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PLENAARETTEKANNE / KEYNOTE

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Do Machines Have Rhythm? AI and the Reorganisation of Urban Life

Technologies have the power to restructure everyday lives, environments, and the world itself. Yet we still lack a clear understanding of the mechanisms through which artificial intelligence is reshaping social and urban realities. One key barrier has been the dominance of two competing discourses: AI as progress and innovation, or AI as a critical force producing inequality and exclusion. This keynote proposes a shift beyond this dichotomy by introducing a neutral analytical framework grounded in Henri Lefebvre's rhythmanalysis. It asks how data-rich and AI-driven systems restructure urban rhythms across time and space. As each city constitutes a distinct rhythmic configuration, AI systems – including autonomous vehicles – are understood as interventions into everyday temporal structures that may either synchronise with or disrupt existing urban rhythms. Empirically, the talk draws on a comparative study across 26 cities, combining cognitive eye-tracking with crowdsourced survey data. Focusing on everyday events in urban mobility, it examines how AI-mediated rhythms are perceived, how experience is articulated, and how disruptions and adaptations emerge in practice. It also addresses a core design challenge: how to build AI systems that can operate across highly heterogeneous rhythmic environments. The keynote ultimately reframes AI not only as a technological system, but as a force that reorganises the social and ethical configuration of urban life, with implications for inclusion, inequality, and urban knowledge production.

Bio: Anu Masso is an Associate Professor of Big Data in Social Sciences at the Ragnar Nurkse Department of Innovation and Governance, Tallinn University of Technology. Her research focuses on the social dimensions of data technologies, with particular attention to data movements, spatial mobilities, and social transformations. She is also known for her work on social science methods and methodologies, including data and AI ethics. Her publications include articles in leading journals such as *Population, Space and Place*; *Information Systems Frontiers*; *Social Networks*; *New Media & Society*; and *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies*. She is currently the principal investigator of the Estonian Research Council-funded project *Data Migration: A Social Transformation Framework* and held a Global Digital Governance Fellowship at Stanford University (2022). She has published the award-winning book *How to Understand a Datafied World? A Methodological Guide* (2020, in Estonian) and *The Data Welfare State* (2025) with Anne Kaun.