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Research Article

The Platformization of Urbanization: Mapping the Intellectual Evolution of Platform Urbanism

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ABSTRACT

Platform urbanism has emerged as a distinct area of interdisciplinary research examining how digital platforms reshape urban governance, economic relations, infrastructures, labour, and everyday life. Yet its intellectual structure, thematic organization, and conceptual contribution to urbanization debates remain insufficiently understood. This article employs an interpretive scientometric approach to examine platform urbanism literature retrieved from the Web of Science Core Collection. Combining co-citation clustering, citation burst analysis, betweenness centrality, and qualitative interpretation of influential works, it maps the field's knowledge structure, research trajectories, and conceptual development. The findings reveal a shift from foundational debates on smart urbanism and platform capitalism toward a broader agenda concerned with the platformization of urbanization. Three major trajectories are identified: critical platform urbanization; platform labour and urban restructuring; and algorithmic governance and platform futures. Visibility and cultural economies also emerge as a developing research direction. The article argues that platform urbanism is moving beyond the study of digital platforms operating in cities toward an analysis of how urbanization processes are mediated, coordinated, and reorganized through platform logics. It contributes a structured scientometric interpretation of the field and clarifies its relevance to broader debates on urbanization.

Keywords: Digital Platforms, Platform Urbanism, Platformization, Scientometrics, Smart Urbanism.

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INTRODUCTION

Platformization is no longer simply an external force acting upon cities. It has become one of the ways in which urbanization is governed, measured, contested, and imagined. Digital platforms mediate urban services, but they also organise everyday practices, economic exchanges, infrastructural relations, and forms of spatial coordination. Platform urbanism has emerged as an analytical framework for understanding how platform ecosystems, data extraction practices, digital infrastructures, and regulatory struggles are reshaping cities today (Barns, 2019; Barns, 2020; Graham, 2020; Sadowski, 2020). In doing so, it extends debates on smart urbanism beyond questions of technological optimisation and provides a conceptual vocabulary for analysing how urbanization is reorganized through data, labour, infrastructure, and logistics.

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The field initially took shape at the intersection of smart urbanism, data-driven governance, and platform capitalism. Srnicek's (2017) account of platform capitalism provides a political-economic foundation for later platform urbanism debates by conceptualizing platforms as accumulation arrangements organised through data extraction, network effects, and infrastructural control. The platform society debate further situates these arrangements in relation to public values, social institutions, and connective infrastructures (Van Dijck *et al.*, 2018). Within urban studies, these debates have been translated into analyses of how digital platforms reshape urban governance, infrastructures, spatial relations, and everyday urban life (Barns, 2018; Leszczynski, 2020; Sadowski, 2020; Graham, 2020). This early work did not treat platforms as discrete applications added to the city, but as infrastructural and political arrangements that reorganize urban space and urban power relations.

Platform urbanism has since expanded well beyond the critique of smart cities. It now encompasses work on urban governance, economic relations, everyday life, labour processes, data infrastructures, logistics, and future urban imaginaries. Studies of housing, labour, mobility, logistics, and governance increasingly demonstrate that platformization is embedded across multiple domains of urban life rather than confined to a single sector or technology (Bosma, 2022; Pollio, 2021; Stehlin *et al.*, 2020;

Shapiro, 2023; Sadowski, 2021). This expansion suggests that platform urbanism should be understood not only as a literature on digital platforms in cities, but also as a broader field for analysing platformization as a relational and multidimensional process of urbanization.

Despite this rapid growth, the intellectual structure, thematic organisation, and conceptual contributions of platform urbanism remain insufficiently mapped. It is still unclear which references anchor the field conceptually, which research trajectories have become established, how these trajectories relate to one another, and how the agenda has changed over time. Addressing these questions requires moving beyond a simple inventory of publications toward an analysis of the field's theoretical contribution to urbanization debates. Scientometric approaches have been used to examine knowledge production networks among world cities (Matthiessen *et al.*, 2010), conceptual differentiation in the polycentricity literature (Van Meeteren *et al.*, 2016), the geographical scope and representational patterns of urban globalization research (Kanai *et al.*, 2018), and Anglo-American knowledge production and citation hierarchies in urban studies (Kong and Qian, 2019). These studies demonstrate the value of citation-based mapping for identifying the conceptual organisation, thematic differentiation, and emerging orientations of complex research fields.

This article examines the intellectual evolution of platform urbanism through an interpretive scientometric analysis of 226 publications retrieved from the Web of Science Core Collection. Rather than offering only a bibliographic map, the article identifies the theoretical foundations of the field, the research trajectories through which it has become differentiated, and the emerging agendas associated with its development within urbanization debates. It addresses four related questions: (1) which cited references constitute the intellectual foundations of platform urbanism? (2) How are the major co-citation clusters organised, and how can they be interpreted as broader thematic frames? (3) How have prominent references and research priorities evolved over time? And (4) which references occupy bridging positions, and what emerging directions do the combined cluster, burst, and centrality results indicate? These questions examine whether platform urbanism has moved beyond a narrow concern with the effects of digital platforms on cities toward a broader analysis of the platformization of urbanization. Knowledge domain visualisation, emerging trends analysis, and co-citation clustering provide the methodological basis for mapping these intellectual transformations and research clusters (Chen, 2004; Chen, 2006; Chen *et al.*, 2010). At the same time, the study treats algorithmically generated clusters not as definitive classifications, but as analytical starting points for interpreting the field's intellectual structure and thematic transformation.

Conceptual Foundations of Platform Urbanism

Platform urbanism is an emerging field of research that examines the effects of digital platforms on the economic, social, and governmental structures of cities. This literature treats platforms not merely as digital service providers, but as infrastructural and governance arrangements involved in organizing urban life, managing data flows, and mediating urban processes (Barns, 2018; Barns, 2019; Leszczynski, 2020).

One of the key conceptual foundations of platform urbanism lies at the intersection of smart urbanism critique and the platform capitalism approach. Critiques of the smart city literature emphasise that framing the city as a system that can be measured through data and technically optimised tends to sideline issues such as privacy, power, public value, and the right to the city (Kitchin, 2015; Charnock *et al.*, 2021; Burns *et al.*, 2021). Platform urbanism continues this critical trajectory but shifts the focus from sensors and dashboards to platform ecosystems, data infrastructures, interfaces, and the role of platform firms in urban governance (Sadowski, 2020; Graham, 2020; Fields *et al.*, 2020).

Building on this political-economic background, platform urbanism examines cities as sites of data extraction, platform-mediated value production, and institutional negotiation. At the urban scale, platformization becomes visible in the ways platforms are articulated with housing markets, municipal services, data partnerships, mobility systems, and growth strategies (Söderström and Mermet, 2020; Rosen and Alvarez León, 2022; Repenning and Hardaker, 2024). This perspective shifts attention from platforms as general economic intermediaries to the specific urban arrangements through which platform power is embedded, contested, and governed.

This political-economic background is also closely related to debates on platform labour and everyday urban life. Platform labour is examined not only as a form of flexible or precarious work, but also as a process connected to the everyday organisation of urban space. Platform-mediated work, consumption, and service relations become entangled with multiple dimensions of urban life through algorithmic management, rating systems, data-driven coordination, and spatial inequalities (Gregory and Paredes Maldonado, 2020; Van Doorn, 2020; Qadri and D'Ignazio, 2022).

When the data infrastructures and network relations on which platforms depend are taken into account, these debates also intersect with infrastructure studies and the literature on logistical urbanization. Approaches that bring platform studies and infrastructure studies together make it possible to understand platforms not merely as software or interfaces, but as infrastructural formations that organise social and urban life (Plantin *et al.*, 2018). Within platform urbanism, this infrastructural reading is important for understanding the multilayered relations that platforms establish with urban

mobility, service provision, consumption networks, housing markets, and governance processes (Pollio, 2021; Shapiro, 2023; Deng *et al.*, 2026a; Deng *et al.*, 2026b).

In this framework, the platform urbanism literature emerges as a multilayered research field nourished by smart urbanism critique and platform capitalism debates, while also engaging with different axes such as labour, infrastructure, logistics, governance, and urban value production.

Data and Analytical Approach

A Topic-field query, TS=("platform urbanism"), was applied in the Web of Science Core Collection in conjunction with the semantic search function to capture closely related conceptual formulations. This approach was intended to balance conceptual specificity with terminological variation while maintaining a clear focus on platform urbanism. All citation indexes available in the Web of Science Core Collection were included; no language, document-type, or additional topical filters were applied, and no post-retrieval topical screening exclusions were made. Records indexed through June 2026 were included, and duplicate versions of the same publication were standardized as a single record. The final dataset comprised 226 publications.

Broader exploratory searches using additional related terms were considered during search development, but they generated heterogeneous records that did not consistently engage with platform urbanism as a focused research concept. The final analysis therefore retains the Topic-field query centred on "platform urbanism" and interprets its findings as the structure of WoS-indexed scholarship retrieved through this concept-specific search configuration.

Data cleaning focused on title, DOI, author name, and publication year. Duplicate records were removed, and basic reference standardisation was conducted to reduce the fragmentation of cited works caused by differences in spelling, formatting, or bibliographic detail.

The scientometric analysis was conducted in CiteSpace v7.0.R0. The analysis used co-citation, clustering, betweenness centrality, and citation burst techniques in order to examine both the intellectual structure and the temporal dynamics of the literature. One-year time slices were used. Terms were drawn from titles, abstracts, author keywords (DE), and Keywords Plus (ID); cited references were selected as the node type. Links were calculated using cosine strength within slices. The g-index with a scaling factor of k=25 was used as the selection criterion. The additional network-selection parameters were LRF=2.5, L/N=10, LBY=5, and e=1.0. No pruning was applied, thereby retaining all links selected under this configuration.

Network-level statistics refer to the full co-citation network. The cluster analysis and the subsequent thematic interpretation, however, are limited to the largest connected component, which contains 316 of the network's 689 nodes. This component comprises the nine technical clusters reported in the findings. Smaller disconnected components remain part of the overall network statistics but are not interpreted as separate thematic trajectories because their limited connectivity does not support comparable cluster-level analysis.

The study treats scientometric indicators not as purely descriptive performance measures, but as tools for interpretive mapping. Cluster structures, burst values, and centrality patterns are read together in order to analyse the intellectual organisation, research trajectories, thematic transformation, and theoretical orientations of platform urbanism. The approach is therefore not a performance-oriented bibliometric analysis focused primarily on ranking influential publications. Rather, it is an interpretive scientometric analysis aimed at identifying the field's knowledge structure, conceptual development, and changing research agenda. Algorithmically generated clusters are treated as analytical starting points rather than definitive or closed classifications.

The three established trajectories and the emerging direction are interpretive thematic frames rather than additional algorithmic clusters or fixed chronological stages. They were developed by grouping technically distinct clusters on the basis of their software-generated labels, their most cited and structurally central references, citation-burst patterns, and qualitative reading of the relevant publications. The framework therefore synthesises related clusters while preserving the technical cluster identifiers and their boundaries in the presentation of results.

The Intellectual Structure of Platform Urbanism

This section analyses the intellectual organisation of platform urbanism through the co-citation clusters generated in CiteSpace. It first reports the network structure and clustering quality, then interprets nine technical clusters through broader thematic frames informed by urban studies. The aim is to retain the specificity of the software-generated clusters while avoiding a purely descriptive cluster-by-cluster account. In doing so, the section addresses the first two research questions by identifying the field's intellectual foundations and explaining how its major clusters can be interpreted as broader thematic frames.

Network Structure and Cluster Validity

The co-citation network consists of 689 nodes and 2071 links, with a density of 0.0087. This relatively low density suggests that platform urbanism has developed through multiple interconnected debates rather than through a single tightly integrated body of scholarship. The Modularity Q value of 0.8105 indicates a clearly differentiated cluster structure, while the Weighted Mean Silhouette value of 0.7659 suggests that the clusters are sufficiently coherent for interpretation. The largest connected component contains 316 nodes, representing

approximately 45% of the network and indicating the presence of a substantial intellectual core.

Figure 1 shows a network organised around a large central cluster (#0, *glitchy vignette*) that connects most major thematic areas. Surrounding clusters reflect distinct but interconnected research trajectories, including platform labour and urban restructuring (#1, #5), algorithmic governance and platform futures (#7, #12), and visibility-oriented cultural economies (#13). The peripheral but connected position of cluster #13 indicates an emerging line of inquiry, while the dense links among the larger clusters indicate a shared conceptual foundation across the field.

Taken together, the network structure suggests that platform urbanism has developed as a differentiated yet interconnected knowledge domain rather than as either a fragmented literature or a closed theoretical canon.

Table 1 distinguishes the software-generated technical labels from the interpretive thematic frames developed by the authors. Representative literature is used to contextualize each cluster group; it does not redefine the technical cluster labels or imply that every cited work is a cluster member. The resulting framework identifies three established research trajectories and one emerging direction within the platform urbanism literature.

Critical Platform Urbanization

This theme brings together Cluster #0, Cluster #14, and Cluster #18, which form the critical-theoretical core of the literature. Together, they show how platform urbanism was shaped through smart city critique, platform capitalism, data infrastructures, city-as-platform governance, commons, and political struggles.

Cluster #0 - Glitchy vignette is the largest cluster in the platform urbanism literature, with 122 members. Because of its large size, central position in the co-citation network, and inclusion of influential works in the literature, it can be considered the main intellectual core of platform urbanism research. The cluster represents a central knowledge domain in which theoretical debates about how platforms transform cities are concentrated and from which later research directions have developed.

The most cited references in the cluster are concentrated around platform ecosystems, the glitch approach, platform urbanization, and platform capitalism, which together form the theoretical core of platform urbanism (Srnicek, 2017; Barns, 2020; Leszczynski, 2020; Sadowski, 2020; Graham, 2020). Considered together, these works conceptualize platforms not merely as digital service providers, but as socio-technical actors that reshape cities through data extraction, digital infrastructures, platform capitalism, and urban governance processes. The glitch approach is particularly important because it interprets platform urbanism not as a seamless and integrated technological system, but as a dynamic process shaped by breakdowns, frictions, and negotiations, thereby strengthening the critical orientation of the literature (Leszczynski, 2020).

The influence of the cluster can be traced not only through foundational references, but also through later research orientations. Works by Pollio (2021), Bissell (2020), Repenning and Hardaker (2024), and Bibri (2023) extend the conceptual frame formed in Cluster #0 into different research areas by discussing the relations between platform labour and infrastructures, the effects of the digital on-demand economy on everyday life, the links between platform capitalism and urban restructuring, and data-driven urban futures. This indicates that the cluster shapes not only the foundational theories of platform urbanism, but also the subsequent directions of the literature.

Cluster #14 - Rebel city foregrounds governance, participation, and technological sovereignty in the platform urbanism literature. With 14 members and a silhouette value of 0.939, the cluster emphasises that the use of platform technologies in cities is not merely a technical issue, but also part of political struggles and governance choices.

The distinctive contribution of this cluster lies in the way its key works bring governance and politics together. The "rebel city" approach developed through the Barcelona case discusses participatory and democratic forms of governance as alternatives to smart city models (Charnock *et al.*, 2021). The Hangzhou City Brain case shows how platform urbanism and smart city systems are co-produced and how data-driven governance mechanisms become central to urban management (Caprotti and Liu, 2022). Debates on the metaverse and data-driven smart urbanism also connect platformization to future models of digital governance (Bibri *et al.*, 2022).

The cluster also addresses the social and political consequences of platformization. Studies focusing on the spatial organisation of platform labour in the city emphasise that digital platforms may produce new forms of inequality (Gregory and Paredes Maldonado, 2020). Studies questioning the role of the individual in smart city applications and critical assessments of what the "smart" city is and who defines it show that platform urbanism is closely connected to questions of representation, participation, power relations, and democratic legitimacy (Breux *et al.*, 2023; Chin and Guthrie, 2023). Cluster #14 therefore clarifies who governs urban platforms, whose interests they serve, and how alternative digital urban governance is imagined.

Cluster #18 - Platform metropolis focuses on the reimagining of the city as a platform. With 10 members and a silhouette value of 0.95, the cluster discusses platforms not only as technologies that transform urban services, but also as organizational forms of economic growth, governance, and collective value production.

The intellectual basis of the cluster lies in early work that rethought cities through digital networks and platform ecosystems. Its

distinctive contribution, however, becomes visible through the work of Rossi, Anttiroiko, and Offenhuber. Rossi (2019) examines how platforms reorganize urban value production and the commons-oriented practices that emerge in response through the concept of the "platform metropolis." Anttiroiko *et al.* (2020) conceptualize the city as a growth platform within the digital economy and analyze the relations cities establish with global technology ecosystems. Offenhuber (2019), through the case of Indonesia, shows that smart city initiatives are shaped less by centralized planning than by improvised and experimental practices of local actors. Cluster #18 therefore extends the field from the study of platform services toward the question of how platform logics penetrate urban development and governance processes.

Together, these three clusters define critical platform urbanization as the field's theoretical backbone. They connect smart urbanism critique, platform capitalism, city-as-platform imaginaries, and democratic contestation, showing that platform urbanism concerns the political and infrastructural reorganization of urban life.

Platform Labour and Urban Restructuring

The second theme brings together Cluster #1, Cluster #3, and Cluster #5, showing how platform urbanism becomes embedded in everyday urbanization through labour, housing, mobility, tourism, and logistics. Here the field moves from its theoretical core toward empirical urban processes.

Cluster #1 - Ghost kitchen brings together studies on platformized service economies, delivery networks, and logistics-oriented urban restructuring. With 46 members and a silhouette value of 0.883, the cluster focuses on how food delivery platforms, ghost kitchens, dark stores, courier networks, and platform-based mobility services reorganize everyday urban life through logistics.

The distinctive contribution of this cluster lies in making visible the infrastructural and spatial consequences of on-demand service economies. Studies on dark stores and ghost kitchens show that platform-based delivery systems do not operate only through apps, but also require new spatial arrangements such as hidden kitchens, micro-fulfilment facilities, and logistics nodes embedded in urban neighborhoods (Shapiro, 2023). These arrangements reshape the material organisation of urban consumption and service provision.

The cluster also addresses the labour and mobility dimensions of platformization. Studies of migrant food couriers' mobility experiences show that the platform economy produces new forms of inequality (Hua, 2025). When ghost kitchens, courier networks, and platform-based transport services are considered together, it becomes clear that urban services are increasingly organised by data-driven logistics systems. Platforms thus become not merely digital interfaces, but infrastructural actors that manage circulation, delivery, and service processes within the city.

Cluster #3 - Platformed professionalization focuses on how platforms transform urban economic activities, forms of income generation, and property relations. With 36 members and a silhouette value of 0.885, the cluster is particularly concerned with the effects of Airbnb and similar platforms on urban economies, housing markets, and tourism practices.

The cluster's most visible contribution lies in Bosma's (2022) analysis of professionalization processes among Airbnb hosts and their implications for urban value creation. Drawing on research in Berlin, the study shows how differences in access to assets, labour, and platform-related capabilities shape hosts' opportunities to benefit from short-term rental activities, reinforcing inequalities and power asymmetries. The platformed professionalization frame thus highlights how digital platforms reorganize opportunities for earning a livelihood and participating in urban value creation.

This cluster also highlights the links between platformization and digital spatial inequalities. Platform-mediated tourism, short-term rental economies, and platform-based income strategies redistribute the possibilities of access to urban space and transform the relation between housing, consumption, and investment. As a result, platforms become part of the reorganization of urban land and property markets.

Cluster #5 - Digital platform focuses on the transformative effects of platformization on urban infrastructures, economic relations, and mobility systems. With 32 members and a silhouette value of 0.85, the cluster examines platforms not merely as digital intermediaries, but as infrastructural actors that reorganize how cities function.

The cluster gains its distinctive weight from studies on the platform fix, taxi platforms, and platform mobilities. The platform fix approach argues that digital platforms produce solutions to problems in urban economies while also generating new contradictions (Repenning and Hardaker, 2024). Studies of taxi platforms and platform mobilities examine how platform power is negotiated in everyday life and how power relations between drivers and platforms are shaped within urban mobility (Kuttler, 2023a; Kuttler, 2023b). These studies show that platformization is not only a technological transformation, but also a mechanism that reshapes labour, mobility, and spatial organisation.

The cluster also addresses the relationship between platformization and future urban development strategies. The debate on strategic place-based platformization emphasizes how public authorities can actively shape the integration of digital platforms into existing urban infrastructures and services in pursuit of public priorities (Hodson *et al*., 2025). Studies on AIoT, data-driven environmental governance, and smart city platforms

draw attention to the role of platformization in sustainable urban management (Bibri *et al*., 2024).

Taken together, Clusters #1, #3, and #5 show that platformization is spatialized through labour regimes, property relations, consumption networks, and logistics infrastructures, translating the political economy of platforms into concrete urban restructuring.

Algorithmic Governance and Platform Futures

The third theme brings together Cluster #7 and Cluster #12, covering algorithmic governance, data-driven coordination, artificial intelligence, and future urban organisation. These clusters show how platform urbanism reworks smart city debates through platforms, algorithms, AI systems, and data infrastructures.

Cluster #7 - Algorithmic governance focuses on the role of algorithms, data flows, and digital platforms in urban governance processes. With 24 members and a silhouette value of 0.962, the cluster examines the growing influence of platforms in urban management and the ways in which decision-making processes are reshaped through algorithmic systems.

The cluster's distinctive contribution emerges through studies that place navigation platforms at the centre of urban governance debates. The study titled "In Waze We Trust" shows that navigation platforms not only provide mobility services, but also affect the management of public space by directing user behaviour (Van der Graaf, 2018). Similarly, "Navigating Platform Urbanism" approaches platform urbanism from a governance perspective and argues that cities are increasingly organised through digital platforms (Van der Graaf and Ballon, 2019). Considered together, these works show that algorithms function not merely as technical calculation tools, but as governing mechanisms that guide urban circulation, user behaviour, and decision-making processes.

Another important contribution of the cluster is the "hackable city" approach. This approach evaluates the use of digital technologies in urban governance not only through mechanisms of centralized control, but also through citizen participation and collaborative governance processes (de Waal and de Lange, 2019). Algorithmic governance is thus treated not only as a technical coordination tool, but also as a mechanism that reshapes the participation of different actors in urban governance.

Cluster #12 - Urban future represents debates in the platform urbanism literature concerning future data-driven cities. With 18 members and a silhouette value of 0.983, the cluster focuses on how artificial intelligence, the metaverse, data-driven governance, and digital city visions converge with processes of platformization.

In this cluster, the future-oriented dimension of the literature comes to the fore through debates on the metaverse and

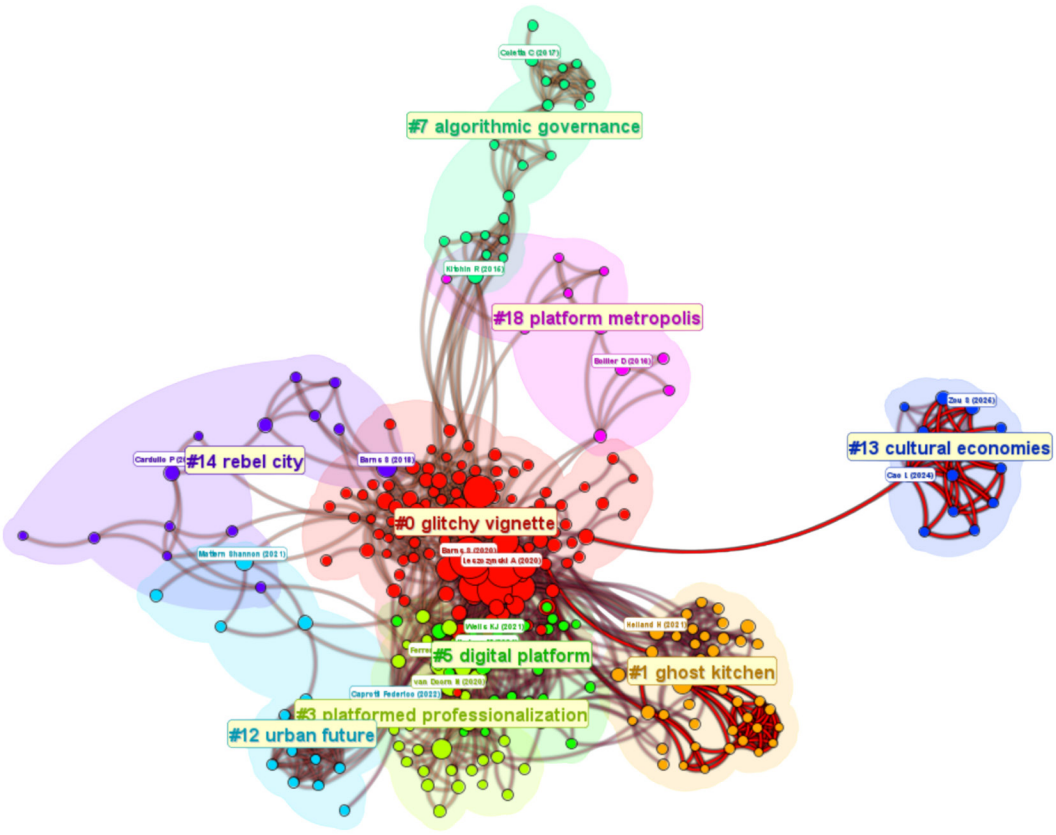


Figure 1: Co-citation cluster map of the platform urbanism literature.

Table 1: Technical cluster labels and interpretive thematic framework.

Interpretive frame	Cluster	Representative literature	Analytical focus
Critical platform urbanization	#0 Glitchy vignette; #14 Rebel city; #18 Platform metropolis	Srnicek; Barns; Leszczynski; Charnock; Rossi	Smart urbanism critique; platform capitalism; City-as-platform governance; public value and political struggle.
Platform labour and urban restructuring	#1 Ghost kitchen; #3 Platformed professionalization; #5 Digital platform	Shapiro; Bosma; Repenning and Hardaker; Kuttler	Gig work; Airbnb; ghost kitchens; delivery economies; logistics infrastructures and everyday urbanization.
Algorithmic governance and platform futures	#7 Algorithmic governance; #12 Urban future	Van der Graaf; de Waal and de Lange; Bibri; Allam *et al.*	Waze; AI; metaverse; digital twins; Data-driven governance; city brain and technological future imaginaries.
Visibility and cultural economies	#13 Cultural economies	Cao; Zhang *et al.*; Liang	Wanghong tourism; influence urbanism; check-in economies; atmosphere production and the circulation of cultural value.

Source: Authors.

data-driven smart urbanism. Studies that connect the metaverse with data-driven smart urbanism discuss the future institutional and governmental dimensions of platformization (Bibri *et al.*, 2022). Similarly, debates on the opportunities and risks that metaverse technologies may create for environmental, economic, and social sustainability in future cities move the platform urbanism literature beyond existing digital platforms toward new urban scenarios in which virtual and physical spaces are integrated (Allam *et al.*, 2022).

The cluster also focuses on algorithmic decision-making and AI-based governance processes. Debates on the rights, risks, and responsibilities associated with artificial intelligence in urban mobility emphasise that data-driven governance produces not only technical, but also ethical and political consequences (Sawhney, 2023). Recent studies on the relation between the metaverse and platform urbanism evaluate the future technological orientations of platformization in relation to digital twins, AI-assisted decision systems, and virtual-physical spatial integration (Bibri, 2023). The cluster thus places the platform urbanism literature at the centre of debates on future data-driven and algorithmic cities, moving beyond current platform services.

Read together, Clusters #7 and #12 show that algorithmic governance and platform futures are not peripheral technological topics, but sites where urban coordination, accountability, public value, and future imaginaries are redefined.

Visibility and Cultural Economies

Cluster #13 - Cultural economies represents an emerging research direction within the platform urbanism literature. Unlike the three established trajectories, this single-cluster theme foregrounds the cultural dimension of platform urbanism.

The cluster's distinctive contribution can be traced through studies on wanghong places and platform visibility. Zhang *et al.* (2026) examine wanghong temples in Hangzhou and show that platform visibility produces new cultural economies and forms of spiritual consumption. Their study demonstrates that social media platforms create new visitor flows and cultural consumption practices by making particular places visible. Similarly, Liang (2026) examines wanghong tourism in Hong Kong and discusses how platforms reconfigure urban experiences and how digital visibility becomes decisive in spatial value production.

Considered together, these studies show that platforms are treated not only as systems that organise services or mobility, but also as actors that shape visibility processes and mediate the cultural and economic valorization of particular places. This perspective draws attention to how platformization reorganizes the relations among cultural production, digital representation, and spatial value creation.

Overall, the co-citation network indicates that platform urbanism is organised around three established research trajectories and one emerging direction. Critical platform urbanization provides the field's theoretical core; platform labour and urban restructuring foreground the everyday, labour, housing, and logistics dimensions of platformization; and algorithmic governance and platform futures highlight data-driven coordination and future urban imaginaries. Visibility and cultural economies constitute a newer frontier concerned with cultural value, digital representation, and platform-mediated place visibility. This structure supports the article's broader argument: platform urbanism has evolved from a literature centred on digital platforms operating in cities toward a wider framework for analysing how urbanization processes are shaped and reorganized through platforms.

The Temporal and Relational Evolution of the Field

Citation burst and betweenness centrality analyses make it possible to examine the temporal and relational dynamics of the platform urbanism literature together. Citation burst identifies references that received exceptional attention during specific periods, while betweenness centrality identifies works that connect different thematic clusters in the co-citation network. Read together, these indicators show not only which works shaped the field, but also how research priorities changed over time and how different areas of inquiry became connected. This section therefore addresses the third and fourth research questions by tracing temporal changes in research attention and identifying bridging references and emerging directions.

Table 2 reports the references with the strongest citation bursts, including burst strength and period. References with burst intervals ending in 2026 and marked with a plus sign (+) remained active at the dataset's cutoff date. Because 2026 represents a partial observation year, these intervals should not be interpreted as evidence of sustained citation bursts throughout the full calendar year.

Table 3 reports the references with the highest betweenness centrality values and their associated clusters. High-centrality works function as intellectual bridges, linking thematic areas within the co-citation network.

References appearing in both tables are marked with an asterisk. These works combine temporal visibility with structural bridging roles, and they support a reading of the literature through three interpretive concentrations rather than fixed historical periods or algorithmically generated categories. The overlapping burst intervals indicate changing concentrations of research attention rather than fixed or sequential historical stages. Read together, they suggest a movement from foundational debates on smart urbanism and platform capitalism toward infrastructural, labour, mobility, logistical, governance, and cultural dimensions of platform urbanism. These concentrations are interpretive syntheses built from the overlap between burst intensity, centrality, and cluster location. This moves the analysis from a list of influential references toward an explanation of how the field's intellectual priorities have evolved.

Foundational Concentration: Smart Urbanism and Platform Capitalism

The first concentration emerges at the intersection of smart city critique and platform capitalism. Srnicek's (2017) Platform Capitalism, which has the highest burst strength

Table 2: References with the strongest citation burst values (2019-2026).

Author	Title	Burst period	Strength
Srnicek (2017)	Platform Capitalism	2019-2022	11.35
Van Dijck *et al.* (2018)*	The Platform Society: Public Values in a Connective World	2019-2020	4.43
Kitchin (2015)	"Making Sense of Smart Cities: Addressing Present Shortcomings"	2019-2020	3.53
Barns (2018)	"Smart Cities and Urban Data Platforms: Designing Interfaces for Smart Governance"	2020-2022	4.37
Plantin *et al.* (2018)	"Infrastructure Studies Meet Platform Studies in the Age of Google and Facebook"	2020-2022	3.98
Leszczynski (2016)	"Speculative Futures: Cities, Data and Governance Beyond Smart Urbanism"	2020-2021	3.68
Barns (2020)	Platform Urbanism: Negotiating Platform Ecosystems in Connected Cities	2021-2026+	4.13
Stehlin *et al.* (2020)*	"Platform Mobilities and the Production of Urban Space: Toward a Typology of Platformization Trajectories"	2021-2026+	3.66
Barns (2019)	"Negotiating the Platform Pivot: From Participatory Digital Ecosystems to Infrastructures of Everyday Life"	2023-2024	3.61
Sadowski (2020)	"Cyberspace and Cityscapes: On the Emergence of Platform Urbanism"	2024-2026+	5.35
Caprotti *et al.* (2022)*	"Beyond the smart city: a typology of platform urbanism"	2024-2026+	4.16
Shapiro (2023)*	"Platform Urbanism in a Pandemic: Dark Stores, Ghost Kitchens, and the Logistical Urban Frontier"	2024-2026+	4.02
Graham (2020)	"Regulate, Replicate, and Resist: The Conjunctural Geographies of Platform Urbanism"	2024-2026+	3.67

Source: Authors

Table 3: References with the highest betweenness centrality values.

Author	Title	Cluster	Centrality
Fields *et al.* (2020)	"Platform Methods: Studying Platform Urbanism Outside the Black Box"	0	1.00
Van Dijck *et al.* (2018)*	The Platform Society: Public Values in a Connective World	0	0.76
Striphas (2015)	"Algorithmic Culture"	7	0.54
Rosen and Alvarez León (2022)	"The Digital Growth Machine: Urban Change and the Ideology of Technology"	0	0.54
Caprotti *et al.* (2022)*	"Beyond the smart city: a typology of platform urbanism"	12	0.53
Shapiro (2023)*	"Platform Urbanism in a Pandemic: Dark Stores, Ghost Kitchens, and the Logistical Urban Frontier"	1	0.50
Barns (2019)	"Negotiating the Platform Pivot: From Participatory Digital Ecosystems to Infrastructures of Everyday Life"	0	0.48
Cao (2024)	"From online to onsite: Wanghong economy as the new engine driving China's urban development"	13	0.47
Stehlin *et al.* (2020)*	Platform Mobilities and the Production of Urban Space: Toward a Typology of Platformization Trajectories	0	0.44
Leszczynski (2020)	"Glitchy Vignettes of Platform Urbanism"	0	0.43

Source: Authors.

(strength=11.35), indicates that early platform urbanism examined digital platforms through data extraction, network effects, and economic intermediation. The prominence of Kitchin (2015), Leszczynski (2016), and Van Dijck *et al.* (2018) further shows that this foundational trajectory was shaped by debates on data-driven governance, smart urbanism critique, platform society, and public value. The first theoretical core of platform urbanism therefore emerged at the intersection of platform capitalism and data-driven urbanization.

Infrastructural Expansion: Labour, Mobility, and Urban Restructuring

The second concentration shows that the literature expanded from its theoretical core toward studies of labour, infrastructure, mobility, and everyday urban life. Plantin *et al.* (2018) contributed to conceptualizing platforms not merely as digital intermediaries, but as infrastructural formations that organise social and urban life. Similarly, Stehlin *et al.* (2020) moved the literature toward a new research axis by making visible the role of platformization in mobility and spatial production processes.

Fields *et al.* (2020) "Platform Methods" has the highest normalised betweenness-centrality value observed in this network (centrality=1.00). This indicates the strongest bridging position among the cited references, rather than the highest citation impact, and supports its interpretation as a methodological bridge between platform research and urban studies. Rosen and Alvarez León (2022) and Leszczynski (2020) similarly connect economic geography, platform urbanism, and everyday urban experience.

This concentration demonstrates that platform urbanism research is not limited to platform companies or the data economy, but has expanded toward labour processes, urban infrastructures, mobility regimes, and everyday practices.

New Research Frontiers: Platform Futures, Logistical Urbanization, and Cultural Economies

The third concentration shows that the literature has opened toward new research frontiers such as platform futures, logistical urbanization, and cultural economies. Caprotti *et al.* (2022) produced a strong citation burst in the 2024-2026 period (strength=4.16) and also has a high centrality value within Cluster #12 (centrality=0.53). This indicates that the study is an important bridging reference in connecting platform futures debates with the smart city and digital governance literature.

Similarly, Shapiro (2023) study on dark stores and ghost kitchens stands out as an important work connecting logistical urbanization debates with different research trajectories, both because it belongs to the current burst period (2024-2026; strength=4.02) and because of its centrality value (centrality=0.50).

Cao (2024) work on wanghong economies, in turn, makes visible the connections among cultural economy, visibility regimes, and platformized processes of urban development through its high centrality value (centrality=0.47). This indicates that the platform urbanism literature has moved beyond economic and governmental debates to address cultural production, digital visibility, and platform-based urban transformation processes.

Overall, the burst and centrality analyses show that platform urbanism has diversified from foundational debates on smart urbanism and platform capitalism toward trajectories involving labour, infrastructure, logistics, cultural economy, algorithmic

governance, and platform futures. They reinforce the article's central argument: the field is shifting from the study of platforms in cities toward an analysis of how urbanization processes are shaped through platforms.

DISCUSSION

The findings suggest that platform urbanism has become more conceptually differentiated and thematically expansive than its early association with smart urbanism implies. The co-citation clusters, citation burst patterns, and centrality results show a multilayered field in which research trajectories intensify, overlap, and connect. This structure supports the article's central argument: platform urbanism is moving from a concern with platforms in cities toward an analysis of how urbanization is mediated, coordinated, and reorganized through platform logics.

The article's contribution is not to propose a further typology of platform urbanism or a universal account of platformization. Rather, it offers a temporal and relational interpretation of an explicitly identified body of platform urbanism scholarship by reading co-citation clusters together with citation bursts, bridging references, and qualitative analysis. This approach shows how critical accounts of smart urbanism and platform capitalism are related to later work on labour, logistics, cultural visibility, and future urban governance. Caprotti *et al.* (2022) develop a typology of platform urbanism, while Stehlin *et al.* (2020) discuss trajectories of platformization in the context of platform mobilities. This article clarifies the intellectual connections and changing emphases among these areas.

This shift first becomes visible in the relationship between platform urbanism, smart urbanism, and platform capitalism. Whereas smart city research often centres on data collection, performance management, and technological efficiency, platform urbanism redirects attention to the political-economic and infrastructural relations through which technological systems operate. It therefore reframes urban digitalization as a problem of power, accumulation, governance, and infrastructural control.

A second implication is that platforms are increasingly conceptualized as urban infrastructures. Mobility applications, delivery networks, short-term rental platforms, payment systems, and data centres may appear as distinct sectors, but the literature treats them as part of a broader infrastructural reorganization of urban life. This reading moves platform urbanism beyond interfaces or apps and connects it to socio-technical systems, logistical urbanization, and everyday urban life.

The third dimension concerns the urban political economy of platformization. Studies of Airbnb, Uber, delivery platforms, ghost kitchens, and other platform-based service economies show that platforms are not only intermediaries between users and services. They are institutional actors that reshape housing markets, labour regimes, consumption networks, logistics spaces, and forms of urban value production. This is where platform urbanism makes one of its clearest contributions to urban studies: it shows how platform capitalism is spatialized through concrete urban processes, and how urban space becomes a site for the extraction, coordination, and circulation of platform-mediated value.

The rise of algorithmic governance and platform futures further extends this argument. Research on navigation platforms, data-driven decision systems, AI-based governance, digital twins, metaverse urbanism, and city brain initiatives shows that platforms shape how urban futures are designed, simulated, and governed. As cities become increasingly dependent on data and algorithmic systems, transparency, accountability, data justice, democratic oversight, and public value become central to the platform urbanism agenda.

Related work on AI-based mobility modelling and urban spatial digital twins further points to the growing relevance of predictive, simulation-based, and data-intensive systems for urban planning (Sharma and Dehalwar, 2026a; Sharma and Dehalwar, 2026b).

These findings also have implications for urban planning. They suggest that platforms can be understood as socio-technical infrastructures whose effects extend across housing, mobility, labour, logistics, urban services, and data governance. Such effects are evident in the reorganization of logistics and service spaces, housing and tourism, and data-driven urban governance (Pollio, 2021; Shapiro, 2023; Söderström and Mermet, 2020; Caprotti and Liu, 2022). Comparative research across diverse urban and planning contexts, including cities in the Global South, may help clarify the uneven social and environmental consequences of these arrangements.

Finally, work on visibility and cultural economies indicates that platformization also operates through symbolic and experiential dimensions of urban life. Studies of wanghong economies, digital spatial capital, and platform-mediated place visibility show that platforms produce cultural value by rendering particular places visible, desirable, and consumable.

Taken together, these trajectories show that platform urbanism is becoming a broader framework for analysing the platformization of urbanization. Its contribution lies in showing how platforms operate simultaneously as infrastructures, intermediaries, governance arrangements, economic actors, cultural mediators, and future-making devices.

CONCLUSION

This study has examined the intellectual structure, research trajectories, and conceptual development of platform urbanism through an interpretive scientometric analysis. Taken together, these results answer the study's four research questions: they identify the field's intellectual foundations, map its major technical clusters into broader thematic frames, trace changes

in research attention over time, and identify bridging references and emerging directions. The literature is organised around three established research trajectories: critical platform urbanization; platform labour and urban restructuring; and algorithmic governance and platform futures. The results also reveal a growing research direction concerned with visibility and cultural economies. Rather than forming a closed and self-contained area of specialisation, platform urbanism is developing as an interdisciplinary field that connects urban studies, platform studies, economic geography, cultural studies, infrastructure studies, and digital governance.

The contribution of the article lies not only in mapping influential publications, citation patterns, and thematic clusters, but in identifying a shift in the field's conceptual orientation. The findings show that platform urbanism is moving from the study of digital platforms operating in cities toward an analysis of how urbanization processes are shaped, coordinated, and reorganized through platforms. This shift is important because it repositions platform urbanism as more than a literature on specific digital examples such as Uber, Airbnb, delivery platforms, sensors, or dashboards. It points instead to a broader analytical framework for examining how data extraction, algorithmic governance, labour regimes, logistics networks, cultural visibility, and urban value production become interconnected in contemporary urbanization.

This transformation also strengthens the links between platform urbanism, smart city critique, urban political economy, and infrastructure studies. The literature moves beyond the technology-and efficiency-oriented framing of smart city debates by relating platformization to questions of political economy, infrastructural transformation, everyday life, and governance. Platforms are therefore best understood not as digital tools added to cities from the outside, but as socio-technical institutions that intervene in the production, circulation, governance, and representation of urban space. The broader implication is that understanding contemporary urbanization requires asking not only what platforms do in cities, but also how urbanization itself is increasingly organised through platform logics. The findings therefore suggest that platform urbanism should be understood not only as a field concerned with digital platforms in cities, but also as a lens through which the platformization of urbanization itself can be analysed.

ABBREVIATIONS

AI: Artificial Intelligence; **AIoT:** Artificial Intelligence of Things; **DOI:** Digital Object Identifier; **LRF:** Link Retaining Factor; **L/N:** Link-to-Node Ratio; **LBY:** Look Back Years; **WoS:** Web of Science; **Q:** Modularity Q; **DE:** Author Keywords; **ID:** Keywords Plus; **TS:** Topic Search; **k:** Scaling Factor for the g-index.

CONFLICT OF INTEREST

The authors declare that there is no conflict of interest.

LIMITATIONS

This study maps scholarship indexed in the Web of Science Core Collection and retrieved through a concept-specific query centred on "platform urbanism"; it therefore does not represent the full literature on digital urbanization or platformization. Future research could compare coverage across databases, test broader search strategies, and combine scientometric mapping with qualitative or comparative case research to assess how corpus construction shapes interpretations of platform urbanism.

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