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Debating sustainable digitalization and digital contributions to sustainability in Southeast Asia

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Abstract

Digital technology is increasingly becoming the core of life, work, culture and identity in Southeast Asia, while narrowing the 'digital divide' still remains a key factor in development. The disruption caused by digital technologies and digitalization processes are presenting significant challenges, first and foremost to ensure that digitalization does not lead to more divided and unequal societies. It is necessary to put digitalization into critical perspective, by positioning the realities of the digital world in a context of colliding socio-political, cultural and natural environments (Jurriens & Tapsell 2017). Beyond interest in the relationship between media technology and the physical and natural environment, this also means to trace the complex and dynamic relationship between media infrastructural materialities and our contemporary socio-technical and natural environments. Such a critical approach contributes to an analysis of our current trajectories of development, but also of our movement towards a new mode of development and the role of technology in that transition.

This panel investigates the effects of digitalization and communication technologies in Southeast Asia and their social transitions under the primacy of the ambiguous concept of sustainable development. We combine the thematic areas mediatization, networked societies, and internet-cultures with the concept of sustainable development, both in theoretical and empirical work. Therefore, Southeast Asia presents itself as a laboratory for sustainable futures in a double sense:

- 1) While digital economies in Southeast Asia show great potential, the state and civil society often have differing priorities and visions, and various actors in the region are developing innovative sustainable digitalization strategies.
- 2) With tremendously increasing yet unequally distributed prosperity in Southeast Asia, the question of environmental and social justice gains importance in the public and often mediatized fragmented discourse.

The panel seeks to investigate these interrelated thematic areas from anthropological, political science, and social-ecological perspectives. The aim of our panel is to discuss new ways of conceptualizing digitalization and sustainability as mutually constitutive processes or trajectories. Contributions on a conceptual basis and with a comparative approach as well as case studies from different Southeast Asian countries are most welcomed. We invite contributions on the following (or related) questions:

1. Digital knowledge production and dissemination: How does digital (in)justice form societal debates, notions of sustainability and sustainable technology?
2. Discourses and narratives: How are conceptualizations of natures and the usage of natural resources interconnected. How are these conceptualizations mediated and shaped by digital technologies, potentially altering human - non-human interrelations?
3. How can digitalization processes and strategies for sustainable development be conceptualized in relation to one another?