

Globalizing the digital: A cross-cultural framework for the ethics of operationalizing Big Data

Big Data, Critical Data Studies, Justice, Moral Foundation Theory, Cross-Cultural, Agency, Capabilities, Aspirations, Affordances, Transdisciplinarity

What is Data?

“The difference that makes a difference for someone or something.”

Zimmerli, 2018

What is a City?

“Unpredictable mass of cooccurring events that result from the direct interaction of individuals.”

Lévy, 2003

To deal with cities is to deal with the well-being of millions of people, their habits, their memories, and their aspirations. The “solutions” that we put in place must make sense for the people who are affected by this transformation of their environment. This should be taken into account, not only when the time comes to create a planning strategy, but also when we start producing knowledge that will eventually feed the work of policy makers and planners, as well as all the other public and private actors engaged in making the city.

Why a cross-cultural ethical framework for Big Data?

Concerns over the ever-increasing production, availability and use of multilayered individual data in social research, business and the everyday life calls for the development of ethical and legal guidelines. In parallel to civic and governmental initiatives, Critical Data Studies offers a transdisciplinary academic platform to define a common ethical framework for computational research. Essays recently published under this label argue for lines of conduct guided by principles such as fairness and justice. Cultural and evolutionary anthropology, as well as political psychology show, however, those principles are mostly common to Northern liberal cultures.

What are other “ethical” frameworks?

In his Moral Foundation Theory, Haidt (2007) identifies five types of moral arguments used in social and political discourse:

Justice/ Injustice	Care/ Harm	Ingroup/ Outgroup	Authority/ Dissidence	Purity/ Disgust
Most common among “liberal” individuals, communities and cultures		Most common among “conservative” individuals, communities and cultures		

The framing of research ethics by notions of *fairness* and *justice* therefore risks to maintain, if not increase, the hegemony of Northern researchers (and Tech Giants) on the operationalization of scientific knowledge in urban planning and policy making.

How to use TRIAD?

TRIAD is still under development. Its application will depend on the research practice or the operationalization concerned. Since it’s a transdisciplinary tool, TRIAD should first be applied to the actors of the research or the project (that’s you, btw). Then, you should be able to identify the actors for whom your work “makes a difference” ... citizens, communities, institutions, organization that would either use what you’ve done, or will be affected by it. Don’t forget that if you are producing scientific knowledge, this knowledge could be operationalized!

Capabilities

“Capabilities correspond to embodied or extended competences that the actor develops. They describe personal or collective aptitudes that enable us to act on affordances in order to actualize aspirations.”

Koseki, 2017

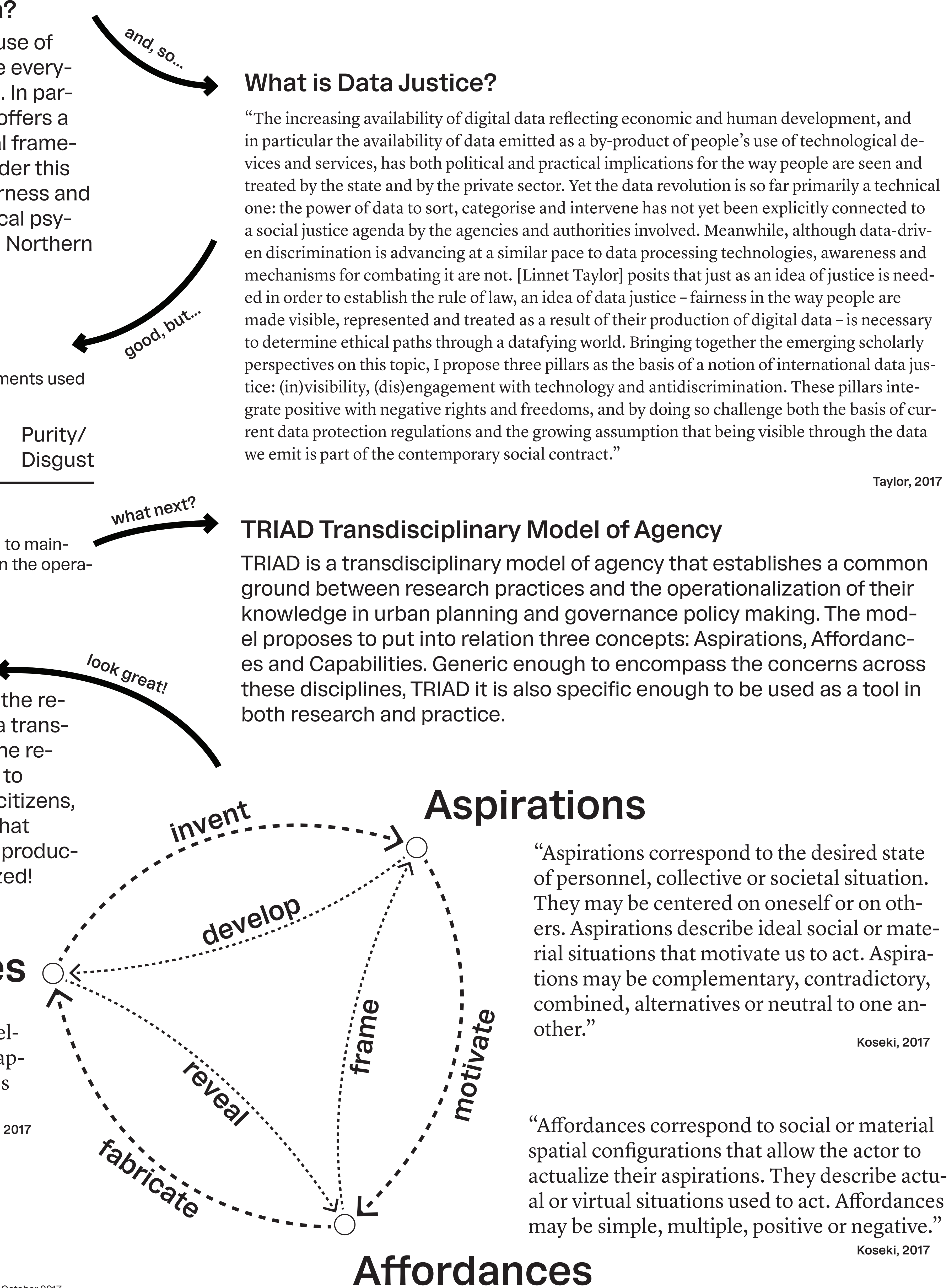
What is Data Justice?

“The increasing availability of digital data reflecting economic and human development, and in particular the availability of data emitted as a by-product of people’s use of technological devices and services, has both political and practical implications for the way people are seen and treated by the state and by the private sector. Yet the data revolution is so far primarily a technical one: the power of data to sort, categorise and intervene has not yet been explicitly connected to a social justice agenda by the agencies and authorities involved. Meanwhile, although data-driven discrimination is advancing at a similar pace to data processing technologies, awareness and mechanisms for combating it are not. [Linnet Taylor] posits that just as an idea of justice is needed in order to establish the rule of law, an idea of data justice – fairness in the way people are made visible, represented and treated as a result of their production of digital data – is necessary to determine ethical paths through a datafying world. Bringing together the emerging scholarly perspectives on this topic, I propose three pillars as the basis of a notion of international data justice: (in)visibility, (dis)engagement with technology and antidiscrimination. These pillars integrate positive with negative rights and freedoms, and by doing so challenge both the basis of current data protection regulations and the growing assumption that being visible through the data we emit is part of the contemporary social contract.”

Taylor, 2017

TRIAD Transdisciplinary Model of Agency

TRIAD is a transdisciplinary model of agency that establishes a common ground between research practices and the operationalization of their knowledge in urban planning and governance policy making. The model proposes to put into relation three concepts: Aspirations, Affordances and Capabilities. Generic enough to encompass the concerns across these disciplines, TRIAD it is also specific enough to be used as a tool in both research and practice.



“Aspirations correspond to the desired state of personnel, collective or societal situation. They may be centered on oneself or on others. Aspirations describe ideal social or material situations that motivate us to act. Aspirations may be complementary, contradictory, combined, alternatives or neutral to one another.”

Koseki, 2017

“Affordances correspond to social or material spatial configurations that allow the actor to actualize their aspirations. They describe actual or virtual situations used to act. Affordances may be simple, multiple, positive or negative.”

Koseki, 2017

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Shin Alexandre Koseki, PhD

shin.koseki@epfl.ch

@sjinko

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