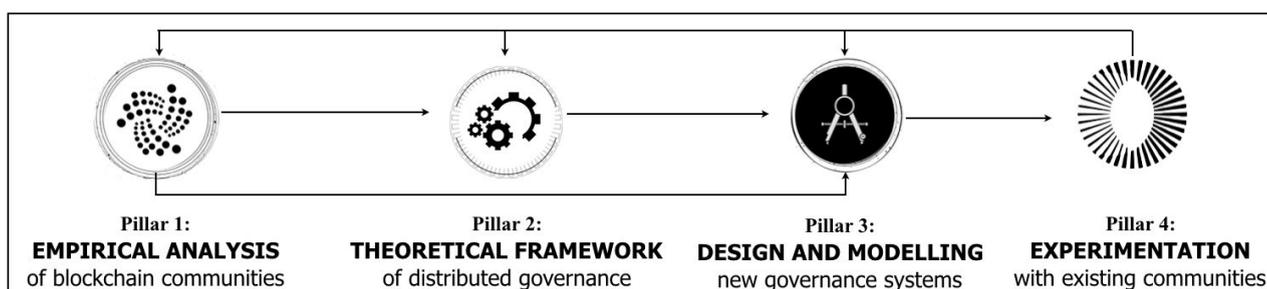# PhD Position
in Social Sciences & Ethnography

The **European Research Council** project "*Blockchain Gov*", directed by Primavera De Filippi, is looking for a doctoral student with expertise in **ethnographic studies** and **Participatory Action Research** to investigate the governance of blockchain networks. The researcher will be expected to investigate the **formal and informal governance structures** of blockchain communities and their underlying power dynamics.

The project is a 5 year long (2021-2026), EU-funded (ERC grant of €2M), hosted at the *Centre National de Recherche Scientifique* (France) and the *European University Institute* (Italy), with Principal Investigator and advisors from the *Berkman Klein Center at Harvard University.*

Blockchain Gov

Blockchain Gov is an **interdisciplinary** research project studying the impact of blockchain technology on **governance**, and its consequences for **legitimacy** and **trust**. It relies on four interrelated pillars:

| Pillar 1: **EMPIRICAL ANALYSIS** of blockchain communities | Pillar 2: **THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK** of distributed governance | Pillar 3: **DESIGN AND MODELLING** new governance systems | Pillar 4: **EXPERIMENTATION** with existing communities |

(1) Through **ethnographic methods**, the project intends to examine the governance of existing blockchain communities, looking at both **formal and informal governance** practices, and the **power dynamics** that subsist amongst the actors involved.

(2) The project aims to develop a **theoretical framework** for distributed governance, grounded on existing legal and political theories, collective action theory, and Internet governance studies.

(3) Drawing from these insights, the project seeks to **elaborate new models** of distributed governance characterised by more decentralized and participatory decision-making, greater transparency and accountability.

(4) Finally, the project will help selected pilot communities to experiment with these new governance models and will encourage the adoption thereof both at the **institutional level** and **global governance level.**

Blockchain Gov is building an **interdisciplinary research team** comprising legal scholars, social and political scientists, who will work in close collaboration with computer scientists and blockchain engineers. All members are expected to already have a proper understanding of blockchain technology and be interested in exploring the potential that blockchain technology offers in the field of distributed governance, while nonetheless maintaining a **critical stance towards the technology.**

Job Description

The scope of the doctoral position comprises the following research activities:

1. Ethnographic study of blockchain communities

The doctoral student will engage in **participant observation, fieldwork and cultural immersion** to investigate **the formal and informal governance structures** of blockchain communities, listening to the voices of these communities from within in order to unveil the tacit governance practices and the invisible powers operating behind the scenes. First, the ethnography will focus on three existing blockchain networks, selected for their distinct approaches to governance: *Bitcoin*, *Ethereum*, and *Tezos*. Subsequently, the attention will shift to analysing the governance and operations of the testbed communities piloting the *Participatory Action Research*. The student will observe blockchain communities through direct and **ongoing participation** with a view to reveal their **intrinsic objectives and needs**, preoccupations and doubts. Qualitative data analysis will contribute new empirical insights concerning both the formal and informal, explicit and implicit governance practices underpinning these blockchain-based networks, revealing power dynamics that may have gone unnoticed by the communities themselves.

2. In-depth analysis of relevant case studies

The doctoral student will challenge the "trustless" nature of blockchain technology by investigating **three relevant case** studies where *onchain* governance has failed to deliver on its promises, highlighting the complex and tacit operations of *offchain* governance. The case studies will be selected in due time over the course of the project (former examples include *Bitcoin* scaling debate and *TheDAO*'s attack). **Qualitative research methodologies**, e.g. means/ends analysis and in-depth interviews will serve to identify the core values and objectives of the actors involved, either directly or indirectly, in addressing these governance challenges (e.g. blockchain developers, miners, token holders, cryptocurrency exchanges, etc.) and analyse the perceived success or failure of adopted solutions. Ultimately, this research will shed light on the limitations of pure *on-chain* governance tools, and the need to account for external forces in the governance of blockchain-based systems.

3. Participatory Action Research (PAR)

The doctoral student will engage with the Participatory Action Research (PAR), helping selected initiatives develop more empirically and theoretically informed practices to improve their governance structure. Central to this task will be an **ongoing engagement** with community members, to ensure a proper alignment with the objectives of the project. Throughout the process, the student will collect **feedback** from the communities on their impression about these new governance tools. All observations will be shared with the group and collectively evaluated in light of the project findings.

The doctoral student will also be expected to undertake the following tasks:

- **Help organise interdisciplinary workshops and focus groups** (three times a year— 20 to 30 participants each), gathering legal scholars, political scientists and blockchain engineers.

- Contribute **to the drafting of a monograph** and an **edited volume.**

- **Support pilots communities** who will experiment with new governance structures.

- **Present** the primary outcomes of the research in **international conferences**, and **publish** in leading research journals.

- **Maintain** on-going communication with international networks of academics, blockchain projects and the developer community to facilitate collaboration and cross-pollination.

Benefits

Career opportunities:

- International recognition
- Publications in high impact journals
- Organisation of seminars and conferences at CERSA/CNRS or EUI
- Collaboration with a network of leading researchers at Harvard, Berkeley, MIT, etc

Remuneration:

- **Monthly salary**: 1 766,49 €
- Funding for visiting fellowships, conferences, equipment, and professional trainings

Autonomy:

- The researcher will be able to work remotely, with regular face to face meetings.
- The position will allow for flexible working hours.
- The research will be managed with a goal-oriented approach, focusing more on deliverables than actual working hours.

REQUIREMENTS

Essential requirements:

- **Master degree** (completed before October 2021) in social science, ideally with a specialisation in ethnographic studies, Participatory Action research or related fields
- **Demonstrated interest and pre-existing knowledge** in several of the following topics: ethnography, Participatory Action Research, blockchain technology, peer-to-peer technologies, distributed governance, commons-based peer-production, science and technology studies.
- **Fluency in English**, excellent writing and presentation skills
- **Ability** to work in multidisciplinary teams, autonomy, critical thinking
- Be available for face to face meetings in Paris once every two weeks, if the pandemic allows

Desirable requirements:

- **Research publications** in relevant conferences and/or journals
- Active or passive **participation in existing blockchain communities** or projects
- Demonstrated interest and previous experience with **decentralized architectures**
- Experience in **Participatory Action Research** and **agile methodologies**
- **Teamwork and interpersonal skills**, collaboration, empathy and adaptation
- Interest or experience in social movements, commons-based peer-production projects, digital communities
- Underrepresented minorities in the blockchain space to increase the team diversity

Application Instructions

Interested candidates should submit the following document:

(1) **CV** (max 3 pages)

(2) **Research Plan**, with a statement of the applicant's ideas on the position research questions, theoretical framework, and methodological approach (max 3 pages).

(3) Two **Letters of Recommendation** (optional but strongly encouraged): referees may email the reference letter directly.

(4) **Letter of Motivation** (one page long) describing the applicant's reasons to apply for this job, research experience, career plans, and available start date.

Applicants are encouraged to apply as soon as possible, at the latest by **June 1st 2021**, in order to start in early **October 2021**. The position is for a duration of **three years**, renewable for one additional year.

Please submit your complete application by email in one **single** PDF file (other formats will not be read), in addition to the letters of recommendation, to:

Primavera De Filippi — pdefilippi+jobs@cyber.harvard.edu

All applications and communications should include in the subject "ERC position: PhD Ethnography".

Informal enquiries are welcome.

Shortlisted candidates will be invited to an interview with the selection board approximately by **July 2021.**

Decisions are expected to be made by **July 2021.**