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Foreword

Like many ideas, the idea for this issue of *Itinera* came out of an informal meeting – a detail of history typically not preserved in archives. In 2017 two research teams from the Swiss Federal Institute for Technology (ETH Zurich) and the Università Svizzera Italiana Lugano (USI Lugano) met and decided to set up a joint research project. The inspiration for this decision was a historical source – a federal dispatch from 1985 announcing «special measures in favor of education and further training as well as research in information technology and engineering sciences».[1] This document led the two teams to collaborate on a project titled Digital Federalism, which had two objects of investigation – the SWITCH network and the supercomputing center in Manno, in the canton of Ticino, both of which are also addressed in papers in this issue.[2]

In an early stage of our research, we aimed to examine archival sources on the history of the network and of the supercomputing center through the lens of federalism. However, when the research started, we noticed that it took hardly any effort to trace the progress of federalism in the narratives provided by the archival materials we were perusing, because the many facets and nuances of the Swiss federal system shone through them all. We learned that chasing down specific developments – «automation», «computerization», and «digitization», for example – and including the perspectives of actors at different levels invariably involved federalism in a federal state. Quite soon, we realized that we were not alone in this journey. This special issue is the result of the dialogue we have woven over time with brilliant colleagues who helped us to look at the history of digital federalism from different theoretical and empirical points of view. Digital federalism and its imaginaries led us to the 2019 annual meeting of the Society for the History of Technology (SHOT) in Milan. In 2020 we discussed digital federalism from the point of view of the history of innovation with international scholars and members of the working group Geschichte und Informatik (G&I) in

1 Swiss Federal Gazette, 1986, 1: 321–383.

2 The research project «Digital Federalism. The Early History of SWITCH and CSCS Manno (1985–1995)» was funded by the Swiss National Science Foundation from fall 2018 to spring 2020, http://p3.snf.ch/Project-183007 (29/3/2021).

Bern. Sources analyzed in this issue of *Itinera* were jointly read and discussed at several meetings of the Computer, Administration, and History network in Weimar, Lüneburg, and Lübeck. We were furthermore lucky to profit from meetings and a conference in Lugano and from the Collegium Helveticum's academic workspaces in Zurich. Digital federalism was discussed on the occasion of several internal and public colloquia during the collegium's Digital Societies fellowship period (2016–2020).

Looking at history through the lens of digital federalism has been a great challenge for us as historians and social scientists. It requires both an individual and collective effort to bring different «eyes», sources, mindsets, and expertise into dialogue. Moreover, cooperation and dialogue were not just a feature of the histories covered in this issue, but also an essential element of our collective work as scholars.

As editors, we wish to acknowledge all the authors who accepted our invitation to contribute to this exciting project. We would also like to thank the Collegium Helveticum and the Chair for the History of Technology at ETH Zurich for financial support to publish this special issue. We are grateful to the editor of *Itinera* and to the General Secretariat of the *Schweizerische Gesellschaft für Geschichte* (*Société Suisse d'Histoire – Società Svizzera di Storia*) for integrating the issue into the series as well as for allowing us to publish it in English. We thank Giselle Weiss in the name of all the authors for the language proofreading and editing: her contribution to each and every paper was invaluable. We also gratefully acknowledge critical feedback (thank you, Silvia Berger Ziauddin and Ricky Wichum), anonymous reviewers, and the publisher, Schwabe Verlag, for editing, design, and printing. For extensive research on Swiss multilingual archival finding aids we thank Henrike Hoffmann. Finally, we owe a special debt of gratitude to all the archivists and technicians who so patiently managed to both satisfy and feed our historical curiosity. They protect and preserve all the precious traces we have followed so far – as well as those to be followed in the future.

Lübeck and Milan, summer 2021