CALL FOR CHAPTER PROPOSALS

Handbook of Platform Urbanism

Edward Elgar Publishing

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Background and objectives

Around 2018, the notion of platform urbanism emerged to signal the growing impact of digital platforms on the governance, experience, and economy of cities (Barns, 2018). This discourse expanded the smart cities literature that had a very pronounced focus on new technological features but often underemphasized what they mean for the socio-economic and spatial structures of the city, as studied by urbanism. Platform urbanism recognizes that digital platforms are increasingly spatial and rooted in materiality (Caprotti et al., 2022) and focuses on what may be called the paradox of connection and disconnection: platforms such as Airbnb or Waze rely heavily on the physical infrastructure of cities (e.g., roads, houses) but at the same time are disembedded from the time-space they mediate (Graham, 2020).

In that sense, platform urbanism deals with concerns that historically have been the domain of mainly urban planners, social geographers, sociologists, economists, and historians. They consider the city as a spatial and social phenomenon characterized on the economic plane by agglomeration effects, the concentration of functions, possibilities for upward social mobility, and on the societal plane by the loosening of social ties, more liberality, but also by conflicts and various forms of alienation, segregation and inequality. Contemporary "platform urbanists" revisit these concerns in light of the increasing platformization of cities.

Platformization can be seen as a type of architectural innovation (Ballon, 2009). These are innovations that may be relatively simple in terms of the concepts or technologies that are introduced, but they produce a change in the overall logic and architecture of systems. It has been shown that this kind of innovation can have a hugely disruptive effect on previously dominant actors and set-ups. Examples are ridesharing platforms such as Uber, being merely a new configuration of already existing concepts and technological components, but with the potential to significantly change urban mobility. As cities become subject to platformization, it seems a potentially disruptive reconfiguration is underway, just like in other domains that have been platformized such as media and advertising.

In essence, platforms consist of an infrastructural and an organizational aspect. Although often convoluted, untangling them highlights that we need to combine theories and expertise about

both to truly understand platforms. The infrastructural aspect refers to platforms representing a shared hardware/software base on top of which applications run. In an urban context, the spatiality of this shared base exceeds mere hard- or software configurations, and also includes components of the physical urban infrastructure such as traffic lights, digital signage, camera networks or energy infrastructure (Smets et al., 2021). The organizational aspect of platforms includes their function as new, multi-sided intermediaries for interactions between societal and economic agents.

Applied to the city, both aspects of platformization have huge consequences. Cities start to look, function, and feel differently. Thanks to high volumes of data and novel interactions aggregated by the platform, opportunities arise to monitor and tackle "wicked problems", i.e. problems that are extremely complex, chaotic, and unpredictable, and where more accurate and immediately available data and services might make a difference. From an economic viewpoint, the very logic behind urbanization –agglomeration effects, i.e. positive or negative effects associated with physical proximity and interaction– is now complemented or in some cases supplanted by so-called network effects, namely positive or negative effects of digital community-forming and interaction. While agglomeration effects predominantly predict urban concentration and urban hubs, network effects typically predict monopolization or at least oligopolization by large tech companies. These have proven to be very elusive for regulation and competition, as illustrated by the discrepancy between the business models of platform companies such as Uber, Airbnb, or Google and existing regulations or policy objectives (Garud et al., 2020).

Here, major concerns about platform urbanism come to the fore. The city as a platform may not simply mean finding a solution through technology to wicked problems of the city, but it may also mean loss of democratic control, loss of privacy or agency, and loss of the (digital) 'right to the city' (Fisher, 2020; Shaw & Graham, 2017). The iconic case of Google in Toronto Waterfront is the cause célèbre that many critical scholars have been rallying against.

But these are not the only concerns. As online and offline practices are increasingly intertwined, questions also arise about the offline consequences of digital platforms. Are platforms as data-intensive and algorithm-driven gatekeepers leading to a reinforcement of existing bias and discrimination (Pak et al., 2017)? What is the impact of platforms on gentrification (Urquiaga et al., 2020)? Are mobile navigation apps shielding us from being exposed to specific aspects or parts of the city (Smets et al., 2019)?

Expected readership

The aim of this *Handbook of Platform Urbanism* is to shed light on the nature of platform urbanism, the mechanisms that underly it, and the benefits and challenges, to provide a status of current scholarship and upcoming research directions, and to report on cases that are of particular interest.

This *Handbook* is intended to serve as a reference work for social science students and scholars from various backgrounds including innovation, economics, communication sciences,

sociology, urban geography, etc. It intends to form a generation of 'platform urbanists' that is able to understand, analyse, and reflect critically on the ongoing platformization of cities.

While mostly oriented towards students and scholars, it may also be of use to practitioners (such as strategists in cities and the companies and organizations dealing with them) and citizens looking for an academic discussion of the burning issues described above.

Topics of interest

We welcome contributions from relevant disciplines (e.g., media studies, urban informatics, innovation management, political economy, digital geography) investigating different perspectives (geography, technologies, platforms, business models, and governance) on Platform Urbanism.

Contributions related to all dimensions of Platform Urbanism are welcome. They include, but are not limited to, the following:

- **Platform Urbanism: definitions, technologies and approaches**
  Definitions, historical and philosophical perspectives, research schools and methods, technologies (blockchain, digital twin, …) and counter-initiatives (decentralized, peer-to-peer), …

- **Spatiality and geolocation**
  Physical and digital infrastructures, geolocation and urbanism, geographies of intermediation, architectural and design aspects

- **Economics and entrepreneurial aspects**
  Cost of living, gentrification, gig economy, network effects, innovation, creative clusters, city operations, …

- **Governance and regulation**
  Public-private partnerships and clashes, regulation and legal aspects, new forms of governance, …

- **Urban life**
  Local social networks and communities, sustainability, health and care, citizenship and social capital, …

- **Equity and equality**
  Data asymmetries, privacy, bias and discrimination, digital rights to the city, …

Publishing information

The Handbook will be published by Edward Elgar Publishing and made available in hardback, paperback, and electronic form. The Handbook will be available on www.elgaronline.com, the award-winning digital platform for EEP's books, reference works and journals. Elgaronline is particularly beneficial for Handbooks as the content is hosted and browsable at a chapter level, and the site allows easy browsing and sophisticated search capability right across its broad

range of content. This will directly benefit authors by making their work more discoverable than ever.

Chapters will be 5,000 to 7,000 words in length. All chapters will be peer-reviewed and included in the Book Citation Index (part of the Web of Science), and the SCOPUS citation index.

Important dates

February 15, 2023: Chapter proposal (+/- 500 words) outlining idea, research questions, relevance for Platform Urbanism, methodology and expected results

March 15, 2023: Notification and author instructions

December 1, 2023: First draft of chapter due

February 1, 2024: Reviewed first draft of chapter returned to contributors

May 1, 2024: Final chapters due

End 2024: *Handbook of Platform Urbanism* publication

Submission information

Please send the chapter proposal to Pieter Ballon and Annelien Smets (pieter.ballon@vub.be annelien.smets@vub.be) with the subject line "Handbook of Platform Urbanism - Chapter proposal"