„Digital Sustainability“: Negotiating Sustainability in Digital Society

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Basic Idea of the Paper

- Background: Sociology / science & technology studies (STS) of digitization…

- …brought together with the notion of sustainability:

  WHAT DOES „DIGITAL SUSTAINABILITY“ MEAN? [What is to be taken into account, considered, researched, investigated … etc.?]


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Line of Reasoning:

- Premises (Sustainability, Ontological Politics, the Digital)

- Dimensions of „Digital Sustainability“ (Nature, Society, the Digital)

- The Logic of Contemporary Digital Society (according to Zuboff)

- Lessons learned
Premises

- Ontological Politics I: What we know of the world AND what the world consists of (even its building blocks) is subject to (social, historical etc.) change (example: no microbes in France known NOR existent in France before Pasteurization of France; see Latour 1988)

- Sustainability: Reproducing potential to render forms of life durable

- Ontological Politics II: The leeway regarding what reality makes ontology a matter of politics, for the way life-styles co-create/bind nature are negotiable

- The Digital: The negotiation of ontology and sustainability nowadays against the background of a thoroughly digitized and datafied society = far-reaching observability of the social
Dimensions of „Digital Sustainability“

- Nature: The focus of discussions on sustainability. Role of the digital here:
  - Rescuing party (e.g. AI traffic management system to reduce the number of traffic jams and thus minimize resource consumption)
  - Threat (e.g. excessive energy wasting sending and storing of digital images, stickers, jike messages and so on)

- Society:
  - The digital as facilitator of inclusive public sphere / democratic society
  - The digital as facilitator of manipulation, disinformation, radicalization

- The digital:
  - Public maintenance of digital skills & infrastructures
  - Economic maintenance of digital skills & infrastructures
Dimensions of „Digital Sustainability“

Nature

Society ↔ The digital

Nature
The Logic of Contemporary Digital Society (According to Zuboff)

Elements of „The Age of Surveillance Capitalism“

- predicting users‘ features, preferences, desires as business model
- „extraction imperative“: collecting & processing ever more data
- „prediction products“ traded on „behavioural futures markets“
- prediction to prescription = radicalization of the data economy’s product: the potential to shape the behavior of people according to the objectives of those who pay for this behavior shaping potential
- spread of predictive/prescriptive logic to other social areas
The Logic of Contemporary Digital Society (According to Zuboff)

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A chance for sustainability? Yes, we can – automatize green behavior!

…but then: Predictive logic blows up sustainability of democracy
Lessons to be Learned

- Permeability between layers
- mutual benefit and insights translatable between sustainability and digitality
- The digital layer might learn from sustainability discourse!

Questions for future research

1. How to re-invent the notion of sustainability in theory and practice when combining it with insights from digitization research?

2. How to re-invent the further development of digitization by feeding in insights from sustainability discourse?
References


THANK YOU VERY MUCH FOR YOUR ATTENTION!!!