

Digital Services of General Interest and Well-Being

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Abstract: This article makes an interdisciplinary contribution by conceptually linking the notion of digital services of general interest (DSGI) with the psychological concept of well-being. DSGI, like any form of digitalization, have an impact. Particularly in the case of essential services that influence personal development and self-realization, the individual effects must be taken into account. The concept of well-being has become established at the intersection of psychology and technology. The article examines relevant aspects for the design of DSGI in order to promote individual well-being and personal fulfillment. Existing studies and concepts for impact research in the areas of digital government and smart city offer few details on effects on the individual level, especially in relation to well-being. Addressing this gap, the article identifies criteria that capture different dimensions of well-being (hedonic, eudaimonic, social, virtues and other needs). Ethical considerations such as dignity, self-determination and values are also included. Example scenarios are used to show how these aspects can be practically addressed. On this basis, a research agenda is developed that identifies open questions on DSGI and well-being. This opens up the opportunity to design digital services of general interest in a way that not only meets functional needs but also actively contributes to individual well-being.

Keywords: Digital Services of General Interest, Well-Being, Digital Government, Smart City, Research Agenda

Digitale Daseinsvorsorge und „Well-Being“

Zusammenfassung: Dieser Artikel leistet einen interdisziplinären Beitrag zur konzeptionellen Verbindung von digitaler Daseinsvorsorge und dem psychologischen Konzept des „Well-Being“. Digitale Daseinsvorsorge hat, wie jede Form der Digitalisierung, Auswirkungen. Insbesondere bei essenziellen Diensten, die persönliche Entwicklung und Selbstverwirklichung beeinflussen, müssen die individuellen Effekte berücksichtigt werden. Im Schnittbereich von Psychologie und Technologie hat sich das Konzept des „Well-Beings“ etabliert. Der Artikel untersucht relevante Aspekte für die Gestaltung von digitaler Daseinsvorsorge, um individuelles Wohlbefinden und persönliche Entfaltung zu fördern. Bestehende Studien und Konzepte zur Wirkungsforschung in den Bereichen digitaler Staat und Smart City bieten bislang nur wenige Details zu Effekten auf individueller Ebene, insbesondere in Bezug auf Wohlbefinden. Der Artikel greift dies auf und identifiziert Kriterien, die verschiedene Dimensionen des Wohlbefindens (hedonisch, eudaimonisch, sozial, wertorientiert sowie weitere Bedürfnisse) erfassen. Ethische Überlegungen wie Würde, Selbstbestimmung und Werte werden ebenfalls einbezogen. Anhand von Beispielszenarien wird gezeigt, wie diese Aspekte in der Praxis berücksichtigt werden können. Der Artikel erarbeitet auf dieser Grundlage eine Forschungsagenda, die offene Fragen zur digitalen Transformation der Daseinsvorsorge und „Well-Being“ aufzeigt. Dies eröffnet die Chance, digitale Daseinsvorsorge

so zu gestalten, dass sie nicht nur funktionale Bedürfnisse erfüllt, sondern auch aktiv zum individuellen Wohlbefinden beiträgt.

Schlagwörter: Digitale Daseinsvorsorge, „Well-Being“, Digitaler Staat, Smart City, Forschungsagenda

1 Introduction

The digital transformation is permeating all areas of life – but it must not be an end in itself. The central goal is to improve citizens’ quality of life (Alfaro-Navarro et al., 2024). But how can the achievement of this goal be assessed? In the public sector, the creation of public value at a broader level – beyond the specific outputs of individual organizations and without being limited to the exclusive mandate of the public sector – is often used as a fundamental criterion (Bozeman & Jørgensen, 2007). Psychological perspectives, such as well-being, are rarely considered (Vigoda-Gadot & Mizrahi, 2024). This article uses the psychological concept of well-being as a criterion, placing individuals at the center. By identifying core well-being dimensions, integrating ethical aspects, and using practical scenarios, it provides a conceptual framework and research agenda for future empirical work and DSGI design.

We adopt the working definition provided by this special issue: Digital services of general interest encompass the digital infrastructures, services, and goods essential for sustainable social participation, equivalent living conditions, and digital sovereignty in a digital society (Papenfuß et al., 2022). The focus is on goods and services that serve existential basic human needs (Frenz, 2016) while allowing for individual prosperity. We do not aim to determine normatively what qualifies as existential; such determinations are shaped by societal, political, and legal processes. Instead, we draw on psychological concepts of well-being to identify factors that may be relevant to well-being, thereby offering analytical perspectives that can support ongoing debates on the scope and priorities of digital services of general interest.

DSGI comprise both public and private services, as recognized by the EU (European Commission, 2011), with non-profit actors and volunteers also playing a vital role. While digital government refers to transforming public administration, DSGI extend further. Their governance is complex, involving diverse actors. In Germany, DSGI domains include utilities, transport, health, education, and social services, while areas like finance and ecology remain contested (Deutscher Bundestag Wissenschaftlicher Dienst, 2024). Digital transformation affects all DSGI by changing how services are accessed (customer interaction), developed (value creation), and monetized (value proposition) (Pousttchi et al., 2019). It also emphasizes the need to treat digital infrastructure and access itself as a service of general interest.

Local governments (cities, municipalities, and districts) are central to DSGI provision and increasingly act through smart city and smart region initiatives. These use data and technology to address urban and rural challenges, improve quality of life, and enhance efficiency through collaboration (van Twist et al., 2023). Data analysis supports decisions across levels. Due to overlaps, smart city research informs DSGI.

Defining and evaluating DSGI remains contested (van de Walle, 2008). Public value serves as a lens to assess their societal impact, especially in the context of digitalization