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Data and Platform Co-ops in Smart City Citizenship: interview with Igor Calzada

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[Igor Calzada](#) is a senior researcher at universities like [Oxford](#) and Cardiff with a focus on urban, regional and technopolitical transformations, considering data issues and social innovation.

In November 2020, he launched the book [Smart City Citizenship](#), which proposes another framework at smart cities based on democratic governance and citizenship. Thus, he presents how it is possible to understand and intervene in technopolitical disputes involving algorithms, data, and artificial intelligence based on notions such as digital sovereignty.

Among the possibilities, there is the creation of data and platform co-ops based on data and digital commons. For the author, data cooperatives are a subtype of platform cooperatives, in which they focus on business models, while data co-ops share and store data. The book analyzes, among other cases, the Barcelona ecosystem and proposes perspectives for public policies.

Currently, Calzada is interested in exploring new models of data governance and artificial intelligence to propose alternative ways to data ecosystems in the European scenario.

He defends experimental cities as a reaction to the mainstream idea of the city as a platform, as a reproduction of extractive and panoptic practices through hyperconnectivity. But it will be very difficult in a dangerous context. And he provokes: “how, in the current context, in which we are closed in our homes, can we propose cities with open systems?”

Other recommendations from the author are an article on platform and data co-ops published in [Sustainability](#) journal and a [conversation in Spanish](#) about social innovation in smart cities.

Read the interview with Igor Calzada:

**DIGILABOUR: What does it mean to consider the city as a platform in experimental cities?**

**IGOR CALZADA:** To be honest, I do think that this idea of the city as a platform may have been misused to the extractivist data practices in many cities. Actually, experimental cities, as indicated in the recent book *Smart City Citizenship* is an attempt to revert the technocratic approach that smart cities has implicitly inoculated to many policymakers. At present, amidst the post-COVID-19 era, it is hard to imagine a city as a platform without thinking in the digital panopticon (Bentham, 1785) reimaged by Zuboff (2019). Experimental cities are much more the reaction to a hyper-connected socio-technical pattern rather than a clear ending point.

**DIGILABOUR: What are the challenges to strengthen alternative data ownership regimes and data commons?**

**CALZADA:** First and foremost, we should acknowledge the shift produced in data governance models. It is only very recent since policymakers and academics have started noticing the side effects of the extractive data business models as entirely business-as-usual approach. As such, even the European Commission has been tirelessly working in launching

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the GDPR as a cutting-edge legislation influencing internationally many governments, which essentially nurture the way in which some cities and regions have dared to experiment with new models anchoring in the main idea that citizens should own their data. Despite the fact that there are a few known models about data commons, we are witnessing at present a huge shift in the smart city discourse eminently pushed ahead by supranational institutions such as United Nations.

### **DIGILABOUR: How do you relate platform co-ops and data commons?**

**CALZADA:** It is a pertinent question. Platform co-operativism is a movement rooted in social entrepreneurship and the potential of digital platforms. Among platform co-operatives, we may find data co-operatives that mutualise the value of data among members and thus by using intermediaries. The most challenging aspect at this stage is how we can mutualise personal data when this data (paradoxically) has been systematically extracted to feed big data-opolies. Without clear data ecosystems organised at sectoral level, data will never become a commons. Here is what *Smart City Citizenship* attempts to demonstrate: the importance of these relationships in ensuring high standards of democracy.

### **DIGILABOUR: What are the potentials of platform and data co-ops – especially in relation to technological sovereignty and grassroots innovation?**

**CALZADA:** We are in very early stages but the pandemic crisis has accelerated the need and the hope for such transformations.

And what are the challenges to build platform and data co-ops outside cities like Barcelona? As I mentioned in a recent [Sustainability](#) journal article, there are several internal and external challenges that should be inevitably addressed.

### **[QUOTE – Calzada 2020, p. 16]**

“Platform and data co-operatives may alter existing data governance extractivism in the post-COVID-19 era if (i) the government play a leading role in crisis provisioning, (ii) businesses behave co-operatively, and (iii) civil society and the effectiveness of local community solidarity provides strong social capital for “pandemic citizens.” Moreover, according to this academically interesting contribution, platform and data co-operatives should focus on the foundational transformations needed in (i) health and care, (ii) housing and energy, (iii) food, (iv) social care and licensing, (v) tax reform, (vi) pension funds and the insurance provision of material infrastructure, (vii) life and work transition plans for local urban and rural areas, (viii) governments’ capacity building, and (ix) global solidarity.”

### **DIGILABOUR: In your research, how did you analyze the role of the university in the construction of “smart city citizenship”?**

**CALZADA:** The university/academia is actually one of the key players in the Penta Helix model, but solely cannot act or transform the surroundings. There is a need for transformative alliance as the book attempts to depict by employing social innovation perspective.

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