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PHD POSITION IN LEGAL THEORY & LEGAL TECH

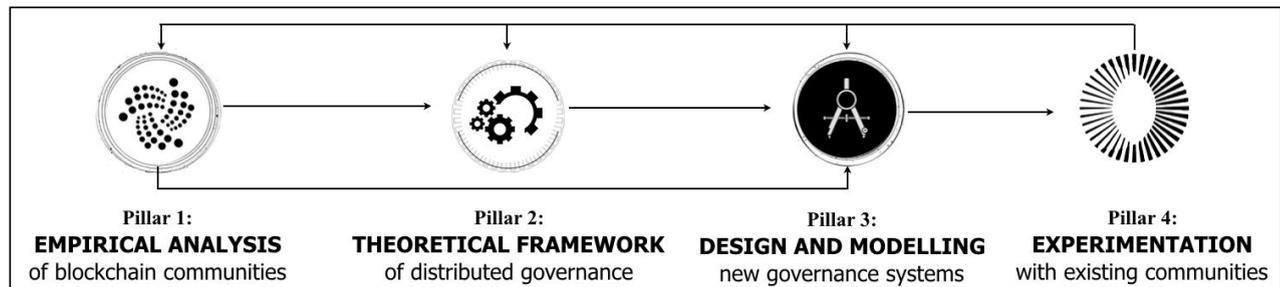
The **European Research Council** project “*Blockchain Gov*”, directed by Primavera De Filippi, is looking for a doctoral student with expertise in legal theory & legal technologies to investigate the **use of blockchain** and decentralized applications and its impact on **the governance** of public and private institutions. The researcher will be expected to explore the qualification of blockchain technology as a **regulatory technology** and its impact on the **rule of law**.

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:



- (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. Blockchain for institutional governance

The doctoral student will explore how blockchain technology can serve as a “**regulatory technology**” whose adoption can **increase confidence and trust** in existing public and private institutions, by promoting a greater degree of compliance between the **rule of code** and the **rule of law**. Specifically, the student will investigate the extent to which the technological guarantees of blockchain technology can be regarded as some form of constitutional constraints capable to achieve specific regulatory or policy objectives (*e.g.* promoting more transparency, auditability and accountability), and whether these can be held to be functionally equivalent to the requirements enshrined in existing laws and regulations (*e.g.* formalities and reporting obligations) so as to justify a reduced regulatory burden for those that incorporate these solutions into their information system.

2. Blockchain for distributed governance

The doctoral student will assist the *Blockchain Gov* team in the elaboration of **new governance tools** for blockchain communities to promote more transparency, accountability, representativity and inclusion in their governance process. Focus will be put on (a) the **code** that defines the governance by the infrastructure; (b) **social norms** that define the governance of the infrastructure; and (c) **economic incentives** embedded into the platform that determine the overall pay-off structure. The work will draw from existing attempts at distributed governance—ranging from traditional market-based approaches, to more meritocratic and experimental approaches (*e.g.* *liquid democracy*, *quadratic voting*)—adjusting them or revisiting them as needed. In particular, the student will contribute to the prototyping of **alternative dispute resolution** systems, combining *on-chain* and *off-chain* mechanisms to ensure better **due process**. These models will be tested by selected communities, providing essential data points on whether these models do, in fact, contribute to achieving decentralized and participatory decision-making.

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, and professional training

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 law or political sciences, ideally with a specialisation in legal theory, constitutional theory, legal and political philosophy.
- **Demonstrated interest and pre-existing knowledge** in several of the following topics: blockchain technology, peer-to-peer technologies, distributed governance, legal theory, constitutional theory, legal and regulatory technologies, Internet governance and politics.
- **Fluency in English**, excellent writing and presentation skills
- **Ability** to work in multidisciplinary teams, autonomy, critical thinking
- Be available for face to face meetings once every two weeks, if the current 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 **agile methodologies**, research projects and multidisciplinary teams.
- **Teamwork and interpersonal skills**, collaboration, empathy and adaptation
- Interest or experience in legal theory and philosophy, political theory, digital communities
- Underrepresented minorities in the blockchain space to increase 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 research questions, theoretical framework, and methodological approach (max 3 pages).
- (3) Two **Letters of Recommendation** (optional but strongly encouraged): referees can send the letter of reference 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 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 Legal Theory".

Informal enquiries are welcome.

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