



# A Social Charter for Smart Platforms

The following pages contain a draft of a Social Charter for Smart Platforms written collectively by members of the EU [Smart Society](#)<sup>1</sup> FET project, and refined with input from members of the wider academic community.

The Smart Society project is developing the next generation of Smart Platform technologies and considering what new governance models will be needed.

Smart Platforms promise much, including convenience and more sustainable use of resources, but have demonstrated downsides too, including: making work more precarious, eroding privacy, creating new forms of social control, and intensifying economic divisions. Our Charter aims to address these issues via a rights-based approach to platform governance.

This is very much a living document, so please feel free comment on the document or provide feedback to: [mark.hartswood@cs.ox.ac.uk](mailto:mark.hartswood@cs.ox.ac.uk)

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# A Social Charter for Smart Platforms

## What is a Platform?

Platforms are online structures<sup>3</sup> that enable and mediate social, economic and cultural interactions on a large scale. They do this by connecting individual users who produce and consume content, undertake transactions and engage in shared activities that interleave between the physical and virtual worlds. Well known examples of platforms include ones that enable us to pool and market our assets (e.g. AirBnB, Uber), share our experiences, feelings and thoughts (e.g. Facebook, Twitter), collaborate in communal endeavours (e.g. Zooniverse), find and perform work (e.g. Upwork, Mechanical Turk ), and manage our lives and activities (e.g. Google Now).

## What makes a platform 'Smart', and why is this so important?

Smart Platforms employ increasingly powerful forms of algorithmic decision-making that go far beyond simple storage and management of user-created information. It is for this reason that Smart Platforms are ever more capable of processing data that index our actions and intentions. While algorithms lie at the heart of what makes a platform useful (for example, the algorithms that power the Google search engine) they also come with risks, because they wield considerable influence over platform users, often in ways that are designed to be invisible and hard to challenge.

## What is a Social Charter?

A Social Charter expresses in a clear way the rights and obligations of those who use, build, operate, interface with or plug into Smart Platforms.

## What is the role envisaged for the Charter?

This Charter articulates the interests of platform users in a format that may be drawn upon by policy makers, campaign groups and rights organisations, as well as by platform owners and managers who wish to demonstrate adherence to the Charter's principles. Thus the Charter is intended to be a seed for more formal, institutionally embedded and enforceable accountability tools or declarations – perhaps a quality assurance system for platforms, or as a codicil to existing declarations of rights.

## Why is a Social Charter needed?

We see the following as important justifications for a Social Charter for Smart Platforms:

1. *Smart Platforms are increasingly an essential part of our lives.* Often we do not have a real choice to opt out of using Smart Platforms because we have come to depend on them for our livelihoods, for participating in society, and to sustain our friendships and family relationships.
2. *Smart Platforms have become a new powerful economic force.* While the value in Smart Platforms accrues from many small individual contributions, platform owners often benefit disproportionately. Platforms may develop exploitative practices and come to embody forms of extractive capitalism, or protectionist cooperativism.

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<sup>3</sup> <http://issues.org/32-3/the-rise-of-the-platform-economy/>

<http://platformdesign toolkit.com/wp-content/docs/Platform-Design-Toolkit-Whitepaper-ENG.pdf>

3. *Smart Platforms are hard to regulate.* Because Smart Platforms operate in unexplored areas of social interaction and exchange, or provide new forms of such interaction altogether, they tend to be initially unregulated or not straightforward to map to existing laws or social conventions.
4. *Smart Platforms mediate interaction using data and algorithms.* Data and algorithms are highly influential on those who use Smart Platforms, but it is often hard to discern if and where algorithms are at work, and whose interests they favour, and harder still to have a voice in how those algorithms behave.
5. *Smart Platforms change the distribution of power in society.* Many people are affected by Smart Platforms, which touch and influence nearly every aspect of our lives and exert influence out into the wider society. Yet power over Smart Platforms remains largely in the hands of a small number of platform owners, and beyond the influence of democratic process or communities.
6. *There are unintended consequences,* some of which have wider societal effects, for example an erosion of liberty, deliberate or inadvertent exclusion or discrimination. It is important to design smart platforms in ways that make it possible to notice and address such implications.

### **Whose interests does the Charter serve?**

Platform owners perform a social good by innovating services, promoting economic activity and generating revenues, but they also have an intrinsic advantage over other stakeholders because of the control they exert over Smart Platforms, which in some cases can lead to inequity or exploitation. This Social Charter aims to help ensure recognition and support for the interests of diverse constituencies typically present within platforms. For many existing platforms this implies actively promoting the interests of ordinary participants, as opposed to platform owners, or the businesses or state actors connected to the platform. We believe that respecting the rights and interests of ordinary platform users can work in the long term interests of platform owners and other interests, by fostering loyal, skilled, cohesive communities, who are more committed and better able to contribute value to the platform.

We also recognise that many platforms are not operated as for-profit businesses and are mindful that the Charter should be applicable to these types of platform too, although issues of diverse interests, access to value and influence also apply within community-led platforms.

## Principles underpinning the Social Charter

The Social Charter is built around three core principles:

- **Respect the agency of people participating in the platform.** The ability of human participants to understand and influence their situation is often undermined by hidden or exploitative algorithms, or manipulative platform configurations. People need resources to help them exercise their agency in relation to algorithms. Algorithms should be designed to support, as opposed to undermine, legitimate human agency. It should be possible to notice, interrogate and contest algorithms and other agency threatening elements of the platform.
- **Support diverse interests.** Platforms incorporate a panoply of interests, including those of: the platform owners; the businesses, state actors or other organisations affiliated to the platform; the economically, socially, culturally and geographically diverse communities who conduct their lives using the platform; and the indirect stakeholders outside of the platform who are nonetheless caught up by the effects it has on wider society. However, many platforms narrowly privilege the interests of a small number of stakeholders, such as the interests of the platform owners, or those of a narrow constituency of platform users. To avoid this situation, platforms should be designed to accommodate a wide array of interests, and incorporate mechanisms that allow interests to be ongoingly inspected, contested and (re)negotiated.
- **Manage the value within the platform in an equitable way.** Platforms may amass vast reserves of value by collectivising individuals' resources and contributions. Value pools of different types may be created. These often include monetary accumulations, but often also involve the formation of digital value pools in the form of data or digital content, and hybrid virtual/physical value pools in the form of networks of physical resources (e.g. spaces in cars). Because Smart Platforms can collectivise resources to form vast reserves of value, and concentrate control over that value in a small number of hands, our pre-existing conventions as to what constitutes acceptable profit-taking, and rights of ownership, may no longer serve as adequate guides in relation to platform built value pools.

## The Smart Society Charter for Smart Platforms

The aim of the Social Charter is to provide a rights and obligations based framework to support the development of equitable, flourishing and sustainable Smart Platforms that respect more evenly the interests of diverse participants and communities.

The rights and obligations stated in the Charter are derived from two sources. The first source is a collection of situations identified from within our case studies or from the literature that reveal how ordinary users are vulnerable to exploitation. The second derives from considering how rights expressed in existing Charters may be interpreted in the context of platforms (see appendix I).

The structure of the Charter is shown in the diagram below. The opening sections of the Charter are dedicated to the tripartite *principles* of respect for human agency, supporting diverse interests and the equitable management of value. The subsequent sections

address the *properties* we wish to see for Smart Platforms, namely those of Community, Accountability and Transparency, Privacy and Safety. Each of these sections of the Charter is a statement of *rights and obligations* designed to uphold the platform principles and deliver the stated properties. Finally the Charter describes a series of *empowerment features* that provide the means to implement the rights expressed in the Charter. Interspersed through the text are sections in *green* that provide examples for further explanation.



## Respect for human agency

Automation and use of algorithms allows platforms to manage large numbers of participants with a very small number of core personnel. The downside of this is that algorithms may come into conflict with the exercise of human agency, especially where algorithms are aimed towards control and that platforms are configured to privilege only a narrow range of interests. Moreover, favouring automated mechanisms to manage aspects of the platform, such as community regulation, trust, and safety in place of human mediation and complaints handling, can contribute to the vulnerability of platform users. This Charter asserts that within Smart Platforms, the expression of human agency should be respected and enabled, both for its own sake, and for the contribution that it is able to make to the collective value of the platform.

### The agency of people participating in Smart Platforms should be valued as a contribution to the 'overall intelligence' of the system

- Platform developers should be respectful of the capacity of people to make sense of their situation, to innovate, make decisions, solve problems, to learn and to collaborate.
- Platform developers should strive for algorithms, tools and features that support and strengthen human agency, as opposed to being controlling.

An example that illustrates these opening statements is the Uber interface for drivers, which uses data to synthesise a 'hotspot' on a map as a prediction of passenger demand. An approach that better preserves human agency would be to supply data about driver locations (which are actually available on the passenger app) in addition to the algorithmic 'hotspot' recommendation so that drivers can collectively manage driver supply.

### People have the right to resources that enable them to exercise their agency in relation to forms of machine agency such as algorithms

- Platform owners should disclose which aspects of the platform are powered by algorithms
- Platform owners should provide a concise lay explanation of the purpose of each algorithm, how it operates, how it was trained, and the data it consumes in its operation.
- Platform communities should be supported to share between themselves their experiences and strategies relating to beneficial ways of interacting with the Smart Platform
- Where possible, platform users should be enabled to interact with algorithms in a non-consequential setting in order to gain experience with that interaction
- Platform users have the right to opt in or opt out where these are appropriate
- Algorithms apply to individuals with diverse circumstances and may disadvantage some groups whilst supporting others. Platform owners should keep an eye open for emerging inequalities and seek solutions that meet work well across diverse user populations.

A number of design options are available to platform owners to help users to customise how an algorithm responds to them individually. Facebook, for example, supports user preferences over how its news-feed filters works.

However, such features can be costly to implement and maintain, hard to apply across many dimensions simultaneously, and their use may redistribute

disadvantage rather than eliminating it. Part of achieving a working trade-offs between potentially competing interests of different users (and platform services) is by making inequalities visible and supporting mechanisms to allow compromises to be negotiated and decided.

- Platform users should be given an influential voice in how algorithms are regulated and the interests they serve
- Where platform users are monitored and receive feedback about their activities, particularly where this leads to sanctions (such as an increase in insurance premiums due to 'risky' driving), the users have the right to negotiate how these important social norms (e.g. what counts as 'risky') are embedded within the platform
- Mechanisms that encourage engagement in platforms should not be premised on inducing addiction, and platform operators have an obligation to maintain awareness of any addictive qualities and issue appropriate warnings to users
- Platform users have a right to have their normative expectations met as to the sort of agent they are interacting with:
  - If a person is led to believe they are dealing with a human agent, then this should in fact be the case. Platform operators have a duty to make clear where 'bots' are used, and police community use of bots, and also to make clear where humans are used as opposed to automated mechanisms
  - Platform operators have a duty to avoid building in 'hidden agency' where it is not obvious that an algorithm is at work within an interaction or operation
- Unsupervised algorithms continuously trained on new (self-updating) data may develop traits that are socially unacceptable, such as exhibiting racist behaviour<sup>4</sup>, becoming abusive or simply being inaccurate<sup>5</sup>. Platform owners and communities have an obligation to maintain an awareness towards undesirable algorithmic behaviour, and human moderation must be re-introduced where this becomes a persistent problem.

### Support diverse interests

Even the smallest decision concerning how platforms are configured (including interactions, spaces, visibility of information, algorithms and AI) can have a profound effect on whose interests are favoured by the platform. Platform owners have a significant advantage over other groups when it comes to configuring the platform to further their own interests. At the same time diverse groups within the platform may have divergent or competing or even conflicting interests, which may be purposely or accidentally favoured or denied in each case by configurations of the platform. This section sets out to specify measures for ensuring that interests embedded within platforms do not become excessively polarised by allowing platform mechanisms and policy to be continuously open to negotiation.

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<sup>4</sup> E.g. Sweeney, Latanya. "Discrimination in online ad delivery." *Queue* 11.3 (2013): 10.

<sup>5</sup> E.g.

<http://www.wsj.com/articles/facebook-trending-feature-exhibits-flaws-under-new-algorithm-1473176652>

## Platform users have a right to have their interests fairly represented within the platform.

- Platform owners should acknowledge that platforms are populated by an ecosystem of diverse constituencies with diverse goals, circumstances and values.
- Platform owners should acknowledge that these constituencies exist in a web of power relations that is partly determined by how the platform is configured, and that this may work to marginalise the interests of voices of some constituencies.
- Platform owners should support these diverse constituencies to voice their interests, to negotiate between competing interests, and allow them to influence how interests are embedded within the platform.
- Platform owners should clearly communicate their own interests. In particular they should create a platform constitution that lays out clearly and succinctly the purpose of the platform, the values to which it subscribes, and how these purposes and values are realised by platform mechanisms, such as algorithms.
- Despite platforms sometimes seeming like isolated 'mini-societies', disconnected from wider society, people's rights and legislation in wider society must also apply within the platform, such as the European Convention on Human Rights, national laws, and so on.
- Platform owners have the responsibility to ensure that no intrinsic advantage can be gained or lost (relative to the privileges and obligations of their role in the platform community) simply because someone belongs to a special group, which may be a sub-community on the platform, or a societal group

This final statement points to an important dilemma within the collaborative economy arising from the clash between private and public realms that occurs when individuals make their personal assets available to strangers. For example, it is not unreasonable for AirBnB hosts to have authority over who they let into their own home, yet the exercise of this discretion may lead to prejudicial outcomes<sup>6</sup>. AirBnB have responded with a 'non-discrimination policy' to apply to its community<sup>7</sup> which specifies what the expectations are of being an AirBnB host and may serve as a useful focus for discussion and debate within the community over this issue. In many ways this example highlights many of the facets of this Charter, including catering for the interests of diverse constituencies and making an explicit 'constitutional' statement of rights, obligations and expectations.

to issue as private and public realms clash in the context of a collaborative economy where personally owned resources are shared with strangers, and where it is reasonable that

## Platform users have the right to engage in activities on the platform

- Decisions to close accounts, exclude people, alter functionality or deny specific activities should never be taken lightly.
- People should never be excluded on the basis of a decision made by a purely automated mechanism and where automated systems make judgements over

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<sup>6</sup> Edelman, Benjamin G., Michael Luca, and Dan Svirsky. "Racial Discrimination in the Sharing Economy: Evidence from a Field Experiment." *Harvard Business School NOM Unit Working Paper* 16-069 (2015).

<sup>7</sup><https://www.airbnb.co.uk/help/article/1405/airbnb-s-nondiscrimination-policy--our-commitment-to-inclusion-and-respect>

human activities then people should have the right to appeal against those judgements<sup>8</sup>.

- People have the right to grievance procedures in the case of exclusion or dispute, preferably with recourse to third-party intermediation to ensure impartiality.
- Emergent uses of the platform that become established should be respected, and changes to the platform made in ways that minimise disruption to these existing uses.

### Platform users have the right to opportunities for self-development in relation to their role in the platform

- Platform owners have an obligation to support users in becoming competent and capable users of the platform.
- Platform users should be engaged in the development of the platform and its regulation. This can be done in a consultative way, through practices of co-design, and/or by involving platform communities in decision-making.
- Where the platform activity has a normative association with personal development, appropriate opportunities should be made available via the platform, for example, to develop a career or acquire qualifications.

### Equitably managed value

Platforms' collectivise resources and activity to create massive stores of value that challenge our conventional notions of ownership and our sense of what constitutes reasonable profit-taking. Often the value is created out of many small contributions which are not worth much by themselves, but in aggregate form new value pools that are controlled centrally by the platform. Value is perhaps the most difficult aspect for the Social Charter to deal with as new mechanisms for redistribution or for custodianship of these types of value have yet to be worked out.

Some have suggested 'platform cooperativism' as a solution<sup>9</sup>, where the platform is managed for and by its community, as an antidote to what are perceived to be extreme and iniquitous forms of 'platform capitalism'<sup>10</sup>, where value in the platform is exploitatively obtained and sequestered by the platform owners. However, imposing a cooperativist model on all platforms does not seem a realistic solution, nor are cooperativist platforms free from difficulties of their own<sup>11</sup>. This Charter accepts that both capitalism and cooperativism are equally valid approaches to managing a Smart Platform, but lays out a framework describing how platforms can be managed responsibly and fairly within these paradigms.

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<sup>8</sup> Follows the data protection principle in Directive 95/46/EC, Art. 15.1  
(<https://www.dataprotection.ie/docs/EU-Directive-95-46-EC-Chapter-2/93.htm>)

<sup>9</sup> **Platform Cooperativism vs. the Sharing Economy**  
<https://medium.com/@trebors/platform-cooperativism-vs-the-sharing-economy-2ea737f1b5ad#.s5fsjl7rr>

<sup>10</sup> **Choosing a Future in the Platform Economy: The Implications and Consequences of Digital Platforms**  
Kauffman Foundation New Entrepreneurial Growth Conference, Discussion Paper  
Amelia Island Florida – June 18/19, 2015 Martin Kennedy

<sup>11</sup> Rothschild, Joyce, and J. Allen Whitt. *The cooperative workplace: Potentials and dilemmas of organisational democracy and participation*. CUP Archive, 1989.

This is a tricky area because it appears to defy the convention that business can legitimately make profit. The point comes, though, from the disproportionate value accumulated by big, powerful, platforms, which arguably goes far beyond what we would consider reasonable within our conventional context of capitalism. Not all of this value is in the form of piles of cash – but lies also in the power of the massive pool of networked resources that result, which are controlled largely by the platform owner. This problem is made harder by the ‘winner takes it all’ network effects, where cut-throat competition and lobbying leads to market consolidation.

There are perhaps open questions here as to what the status of these commons is in terms of ownership (what proportion of ownership lies with the contribution, and what with the enabling infrastructure and capital?). What do anti-monopolistic practices look like in this space? Is an ownership model appropriate – or do we need to transition to a stewardship model? What might constitute an appropriate form of taxation and redistribution in these settings?

**Platform operators should adopt a stewardship approach to the value within the platform, avoiding flows or accumulations of value that are inequitable or exploitative**

- Platform owners should be alert to the fact that they may be benefiting from labour that was freely given in another context (e.g. mark-up as part of a serious game) and consider what obligations to the labour force this imposes upon them when they benefit from this value.
- Platform owners should consider ways of redistributing value where value flows would otherwise be iniquitous or exploitative
- Platforms owners should respect the ability of groups or communities to co-create value for themselves and for each other
- Ownership and use of the value within a Smart Platform should reflect the values outwardly promoted by the platform.

## Desirable properties of Smart Platforms

### Community

Communities founded on a shared sense of identity, shared practice and shared experience are central to the functioning of Smart Platforms. These include the loosely connected yet vibrant groups that have emerged around and in response to platforms such as AirBnB, Uber, the Zooniverse, Mechanical Turk and many others. They sustain the platform through their activities and by engaging in ‘hidden work’, including developing resources and expertise that add value to the platform as a whole. Sometimes platform owners will treat participants as collections of individuals, and disrupt community formation in order to maximise their own interests. But even in these circumstances it is typical for communities to form spontaneously ‘off platform’<sup>12</sup>, and then to go on to play an important role in sustaining the platform through their activities. This Charter advocates that platform owners invest in community formation as an integral part of the platform and to benefit the welfare of platform participants.

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<sup>12</sup> Important examples include Turk Nation <http://turkernation.com/> and <https://turkopticon.ucsd.edu/>

There are trade-offs between on-platform support for communities provided by the platform owners, and off-platform community support managed by the community itself. The former allows for greater integration with the platform mechanisms and closer engagement of platform staff. The latter supports greater autonomy for the community, but will require the community to find resources for its creation and maintenance. The culture of the platform and the relationship between the platform and its community will strongly shape which of these approaches is adopted in practice. As a general rule, we see it as the responsibility of the platform to provide for and be responsive to its community, but for some platforms and in some contexts, off-platform communities may work more effectively.

- Platform participants have the right to association and to form communities.
- Platform owners have an obligation to provide support for the social fabric of the community. A basic level of support would be a digital space, such as a forum, which can be a focal point for the community.
- Communities have a right to protest, including boycotts and strike action, which may be conducted in physical or in virtual spaces.
- Platform communities have a collective right to have a voice in how the platform evolves, the interests it serves and the activities it supports.
- Communities have the right to share resources and collectively learn how to exercise their agency in relation to algorithms used within the platform.
- Platform communities have a right to communicate with the human owners of the platform, who in turn have an obligation to be responsive towards their community.

Many platforms are allied to more than one community, particularly platforms that have a global reach, or that act as a marketplace, where the buyers and sellers form separate communities. In these cases each sub-community may have distinct values and interests that are sometimes only loosely aligned, and sometimes in conflict with each other. The platform owners, who have interests of their own, that might be more aligned to one community or another, play an important role in setting the stage for how these communities relate to each other.

- Algorithmic and interactive features of the platform should avoid favouring the interests of a single or small number of constituencies allied to the platform. For example, if ratings are used as a form of reputation, every party in a two-sided or multisided market should be subject to ratings, and the ratings systems should avoid overtly privileging the interests of one community above another.

### **Accountability and transparency**

Design transparency and operational transparency are two important means for holding the platform to account. Design transparency involves disclosing the values and intentions underpinning the platform, and how those values and intentions have been translated into platform mechanisms. Operational transparency concerns being able to test whether those mechanisms (or the platform as a whole) conform to these stated values and intentions. Disclosure in fulfilment of these objectives is never a neutral act, and will itself impact on the future functioning and viability of the platform (for example, if the privacy of participants, or the commercial viability of the platform were to be compromised). For these reasons, negotiating disclosure itself will be tied up within the process of prioritising

interests across all the platform stakeholders. Yet it is much harder for ordinary participants to make a case for transparency and it may be tempting for platform owners' to remain opaque. On the other hand, promoting transparency fosters a stronger sense of belonging (community cohesion), which benefits participants directly but also - in the longer term - owners and operators by favouring a more sustainable business.

- Platform owners have a responsibility to provide evidence about how the platform operates, in particular to show how the platform behaviour is consistent with the stated goals and values as laid out in the platform constitution.
- Platform owners have the responsibility to make visible the algorithms and personal data used within a platform and the interests served by those forms of agency, including:
  - all aspects of information processing, especially those that involve persuasion, profiling, interpreting human activity, making of judgements on behaviour or character, target incentives, that modulate how the platform responds interactively or how it allocates resources to people.

A variety of disclosure models may be utilised in order to protect commercial sensitivities, the privacy of platform users, or simply to make the process of disclosure tractable. These may include adjusting the granularity of disclosure, use of a neutral and trusted third party to provide an audit. A wide variety of models are possible.

- Platform operators have a responsibility to promote awareness of the ways that it is possible for devices or sensors to connect to the system, sense and interpret the behaviour of participants, and the ways the platform may interoperate with other platforms or systems, to help users make sense of their involvement and assess any potential negative consequences.
- Platform operators have a responsibility to be open about the types of information they collect.
- Platform operators should make visible where the platform encourages compliance with a social norm. This is especially important where these are 'enforced' via automated feedback loops based on sensors, algorithmic interpretation of human behaviour, and actuators or incentive delivery to maintain compliance.
- Platform operators and platform communities have a responsibility to monitor the 'global agency' of the platform such as macro level effects involving its influence e.g. on the flows and movement of people, resources and opinion.
  - This includes the responsibility to work with existing authorities to facilitate societal governance and planning by sharing data and by accepting a responsibility within society for how the platform has global influences on flows of opinion, resources and people.
- Platform owners have a responsibility to make visible how value is created in the system, how it flows and with whom it accumulates.

- Platform owners have a responsibility to make visible how the value in the platform is used to influence decisions in wider society, such as lobbying for legislation that benefits platforms<sup>13</sup>.
- Platform operators should strive to be transparent about the activity that happens "around" the platform, at the management or directive level, to make users aware of managers decisions affecting the future activity of the platform.

## Privacy

[This section still attracted a lot of comments in the prior round of review, some of which still need to be resolved. Issue include: relationship to various data protection legislation, issues of technological sovereignty, phrasing and avoiding impossible demands.]

Platform operators are in a supremely privileged position in their ability to access personal data relating to aspects of people's' lives played out on a Smart Platform. This data can represent a significant asset that the operators may use in various ways to generate revenue and profits and to influence the lives of participants. Participants may be led to be open to engage in the activities supported by the platform, but blindsided to the extent that their data is being retained, accessed and exploited by the platform owners. Thus a Smart Platform represents a mix of different information sharing and privacy norms alongside a mix of different interests and audiences that are easy to conflate together. The following rights and obligations are framed in a way as to navigate these complexities.

- Platform users have a right to different social identities associated with different contexts (digital personae).
- Platform owners should take appropriate measures to establish that people are who they purport to be in cases where it is important for users to reveal their real-world identity for reasons of community safety.
- Platforms often depend on data from individuals and platform communities to create revenue to support the platform and derive profits. This should always be done transparently, and never in ways that may pose a risk to an individual (e.g. by disclosure) or used in ways that are not in the individual's or group's interests (because the data is used to manipulate the group, or to serve interests that are inimical to the group).
- Platform owners should provide accessible and usable mechanisms for individuals to be able to control how much information they reveal and the purpose of the information they share to different platform communities to which they belong, and to the platform owner.  
(Thus, within a platform, an individual may have differentiated privacy requirements in relation to several 'audiences'. Part of this may be managed via 'digital personae', or by 'community specific' privacy settings.)
- Where participating in a community requires revealing personal information (such as a telephone number to arrange a lift, a photograph for recognition in the real world etc), then this should be staged at an appropriate place in the transaction.
- An individual refusing to share personal information shall not be barred from participating in a community. Instead of alienating individuals, the platform owner should be clear about the advantages of opting in, the use of the personal data, and list the limitations to the platform if the data is not provided.

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<sup>13</sup> For an example of issues with lobbying and Smart Platforms, see here:  
<http://uk.businessinsider.com/uber-has-a-huge-group-of-lobbyists-to-help-it-take-over-the-world-2014-12?r=US&IR=T>

- Platform owners should acquire the minimal amount of data to serve the purposes of the platform. Methods should be used to allow individuals to minimize the amount of personal information revealed (e.g. age versus date of birth).
- People have the right to withdraw from platforms in a clearly delineated amount of time, to the extent that withdrawal is possible given the complexity of removing residual traces, and the necessity of maintaining those traces for community coherence.
- Data that represents interactions between community members is no longer exclusively owned by a single individual. Therefore, community norms should be established to find acceptable trade-offs between individual rights to data erasure and the rights of the second individual, or of the wider community. This may take into account accountability for members' conduct, or the preservation of shared community resources.
- The process of withdrawing from a community should be clear, including what the implications for data retention may be.
- People have the right to data portability (downloading of their data in a convenient and portable format), rectification (to correct any errors about their data), erasure (to have their personal data removed from the platform) and to restricting how their data is processed.
- People have the right to be informed about how their data is processed, the existence of automated decision-making, including profiling, and procedures by which they may object to data being processed in those ways.
- People have the right to be informed about security breaches in relation to their data.

## Safety

Use of Smart Platforms, particularly those supporting sharing economy applications, may involve trading a certain amount of increased personal risk for convenience, with the platforms themselves relying heavily on community reputation mechanisms to keep users safe. The risks considered here are those arising from the actions of one community member towards another, which may have implications for the safety and wellbeing of individuals, for the integrity of the community, and the reputation of the platform as a whole. Such risks include physical assault, verbal abuse, bullying, dangers from poorly maintained physical assets, and the theft of personal information.

- Platform owners have an obligation to make clear the risks of participating within the platform, particularly where these may differ from people's normative presumption of what the risks may be.
- Platform owners should provide appropriate resources to help individuals keep themselves safe from physical harm or abuse. This may include guidance for accessing services provided by community members, ensuring people undertake relevant security checks, possess appropriate insurance, have their identity established, that the identity of vulnerable people is protected, being alert to wrongdoing, establishing procedures for reporting and acting upon wrongdoing.
- Platform owners should never depend solely upon within-platform mechanisms / community standards to keep the community safe.
- Platform owners should develop fair and non-discriminatory disciplinary procedures within the platform. These should never be wholly automated, and ideally should involve senior community members in their development and execution.

- Platform owners should strive for a trade-off between privacy and disclosure whereby wrongdoers cannot hide, but where the identity of users is sufficiently protected so that they cannot be easily victimised.
- Protection should be provided against Des-information – especially against fake news that may infringe the privacy of individuals about whom incorrect statements are made. Such means of protection should include privacy-respecting provenance of information. At the same time, freedom of expression needs to be respected and should not be unduly limited.

## Empowerment features

This section considers the interactional and operational features of Smart Platforms that may serve to support and promote the rights specified in this Social Charter. Some of these features have already been mentioned, but here they are collected together.

- **Platform constitution** - Smart Platforms should employ a constitution to complement standard ‘user agreements’ and ‘terms and conditions’. A constitution differs in that it serves much more as a ‘social contract’ between the platform owners and the different constituencies that are allied to the platform. It should specify the aims and values of the platform, and how these are realised by platform mechanisms, such as algorithms and other interactional features. It should also spell out the rights and obligations of the different platform constituencies and the procedures by which their interests are to be negotiated, grievances settled and decisions made.
- **Provision of accountability mechanisms**<sup>14</sup> which can be used to audit how the platform behaves and help provide evidence that the platform adheres to the platform constitution.
- **Support for social fabrics** - The platform should provide resources for community formation and functioning, which include uncensored focal points for communities to meet, such as forum or chat; and support for community dynamics, such as reputation systems, decision-making procedures, and so on.
- **Provision of democratic structures** to support community voices in relation to issues around how the platform is evolving. These may work on many different levels including consultations with senior community members; co-design activities; taking formal or informal community soundings via polls or other forms of consultation; or support for explicit community decision via mechanisms such as voting.
- **Resources for responding to algorithms** - these include features such as opt-ins, opt-outs, preference settings, audit, lay-explanations of algorithm mechanisms, support for collective learning so individuals may act in their own interests with respect to algorithms.
- **Provision of information about the state of the activity within the platform** done in a privacy preserving way so that people are aware of what is happening in the platform relative to them to help them exercise their agency in relation to their judgements and decision.
- **Features to support privacy and safety** - such as user- or community-defined privacy settings, use of privacy enhancing technologies and transparency

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<sup>14</sup>Such as that provided by the prov framework which provides a comprehensive facility for exploring the activity of people and algorithms on the platform  
<https://www.w3.org/TR/prov-dm/>

enhancing tools, procedures for handling complaints, reporting and responding to abuse, verifying the identity of users, ensuring their compliance with community standards, and regulatory obligations.

## References

These references were generally drawn upon in the creation of this Charter.

A Review of Methodologies for the Design & Incubation of Collaborative Platforms

<http://dimmons.net/methodologies-for-design-incubation-collaborative-platforms/>

Procomuns: Policies for Commons Collaborative Economies at the European Level <http://procomuns.net/en/policy/>

Ours to Hack and to Own. The rise of platform cooperativism, a new vision for the future of work and a fairer internet. Edited by Trebor Scholz and Nathan Schneider. <http://www.orbooks.com/catalog/ours-to-hack-and-to-own/>

## Appendix I

In this appendix we explain the background to the Charter and its relationship to existing Social Charters.

### How the Charter was formed

The Charter has been developed from case studies and analysis of existing platforms, literature reviews, monitoring controversies surrounding existing Smart Platforms, and from a Responsible Research and Innovation exercise within the SmartSociety project that examined the societal implications of each component of a Smart Platform in detail.

### Relationship to existing Charters and statements of rights

Charters of rights play the role of anchoring the rights of individuals and groups to counterbalance the other powerful forces that may be at work within modern societies, such as those associated with the state, with businesses and markets. Charters, such as the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union<sup>15</sup>, codify generally held human values (such as those relating to human dignity, freedoms, rights to privacy and family, rights in respect of labour, and so on) to give them prominence and to help afford their protection. Charters of rights are given teeth by being embedded within a formal judicial process.

Such Charters typically directly apply to government agencies and organisations, but are not directly enforceable on the private sector, which often has to be managed via secondary legislation that expresses the principles of the Charter. The UN has issued

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<sup>15</sup> [www.europarl.europa.eu/Charter/pdf/text\\_en.pdf](http://www.europarl.europa.eu/Charter/pdf/text_en.pdf)

guiding principles that mandate that states have a duty to ensure that businesses comply with human rights<sup>16</sup>, a position which has been endorsed by the EU council of ministers<sup>17</sup>, and surveys reveal that businesses are becoming increasingly aware of these obligations, but are often unsure how to translate them into practical action<sup>18</sup>.

There are Charters of rights emerging that articulate rights in relation to the Internet, such as the African Declaration of Internet rights<sup>19</sup>, the recent declaration by the Italian government of a Charter of Internet rights<sup>20</sup> (which includes sections relating specifically to platforms), and Internet rights specified by coalitions of rights and campaign groups<sup>21</sup>. There are also codes of ethics emerging relating to the development and operation of algorithms<sup>22</sup>,<sup>23</sup>,<sup>24</sup>.

Our Social Charter for Smart Platforms draws upon these existing Charters for its grounding in existing expressions of human rights, and shares many features with them, particularly around principles such as freedom of association, right to privacy and rights of access, which take on particular significance within Smart Platforms.

### How does this Charter differ from existing Charters?

Charters aimed at a societal level, such as the European Convention on Human Rights, are often specified in a general way making it hard to decide how they might apply to the specific features of Smart Platforms, such as algorithms, ratings systems and incentives. On the other hand, Charters that focus on digital living, but apply to specific groups (such as the 5Rights framework for Children<sup>25</sup>), miss out on the ways that Smart Platforms connect and implicate diverse groups with diverse interests. In contrast, this Charter is scoped directly around the circumstances and technologies that pertain to diverse participation in Smart Platforms.

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<sup>16</sup>[http://www.ohchr.org/Documents/Publications/GuidingPrinciplesBusinessHR\\_EN.pdf](http://www.ohchr.org/Documents/Publications/GuidingPrinciplesBusinessHR_EN.pdf)

<sup>17</sup><https://wcd.coe.int/ViewDoc.jsp?p=&Ref=CM/Rec%282016%293&Language=lanEnglish&Ver=original&BackColorInternet=DBDCF2&BackColorIntranet=FDC864&BackColorLogged=FDC864&direct=true>

<sup>18</sup>[https://www.dlapiper.com/~/media/Files/Insights/Publications/2015/03/Challenges\\_for\\_business\\_in\\_respecting\\_human\\_rights.pdf](https://www.dlapiper.com/~/media/Files/Insights/Publications/2015/03/Challenges_for_business_in_respecting_human_rights.pdf)

<sup>19</sup> <http://africaninternetrights.org/about/>

<sup>20</sup>[http://www.camera.it/application/xmanager/projects/leg17/commissione\\_internet/testo\\_definitivo\\_inglese.pdf](http://www.camera.it/application/xmanager/projects/leg17/commissione_internet/testo_definitivo_inglese.pdf)

<sup>21</sup>

[http://internetrightsandprinciples.org/site/wp-content/uploads/2015/01/IRPC\\_english\\_4thedition.pdf](http://internetrightsandprinciples.org/site/wp-content/uploads/2015/01/IRPC_english_4thedition.pdf)

<sup>22</sup> <https://cihr.eu/hoa2015web/>

<sup>23</sup> [https://www.gccs2015.com/sites/default/files/documents/Ethics\\_Algorithms-final.doc.pdf](https://www.gccs2015.com/sites/default/files/documents/Ethics_Algorithms-final.doc.pdf)

<sup>24</sup> <http://www.coe.int/en/web/conventions/full-list/-/conventions/treaty/108>

<sup>25</sup> <http://5rightsframework.com/>