Notes

1. W. Metcalf and E. Huf, *Herrnhut: Australia's First Utopian Commune* (Melbourne: Melbourne University Press, 2002).

2. E.g., G. Souter, *A Peculiar People* (Sydney: Sydney University Press, 1968).

3. W. Metcalf, *"Alice River: Queensland's First Commune," Queensland History Journal* 22, no. 5 (2014): 357–74.

4. E.g., V. Dawson, *Chinchilla's Communal Settlers* (Brisbane: Watson Ferguson, 2014); W. Metcalf, *The Gayndah Communes* (Rockhampton: CQUP, 1998).

Smartopia—Geht Digitalisierung auch nachhaltig?

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"Turn off all devices and look at the sky." The 130 pages of this special edition of *Politische ökologie: Die Reihe für Querdenker und Vordenkerinnen* (Political Ecology: A Series for Lateral and Forward Thinkers) may require resilient readers. It is quite challenging to dive into the complexity of the issues at hand and digest the implications of the digitized society that we are faced with today. Maybe some nourishing snack should be in your reach while delving into the kaleidoscope of more than thirty contributions, which explore what might need to happen in order to make it more likely that digitalization eventually leads to a better, more sustainable life.

The initial comments of Professor Tilman Santarius, social scientist, Technischen Universität Berlin, may be helpful to clarify how to shape digitalization in a prosperous way as well as advocate new concepts. Chances and risks: both sides of the coin are presented with lots of factual information and concrete suggestions, complemented by further literature, videos, and links.

Thus while going through the table of contents, one feels somehow overpowered by the range of crucial topics combined in chapters such as

"Cloud Computing" and "Deep Learning" or in the section "Spectrum of Sustainability." As in real life, digitalization challenges the reader as a comprehensive political, economic, social, and environmental phenomenon that penetrates nearly all spheres at breathtaking velocity.

But sustainable digitalization cannot be a disruptive digitalization, and therefore the speed by which it is developed must be diminished. This correlation is clear for Santarius. Together with Steffen Lange, Institut für ökologische Wirtschaftsforschung, he explores how digitalization can become a booster for the transformation of economy and society into sustainability. They point out a lot of issues determining our future: first, we must consume differently. Consumers of sustainable products could offer their own products on the same platform. But digitalization can only be beneficial and successful if we consume fewer and more sustainable products, avoiding the platforms of the IT giants. So politics, prosumers (consumers who act as producers), and progressive entrepreneurs should design and strengthen cooperative platforms.

Another driver for a significant change of direction is mobility. Here again digitalization can foster multimodular mobility by integrating different platforms for mobility, such as public transport, rent-a-bike, and car-sharing. Mobility "on the go" can be pushed by local communities. But the authors state that politics, rather, follow the call of car manufacturers. As a consequence, their first interim conclusion sounds discouraging: instead of developing concepts that could lead to social innovations driven by technical innovations, digital applications are thought to enhance the existing ecologically disastrous transportation system. Indeed, the authors stress the importance of aftergrowth as a key factor for reducing carbon footprints. Here again, digitalization incorporates great potential, for example, in the field of efficient logistics or with respect to technical solutions that would decentralize parts of commerce and the usage-bound production of energy. One thing is evident to Santarius and Lange: the synergy between politics, society, and economy could make digitalization more useful for fair social conditions and environmental protection. Although research on digitalization and sustainability is in its infancy, we must shape the processes today. And this probably needs some pressure from society.

The following chapters reveal more blind spots concerning digitalization. When I talk to people about sustainability and digitalization, they mostly say: "Oh, I never thought about that." Sixty-five percent of German citizens do

not associate environment with digitalization, reveals a study in October 2018. *Smartopia* can teach us about this phenomenon.

The chapter "Anything, Anywhere, Anytime" by Vivian Frick and Johanna Pohl, Technischen Universität Berlin, simply recommends a traditional, a little "unhip" approach: moderation. Options for shopping 24/7 evoked by digital advertising campaigns create growing desire and, in turn, increasing consumption, which leads to an inevitable rebound effect. So the authors plead for moderation for the environment's sake: Who knows that if the Internet were a country, it would already have the highest consumption rate of power after China and the United States? As we do not "see" what is behind our mouse click for streaming videos and what materials "work" for this service, it is difficult to develop a consciousness of this kind of energy consumption and the environmental consequences. Yet one game-changing example is the domestic home in Sweden: it is mandatory for the waste heat from computer centers to be used, for example, for heating houses, a fact that was highlighted in a paper by the green politician Dieter Janecek (Germany) in September 2018.

Another factor consumers do not normally consider is e-waste. Felix Sühlmann-Faul, a technical sociologist, and Stephan Rammler, director of the Institut für Zukunftsstudien und Technologiebewertung Berlin, are amazed about the lack of concern from society. They agree that digitalization can contribute to a sustainable society, but they seem pessimistic, all in all. Fittingly, they entitle their chapter "Modern Slavery Included." Not only does the production of electrical and electronic equipment lead to inhuman working conditions and damage to the environment, mainly in Africa; the authors also discuss the struggle for so-called conflict minerals, such as columbite-tantalite (or coltan) in the Democratic Republic of Congo. But e-waste also presents a huge challenge. The reader learns that in 2017, about sixty-five million tons of e-waste were produced. Mainly computers and smartphones have extremely short life cycles (twenty months—planned obsolescence), and material cycles simply do not exist. If we look at Ghana, we see markets of e-waste, where parts of plastic are burned to extract precious metals. Even unprotected young children work there. But, on the other hand, Africa can profit enormously from digitalization and has already started doing so—as thirty million people can pay via SMS using the Keynian service M-Pesa. In short, digitalization is contradictory and ambiguous, but, of course, to protect humans and nature has to be at the top of the political agenda.

The next essay inquires, What makes a city livable? If we listen to Rainer Rehak, an information scientist, digitalization seems to be implemented before knowing whether an aim will really be reached by solutions such as intelligent streetlights or intelligent classrooms. Rehak suggests that we should stick to the more classical approach: explore problems and challenges first and then develop the adequate solutions. So, when it comes to town planning, this principle is crucial. What constitutes a "good" town? Obviously, the author says, fresh air, low noise levels, clean water, light, short distances, and many greenspaces, for instance. This demands more than mere technology. At least in Barcelona, designers of the smart city start the planning process by mapping out the needs of the citizens. Nevertheless we still have to wait for the next phase of the process to be developed.

"Regulation wanted!" The last chapter argues for international regulations in the design of digitalization. Nelly Grotfendt and Marie-Luise Abshagen, Forum Umwelt und Entwicklung, think that digitalization as managed to date does not aim at making life better or industry more efficient, due to the continuance and further development of existing patterns in the economy. As a consequence, the authors see the seventeen Sustainable Development Goals approved by the United Nations as an adequate framework that still needs broad public debate with all stakeholders. That leads us to a last but really important question.

What can we do? This volume offers a lot of inspiration and practical tips embedded in the chapters. These are, for instance, Save energy: empty the recycle bin of your devices, be careful with appendixes sent or saved, or as often as you can just turn them off. Be a conscious consumer: check out what kind of energy your apps are run with at http://www.clickclean.org. Try out the range of products on platforms run as cooperatives, such as Fairmondo; look at Fairbnb.coop for your next stay abroad. Moreover, do not miss the opportunity to get involved in discussions on sustainable digitalization, maybe in a political context, or find out about Global Recycling Days in your neighborhood.

Too much for daily life? For the motivation to engage and stay active, it may be helpful to keep a positive mind-set and develop resilience. As emphasized by many authors in this volume, digitalization still contains the *option* of shaping a better world, that is, to impress the principles of sustainability onto the economy, society, and the environment. This hope needs to be nourished in order to avoid the crippling effects of climate grief developing from

alarming facts and figures. One elixir is to strengthen our connectivity to nature and to our earth. Earthfest: An Initiative (https://erdfest.org/en) celebrates the earth, reinvents positive natural communication, and thinks nature as "commons." The initiative, developed by Andreas Weber, natural philosopher, journalist, and author, and Hildegard Kurt, cultural researcher, author, and artist, brings together nearly eighty German organizations celebrating the earth in a completely individually designed festival during the period of June 21–23.[1] If you love something you will fight for it, the authors suggest. This approach of communication for and with nature encourages us to act creatively in a free space. Before entering your individual free space, a long moment of looking into the sky can also empower you to find an approach for contributing to sustainable digitalization in times of uncertainty.

In short, this volume highlights that the digital future is simply a trip into uncertainty. This should not at all provoke an attitude of resignation—on the contrary. We will need a maximum of openness to shape the impact of technology together if we really want to take the chance to enhance society and the environment. To reach this goal, no stakeholder can succeed alone: mainly politics and policies have to take the lead, for example, in fostering green IT and the refurbishment of IT products, and pave the way for adequate regulation of the current monopolists' platforms. Although we still face various blind spots in the research on constructive approaches to sustainable digitalization, we as users and consumers can focus on what we can contribute right now. Why not join initiatives around the corner like political working teams and try out a more conscious use of the Internet and IT devices? If you switch off your mobile phone sometimes and just look into the sky, you may gain quality of life and positive energy. This can boost confidence in your own power in disruptive times.

Note

1. See their Cultures of Aliveness Manifesto, Andreas Weber and Hildegard Kurt, *Lebendigkeit sei! Für eine Politik des Lebens. Ein Manifest für das Anthropozän* (Klein Jasedow, Germany: thinkOYA, Klein Jasedow, 2015).