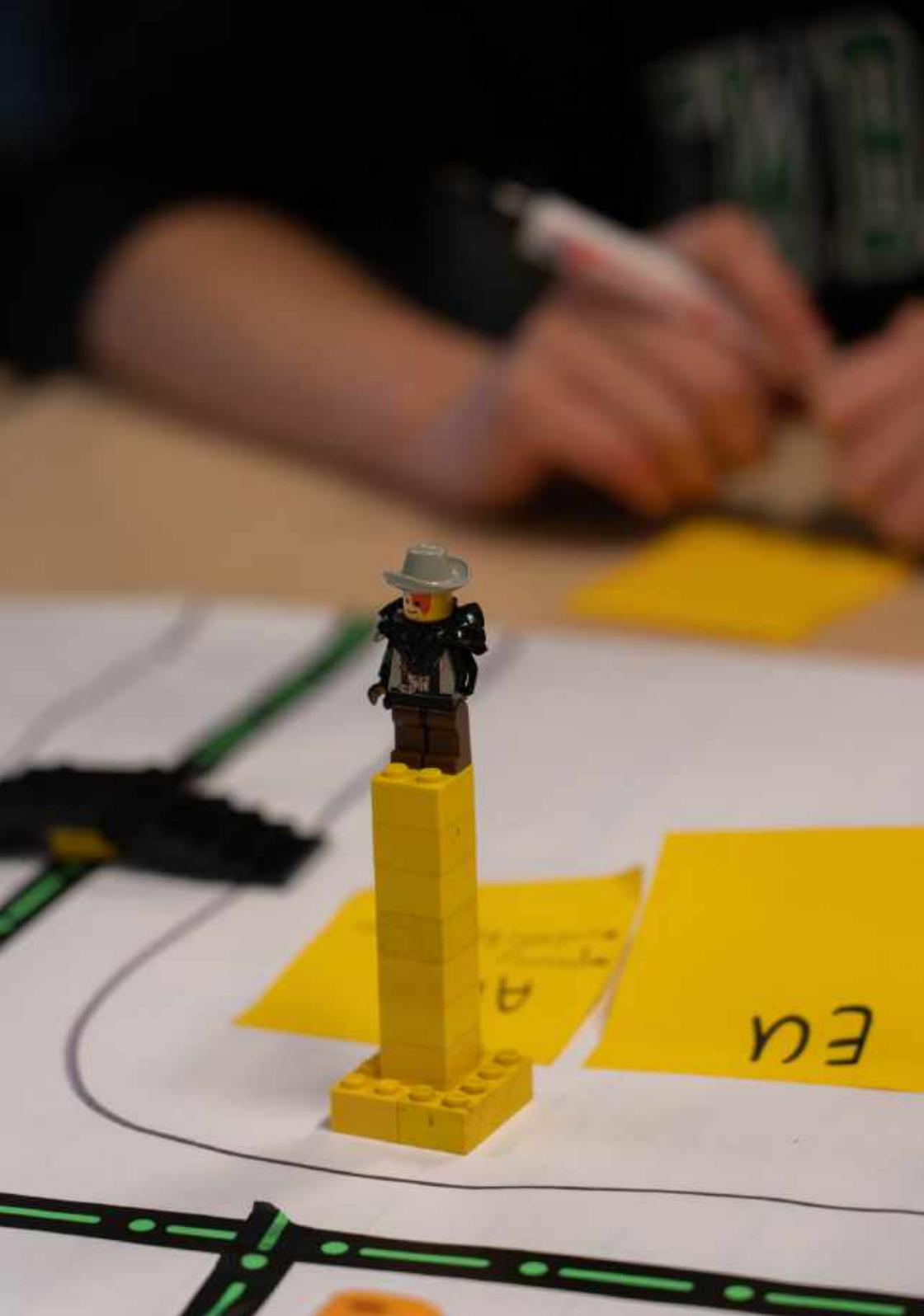
*Then, the team considered labels should include different aspects of trust, drawing inspiration from a variety of interesting nutrition labels. As a result, they concluded that one 'number' or 'rating' is difficult, since trust is a multi-factor problem.*

*A key component in the teams' conversation was the question: who owns this label? They debated the merits of whether the content of the label should be controlled by a company or the general public providing their feedback on how much they trust products. But the question stays: does the general public really know how well they can or cannot trust a digital rights label?*

Team

*This is a valid point. I like the airline example, because it is a self-incriminating process.*





## Concept 4

### Transparency

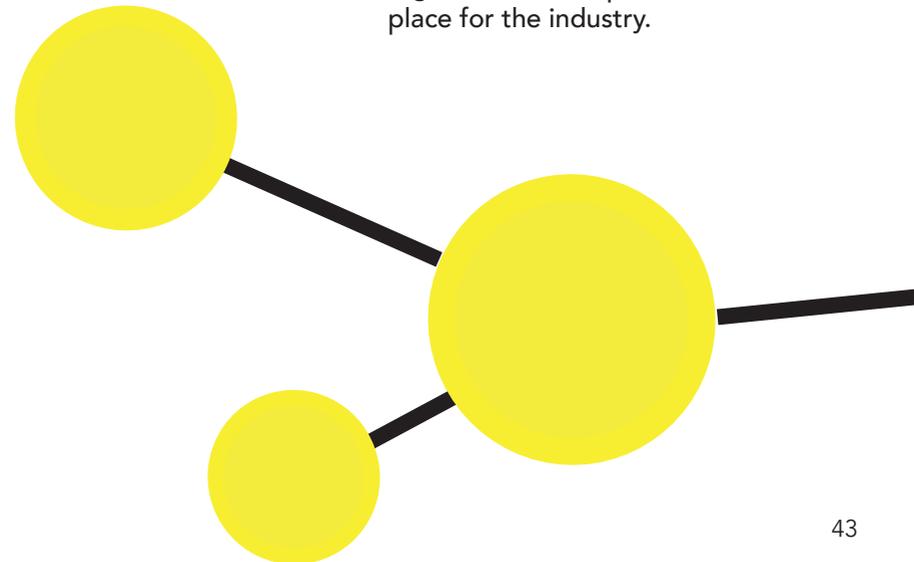
How long can you have access to my data?

#### Exploring the system

The yellow team divided their prototype in four parts: government, research institutions, industry and users. See picture on the left. By doing so they learned that the user has no idea about their data and where it is stored, how it is used, etc. The industry owns that data and uses it for marketing and sales. The government does have some information about what the industry is doing with the data, and universities want to use the data to do research.

#### Creating new rituals

The team identified that users do not see or know whether and where their data is used. And while the government is the authority safeguarding personal information, we as citizens still don't know how much they look into this. Therefore, this team wanted to ensure that users get a choice in how their data is used, and can ensure that their information is only stored for like a day or a week and then needs to be deleted. Therefore, the government has to make regulations to keep those rules in place for the industry.



# Discussions

## Transparency How long can you have my data?

Expert

*The idea of transparency is appreciated. Do you enforce that by means of an institution or do you enforce it by means of technology? Did you think about how to...?*

Expert

*In your situation, the Dutch personal data protection authority (autoriteit persoonsgegevens, AP) is the institution who checks if individual companies organize their own policies. So, it is a non-technical solution to this problem, right? Yet, you might be overestimating the power of the government. Governmental organizations often don't have a clue what tech bots are doing and they have no way to find out. But, it is not impossible. The interesting challenge is; what does the user need to know and when do they know enough to experience it as transparent?*

Expert

*There is a really nice trick called the 'inversion of responsibility', where the platforms are responsible for making sure that users know enough. The platform then gives more and more transparency, until the users say: I am satisfied and feel comfortable with this. And then the pressure is not on the user anymore, but it is on the platform of the government, to demonstrate they have done enough work. In fact, it is making the others work for the users, and making the users work for the others.*

### Next steps

- Prevent technological solutions
- Ensure privacy choices
- Be transparant

Team

*It is still the responsibility of the government. The government has to protect users. They have to think outside of the existing rules.*

Team

*That is a difficult question indeed. The government should have more information from the industry where data is used for, how they use it and which data is out on the street. Yet, it depends on the user: some users do not want to know everything, some users want to know everything, some users only need a little information to be satisfied. This makes developing regulations difficult.*

Team

*It is definitely important that the user can see the information, as well with regard to the government as the industry. Right now, the government oversees everything, but it has to be turned around: that the users can see everything they want.*



Industry

TESLA

EU

needed for the manufacturing  
to the users more  
benefits in the  
industry

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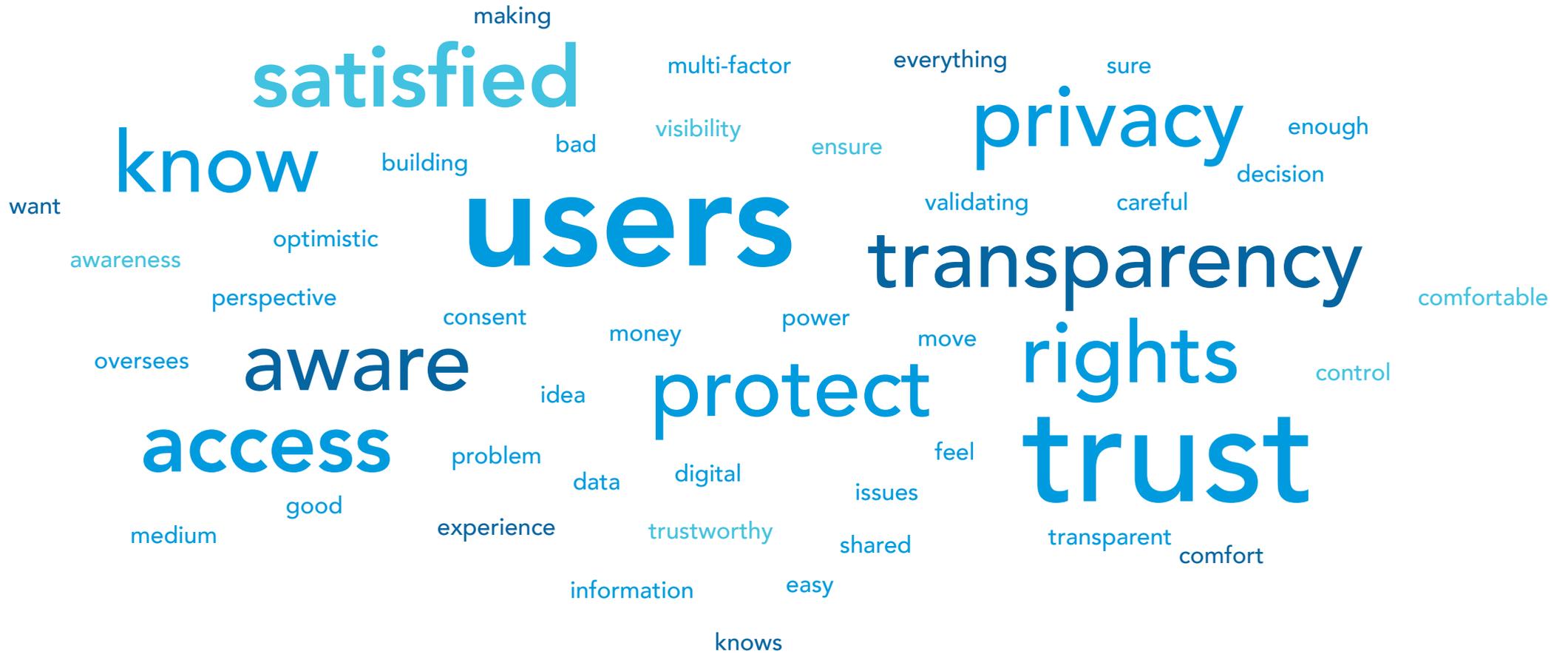
# What we learned

## Current digital rights context



# What we learned

Digital rights aims







## Next steps

### Digital rights in the Sustainable Media Lab

From February 2023, students at the Inholland Sustainable Media Lab will start working on the topic of digital rights, specifically focused on protecting the rights of the most vulnerable. Lab researcher Susannah Montgomery is gaining a lot of inspiration for the upcoming semester from this co-design day. *"Today's outcomes are a great starting point for the new students. We are building on these discussions and will also be using the results of this co-design process"* says Montgomery. *"We have learned that by working creatively and combining many different perspectives, it points us in the direction of more insights and ideas."* Moreover, Ander de Keijzer of the TOI domain will discuss if there might be a follow-up in his data driven minor as well.



Societal  
Impact  
Design

digital  
Rights  
House

DIGITAL  
RIGHTS  
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Voorjaar 2023