PROJECT n. 4
Climate change and sustainability: fake news and conspiracy theories

The problems of climate change and sustainability have been raised on the basis of detailed scientific evidence; however, the rise of online communication casts a further shadow on the trust in science and in the policies implemented on its grounds. Billions of users are active every day on the main social media, regularly exposed to *fake news.* Especially worrisome phenomena are *epistemic bubbles* (structures that leave out – possibly by mere accident – different relevant voices) and *echo-chambers* (structures that actively exclude and dismiss other relevant sources) – that hinder the free circulation of information online, and affect the behaviour of agents especially with regards to environmental and public health issues. At the same time, polarization in online discussions and social media may manipulate users into communicating only with users belonging to their own group or subscribing to their own orientation, and eventually into espousing extreme ideologies.

In light of these dangers, the project will aim at elucidating the characteristic features of *fake news* and conspiracy theories concerning environmental science, the linguistic tools that can be used to contrast and prevent them, the standards that scientific communication and dissemination should uphold, and the argumentation techniques those standards should utilize. It will address questions like the following:

- What are the characteristic features of fake news and conspiracy theories on environmental issues and climate change?
- How and to what extent is scientific disinformation regarding climate and sustainability science spreading in the info-sphere?
- How to defeat ongoing online scientific disinformation on climate and sustainability science and prevent it?

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