EVERYDAY LIFE AND URBAN PLATFORMS IN CHINA AND SOUTH KOREA

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ABSTRACT

The use of diverse digital platforms has become central to people's everyday life within cities. Part of complex 'platform ecosystems', these platforms function as intermediaries connecting several players for various kinds of transactions and interactions (Autio and Thomas, 2021; Barns, 2020; Rong and Shi, 2014). We can carry out most of our daily errands through a range of platforms in the forms of apps and super-apps accessed on our smartphones: pre-order food for pickup, get food delivered to our home or office, receive shopping and restaurant recommendations, book a haircut, meet a doctor, digitally queue at a physical shop, share different kinds of items, and scan QR codes for payment and entry to certain places. As platforms have become increasingly embedded and taken-for-granted, today's urban life has emerged into a platform-ed condition (Barns, 2020 and Van Dijck et al., 2018). Within this context, platforms intervene in urban space and make places and relations part of intricate platform ecosystems (Barns, 2020). The use of platforms has emerged into "a unique socio-technical imaginary for enacting urban spaces and relations" (Lee et al, 2020: 117). The entanglement between platforms (and their ecosystems) and urban spaces has recently received scholarly attention through the concept of platform urbanism (Barns, 2020). The scholarship on platform urbanism combines perspectives on smart cities, platform ecosystems, infrastructure studies and platform capitalism to describe how urban spaces have become dense landscapes of platform intermediation (Barns, 2020).

Whilst most scholarship on platform urbanism has focused on the emergence of platforms in the West, there is a call for studies on platform urbanism in non-western contexts (Caprotti et al, 2022). Although there are a few conceptual and empirical articles on platform urbanism in the Asian context (Caprotti and Liu, 2020), there is a need to analyze the everyday multi-player creation of platforms and their reconfiguration and (co)creation of urban space. With the above in mind, we have conducted an exploratory study on the emergence of platform urbanism with a specific focus on super-apps in China and South Korea. In contrast with platforms in the West, Asian counterparts are generally emerging into super-apps (such as WeChat in China and Kakao Talk in South Korea). A super-app is an all-in-one mobile application combining multiple functions, such as messaging, social media and payment services. Particularly, drawing on an ecosystem perspective (Barns, 2020, Rong et al, 2018), we focus on the (co)creation of the technological everyday of

platform urbanism by diverse players, such as developers, content providers and end users.

Our approach draws on academic scholarship on ethnography and digital ethnography (Pink et al, 2016 and Przybylski, 2021), and platform urbanism (Barns, 2020). As a strategy to address the ecosystem of numerous players involved in the (co)creation of urban platforms, we have conducted an exploratory study on how developers imagine people's everyday use of platforms, how specific content providers imagine and create the contours of people's everyday life through their specific services, and how people use the super-apps in their everyday life. The main fieldwork consists of interviews with different players, observations and collection of diverse material, such as promotional material and business reports.

By this research, we contribute to the emerging field of platform urbanism, platform urbanism in East Asia, ethnography, and studies of everyday life in the digital era.

Keywords: Platform urbanism (in East Asia), urban platforms, platform ecosystems, urban space, technological everyday

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