Final Speech for the Global Forum Mário Campolargo

10 minutes

The rise of *homo digitalis*: forging the conscious self

Good morning. It is an honour to be here at the Global Forum, an essential think-tank dedicated to navigating the evolution of our digital society. This year's theme, "Transformational Change: Building a Collaborative Future," and this session on connectivity, could not be more timely.

Connectivity is the invisible force that shapes our global economy and holds our world together. It is the key to bringing people together, identifying common interests, and overcoming our joint challenges.

We live in a truly **hyperconnected society**, an era of unprecedented potential. This connectivity drives solutions for our most pressing issues - from climate and healthcare to

financial or social inclusion - and forms the foundation of our digital public infrastructure. The technological landscape, powered by AI, quantum computing, Internet of Things, biotech and increasingly powerful data systems, promises a future of boundless possibilities.

But as we **celebrate this hyperconnectivity**, we must also acknowledge a profound transformation occurring in our societies and within us.

In times of unprecedented technological acceleration, innovation develops at an exponential pace while the capacity of societies to understand, adopt and trust disrupting technologies evolves more slowly, often following a linear or even lagging curve. This **gap** poses a significant risk of generating not only economic inequalities but also social instability, institutional distrust, and ethical dilemmas.

At the same time, our existence is increasingly mediated by digital interfaces. We connect not only with other humans but with a complex ecosystem of bots, algorithms, and virtual AI agents. The classical notion of the rational human with

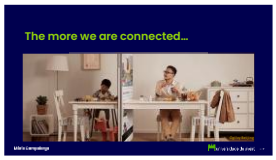
reflective capacity and consciousness, progressively fashioned by family, school and society, understood as a decisive driver of history, is now giving way to more hybrid, fast and fluid notions in a liquid society, which is slowly giving rise to a second human “nature”, significantly induced by technology. Each one of us is in this convergence between physical and virtual, between natural and artificial, giving birth to a composite self. In a few words, we are participating and witnessing the creation of a new kind of human: **the *homo digitalis***.

This raises a critical question about the nature of our **digital self**. In this new context, are we the masters of technology, or are we being mastered by it? If we lack sufficient **digital literacy and conscientiousness**, we risk becoming mere passive connectors of the vast networks growing around us.

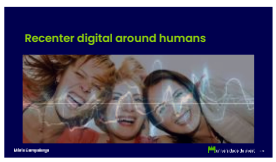
With the authoritarian and populist drifts of our societies, very much determined by disinformation and the hegemonic power of global, commercial, monopolistic and capitalist networks or those serving states, we have entered a dynamic in which rationalities and logics of behaviour can be pre-programmed. Between the natural and the artificial, the challenge is, for each one of us, not to allow ourselves to be overwhelmed by the

potential mass cloning of citizens who come to think and act identically, if not in an alienated way.

This is not just a societal challenge; it is a geopolitical one. The very digital infrastructure that can enable peace and resilience is also a domain of power struggles and strategic competition. We must ask: what are the powers of non-democratic or ill-intentioned groups to manipulate the emerging digital self? The threats are real, from misinformation to cyberattacks, from isolating us in social networks echo chambers, shaping our thoughts and reinforcing our prejudices to the fragmentation of our shared digital space and societies, and they demand our urgent attention.



Moreover, we risk allowing digital intermediation to replace genuine human relations, thereby leading to a diminution of the empathy and feelings that bind us together. We see this paradox every day: **sometimes the more we are connected, the less we truly connect**.



So, what is the path forward?

The answer is not to retreat from technology. The answer is to advance with purpose. We must transition from being passive **connectors** to becoming **active actors in shaping our digital destiny**.

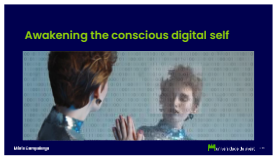
This requires a fundamental shift in focus. **We must recenter the discussion and our collective efforts around the human and our shared human values**. But this is easier said than done.

It requires us to confront some profoundly difficult questions, and I want to leave you with three of them today.

- **First**, on being “actors and not connectors”. Beyond individual digital literacy, what systemic changes must we demand from tech platforms and policymakers to ensure that our evolution into *homo digitalis* enhances human agency, rather than simply making us more efficient nodes in a network we don't control?
- **Second**, on the paradox of increased connectivity and diminished connection. As we race to build essential digital public infrastructures for social and economic purposes, are we unintentionally **architecting genuine human relationships out of our society**? If so, how do we hard-

code empathy into systems that are, by their nature, transactional?

- And **finally**, this all relies on a shared **sense of a common future** built on technology and regulation. But in a pluralistic world with bluntly different points of view, whose human values do we embed into our global digital governance? And how do we enforce them without stifling innovation or imposing a single world order? What new institutional models are needed to protect the digital self and promote digital sovereignty without resorting to fragmentation? How will multilateral organizations foster digital infrastructure that minimize digital divide and are built on a foundation of peace, security, and resilience.



These are epochal challenges that will define our generation. We have now a unique opportunity to define our future, not just through technology, but through thoughtful regulation, research and investments and, most importantly, a **shared sense of a common future**. We have an opportunity not just to build a connected world, but a **conscious one**. Let’s make sure it’s a deeply human future we actively choose.

Thank you.


Thanks
Mario Lampalzer