Platform Urbanism 'Glitches' – Minor Theory for Researching Platforms in Latin American Cities

ABSTRACT

With this article, I propose an alternative to research platforms in the urban 'south'. The debate on platform impacts has been divided between those embedded in platform determinism, predicting a utopian urban environment mediated by the digital, and those critics who see platforms as the portrayals of dystopian urban futures. However, some recognize 'glitches' in platforms as opportunities for corrections, opening the debate for flexible and negotiable futures of platforms in cities. This 'glitchiness' of platform urbanism (Leszczynski 2020) is particularly evident in the evolution of platforms in cities from the global south. Regulatory stagnation and fragile governance put platforms in the space of marginality, requiring a minor theory of 'glitchy' platform urbanism to understand their impacts. Through the narration of the interface between mobility platforms and three cities in Latin America, I recognize the ways in which platform glitch theory informs how digital actors re-shape cities in real-world contexts. I explain how a perspective on the everyday bottom-up practices on platform mediated realities show an alternative way to research platform urbanism and the new digital denizens. Ultimately, this can allow for building new possibilities in which southern urban policy, theory and futures can be engaged in their relationship with technology.

Keywords:
Platform Urbanism, Glitch, Urban Futures, Global South, Latin America

1. Introduction

Platforms have a unique urban and territorialized characteristic to their development, especially since the emergence of the sharing economy in cities worldwide (Davidson and Infranca 2016). At the same time, platforms have alternative processes of development when they territorialize in the global south, particularly in southern urban spaces. From this territorialization of the digital economy, the concept of platform urbanism came up recently as a designator for analyzing platform effects in cities.

However, the burgeoning development of literature related to platform urbanism has proven insufficient to address the issues specific to the development of platforms, and for that matter of the sharing, platform, or gig economies (whatever you want to call them) in southern settings. In Koskinen et al. (2019), for example, the authors name to attention the need to engage with a theoretical framework specifically for the analysis of digital platforms in the global south, including taking bold steps to differentiate the platform development in the global north, and its impacts from those of developing countries.

For instance, they call for future lines of research which deal with the developmental (in the development studies sense) potential that digital platforms can bring to cities. Equally, the need to recognize how the development of platforms in the south differs from that of the north, their institutional implications, and how they can exacerbate inequalities. Finally, they also call for an analysis of what could be plausible alternatives (that is publicly developed, cooperative or other alternative forms of platform organization).

This first call for the need for a specific way of studying platforms in global south cities prompted me to develop this article that aims to propose alternative ways to study the development of platforms in cities of the global south, particularly in Latin America. To do this, I will build from the work of Agnieszka Leszczynski (2020) which re-signifies the work of Katz (1996, 2017) on 'minor theory', and how this feminist critical analysis can nevertheless be helpful in considering the engagement with platform urbanism under the concept of 'platform glitches'.

I will start this article by outlining the definitions and debates linked to platform urbanism as a designator of these emerging urban issues, for then dealing with the concept of 'glitchiness' and minor theory building from the work of Leszczynski (2020). I will then start to engage with the particularities of southern contexts, especially when dealing with marginality, and what questions should we ask to these developments (Koskinen et al. 2019).

This I will present, again drawing from the perspective of Leszczynski (2020), not in the form of case studies representing full methodological or empirical cohesion but rather 'vignettes' of the cities of Bogotá and Cali in Colombia and Santiago in Chile, illustrating the fluidity of episodes and space-temporalities typical to southern contexts. I argue here that the preliminary use of these 'vignettes' to observe platforms in the south is the base for a new conceptual lens and framework that allows us to observe practices rather than imposed foreign 'northern' theory (Bhan 2019).

Thus, building a first step into a new way of observing and understanding platform urbanism in the form of a 'minor theory' or let us say a 'minor methodology', which nonetheless can give an alternative and complementary view to more classical ways of studying urban phenomena. A vision that is free from the local material limitations of

southern contexts and the restrictions of the so-called forward-thinking can act as a blinding lens to understand the peculiarities of southern phenomena.

I finalize the article by exploring the new possibilities that minor theory and minor methodologies can offer us for the development of southern urban policy, theory, and futures. Understanding here that I apart myself from the perspective of Katz (2017) that minor theory 'undoes the major from within' (Katz, 2017, p. 599) as I will argue that the creation of pluriverses and 'worlds' (Escobar 2018) is not in contradiction with the possibility of coexistence in a frame of common institutions. Responding to the *modus vivendi* liberalism of Gray (2000, 6) and its need for southern contexts (Claudio, 2017).

2. Platform Urbanism

Platform urbanism' as a designator for analyzing platform effects in cities worldwide is linked to a burgeoning discipline emerging from the concept of 'platform capitalism' as termed by Srnicek (2017). As of recently, it has helped to frame platforms with the current debates of political economy and especially the increasingly central role of data, and data capture, rather than of traditional commodities in the new forms of capitalism. From the recognition that platform capitalism has relevant and abundant expressions in the urban space (Davidson and Infranca, 2016 and particularly Barns 2019), the term 'platform urbanism' came to be.

The emergence of this terminology of study, currently evolving to a full-fledged discipline is not surprising as theorists of socio-spatial phenomena have understood the spatialized impacts of platforms and the transformations that digital technology brings to cities. In the words of Leszczynski (2020, p. 193):

> 'Platform urbanism discursively signals and provides a theoretical framework for researching the unprecedented scale, scope, agency, and urban ambitions of platform economy actors and their effects, which are held to be unique to platform entities and distinct from antecedent digital-urban configurations, namely those of the smart city and its corollary smart urbanism in several key ways'.

However, as any conceptual framework develops, the perspectives on what platform urbanism is and how to study it are not homogeneous in the literature. Some authors for example, focus on understanding platform urbanism as the framework to study the ways in which platforms act as extractive agents in the city.

In a framework of purely technological engagement and analysis of the infrastructural impacts of platforms in cities, authors like Bratton (2015) or Plantin et al. (2018) for example delve in a deterministic observation and interest in the 'architectures' and 'infrastructures' of platforms. Moreover, even if Bratton (2015) deals with techno-politics frameworks in the macro scale, there is little engagement with societal, discursive, and much less organizational or micro-political developments, which I argue are crucial for understanding platform urbanism as a societal impact.

However, there are other authors who start to problematize this perspective. For example, Krivý (2018) sustains the notion that the effects of platforms in cities are linked to the accumulation of centralized corporate power and the reproduction of social

inequality linked to the latter. This perspective on the conflicts emerging from platforms in cities was addressed even before big platforms such as Uber or Airbnb (Gillespie 2010) in relation to the increasing accumulation of power for framing the discourse in the urban space.

Platform urbanism under this perspective is heavily related to data capture which is the 'currency' and commodity of platforms within the urban space. Particularly in relation with the massive generation of data related to everyday practices, the algorithms behind the platform-mediated interaction and the tools, in this case smartphones, which at the same time decentralized the data capture while centralizing its capital value within an enterprise.

In addition, a line in the literature argues that platforms are not only mechanisms of extraction but can also be ecosystems of interaction. Understood here as special and new social spaces that exponentially expand people's ability to interact, building a relational nature behind the creation of all types of markets (Brown et al, 2004). In this position, the work of Barns (2019) is very illustrative in how platform urbanism can be defined and, furthermore, studied as an ecosystem of interactions and mediations territorialized in the urban space.

Barns (2019, p. 21) argues that platform urbanism is an urban ecosystem of new relational processes building on the 'co-constitutive natures of urban institutions, actors, governing tactics, modes of expertise, training data, and ways of knowing and designing cities'. And that in this case, platforms are actors of the enormous variety of relationships and interactions which are natural to cities. In this perspective, Barns (2019) considers that platform urbanism are triggering very specific new forms of interactions, markets, and agency amongst urban denizens. It is argued within this line of thought within platform urbanism that this ecosystem of mediation is not a separation from the conceptualization of the 'smart city', rather a new recognition and identification of its practices, fluidity, and the variety of platform-based impacts in the city.

Co-joint with the focus on platform urbanism as the discipline for studying the mediatory space of platforms, platform urbanism is also observed in the literature from its societal impacts and consequences. Particularly in this case, how platforms are giving strength to new ways for understanding organizations and institutional evolution and the multiple ways in which people construct governance alternatives with the affordances brought by digital platforms. There are very interesting works from Hartl et al (2016) and Martin et al. (2017) which focus on organizational models for conceptualizing platform governance.

However, within the study of alternative organizational models the most prominent is the conceptualization around platform cooperativism (Scholz and Schneider 2017) which talk to us about radical structures of platform governance and how a democratically managed platform can give better social outcomes. This is more than relevant if we understand that platforms as exposed previously, transformed into constituent elements of urban development in the past few years.

The authors' response in this literature is the advocacy toward cooperative platforms as a model to confront the centralized multinational structures of "sharing economy" platforms. Not here exclusively in a preoccupation related to data accumulation, the capture of data capital, but rather an observation of platforms as possible community builders. As stated by Cameron Tonkinwise in Scholz and Schneider

(2017), platform cooperatives are an opportunity for designing and reviving the project of establishing a genuine sense of community.

As diverse as the debate is, including positions focusing on the infrastructures and architectures of algorithms, discourses of mediation and interaction, data capital capture and emergent organizational forms, platform urbanism is a discipline that may rightly be considered as encompassing of all these themes. Van Dijck et al. (2018. p. 2) even states that beyond the different themes included in the development of platform urbanism, what its important is that this designator 'emphasizes the inextricable relation[s] between online platforms and social structures', and as such it should be studied.

Finally, it is relevant to address that while the literature on platform urbanism has developed to understand its structural characteristics, there is also much to say regarding the specific trajectories (Stehlin et al. 2020) of platforms and how this develops in the challenge of urban institutions. Being here where the literature of platform urbanism takes a different shift alas not sufficiently explored.

There are, however, interesting takes on how platforms are actively influencing how urban governance functions and actively curating relationships between market, civil society and government stakeholders. Platforms frame their narratives as brokers of state-society connection and position themselves as relevant actors within the urban institutions.

Examples as the presented by van Doorn (2020) in its analysis of how platforms are starting a process of institutional design and active challenge acting as a policy or institutional entrepreneurial agent. Or observations such as the strategies and tactics of urban legitimation by platforms (Yates 2020), processes of recombinatory governance (Barns 2020), how platforms actively engage in institutional entrepreneurship (Pelzer et al. 2019) showing that platforms are actively operating beyond the bound of traditional governance and acting as active challengers of the status quo in cities.

Equally, there are authors of an emerging line of inquiry dealing with how platforms are re-shaping everyday life in urban settings. This includes works on platform phenomenologies (Rodgers and Moore 2020), platforms as flexible spatial arrangements (Richardson 2020), and an initial engagement with southern themes in the analysis of everyday politics of ridesharing platforms in India (Mazumdar 2020), the development of a new urban environment in Brazil (Luque-Ayala et al. 2020) and the emergence of alternative organizational forms and entrepreneurship in platform-ed communities (Reilly and Lozano-Paredes 2019; Lozano Paredes 2021).

It is fair to say here that this section does not aim to be a complete literature review on platform urbanism as a designator concept or discipline, which clearly exceeds this article's coverage. However, I wanted to present a panorama with summarised can tell us that platform urbanism deals with four main themes:

1. The infrastructural/architectural elements of digital platforms and its algorithms, together with the emerging issues of data capital capture.
2. How platform urbanism develops as an ecosystem of mediation of the everyday life in cities.
3. How different forms of platform urbanism can emerge in the articulation of cooperative or democratic engagements responding to the forms in which platform capitalism develops in an extractive manner.

4. The impact of platform in urban institutions and the changes and trajectories in which these challenges manifest.

On this last theme of the evolution or trajectories of platforms in the urban space and how they challenge institutions, Stehlin et al. (2020) gives us a very interesting typology which even if I'm not going to develop fully for the purposes of this article, does talk to us about different ways in which we could form a framework to study platform urbanism. This typology observes the trajectories of platforms within platform urbanism as:

1. Networked accumulation talks to us about the abovementioned theme of issues with data capture and more tangentially about the disruptive characteristic of platforms; 2. Infrastructural thickening, which talks to us about a reaction to the disruption of platforms in urban settings, and the utilization of digital technology to strengthen the base of public procurement of urban services (Mobility as a Service for example); 3. Life extension, in which incumbent disrupted agents utilize platforms to strengthen their position in response to disruption; 4. As a governmental fix, where the government embraces platforms to develop tasks that private capital is unwilling or unable to provide; Finally, 5. Platformisation as a commoning which talk to us to both the mediatory characteristics of platform urbanism and furthermore how new organizational forms with a societal engagement can emerge from the affordances of platforms.

This overview of platform urbanism helps to introduce the development of the following section of this article, in which I wish to engage with the idea of 'glitch' within this platform urbanism now embedded in minor theory. In this case, I will argue that the 'glitchiness' of platform urbanism is the missing element in the construction of a conceptual framework for platform urbanism which can engage with issues in the global south and start to respond to questions on commoning, institutional implications and affordances of platforms in southern cities.

3. The glitchiness of platform urbanism

An analysis of the 'glitches' within platform urbanism for building a conceptual framework applicable to the global south requires the adaptation of Russel's concept of the 'glitch' and the 'error/erratum' debate within systems theory, and applied to urban settings by Leszczynski (2020):

> 'Russel's error/erratum dualism serves as a heuristic that captures both the empirical propensity of platform–urban configurations toward erraticness and the radical potential of the indeterminacy of this tendency toward error to underwrite an indeterminate, ontogenetic, and ultimately more hopeful platform urban politics (erratum)' (Leszczynski 2020, p. 197).

This perspective on the erratum is at the core of how platform urbanism should be understood beyond its technical aspects and not as a 'perfect' smart-city like deterministic conceptualization, but rather as an open and full erratic configuration that can harbour answers to problems of platforms in cities. The latter is essentially opposed to the conceptualization of the 'smart city' which has permeated the discourse of

platforms in cities. I want to criticize this article. It is based on its inapplicability to both the 'glitchy' nature of platform urbanism and platform urbanism in the global south.

In his work on smart city theorization Goodspeed (2014) develops an analysis of the concept and argues that most smart city discourses are based in the theory of cybernetics and urban cybernetics (Wiener 1961; Savas 1970; Lee 1973; Rittel and Webber 1973; Branch 1981). Which, amongst other things argue for a centralized control structure facilitated by the improvement of communications and how this can allow for real-time feedback loops to improve systems agency and structure.

Early good examples of this line of thought are the ideas of Maturana, Varela and Atlan (Boulding and Khalil 2002) and the project cybersyn in Chile (Harries-Jones 1988, Medina 2011). The latter being particularly relevant because while the project cybersyn attempted to introduce a cybernetically controlled country (and cities) during the Allende presidency in Chile (Medina 2011; Loeber 2018), its failure and subsequent political consequences talk to us about the limits of this first 'smart city' structure. Both as a political concept, as a theorization tool or as a practical application.

Goodspeed (2014, p. 89) argued, 'Although IT artefacts can play a role in social change, they do not eliminate cities' social and political dimensions.' Being here where the metaphor that is the 'smart city', with its centralized technological control, would not be applicable to any city whatsoever because cities by their formation and nature cannot be optimized as a machine. At least on this regard the smart city concept confronts a crisis to which I argue platform urbanism as a theoretical framework can solve. Moreover, as I will present in following sections of this chapter, it already did.

Beyond the characteristics inherent to the city, the concept of smart city also confronts a pressing issue: the evolution of the nature of the digitalization of cities (Finger and Razaghi 2017; Lyons et al. 2018; García-Moreno 2020). Far from a centralized automation, the development of digital technology in the urban space has been marked by the expansion of enterprises like Facebook, Amazon, Google, Uber, or Airbnb with accelerated speeds since the 2020 COVID-19 pandemic.

These enterprises that constitute proto-oligopolies do not establish a centralized ecosystem of integration in which a 'smart city' can thrive. There is not centralized interoperability (it is rather a very much decentralized cross- platform operability (Barns 2019)) much less a requisite of portability of that data by the users (that is that a user of Facebook can transfer its data to Amazon, Google, etc.). At the same time, the physical elements of the city space such as museums and other cultural venues, public transportation and even restaurants depend on the articulation of these platforms, the services they provide, and the alternative platforms that emerge as a competition.

The way digital technology reconfigures the city does not rely anymore on the centralized articulation of computer and information technology proposed by the smart city theory. Materialized for example in the failure of the very praised Rio de Janeiro Operations Center, which could not confront problems as mudslides and wastewater infrastructure (Goodspeed 2014) and had to rely on informal settlements local knowledge and analogical societal initiatives.

On the other hand, the impact of digital platforms has shown to be complex, decentralized, not necessarily interoperable and in many cases even chaotic. Therefore, this abundance of alternatives and enterprises all intertwined with competing narratives and the networked ubiquity of social media is the context in which platform impacts on cities should be studied. It is simply out of bounds of the smart city narrative, and this

demands new conceptual reconfigurations to be incorporated to better theorize the digital platforms urban scene.

Moreover, from data generated by these platforms, either within or outside their organizational structures, a new line of studies, research and products are already emerging to understand how these different companies and sectors are separately changing urban life. Uber and its platform to measure travel times and density have sparked many urban research lines (Pearson and Samaniego 2017; Sathanur et al. 2019; Aryandoust et al. 2019; Sun et al. 2020; Roy et al. 2020; Vieira and Haddad 2020). Airbnb listings have been mapped to observe the effects on urban housing and policy (Yrigoy 2018; Campbell et al. 2019; Vinogradov et al. 2020; García-López et al. 2020; Benítez-Aurioles and Tussyadiah 2020). Even Facebook has been analyzed in its socio-spatial impacts in urban settings (Afzalan and Evans-Cowley 2015; Lin et al. 2016; Mhedhbi et al. 2019). All this tells us that in the ubiquitous reconfiguration that platforms have given to the urban sphere, there is little space for the 'smart city' as a category of analysis which can effectively study the impacts of platforms in urban spaces.

The complexity of platforms in cities, particularly in contexts of the global south, gives strength to the concept of 'glitchy' platform-urban configurations and how these very configurations can show alternative (and I argue more appropriate) ways to study platforms in the south. The 'glitchiness' of platform urbanism and specifically of southern platform urbanisms therefore serves to, in words of Leszczynski (2020, p. 197):

> '…name a technopolitical epistemology of attunement to precisely this glitchy marginality—moments and sites where platforms materialize otherwise or differently than expected, where platform–urban configurations fall short of their ambitions for capitalist frictionlessness, where platforms cannot effectively smooth out or 'fix' city spaces in ways necessary for their unencumbered operation, or where the platforms are unexpectedly absent.'

And it is this attunement, to which I agree with Leszczynski (2020) not a demonstration of an irredeemable failure of platform development and technological futures of cities, but rather that platforms need to be thought and studied within 'an epistemological ethos of being attentive to platform–urban marginalities that open up opportunities for mundane tactical maneuver.' Leszczynski (2020, p. 197).

Glitchiness in this perspective for southern platform urbanism, is a framework to understand the mundane and marginal maneuvers that emerge from platform effects and affordances in southern settings. Moreover, how glitches have a space to conceptualize both 'error and erratum, or a much needed "correction to the 'machine'" of digital and social systems alike (Leszczynski 2020, p. 197, quoting Russell 2012).

In this case glitches are the key for opening aspects of platform urbanism that exceed traditional socio-digital practices that we observe in 'northern' contexts. They open a space for alternative perspectives on 'what platforms can do', which is more than performing disruption or challenge to cities, but rather to open affordances for people to articulate autonomous ways of social innovation, commoning and institutionalization.

Social innovation in this context that is intrinsically related with the conceptualization on minor theory to which Leszczynski (2020, p. 196) gives us an excellent summary, building from the work on Katz (1996, 2017):

> 'Minor theory instead proceeds precisely from the margins, working the universalizing axioms of political economic orthodoxy through the subjective particularities and site-specificities of marginality in ways that simultaneously acknowledge the influence of capitalism's broader structural forces and expose the inherent limitations of universalizing explanations tendered solely in terms of capitalist social relations. In eschewing totalizing analytics in favor of the relationalities and intersectionalities of marginality, minor theory remains open to alternative "terrains of possible practice" and to the political potentials of the everyday (Katz, 2017: 598).' (Leszczynski 2020, p. 196).

The abovementioned 'terrains of possible practice' show how the focus of study should be directed towards the observation of marginality and alternative forms of commoning. Responding to the call of scholars of the global south advancing a line of thought focused on the need to observe the practices in southern cities—moreover, building theory and analysis from those cases (Bhan 2019).

However, platforms and platform urbanism in the global south are challenging to study due to the lack of conceptual definitions, their spread, and their intertwined nature with pre-existing institutions (Koskinen et al. 2019). There is a phenomenon of shared space between platform technology and societal structures such as informal community links, black markets, and shadow economies, and this has contributed to the implications of platforms in the global south being under-researched. The nature of informality has discouraged scholars to study the phenomena more deeply.

Nevertheless, there are recent case study approaches to platforms in southern cities (Pollio 2019; Prananda et al. 2020). They all observe how platform impacts and its relationship with the institutional ecosystem emerge for alternative practice or the 'terrains of the possible'.

In all these case studies a common thread is the existence of a phenomenon of shared space between advanced digital technology (platforms) and informal societal structures such as bottom-up communities of practice together with fragile governance settings and low contract enforcement.

This attention on marginal and informal societal structures is at the base of 'minor theory' and is the main call of this article as to the need for future scholars analyzing platforms in southern contexts. Observing the practices emerging from the margins should be the new method in which scholars address issues of southern implication, and as we saw previously, even more when dealing with erratic effects such as those developed by platforms.

Particularly, when the analyzed situations may be difficult to fully engage with a case study perspective due to the nature of fragility, fluidity, and informality. Reason why, in the following section and drawing again from the original work of Leszczynski (2020), I use the tool of 'vignettes' to identify the platform-afforded space temporalities that are emerging in cities of the global south. These vignettes, far from being epistemological case studies with all the requirements linked to 'northern' academic tradition, bring us an alternative way of understanding what is happening and beyond that, what platforms do when used by people in the south.

A 'methodology' which again freed from the material limitations of southern contexts, it is also free from the 'forward thinking' that can transform into a blinding element pervasive in northern academia. Particularly in its engagement with the 'south'

(Watson 2003, Bhan 2019) which is constantly, and erroneously, tried to be understood with the settings of northern preconceptions.

4. Vignettes of platform urbanism in Latin America

In this section of the article, I introduce the vignettes on different cities in South America, extracting observations from case study research (Lozano-Paredes 2021; Farías Pereira and Ossandón Sabal 2020) in the cities of Bogotá and Cali in Colombia and Santiago in Chile. These vignettes show us a glimpse into the development of commoning by communities of practice and the social evolution of marginal activities which again, are at the centre of minor theory and glitch perspective of platform urbanism.

These vignettes are focused on ridesharing platforms as I argue that the networking space brought by the structures of urban mobility are the setting in which the southern glitchiness of platforms is more prolific. However, this does not remove the possibilities that emerge by platform-mediation in other areas of the urban space.

4.1 Bogotá

In the city of Bogotá, capital of Colombia with 10 million people in its metropolitan area and a long history of transport informality, I identified a community of practice named 'Drivers Club Bogotá' (Lozano-Paredes 2021). This community was formed in 2017 by a group of drivers from multinational ridesharing platforms such as Uber which are active in the city, and its main purpose is to collaborate, help each other on night shifts on the platforms and alert members in case of problems or eventualities.

This by all means informal association of drivers started as a WhatsApp group who met at the 'activation' days of the multinational platforms recruitment and grew into an online community completely based on a Facebook group and now amounts to 6000 members (Drivers Club Bogotá 2021).

Beyond the initial association, this group has framed strategies of branding, audio-visual production, and centralized messages from the original administrator of the WhatsApp and Facebook groups. This association of the platform drivers, again, started as a space to share information on accidents, traffic, and networked information to avoid the traffic police checkpoints -as ridesharing platforms are not regulated in Colombia and its drivers are charged heavy fines or can even be punished by the removal of the license and vehicle). However, the group evolved to design elaborate governance structures (Lozano-Paredes 2021, p. 8) and started to develop direct relationships with users and eliminate the mediating element of the multinational digital platform.

In Colombia, and this is the case in many countries of Latin America, ridesharing platforms such as Uber accept cash payments to increase their service coverage and critical mass by bringing accessibility of the service to a large population that is outside the baking system. This is sustained by platform companies in the fact that the payment system is designed in a way that when a driver takes a cash payment it incurs in a debt of the commission costs with the platforms, and this debt is paid when another user pays for the service by credit card.

The latter however, created a massive incentive for drivers and clients to avoid credit card transactions completely and work exclusively with cash payments which more

than anything built even more direct relationships with users. To the point that these drivers started to abandon completely the work with multinational ridesharing platforms and develop their work exclusively within the online community of Drivers Club Bogotá. On the other hand, there is no shared information between the different platforms (or at least not an explicit and undisclosed one), and no traceable credit history for drivers, so they do this very freely.

These glitches in ridesharing platforms in Bogotá prompted drivers to use their online communities on Facebook and WhatsApp to establish a system of mutual aid for work procurement. In this system, if one driver is contacted directly by a user and cannot provide the service, the online group has administrators that locates another driver (member of the community) who can provide that service and effectively do it.

This type of cooperation afforded at the beginning by the systems of multinational platforms but then incorporated by people using other platforms as to cooperate and improve their conditions, shows us an unexpected consequence of platform effects in southern cities. Research on this phenomenon, with the observation of practices as a method needs to happen to illustrate more than a vignette into the glitches (error and erratum) in the global south and how interesting and alternative commoning forms start to emerge.

4.2 Cali

A similar situation is observed in the city of Cali, also in Colombia, albeit with more expansive characteristics. The city of Cali is the second largest in Colombia and was the birthplace of drivers creating these online communities of practice and mutual aid (Reilly and Lozano Paredes 2019, Lozano-Paredes 2021).

In Cali, however, the online community of drivers, known colloquially as 'Los Zellos', evolved by using a Zello channel, a push-to-talk platform that allows for communication channels with a great capacity of users. This community emerged from two WhatsApp groups of drivers working with Uber and other multinational platforms, similar to the process of Bogotá, but then amplified by the use of Zello as a massive communication channel.

The evolution and experience of 'Los Zellos' nonetheless has a particularity that can help to illuminate the debate on the glitches that platforms evolve to in southern contexts. In this case, drivers created very sophisticated financial collaborative structures (Lozano-Paredes 2021), which included:

Cooperation with external actors

The geographical division of the city to avoid competition

Creation of a common mutual aid fund to help drivers when the traffic police retain vehicles or collaborate with the payment of imposed fines.

This financial structure has helped the 'Los Zellos' community to become one of the main stakeholders of transportation in the city of Cali. Moreover, the creation of new forms of organization and institutionalization embedded in what we could call a 'platform mutalism' talks to us about how far the erratic transformations within platforms and platform urbanism can go. Another example of the glitchiness that can be studied with implications on organization theory and even new understandings of urban sociology in southern cities.

4.3 Santiago

Finally, beyond the Colombian context, I want to show a vignette of the city of Santiago, capital of Chile, and how their platform mobilities are also developing alternative features and harnessing different marginal opportunities. Working with the findings of the qualitative analysis by Farías Pereira and Ossandón Sabal (2020) it is interesting to observe that same as in the Colombian vignettes, users of ridesharing platforms also joined together to form online communities of practice. In a similar process to Bogotá or Cali, in Santiago, ridesharing drivers created social media group and used the Zello platform as a communication channel with the main purpose of collaborating for security issues and to increase their work and income.

However, it is interesting to observe in this vignette that different from their counterparts in Colombia. The Chilean online communities had an active 'institutional entrepreneurial' development (Elert and Henrekson 2021) and got involved in pushing for institutional change and for the creation of a regulatory framework for their work. This process of actively pushing institutional change included the proposal of a special category for their drivers' licenses and the creation of a union organization with the purpose of representing their interests.

Equally, a particularity of this vignette is that the institutional challenging developed by the online communities manifested in the more theoretical debates on the nature of their work. They actively participated in the discussion on their situation as 'workers' or 'driver-partners' definition, and their activism towards finding a favourable outcome on that regard in the development of the regulation, manifested in many institutional strategies and work (as defined by Lawrence et al. (2013). These strategies include framing their work within an independent category from the original duality of the debate (worker vs. driver-partner), going into the media to defend their positions, and being present as citizens in every discussion of the platform regulation to articulate their needs.

The processes of institutional entrepreneurship, which rapidly evolved into political action shows us what Gillespie (2010) referred to when analyzing platforms as the new element of a discursive construct which shows the agency and structural capacities that platforms have in the political sphere. Understanding platforms as such is essential if we apply a vision of minor theory that goes beyond the articulation of technological determinism and analyses how different forms of platform urbanisms can modify the political and institutional environment of southern contexts. In ways that may be completely overlooked if we are to engage with these vignettes on a 'northern perspective.

As I developed previously in this article, platform urbanism deals with four themes across its scholarly evolution, including the study of the infrastructural elements of digital platforms and algorithms, issues of data capital, the creation of ecosystems of mediation in cities, but most importantly how platform urbanism can emerge in the articulation of alternative organization forms and how this can challenge urban public institutions. In the global south these last two elements, as we saw with the vignettes of Bogotá, Cali, and Santiago are built from the observation and analysis of everyday practices that can illuminate and create new theoretical forms.

Observing the practices of Latin American platform drivers, we can start to talk about an alternative form of 'platform mutualism' or the development of new theory for

non-market forms of entrepreneurial activity focused on institutional and policy change. From the vignettes observing practices, we can extract how platforms require local knowledge and create new forms of worker solidarity (examples which are already being observed in other places of the south (Qadri 2020)). At the end of the line, we can work from a theory of the bottom up that can inform scholars worldwide and help direct our research towards emergent and autonomous forms of platform urbanism worldwide.

5. Emergent and Autonomous Platform Urbanism

I finalize this article by extracting the idea of minor theory for observing practices. Studying how glitches evolve within platforms helps explore the new possibilities that they can offer for the development of southern urban policy, theory, and futures.

From the vignettes of practices and platform glitches, we observe that platform urbanisms are working towards changing the state of how 'things are done' within urban policy and producing institutional reforms. The latter occurs in a context where the state has not provided policy solutions and a regulatory frame in which these platforms (and the people behind them) can work.

To support this analysis on 'southern' contexts possible urban policies and the observation of practices embedded in platform development, it is necessary to incorporate and re-interpret the idea of 'conflicting rationalities' (Watson 2003). In its original conceptualization, conflicting rationalities addresses the clashes between the intention behind policies and responses by planners and policymakers, and the wills, demands and meanings of southern urban denizens. The term is engaged in searching for a southern and 'minor' perspective on urban theory, which is still primarily emerging from contexts in the 'north' or the 'west', focusing rather on the 'south' and the 'east'. Moreover, it demonstrates how conflicting visions between the ambitions of state planners and policymakers on one side and the informal actors on the other, have historically permeated all state-society engagement in the urban planning and policy processes in the global south.

The use of 'conflicting rationalities' is part of an argument for the need to understand the emergent phenomenon of southern platform urbanism, and for that matter, other informal or extra-legal activities occurring in southern cities, in a polyrational and pluralist way (Schmitt and Hartmann 2016), that talks to us clearly from a minor theory lens of postcolonial, feminist and bottom-up emergence studies.

Recognizing that there is the need for diversity in the analysis of cities, that polyrational situations are more robust when dealing with diversity of processes. Moreover, a 'clumsy' solution (Verweij et al. 2011) here, recognizing emergent realities and the need to embrace different rationalities, is necessary for understanding urban governance in the future.

Wicked problems such as platforms in the southern vignettes we observed, and the institutional limbo in which they are embedded (while actively pushing for institutional change) do not have however to be deemed unsolvable. Conflicting rationalities gives us a good panorama of the settings is a conceptual tool to understand why so far, the government has proven incapable of reconcile its views with the emerging process of paratransit platforms.

Part of understanding the panorama of rationalities, wills, and intentions of actors of platforms challenging institutions, and how these rationalities in conflict with the government, leads us to ask how to further understand the institutional challenging. The latter a way in which the rationalities in conflict can find a different form to engage with themselves and produce better policy outcomes.

An additional way in which urban policies in the south can understand and respond to the challenging processes of southern platform glitchiness is to observe the phenomenon by the lens of ontological design[1] (Willis 2015; Escobar 2013, 2018). Observing that the process in which platforms develop and the affordances that the technology brings as a process of ontological designing in which they are actively designing the new institutional fields: new ways of doing things, new pluriverses, new worlds for understanding not just hoe platform work, but how they create new modes in the settings of the south.

In creating new forms and fields, platforms are designing new institutional spaces to which policymakers and planners should respond. Here, for the government the choice lies in recognizing this design process hidden in the challenging of institutions, and whatever policies they produce should align with these bottom-up processes.

A quick note on minor theory and liberal democracies in the global south

At the end of this article, must attest that even if I support the need for an analysis of southern contexts freed from the constraints of northern scholarship, I apart myself from the perspective of Katz (2017) which argues that these new ways of minor theory 'undoes the major from within' (Katz, 2017, p. 599).

One of the linking arguments of scholars in the global south, and specifical scholars of minor theory such as Katz (2017) or Leszczynski (2020) is that liberalism (or the perspective of liberal democracy) does not have a space as a valid discourse in the analysis of southern processes (Claudio 2017). This is because liberalism is viewed as a symbol of colonialism oppression and imposition, or structures of patriarchal and hierarchical organization of society, which are to be unapplicable if we are dealing with glitchy and bottom-up observations. Much less if we advocate for a new way of creating institutions and understanding plural ways of designing 'worlds' when we engage in southern contexts.

However, I agree with Lisandro Claudio's (2017) work on the imperious need of liberal institutions to fight growing authoritarianism in the global south (Claudio gives the example of Duterte's Philippines). Moreover, these perspectives on liberal democracy and its inapplicability to new forms of making theory and understanding the global south are at best misguided. The focus on criticizing the universalistic nature of liberalism has neglected a face of this political philosophy that Gray (2000) allocates as a *modus vivendi*

[1] Ontological design was initially proposed by Winograd and Flores (1986) and developed as a philosophical approach to the design discipline by Willis (2015) and particularly by Colombian anthropologist Arturo Escobar (2018), observing the informal organisation of indigenous and afro communities in southern Colombia. Ontological design in this way is presented as one possibility for contributing to a transition from a 'one-world' perspective or one 'ought to be' view of societal and natural configurations. In that context ontological design perspectives are considered to 'become a tool for reimagining and reconstructing sustainable worlds' (Escobar 2013).

– being this a liberalism that 'allows for common institutions in which many forms of life can coexist' (Gray 2000, 6).

And it is here, on this particular point, that I want to advocate that the search for minor theory to understand the way in which different modes and worlds are built in the south (being them guided by platform affordance or otherwise) is not opposed to a view which recognizes that the existence of common institutions gives the space for the coexistence of the different 'worlds'. The existence of common institutions allows the possibility of surpassing the discussions on conflicting rationalities in the urban space and allows the possibility for cities to be studied in multiple forms, including the use of minor theory and vignettes for observation of practices.

In the words of Claudio (2017, p. 96):

> 'A modus vivendi (liberalism) cannot be colonialism. And neither is colonialism a way of ordering liberty through institutions that enhance individual and collective freedoms. I must concede that at various points in liberalism's history, the pendulum has swung towards its more universalizing tendencies. Yet to contend, as anti-liberal postcolonial theorists do, that liberalism is a universalizing project that imposes itself on divergent belief systems relies on an incomplete vision of the liberal project.'

An absence of the liberal common institutions which impede the articulation of authoritarian, populist, or autocratic projects also destroys the structures of coexistence between worlds and modes of practice that minor theory and ontological designing perspectives advocate for. It cannot be that the result of the use of minor theory and the understanding of the different ways things can be done becomes a conceptual tool for articulating authoritarian regimes. We need to rescue liberalism in its *modus vivendi* form and use it as a tool to communicate new ways of understanding not just platform effects, but the evolution of southern cities for a better future.

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