

“Data” and “Youth”



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UN World Data Forum, *Data and Youth* Event

27th April 2023

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<https://ict4d.org.uk>

Three underlying themes

- The importance of inter-generational dialogue
- Just because it is possible to do something, does not mean that it is right or good to do so
- We must all consider the environmental impact of data, and digital more widely



<https://www.occupycorporatism.com/secrets-of-the-transhumanist-agenda-revealed-at-2013-conference/>

1. Intergenerational dialogue



DESC walk at WSIS, March 2023

*We all have much to gain by learning
from each other*

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How do you and I differ?

I have grey hair! I must be old and slow!

I'm European; you're...

I'm not a digital native – I can't possibly use digital tech

The future is yours – you should determine it

You have all the good innovative ideas

With or without digital tech: the most important difference?

Imagine a world where you could not access or use digital tech!

For me, the most important difference is that I've known a world without much digital tech



How do we ensure effective intergenerational dialogue?

- Much youth involvement replicates existing political structures
- Too many “Youth” initiatives within international discourse tend to be patronising and condescending
- We need to work together to
 - Engage young people from diverse backgrounds
 - Build trust through mutual respect
 - Be humble and collaborative
 - Recognise and accept that just being young does not mean we have all the answers!



@globalyouthigf

2. The environmental impact of data?



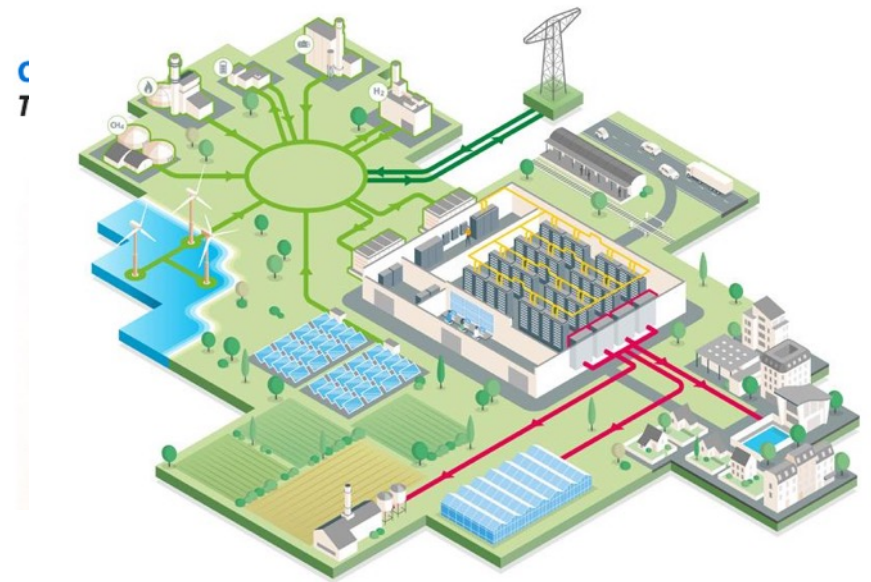
Data Centre, Nairobi, 2015

Many “young people” care about “climate change”. So, what are we actually doing about the wider environmental impact of data?

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The environmental impact of data

- Wide ranging estimates of data centre energy consumption (and this is only the storage of data)
 - Between 1% and 4% of global electricity
 - Around 1% global greenhouse emissions
- Environmental impact is not just about servers
 - Digital data creation has environmental impact
 - Energy and infrastructure necessary to transmit data
- More widely, recent figures suggest that digital tech sector produces around twice as much carbon as entire airline industry
- Massive increases in data facilitated through 5G (and beyond) enabling greater IoT and AI – new tech increasing impact on the environment



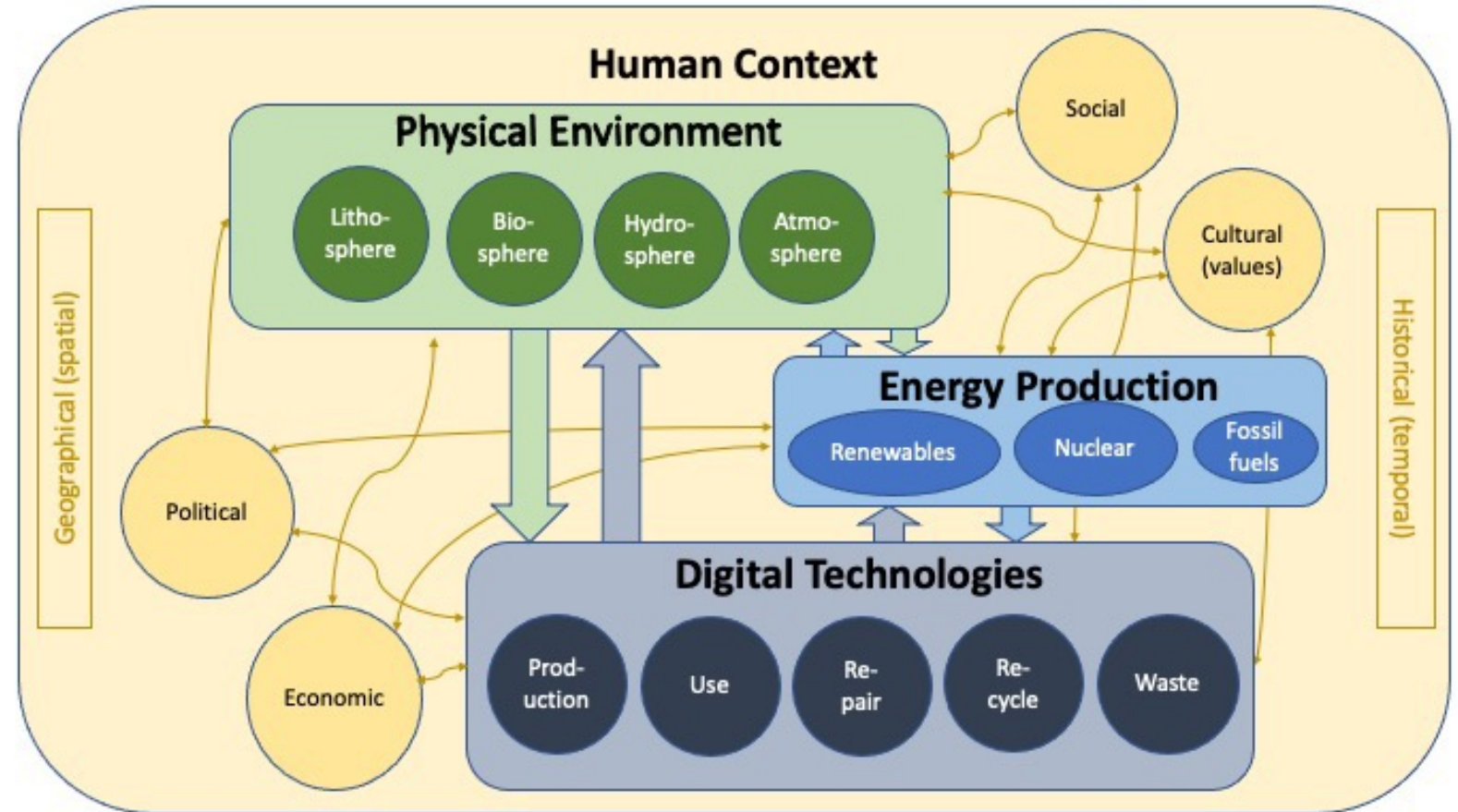
Sources: <https://www.engie.com/en/campaign/green-data-centers>,
<https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S2666389921001884?via%3Dihub> ...

Digital-Environment System Coalition

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See <http://desc.global>



What to do about it? Simple things...

- #1in7offline
 - Regain our experience of nature
- Keep our 'phones for twice as long
 - Much more energy used in making a 'phone than in using it
- Don't use online video (stick to audio)
- Stream in low-res
- Repair rather than replace
- Listen to multiple voices from different cultures
 - Dominant views on environmental issues mainly from privileged elites
 - Where are the indigenous and marginalised voices?



Wall tiles in Macau, 2018

3. We are the data



Just because it is possible to do something, does not mean that it is right or good to do so

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Who benefits from our data?

- Digital tech is being created and sold to achieve specific objectives
 - But also remember unintended consequences
- Need to understand the interests underlying this
 - Driven by private sector companies
 - Who have co-opted governments and the UN system into supporting their agendas
 - Think about governments giving our data to companies...
- Remember, digital tech itself does not cause anything (digital determinism is a deeply problematic notion)
 - It is the people who design, build and sell it that cause things to happen



<https://clario.co>

The role of science and scientists

- Science is never value free, but the values behind it are frequently not taken into consideration
 - Modern science is very good at answering the “positive” – what is
 - But not good at the “normative” – what should be
- Scientists (both academics and in private sector) are responsible for what they create
 - Especially for harmful unintended consequences
 - This applies to the digital tech sector as much as any other science
 - Scientists choose what they do research on!
 - And whose interests they serve
- Just because it is possible to do something does not mean that we should do it
 - Think about this in the context of data



<https://www.undp.org/bangladesh>

We are the data: if we cannot avoid using digital tech we are unfree



<https://erickimphotography.com/blog/2020/03/05/social-media-slavery/>

A new form of enslavement, whereby the “Digital Barons” exploit us as data to generate ever greater surplus value

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In conclusion: youth and data

- We need new, more inclusive modes of inter-generational dialogue about digital
- Just because it is possible to do something, does not mean that it is right or good to do so.
 - Digital tech is usually assumed to be good – but we need to mitigate the harms to ensure any good can prevail
- We must all consider the environmental impact of data, and digital tech more widely.
 - Digital tech is often the cause of environmental harms rather than a solution.



Pokhara, Nepal, 2023

Do something really different: don't necessarily follow the dominant rhetoric

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Read more at <https://unwin.wordpress.com>

<https://ict4d.org.uk>