

Invitation

Circularity, Sufficiency, and Justice: new approaches to governance of the twin transition of digitalization and sustainability



Date: 21 March 2023

Time: 11:00–13:00 CET

Registration/coffee: 10:30

Lunch provided following the conference

You are cordially invited to a science-policy interface event to discuss the future of a twin sustainable and digital transition. **An engaging discussion on how the EU can expand its approach to the twin transition, focusing on three areas: circularity, sufficiency, and justice.**

The world is entering a digital era where digital technologies are said to support sustainable development and create untapped potentials in many areas. However, more recently social and ecological drawbacks have become more apparent where digitalisation has not lived up to its ascribed potentials. Over the past years, voices have become louder advocating for a sustainable and digital twin transition. To move towards sustainable digitalisation, work needs to go into reorganising existing production and consumption practices based on governance principles of circularity, sufficiency and justice. A central challenge to progress has been the siloed approach to the twin transition, with policy professionals in technology, sustainability, economics, health and social services rarely collaborating on these transitions.

Join us on **21 March, 2023 from 10:30 – 14:00 at the Brussels Press Club** for a gathering of experts from different policy fields for an open discussion of the ways that the twin transition could be enhanced through new governance approaches. Questions to be considered include:

- What are the key challenges to move towards a twin digital and sustainable transition within the EU? How does existing work on circularity, sufficiency and/or justice point to overcoming some of these challenges?
- How can governance towards a twin digital and sustainable transition be supported if ideas derived from circularity, sufficiency and justice would become core elements of the political narrative around digitalisation within the EU?
- How would EU policy frameworks need to be designed and look like if they would integrate ideas derived from circularity, sufficiency and justice to move towards a twin digital and sustainable transition? What are promising policy areas where such policy work could be developed?
- What could be done to open up existing EU policy processes so that diverse groups in society can participate in shaping a twin digital and sustainable transition within the EU?

This event's discussion is based on policy papers produced by the Institute for Ecological Economy Research (IÖW) and the Institute for European Environmental Policy (IEEP) for the German Environment Agency. The aim of the event is to move towards an overall political-strategic approach in this field based on issues and potentials raised by the three areas. For a little more detail on the papers about circularity sufficiency and justice, please see the annex.

Please click [here](#) to register. We look forward to advancing the discussion around the twin transitions with you.

Agenda to follow.

For more information about the event, please contact: [Agata Meysner](#)

Organisers



Funding

This science-policy event is implemented as part of the R&D project "Digitalization and Sustainability at the EU level" (research code: 3720 41 101 0) on behalf of the German Environment Agency (UBA), and financed by the Federal Ministry for the Environment, Nature Conservation, Nuclear Safety and Consumer Protection (BMUV).



Annex: Circularity, Sufficiency and Justice: Steps Towards New Governance Approaches for a Twin Digitalisation & Sustainability Transition

It is widely recognised that a future economy will become sustainable only by moving from a linear to a circular economy by, for instance, making the production of technologies more circular. Yet, digital data collection and exchange for circularity are not commonly used in businesses and their value chains. If data are being collected and processed, the activities are often limited to data exchanges between industry actors. Digital data collection and exchange heavily rely on (all) stakeholders to be willing and able to collaborate and share information in a transparent, accessible and comprehensible way. The governance of circularity, especially information flows and actors' relationships that empower stakeholders to move towards circular economy is crucial but often neglected in policy processes. Only if all relevant actors (including policy makers and civil society organisations) are willing and able to share and use relevant data, processes can be changed from linearity to circularity. Such change also requires active and reflexive governance. Our recommendations aim to support the twin transition towards a digital circular economy by presenting opportunities to integrate new ways of governing for circularity into policy.

Yet, moving towards circularity whilst focusing on recirculating resources (e.g. recycling and repair) is often not enough as it ignores the fact that such approaches have limitations in often not recognising rising consumption practices and rebound effects. The question whether a digitally enabled momentum towards a circular economy driven by economic growth is compatible with the EU's sustainability goals evokes considerations of the use of digitalisation for sufficiency. A premise of sufficiency as a guiding principle for the digital transformation is that technological innovation alone cannot solve societal problems. Moreover, sufficiency takes social well-being into account where resource consumption is actively changed. Unsustainable practices must be either reduced or replaced by more sustainable alternatives, pointing, for instance, at a generally frugal use of resource-intensive technologies, high longevity and reparability of products and business models that support sufficiency through, for instance, sharing practices. The notion of digital sufficiency could provide a basis to build an understanding of how digitalisation can become part of social and environmental transformations. Our recommendations aim to provide ideas on how to introduce digital sufficiency into the policy agenda of the twin transition.

The governance of a digital circular economy based on digital sufficiency principles might not go far enough to address social and environmental developments towards sustainability where no one is left behind. Digitalisation is not only a question of technology, circularity and sufficiency, it also shapes the ways in which (1) people can participate in and govern environmental change processes and (2) the burden of environmental and social impacts and potentials of digitalisation processes are distributed within society. Stringent policy action for the governance of digitalisation is necessary to not only address environmental issues but also to govern social implications and possibilities. Using digital tools to enhance EU citizen participation in environmental decision-making is an area with significant promise that could be acted on immediately, but care needs to be taken to make sure that this does not deepen the 'digital divide' (i.e. the divide between those with effective access to digital tools and those without). Moreover, the differential environmental and social consequences that result from ICT product life cycles through resource extraction, manufacturing, and disposal are a classic example of environmental injustice. Despite efforts to combat these problems through domestic EU legislation and international agreements there are still significant problems.