

Introduction

The occasion for this book is the growing conflict between the call for a “data-driven” society on the one side and the demand for ensuring individual freedom, autonomy, and dignity by means of protecting privacy on the other. Gathering and exploiting data of all kinds in ever greater quantities promises to create value and efficiency in business, education, healthcare, social services, energy, transportation, and almost all other areas of society. But at the same time, fears of loss of privacy lead to ever more prohibitive regulations. The European Union offers a concrete example of this conflict. In the name of a single digital market, the European Commission proclaims that “the internet and digital technologies are transforming our world. But existing barriers online mean citizens miss out on goods and services, internet companies and start-ups have their horizons limited, and businesses and governments cannot fully benefit from digital tools.”¹ Among the “existing barriers” are not only inadequate infrastructure and the many different legal frameworks in Europe but also the strong data-protection laws. While extolling the benefits of good infrastructure and free flows of information, the EU has at the same time ratified a new General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR). The GDPR takes a strong stand on privacy as a fundamental human right and prohibits, at least in principle and intention, any use of personal data that is not based on the informed consent of the “data subject” or is not anonymized. From the perspective of big data analytics, which does not allow for complete knowledge of uses of data in advance, and therefore prevents any consent of data use based on this kind of knowledge, the vision of a data-driven society becomes unrealizable. One cannot base the development of new knowledge and products and services on data, while at the same time prohibiting the gathering and use of data. This becomes especially embarrassing when it is a matter of developing *personalized* products and services in all areas while at the same time demanding that data be anonymized and strictly separated from any personal references. It would

1 | https://ec.europa.eu/commission/priorities/digital-single-market_en. Of course, this conflict is not merely European. The situation in the USA is not essentially different.