Intersection #1

'Sustainable' internet and tech

The extractivism of Big Tech companies and the extractivism of fossil fuel companies are increasingly resembling each other - and in some cases, even working together.

Big Tech is continuing to develop and deploy data-hungry large language models (AI) – in some cases, to directly assist with actual fossil fuel extraction. Big Tech companies are also continuing to build new and ever-larger data centres.

In Chile, in the process of expanding their data centres, Google[01] and Microsoft[02] are diverting scarce local water sources and polluting the local water systems in the process. In the Netherlands, plans by Meta and Microsoft to build new data centres have been met with controversy from local residents and governments, as the centres would absorb much of the new renewable energy coming online while offering few local benefits.[03]
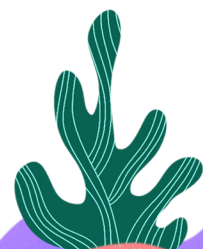
As one energy transition expert told us: "Anyone who comes in and says 'I'm going to use a lot of energy,' is not doing the transition to sustainable energy a favour."

In parallel, there is a **lack of transparency** when it comes to digital technologies' **carbon emissions and environmental impacts:** While Big Tech companies have been making bold public climate pledges, they have shared little detail around their progress. Big Tech companies are also not legally required to disclose information about their emissions, leaving EJ-CJ activists dependent on data from Big Tech companies themselves and inhibiting external oversight.

01 Mosacat Chile (Oct 2020). **Mosacat Chile presenta recurso de invalidación ante el sea contra cerrillos data center de Google**

02 Vallejos, R. (March 2022). **Las mentiras de Microsoft en Chile: Una empresa no tan verde. Resumen.**

03 Meaker, M. (Jan 2022). **Facebook's data center plans rile residents in the Netherlands. Wired.**

Opportunities for the digital rights space to support a more sustainable tech ecosystem

There are a number of areas where important work happening across DR and EJ-CJ spaces would benefit from further support and expansion. This could include, among other things:

- Supporting **grassroots and community-led** environmental and climate groups exposing Big Tech harms

- Pushing for greater **transparency and accountability** in Big Tech sustainability practices

- Exploring strategies for **divestment** in Big Tech and polluting companies in general

- Building out **holistic impact assessment frameworks** to understand tech's impact on society and the planet

- Promoting **policy** at the intersection of digital and climate/environmental issues

- Fostering the development of **cross-cutting projects and programmes**, such as collaborative campaigns

- Supporting projects, grants or convenings to develop **shared lexicons** around climate, environment, and digital rights concerns.

Find more intersections, opportunities and recommendations in our report:

At the confluence of digital rights and climate & environmental justice – a landscape review

- **engn.it/climatejusticedigitalrights**

THE ENGINE ROOM