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Negotiating Sustainability in Post-Digital Life-Politics

Digital Technologies are the main drivers of societal transformation today. They have seeped into current life practices to such an extent that digital and non-digital aspects of social life have become inextricably intertwined. Since there is no longer an outside of digital sociality, the (re-)negotiation of life practices in their social, existential, physical, psychological, cultural, technical, and economical dimensions necessarily takes place under conditions of digitality.

In this panorama, sustainability acts as a matter of common concern that needs to be integrated into different life practices. Its meaning is, however, contested and thus at the center of political negotiations. Our panel takes this diagnosis as starting point to ask: How does digitality shape life practices and what role does sustainability play in them? What openings for sustainable transformations do different life practices based on specific socio-technical arrangements provide?

We start from the assumption that the interplay between social, material, and technological aspects shapes life practices, which articulate specific ontologies. We argue that different post-digital life-politics create different ontologies, and thus different openings for sustainable transformations, inscribed in the bodily materiality of how we live our life and what we aspire to do with it. We argue that without a theoretically and empirically robust understanding of the (everyday) negotiations between these ontologies, a sustainable transition of society at large is bound to fail.

The research cluster "Post-Digital Life Politics" (Fachgebiet Soziologische Theorie) focuses on the different aspects, dynamics, and conflicts concerning the boundaries, the interplay, the hybridization, and separation as well as the reflexive or pragmatic political logics of life practices in current digitalized life forms. We scrutinize, for example, the inflection of life practices by digital infrastructures, the development of critical competencies for a sustainable democracy in the digital public, and the social and cultural diversity and ontological differences of sociotechnical modes of life and existence.

The panel connects to our work in the research network "sustainable intelligence – intelligent sustainability", initiated by ITeG and the Hessian Centre Responsible Digitality (ZEVEDI). In this research network, we focus on the operational (e. g. political, scientific, and technological) logics, actions, and framings of the SDGs, thus contributing to the analysis of the relation between digitality and sustainability.[1]

In the panel, we will discuss four interconnected topics that link our research endeavors:

- o Post-digital sustainability in alternative forms of life
- o The politics of infrastructure – sustainability and digitality by design?
- o 'Eco-Logics'? – Cosmologies in cybernetic sociotechnical thinking
- o Sustainable consumption, digital recommendation, and the future of critique

The research cluster will engage in in-depth discussions of these topics during its retreat in the summer of 2022. The panel strives to dialogue the results of our internal deliberations with members from the research network "sustainable intelligence – intelligent sustainability" (e.g. Prof. Dr. Birgit Blättel-Mink, Goethe-University Frankfurt am Main) and the internationally renowned scholars Prof. Dr. Cordula Kropp (Stuttgart University) and/or Prof. Dr. Noortje Marres (University of Warwick).

Based on papers shared beforehand, members of the research cluster will give short inputs on the four topics listed above. Prof. Dr. Blättel-Mink, Prof. Dr. Cordula Kropp, and Prof. Dr. Noortje Marres will respond by commenting on and thinking further the issues raised in our paper-based inputs. We plan on publishing a special issue on 'negotiating sustainability in post-digital life politics' based on the presentations and comments of the panel.

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[1] cf. WBGU (2019): Unsere gemeinsame digitale Zukunft. Berlin