The Digital-Environment System Coalition (DESC)

Tim Unwin

International Symposium

European Approaches Towards a Sustainable Digitalization

6th May 2021

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5 minutes on:

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- Short introduction of the Digital-Environment System Coalition (DESC)

- The potentials of such scientific networking processes to drive policy debate towards stronger sustainability focus of digitalization?

- What (else) would be needed to make digitalization work for sustainability?

East Africa Data Centre, Nairobi, Kenya

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Many existing initiatives on digital sustainability

- **Cambridge Institute for Sustainability Leadership** – and the **environmental footprint of cryptocurrency**
- **ClimateAction.tech** – using the skills of tech workers to accelerate climate action
- **climatecare** and their work on the **carbon footprint of the Internet**
- **Digitalisierung und sozial-ökologische Transformation** (**Digitalization and Sustainability**) project – a cooperation between the Technische Universität Berlin (TU Berlin) and the Institute for Ecological Economy Research (IÖW)
- **EIT Raw Materials Academy** – especially **learning map of the lifecycle of a phone**
- **Ericsson**'s understandings of environmental sustainability
- The UK's **EPSRC Digital Economy's Theme** on Sustainable Digital Society
- **EuroDig wiki – drowning in data** – lists useful references and resources
- The **European Commission's work** on digital sustainability
- The **European Space Agency's work** on space trash and debris
- **GeSI**'s work seeking to enable digital sustainability
- The GIP Digital Watch observatory on **Digital and Environment**
- The **Global e-Waste Statistics Partnership** (GESP) founded by the ITU, UNU and ISWA
- Greenpeace's work on **greener electronics**
- The **Green Web Foundation** including **Green Web Datasets**
- The GSMA's work at the interface between mobiles and climate change
  - 2021 report on *The Role of Digital and Mobile-Enabled Solutions in Addressing Climate Change*
- The ITU's activities on **ICTs for a sustainable world** (see also *ICT-Centric Economic Growth, Innovation and Job Creation*)
- The **Restart Project** and associated initiatives
- The **Shift Project**
- The **StEP** initiative on e-waste
- **Sustainable Digital Infrastructure Alliance**
- Some of the **UN's work on the impact of digital technologies**
- The **World Economic Forum**'s circular vision for electronics

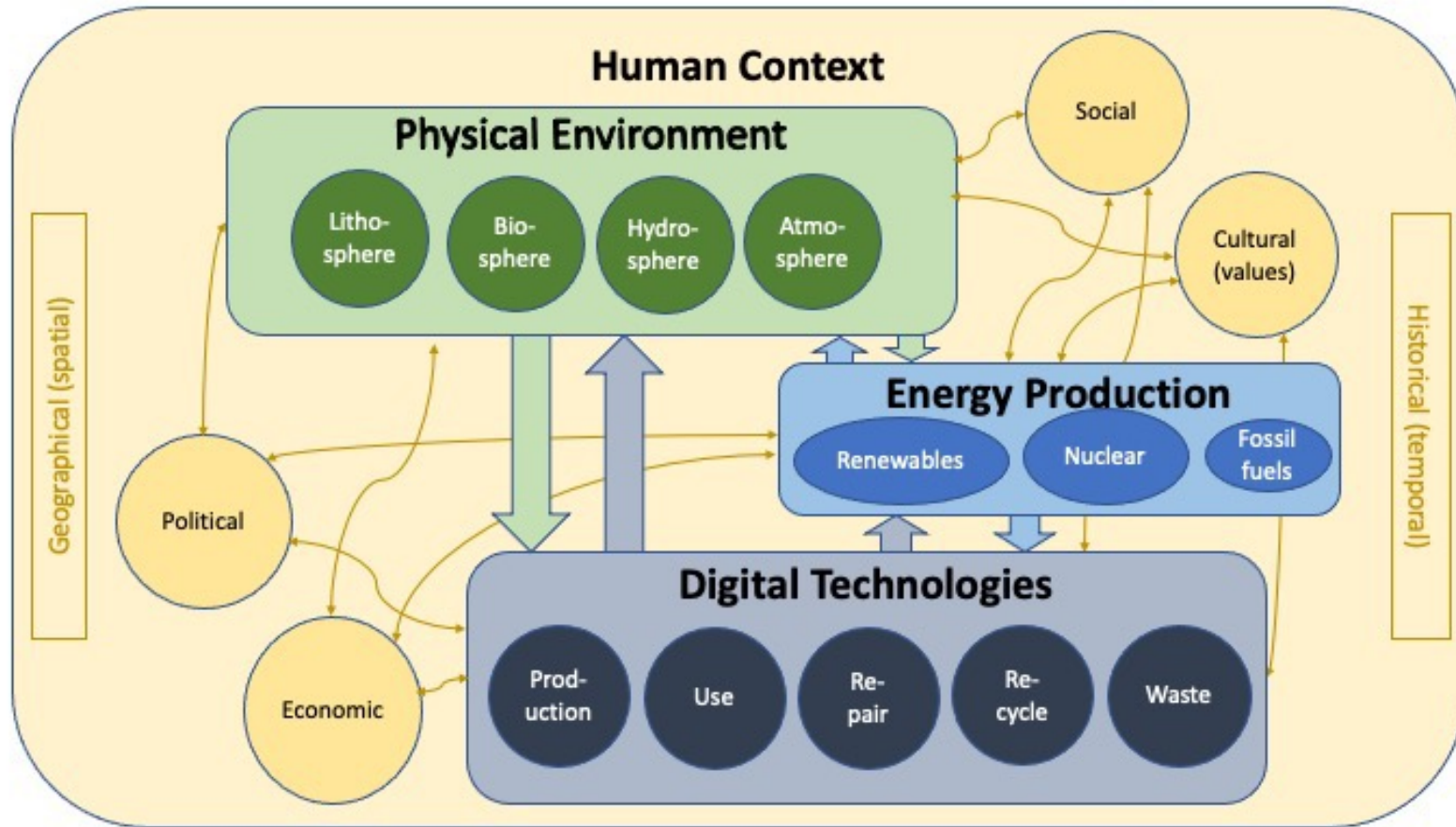**But none yet addresses these issues in a sufficiently holistic manner**

Crafting a new more holistic systemic framework – exploring the positives and negatives within this system

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... rather than mainly

Clear actions and outputs

- Establishing a flexible framework

- Developing new research clusters

- Engaging in policy dialogue and disseminations
  - Workshops
  - Diversity of publications

- Towards a 2025 report
  - Five years before end of Agenda 2030
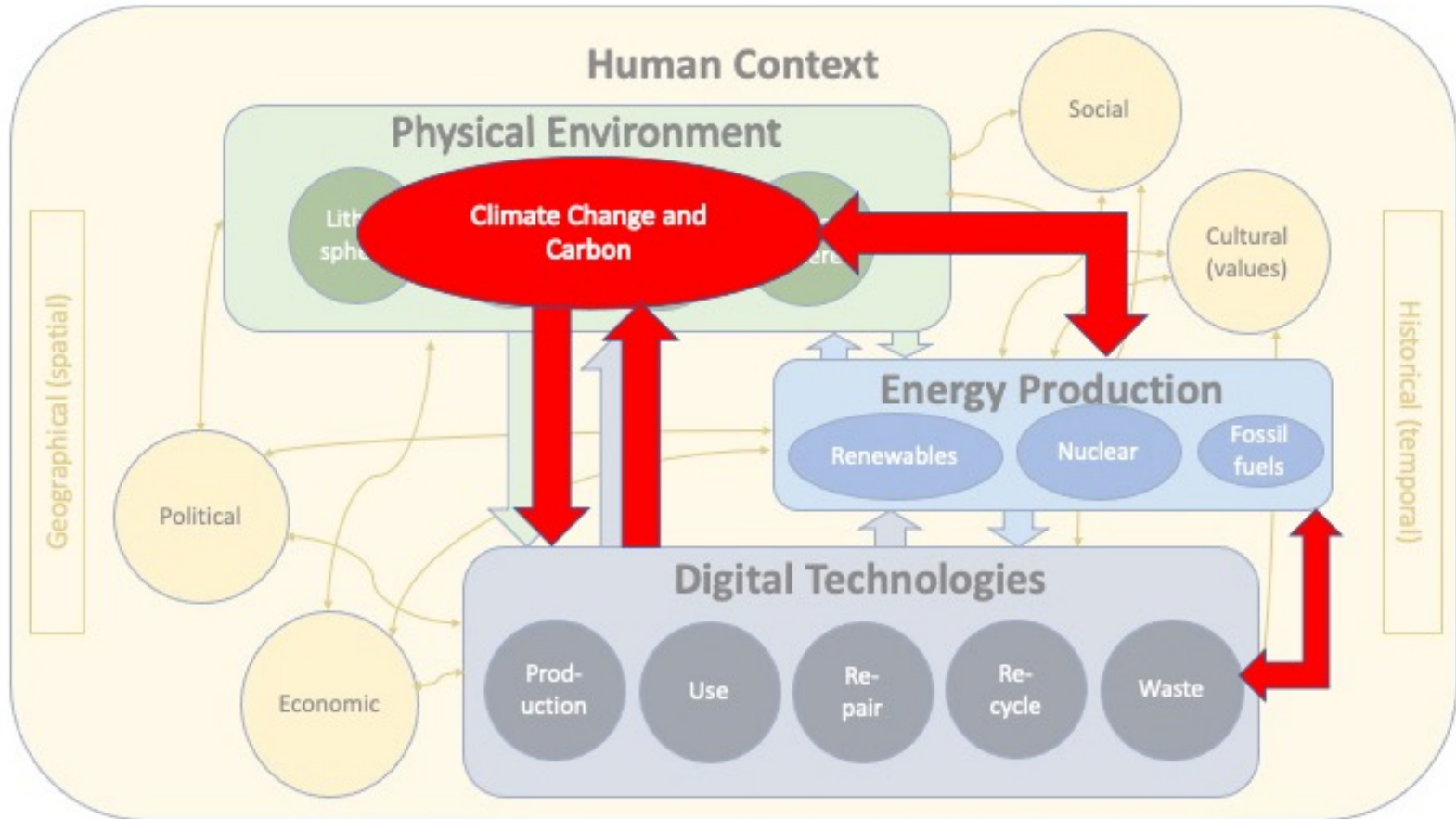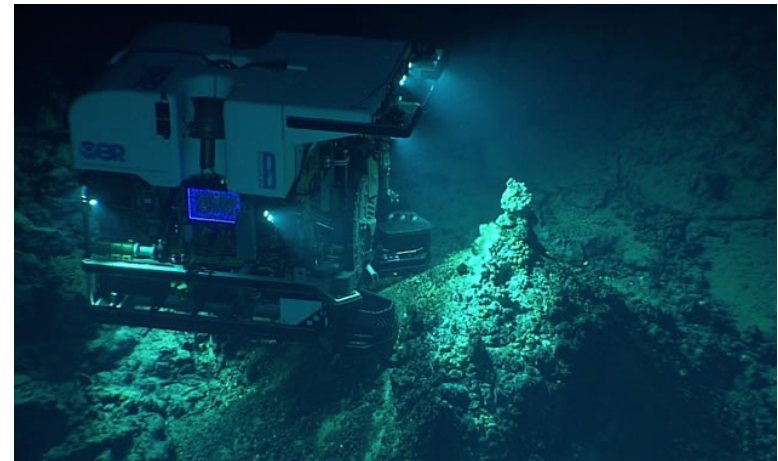
Potentials of scientific networking processes to drive policy debate

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Potentials

- Current positions are very entrenched
  - Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)
  - The Climate Change agenda (and the carbon fetish)
  - Driven very largely by powerful private sector interests
  - Digital tech almost always seen in a positive light
- But that makes it all the more interesting
  - Strong evidence base
  - Working with relevant stakeholders
    - Governments, private sector, civil society,
  - Convincing arguments
  - Vehement dissemination of ideas
  - Active engagement with policy makers
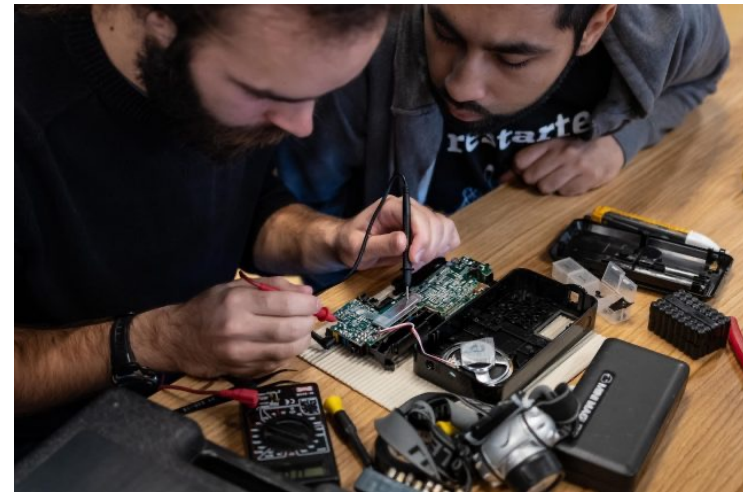
Making digitalization work for sustainability

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Making digitalization work for sustainability

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- Depends on how sustainability is defined!

- Our agenda is very radical
  - Claims that much use of digital tech is actually "anti-sustainable"
  - Must move beyond just climate change to a holistic view of the digital-environment system

- Must mitigate the harms if the benefits are to be realised

https://therestartproject.org/

Thanks

Digitalization and Sustainability

To find out more

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