

The Responsible Software Engineering (RSE) Project

 Roberto Cibirin (rcibirin@ucc.ie); Sarah Robinson; Irum Rauf; Luigina Ciolfi; Conor Linehan; John McCarthy; Jim Buckley [UL]; Clare McInerney [Lero]; Bashar Nuseibeh [OU].

WHAT DID WE DO?

In recent years, **public trust** in **software** has been **undermined** by growing concerns over online scams, deepfakes, and corporate prioritisation of profit over welfare.

Viewing **software engineering** solely as working with code is too narrow. Instead, we argue that it should actively **prioritise responsibility**.

We have proposed an **infrastructural and sociotechnical** theoretical approach to **responsible software engineering (RSE)**, which shifts focus from liability to exposing the **dominant norms and practices** that make software complicit in social and environmental injustices.

Using interviews, surveys, Forum theatre, and workshops, we have engaged both the public and software engineers exploring how **software engineering** can become **more ethically reflexive**.



Forum Theatre performance on the practice of algorithmic shadow-banning with Creativity and Change Performers and Sarah Robinson, UCC Social Sciences Festival December 2024, photo credit Joeleen Cronin.

“My main reflections are how easily responsibility is delegated to others and how a substantial impediment to responsibility is obliviousness; going right ‘over my head’, as a team lead.”

Reflection from a PI in a team of software engineers

WHY IS IT IMPORTANT?

Key Insights from a **Sociotechnical** Lens on **RSE**:

- Software engineers’ tendency to believe in **software’s neutrality** or **benefit** limits **reflection** on societal risks.
- Software engineers’ **standards, conventions**, and **habits** are **critical leverage points** for responsible practice.
- The **public** is concerned about software-related risks but often feels **disempowered** to act.
- **Structural barriers**—like **insecure freelance work** with limited access to training and company culture—hinder responsible engagement.

LERO Software for a better world

SCAN FOR MORE INFO

