01

Innovazione, tecnologie e modelli di configurazione spaziale

A CURA DI MARCO RANZATO E CHIARA GARAU

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Co-production of digital platforms
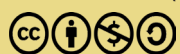# for youth inclusive urban governance

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Abstract
Young people's role in urban governance is critical, both to ensure that their perspectives and priorities as urban citizens are factored into the planning and management of their cities, and to foster their civic engagement as future city leaders. However in many contexts young people are disengaged from formal urban institutions, and where they do pursue urban politics, that they often do so through their own insurgent practices, acting independently of, or in an adversarial approach to, local government. Such independent youth initiatives have an important role in urban governance, but there is also a need for young people's meaningful collaboration with urban governance institutions. Given their high use of digital media and technological skills, digital platforms have been proposed as a fruitful approach for fostering young urban citizens' involvement with urban governance institutions. However our research proposes that strategies to involve young people in inclusive digital urban governance platforms need to be based on a deep understanding of the existing nature of young people's engagement in urban governance, in order to better understand the extent of, and reasons for their disengagement from formal state led spaces for participation.
Accordingly, our research will focus on four small to medium sized cities in Indonesia and Lebanon where our local consortium members have observed that, in the context of these exclusionary power dynamics, there is limited youth engagement with urban government-led invited spaces of participation in urban governance. Rather, in both countries, those young people who are using digital technologies to address urban issues tend to do so independently, through autonomic and/ or 'insurgent' planning approaches.

Parole chiave: piattaforme digitali, partecipazione, governance urbana

Introduction
Local and central government are increasingly using digital technologies to deliver services to urban residents. However, more recently governments are interrogating themselves on how these technologies could contribute to a more participatory governance to shape urban development. A number of government-led digital platforms have been created, often to crowdsource information and opinions and in some other cases to consult residents. However, they had limited success, particularly in terms of engaging specific categories such as young people, who are a significant actor in the Global South. After an analysis of the ways in which young people participate in urban governance, this paper suggests a different approach to engaging young people through digital platforms as a way to radically shape the urban project towards co-produced cities. The paper seeks to advance the debates on inclusive urban governance, expanding the conceptualisation of forms of participation and the related relationship state-citizens.

Inclusive urban governance
Urban governance refers to processes through which citizens, and public and private actors, collaborate over decisions concerning the implementation and management of urban policies and actions (Bayat and Kawalek, 2021: 3). As such it focuses on collaboration between different urban actors, but many approaches focus primarily on the state as an entry point (Jiang et al 2020).
However, there is an increasing consensus that urban governance should be collaborative (Haus & Klausen, 2011; Nuissl & Heinrichs, 2011; Le Galès, 2001, 2011; UNDP, 1998; UN-HABITAT, 2002). Diversity and inclusion are core values in this effort (GWGIIAS, 1996) and the United Nations has used the term 'urban

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governance' to refer to an inclusionary process drawing in members of civil society as crucial partners in urban affairs (Tibaijuka, 2009: 47).

In this vein, inclusive urban governance implies a society-centric model of governance that is "primarily concerned with the role of civil society in the governing process and its relationship with the state through a variety of institutional arrangements" (Allen, Hofmann and Griffiths, 2010: 97). This focus on opening up urban governance to democratic engagement with civil society has been emphasised across urban research, with a range of conceptual framings. The framing of participatory urban governance has been linked to processes such as participatory budgeting (Cabannes 2004), and participatory urban planning (Åström, 2020). Debates around the Right to the City have provided a fertile ground for foregrounding the claims of subaltern urban groups (Walker et al 2020), and proposed a model of civil engagement which challenges both functionalist urban planning, and the appropriation of cities by market interests in a context of deregulation (Morange and Spire, 2015), and has been institutionalised in policy in some contexts (e.g. the Brazilian Statute of the City). Finally, there has been a conceptual focus on the distinctive processes of urban citizenship, which frequently transcend formal liberal models of citizenship relations to encompass more insurgent urban practices (Yiftachel, 2015).

Another area of debate around urban governance as a means of collaborating between different city stakeholders is that most attempts at public participation in planning, including youth participation, have aimed at identifying a consensus and downplaying conflict. Such processes have often led to depoliticised participatory approaches that have excluded marginalised constituencies and reinforced unequal power relations, as has been characterised in literature on the 'post-political city' (Swyngedouw, 2007). On this basis, others have argued that the importance of urban governance is also about making dissent and conflict visible (Mouffe 2002). This is also critical in ensuring that diverse identities are represented in urban planning (Walker and Butcher, 2016).

In addition to these framings which focus on the power relations between the state and urban citizens, en masse, in shaping cities, inclusive urban governance also requires a focus on *which* citizens are involved in governance processes of cities, according to identities such as age (Dennis, 2006), gender (Chant & McIlwaine 2015), or disability (Pineda, 2020). This approach has made urban diversity perspectives visible in governance arenas such as urban planning (Sandercock & Bridgman, 1999) as a basis for more just urban planning outcomes (Fainstein 2010) and the increasing exploration of identity based relations of urban governance through intersectional perspectives (Rigon & Castan Broto 2021).

Young people as an urban constituency

Drawing on these, debates on youth inclusive urban governance focus on the extent to which young people, in all their diversity, are able to engage in urban governance processes, and the particular barriers associated with youth. Despite a broad consensus on the need for inclusive modes of governance, as discussed above, patterns of young people's exclusion from processes of urban governance persist. This relates in part to their wider treatment in policy. According to the State of Youth Policy 2014, of 198 countries, 122 countries have a national youth policy. However, structures for youth participation have often been criticised as symbolic exercises more on numerical and structural inclusion than meaningful engagement in decision-making. Young people are often treated only as 'future adults', with an associated lack of focus on their policy priorities and fundamental human rights (Farugia & Wood, 2017; ActionAid, 2020: 3), rather than framing youth and children as 'citizens in their own right' (Sakil, 2018: 221).

An increasing number of studies have explored how ageism manifests itself in politics, finding that there is a tendency to doubt, deny or dismiss the voices of youth and children, regulate their identities, and generally limit their efforts in political and advocacy movements (de la Fuente-Núñez et al., 2021; WHO, 2021). In the sphere of urban governance, young people continue to be marginalised in many contexts as active urban citizens (Frank, 2006) including in smart cities (Henning, 2014).

This is linked to a failure of governance interventions to respond to the nature of youth participation, and to young people's priorities and as a consequence young people's disengagement from formal structures of governance. Research suggests that there has been a participation shift among youth in many contexts, with traditional governance platforms increasingly displaced by non-conventional forms of engagement. While youth participation in formal electoral processes is declining in many contexts (Xenos et al., 2014; Barrett & Pachi, 2019), their interest in politics and participation is not (GYS, 2020; reference). A growing number of youths are tackling a wide range of issues through advocacy, lobbying, volunteering, digital activism or engagement in community-based or civil society organizations worldwide (UN, 2020; GYS, 2020).

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The changing nature of young people's political participation and their suspicion towards mainstream city institutions, means that young citizens frequently engage in urban politics through 'insurgent' planning approaches (Holston, 2014) outside of formal government-led invited spaces of participation. For example, our local team members have observed in Lebanon, that young people use social media for advocacy on urban issues, often criticising government, while in Indonesia, young people have built their own independent digital platforms to crowdsource information on safest cycling routes or accessible and safe public spaces for women and people with disabilities that act independently of formal municipal institutions. An important conceptual point, however, in characterising young people as a political constituency, is that the intersection of age with other social identities such as gender, ethnicity, disability or citizenship status, means that young people should not be understood as a homogenous political interest group. This presents both an institutional challenge for organisations wishing to promote youth inclusive urban governance, and a methodological challenge for research aiming to understand young people's participation in urban governance.

Crenshaw's (1993) adoption of the term 'intersectionality' to explore the ways in which the juxtaposition of race and gender affect experiences of the law in the USA has been widely taken up to critique the conceptual treatment of social identities as 'singular affiliations' Sen (2006) in popular identity politics, or the tendency in public policy to address identities such as women, or the youth through institutional 'silos' (Levy, 2009). Silioed approaches to identity based politics and governance mean that those with multiple subordinated identities are likely to have political interests that remain invisible (Purdie-Vaughns & Eibach, 2008), and that identity based social movements pressure participants to trade off one identity against another (Radcliffe et al 2004). It has also meant that effects to promote diversity through quotas in representative structures can lead to elite capture - see for example Rigon (2014) on youth representatives on ward committees in Kenya representing their land-owner interest over their youth interests.

While intersectionality is well developed as a conceptual approach there has been less work on its translation into methodology (Goethals, et al, 2015). However there are emergent methods to bring an intersectional perspective to both quantitative and qualitative research (Nash, 2008) including approaches to prioritise research participants' own interpretation of the salience of their various social identities at the same time as recognising shared identities (for example 'youth') as a productive political space (Walker and Ossul, 2021) by engaging with the interplay of categorical and anti-categorical (McCall, 2005) treatments of social identities.

The role of digital technologies in urban governance
There is a considerable literature on the role of digital technology in the governance of cities. Much of this focuses on the generation, use and ownership of data in cities (Metropolis, 2022), including the smart cities agenda, and the role the citizen scientists can play both in collecting data but also in using it to advance policy advocacy (Haklay, 2018). There is also a focus on the scope that digital technology gives for policy and makers and citizens to engage with each other in novel ways (Janssen and Helbig, 2018) including under the framing of smart cities (McFarlane & Söderström, 2017; Meijer & Bolívar, 2016). At the same time a critical literature questions the association of smart cities with problems of surveillance (Melgaço, & van Brakel, 2021) or commodification of data and creation of neo-liberal cities (Grossi & Pianezzi, 2017) as well as highlighted the ways in which the digital divide excludes some urban citizens from the benefits and processes of smart cities (Shin et al 2021). However, with these criticisms in mind, digital technology still has strong potential as a resource for inclusive urban governance and may be particularly important for young people's urban civic engagement.

The position of young people in relation to digital technology as a resource for urban governance
Young people are the majority of those online in both developed and developing countries. Statistics from the International Telecommunications Union show that 45% of the world's Internet users are below the age of 25, suggesting both an early surge by the young to access the Internet as well as a large potential group of users still to be connected (Abebe, 2011). The digital landscape has permeated and transformed the lifestyles of young people, shaping how they interact with each other and their environment. Young people, in particular are constantly surrounded by, and immersed in, portable personal devices such as mobile telephones (Prensky, 2001).

This suggests that digital platforms could be a productive entry point for promoting youth involvement in more collaborative forms of urban governance, and could be particularly suitable given young people's greater access to, and knowledge of technology (Halewood and Kenny, 2008). Young people embrace the

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digital environment they grew up in to construct and deconstruct their civic identities, express political stances and claim agency that "may not be afforded to them in traditional civic spaces and reimagine the concept of 'the political' write large" (Cho & Byrney, 2020: 4). According to the UN, young people are using digital technology as an alternative avenue for engaging in political and governance processes. "Social media leverage their enhanced connections and solidarity, and various new forms of activism are becoming mainstream." (2020: 44). It is important to note however that this pays out in context specific ways – for example different digital media are adopted to this end by young people in different contexts, such as the use of computer based platforms for young activists in Singapore (Zhang, 2013) vs mobile phone based platforms in the Philippines (David 2013)

Digital technology has been increasingly taken up by municipal governments as a tool to enable citizen participation in urban governance, including data collection, accountability and participation in decision making through the creation of spaces for deliberation (Cortés-Cediel et al, 2021; Pelzer, 2017; Jian et al., 2020). However, the use of digital platforms does not in itself address young people's disengagement from, or suspicion of formal city institutions. Efforts to include young people in urban governance through digital platforms need to address wider exclusionary power relations (Aurigi & Odendaal, 2020) especially given that the critical literature on 'smart cities' has highlighted that the adoption of digital platforms for urban governance by municipal actors has often taken very technocratic approaches that entrench top down power dynamics (Krivý, 2018) and elided urban politics and the interests of urban citizen interests groups (Malek et al 2021) including young people.

While the growing use of digital technology as a tool for young people's online urban activism is clear, a question remains of the extent to which it effects real world change. Looking at the case of young 'bloggervists' in Singapore, Zhang highlights the need to understand "how to build a link between online activism and actual policymaking, which still largely happens offline" (Zhang 2013; 252). On the other hand, young people's activism such as the student-led protests in Chile (Scherman et al 2015) were able to coordinate face to face student actions with social media and initiate policy change.

In terms of the potential for digital platforms as a means for *collaborative* governance actions between city institutions and young people, as opposed to young people's insurgent activism, one barrier has been the unequal terms of engagement between young people and the urban institutions inviting their participation. This reinforces the contention that digital technologies are not neutral tools but may reproduce exclusionary patterns, depending on how they are set up and governed (Polgar, 2010). Where state and development actors have used digital tools to work with young people on urban issues, research has highlighted that technology is used to involve young people primarily to gather data (Gibbs, L., Kornbluh, M., Marinkovic, K., Bell, S., & Ozer, E. J., 2020) and the use of mapping/GIS technology as a way to get youth perspectives and create awareness about urban planning (Santo, C. A., Ferguson, N., & Trippel, A., 2010), without involving young people in the use of this data to shape urban policy.

A further barrier is the nature of the offered digital platforms themselves. One issue that has been highlighted is that youth may be digitally engaged, municipal institutions are often not able to match/ meet their digital competence. "The expectations of a digitally competent government are high, and the young easily dismiss efforts of the state when it is technologically unsound." (David 2013; 330). In addition a key challenge for youth focused ICT programming by state institutions is that they tend to focus on "…. skills, access and infrastructure with little attention to how these tools can be applied to solve the problems youth are most concerned with." (Sakil 2018; 230). Coming back to the previously discussed issue of the 'digital divide' a final challenge is to recognise that young people's intersecting social identities are likely to map across the extent to which they have access to digital media and skills or are excluded from digital platforms.

Participatory spaces

Literature on participation distinguishes between organic forms of participation leading to 'claimed spaces', where powerless or excluded groups create their own autonomous initiatives outside institutionalised policy arenas, from 'invited' forms of participation initiated and managed by government bureaucracies (Cornwall, 2002; Gaventa 2006; Cornwall & Coelho, 2006; Gaventa & Barrett, 2012; Mansuri & Rao, 2013). In our case study cities our consortium members Kota Kita and Catalytic Action have observed that young people use digital technologies to construct claimed spaces for participation in the governance of their cities. In contrast, where city governments have invited young people to participate in their 'invited' digital platforms, young people show little interest in engaging in them. These patterns confirm wider research into young people's disengagement from formal political structures, and represent an urban governance gap. Our hypothesis is that a key cause of young people's disengagement from formal urban governance structures is

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the power dynamics in the invited spaces for young people's collaboration, which do not allow them to voice their own priorities and preferred modes of engagement with urban processes. We further hypothesise that there is a third type of participatory space which would be more attractive for young people: 'co-produced' spaces for participation which are based on a deeper understanding of, and challenge to, the unequal power dynamics that has led to young people's disengagement from formal urban governance structures. Accordingly, we hope to test the theory that when young people are working with local governments to co-produce and manage digital platforms in policy domains of interest for both, this can result in genuine inclusive urban governance. We are testing this assumption in a three-year project with our consortium members Kota Kita and Catalytic Action, who both have highlighted this digital co-production as a potential strategic focus for their ongoing work on young people and urban citizenship. Therefore, we will work in four small and middle cities in Lebanon and Indonesia to develop these co-produced digital platforms. Moreover, our hypothesis is that because of the great diversity within the "youth" constituency, it is important to adopt an intersectional approach to understand the motivations and barriers to young people's participation and address these in tailored co-production processes.

Tabella I | Conceptual Framework: spaces and types of participation. Authors based on Rigon 2013, drawing on Cornwall 2002; Gaventa 2006; Cornwall & Coelho, 2006; Gaventa & Barrerr, 2012; Mansuri & Rao, 2013.

Spaces	Description	Type of participation	Description	Civil society /citizens	Government
Claimed	Spaces created by powerless or excluded groups. These range from spaces created by social movements and community associations, to those simply involving common places where people meet to debate outside of the institutionalised policy arenas.	Organic	Spurred by civic groups acting independently of, and often in opposition to, government. Usually driven by social movements aimed at confronting powerful individuals and institutions and improving the functioning of these spheres through a process of conflict, confrontation, and accommodation. Effective because they arise endogenously, within a country's trajectory of change, and are often directed by highly motivated, charismatic leaders who mobilize citizens to give voice to their interests. They ultimately achieve their goals when they are able to influence the political process or obtain political power.	Create	Oppose Institutionalise Listen
Invited	Spaces provided by the government in response to popular demand, donor pressure or shifts in policy.	Induced	Refers to participation promoted through policy actions of the state and implemented by bureaucracies.	Shape	Create Close
Closed	Spaces where decisions are taken without any participation of citizens	No participation	N/A	Open	Maintain closed Open
Co-produced	Spaces negotiated, created and managed by citizens and government	Negotiated	Citizen co-own and participate in managing the space, shaping the modes of engagement.	Co-manage	Co-manage

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Conclusion

We argue that co-produced participatory spaces offer a different way to engage young people through digital platforms. This approach has the potential to radically shape the urban project towards co-produced cities. In terms of digital technologies, co-produced spaces can empower citizens to fully comprehend the complex power dynamics around data ownership and management, enabling them to demand more democratic and transparent use of digital technology by government as well as tech companies. It can be a tool of building trust between local government and young people, while at the same time transforming young people into active citizens, shaping urban governance.

This experimentation with the co-production of digital platforms is urgent given the possibility that digital technology further concentrates power in the hands of government or tech companies, leading to dystopian forms of urban governance, which emphasises the control and policing of citizens' behaviour. By expanding the conceptualisation of forms of participation and putting forward a suggestion for a different type of government-citizen relation, this paper sought to advance debates on inclusive urban governance.

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