Template – Session Outcome Document

(2 pages max)

Summary of Session: Digital Environment System Coalition Walk (Session 403):
Experiencing digital environment interactions in the "place" of Geneva

Royal Holloway, University of London, on behalf of DESC

16 March 2023; 16.00-18.30

See also: https://ict4d2004.files.wordpress.com/2023/03/desc-sessions-wsis-2023.pdf

Key Issues discussed (5-8 bullet points)

This walk provided an opportunity for participants to share their own research and practice relating to the interactions between digital tech and the environment, and also to discuss the positive and negative impacts of digital tech on the biosphere, hydrosphere, atmosphere and lithosphere, as well as a specific session on YouthDESC. In essence, individual participants brought the group to a halt at locations that they felt were most appropriate for them along the walk and shared information about themselves and their research/practice, and we also stopped at five pre-planned locations to discuss each of the main themes as a group. Moderators of each main stop sought to encourage the participants to highlight three positive and three negative interactions between digital tech and the environment.

- **Parc Mon Repos** - the biosphere (led by Paul Spiesberger). Issues discussed included the positives of being able to share nature through digital images, use of remote sensed imagery to monitor the biosphere, and the use of digital tech to enhance agricultural production. Negatives included digital pollution of plants and green spaces, potentially adverse effects on human health (including mental health), and increased urban exploitation of rural environments through digital tech.

- **Poste Filial** – YouthDESC (led by Tasfia Rahman). This began with a visit inside the building to discover the ways through which it is now necessary to use virtual/digital systems to post a physical/real card. We also recognized the important links between postal communication in the past and digital communication at present. The Instagram account of @YouthDESC was discussed, alongside the pros and cons of different social media platforms for engaging youth.

- **Pont des Bergues** - the hydrosphere (led by Ahmed Imran). It was recognised that unlike the biosphere and lithosphere, the impact of digital tech on the hydrosphere is less immediately visible. However, negatives include the impact of deep sea mining for rare earth minerals, and the heating of water in cooling systems. The use of water warmed by the heat produced by servers was, though, also seen as a benefit.

- **Ile Rousseau** - the atmosphere (led by Zumana Imran). Beneath the feet of the philosopher Rousseau, our thoughts turned to the atmosphere above us, and focused on the positives of the use of satellites for monitoring environmental change and enabling communication in isolated places, whilst also recognizing the harms of treating outer space as we used to treat the oceans (global commons), the impact on dark space, and space junk. It was also recognised that different cultures have differing views about the environment, and we must engage with indigenous communities.

- **Auditoire de Calvin** - the lithosphere (led by Tim Unwin). As dusk came upon us, few people remained to walk up the steps to the Cathedral and Auditoire de Calvin, but we nevertheless discussed the impact of mining for minerals used in digital tech, the impact of waste especially in landfill, and also the potential benefits in land management.
Towards WSIS+20 and WSIS beyond 2025, please share your views on the emerging trends, challenges, achievements, and opportunities in the implementation of the WSIS Action Lines to date (5-8 bullets)
All participants agreed on the importance of developing a holistic cross-sectoral and multidisciplinary approach to understanding the environmental impacts (both positive and negative) of digital tech on the environment as proposed by DESC (https://ict4d.org.uk/desc/). WSIS provides an excellent forum where these issues can be discussed because it engages many UN agencies and governments, along with researchers, civil society organisations and companies (although few of the latter were present).

Tangible outcomes (such as key achievements, announcements, launches, agreements, and commitments (3-5 bullet points)
These discussions fed directly into the discussion at Session 204 the following day (see separate report). However, they also did much to enhance the DESC network, help build specific research/practice collaborations, and reinforce the practical commitments of participants to influence global understanding and policy making relating to these issues.

Actionable plan (2-5 points)
The discussions have already fed directly into DESC’s emerging framework, and will help ensure a more nuanced approach to DESC’s pledges to the ITU-led Partner2Connect over the coming months. We will report back to the WSIS Annual Forum in 2024.

Suggestions for thematic aspects that might be included in the WSIS Forum 2024 (WSIS+20 Forum High-Level Event) (one paragraph)
Developing a comprehensive and holistic framework to understanding interactions between the physical environment and digital tech upon which sounds policies at global and national scales can be implemented is essential for the survival of the human species. This would be an important HL theme for WSIS 2024