University of Regensburg

Institute for Politcal Sciene

Professorship for political science research methods

Seminar: Globalization and Democracy

Instructor: Romy Escher, M.A.

Summer Term 2020

**Research Design:**

**Digital Infrastructure and Environmental Performance: Antagonists or team players?**

Jakob Berg

Wöhrdstraße 17, 93059 Regensburg

[Jakob.Berg@stud.uni-regensburg.de](mailto:Jakob.Berg@stud.uni-regensburg.de)

Student-ID: 2041821

Course of Study: B.A. Political Science

1. Subsidiary Subject: Public Law, 2. Subsidiary Subject: Economics

6. Semester

2020-07-22

**I. Introduction**

Whilst talking about a few of the most ongoing and interesting social phenomena of the late 20th and the beginning 21st century, digital revolution and changing environment, a third societal process does inevitably come up sooner or later: globalization. As globalization is both having a huge impact and being reliable on digital and environmental change, the first two mentioned phenomena are tightly interconnected to the globalization process.

It is well-known that globalization without new ways of digital communication around the globe such as the internet or social media, to just name a few, would not be the society-influencing, daily-life-changing social phenomena by which modern society is deeply formed.[[1]](#footnote-1) Maybe the youngest or at least the most recently discussed phenomena is environmental change with its concomitants like climate change or water pollution. But despite the relatively new emergence of environmental change as a worldwide discussed topic, it is still strongly connected to both globalization and digital infrastructure. Nearly all the problems and challenges world society is facing because of the changing environment are globalized problems which can’t be solved by single states and mostly not even by continental groups.[[2]](#footnote-2)

But whilst the connections between globalization and environment and the strings between digital infrastructure and globalized social processes seem to be discussed and examined under a lot of scientific aspects and by different academic approaches, the codependence of digital infrastructure and environmental performance still seems to give room for empirical research and a data-based analysis.

While one advantage of focusing on digital infrastructure and environmental performance is the above described rooms and possibilities for new empirical research, the area and the research topic are both largely extended ones. Therefore, and to live up to the common quality expectations of state-of-the-art empirical studies, this analysis does focus on three aspects of digital infrastructure influencing environmental performance of nations. These three aspects, that can be expected to be clarified and conceptualized during this study, are: Internet access and parcel shipping, internet usage and energy consumption and last, but not least internet access and environmental knowledge. These three branches of digital infrastructure should serve as explaining basics for the following questions: Do countries with a high developed digital infrastructure perform better or worse in environmental aspects? Or is the performance of countries regarding climate change and environmental problems even in some way dependent from its state of digital infrastructure?

In order to lead through the following empirical research, this question is trying to combine all interests and problems from above:

**How does digital infrastructure affect environmental performance?**

**II. Literature review**

As already mentioned, the connection between digitalization and environment are not as thoroughly discussed and analyzed in the scientific world as the social and economic relationships between globalization and digitalization or digitalization and environmental issues. Nevertheless, still a lot of interests and expectations lie on the many research studies regarding the interaction of digitalization and environmental sustainability. Many different academic fields have lied eyes on the various possibilities and transformations digitalization could bring in the scientific discussion about sustainability issues. Even if this paper focusses on environmental and ecological problems, when browsing through literature and scientific papers regarding the changes brought by modern digital world, data protection and social justice do inevitably come up as other areas of sustainable development affected by digital change. Therefore scientific, humanistic and economic approaches have been made to discover the new solutions and discuss the scientific revolution brought by digitalization. Especially geographic papers can be found often, concerning modern urban or suburban life affected through digitalization. Particularly technologies and projects like smart cities or smart homes are hereby discussed and analyzed frequently. Beyond that, another concept seems to become more relevant in academic research: The Internet of Things (IoT). From physicians over sociologists to politicians, a broad spectrum of people seems to take interest in the development that nearly all common household items, but also many public goods and industry and economic related technologies are connected to the internet by some or another way. But not also this process at its core is monitored, also the possibilities and criteria for sustainable development of the IoT is followed by many groups of interest.

- Internet of Everything (Deckert 2020, Querverweis Bauer et al. 2014, S.17)

But the academic discourse does not only bring up positive changes and expectations brought to world throughout digitalization. Also, the risks and disadvantages of new digital structures traversing our daily life around the globe

- internationalen Character reinbringen

- Entwicklungsländer

- Data does exist, must be worked with

Altogether many several items touched this examination are discussed analyzed in the academic discourse (vllt. Erwähnen, ob und wie viel verschiedene Daten), meanwhile the big link between digitalization and environmental performance is not analyzed closely, for now after all. And naturally this paper does not claim to even begin with logicalizing and thoroughly explaining this connection, at least the goal is to try to start with searching and lightly connecting a few of the many pieces the big puzzle of sustainable and ecological digitalization provides.

- Forderung nach Interdisziplinärität reinbringen

-„Perfection is achieved, not when there is nothing more to add, but when there is

nothing left to take away“. (Antoine de Saint-Exupéry)

- sufficient, but efficient digitalization (Lange et al.)

***III. Theory and/or hypotheses***

***IV. Empirical Design***

***V. References***

1. Clapp, Jennifer and Peter Dauvergne; Paths to a Green World; The Political Economy of the Global Environment; Massachusetts: 2011; S. 21 [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Ebd.: S. 23 [↑](#footnote-ref-2)