

BLOG POST April 1st 2016

Ecology x digital = a shared transition?

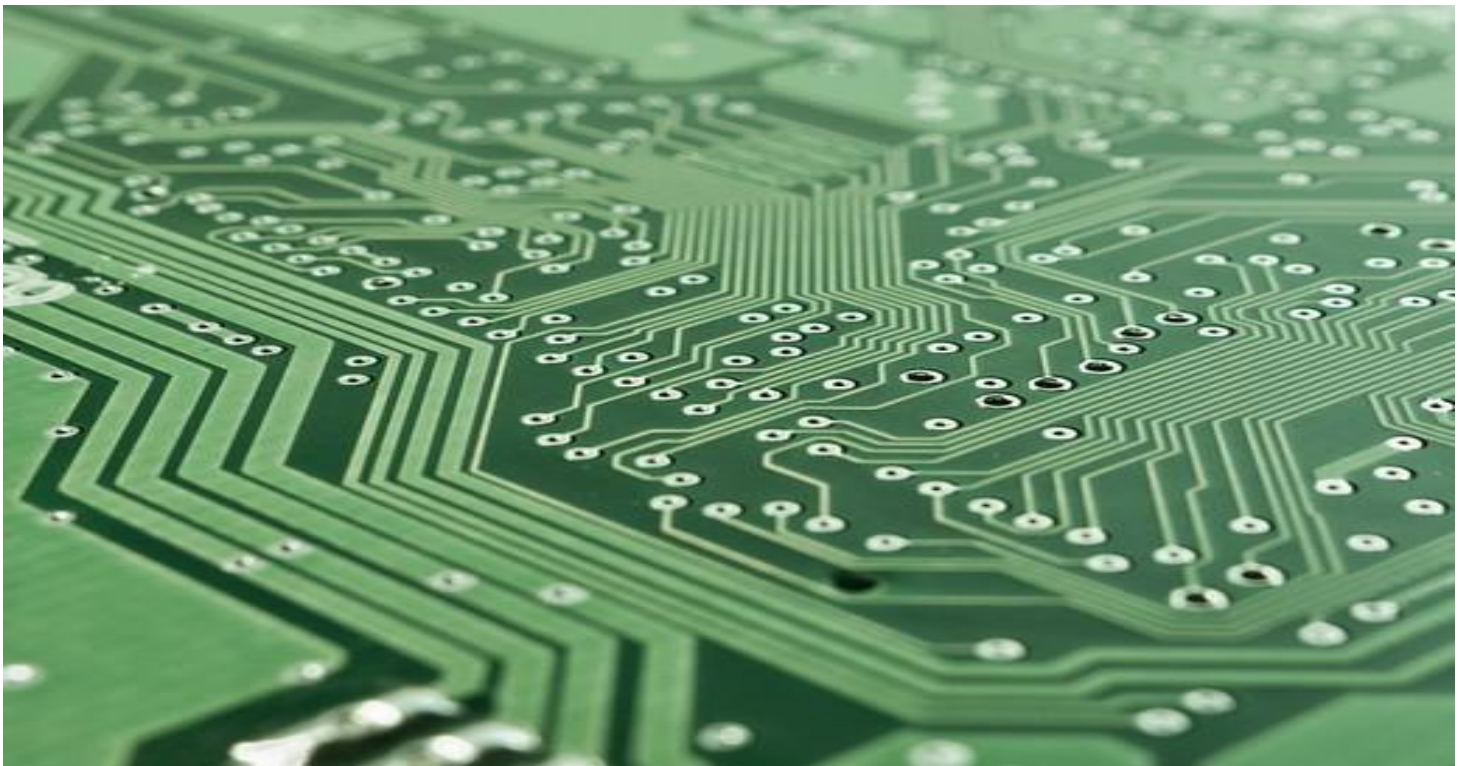
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Ecological transition and digital transition are both unfolding in society. If the former does not meet genuinely sustainable development challenges, the latter could make a meaningful contribution... provided that we are guiding it collectively in that sense.

Today, the **ecological transition** seems to be well established in public policy. Increasingly detailed medium- and long-term goals are on the table, an arsenal of standards and planning tools has been created for the conception and application of sustainable development, and the professionalisation of environment and energy experts is underway. However, it is clear that this transition is not moving fast enough given the urgency of the situation. Its role as a force for change and the power of its narrative are not always sufficient to ensure structural and behavioural change, to challenge policy making and to overcome a certain number of obstacles facing sustainable development (such as encouraging citizen participation, generating innovation, addressing structural inertia, etc.).

Another transition, however, is altering many aspects of our society through its capacity for innovation and for large-scale dissemination: the **transition to digital technology**. Internet and the social networks have changed the way we share information and communicate. Digital technologies are also entering our economic system, producing new giants, modifying business models and gradually altering our administrative models. Finally, digital tools are giving rise to new large-scale collaborative practices.

However, as observed by the [Transitions² initiative](#) (led by the [Fondation Internet Nouvelle Génération](#)) in which IDDRI is participating, the digital transition is emerging as a force without a purpose, without any shared horizon. What is its vision of society? Do its stakeholders give enough attention to the [major challenges of our time](#)? Is this not a great opportunity for pooling energy and for using the capacity for change represented by digital technologies to support environmental objectives?

IDDRI is tackling this question, based on an intuition confirmed by its initial research: digital innovations are *a priori* neither good nor bad for the ecological transition. It is therefore necessary to ensure they converge and join forces. Preconceived ideas must be challenged and reassessed. **No, [smart cities](#) and big data will not be a magic bullet for urban problems! No, the [sharing economy](#) is not necessarily environmentally friendly!**

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