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REVISED Co-creation of the Digital Democracy and Data Commons Manifesto: alternative sociotechnical visions of data

[version 2; peer review: 4 approved, 1 approved with reservations, 1 not approved]

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Abstract

Amid public concern surrounding the proprietary and exploitative use of personal data by corporations and public institutions, and its consequences from a sociotechnical perspective, narratives around digital commons have recently emerged, framing potential alternatives. This paper presents the co-creation of the Digital Democracy and Data Commons Manifesto through a collaborative writing sprint, drawing on principles of openness, diversity, and inclusivity. The manifesto articulates a technopolitical vision for data governance that prioritizes community control over data. We analyze the manifesto's evolution throughout the process, demonstrating its capacity to address contemporary concerns such as data extractivism and algorithmic governance. Our approach is based on participatory design methods, more concretely on a collaborative writing sprint, to co-create a manifesto on alternatives to current datafication, digital inequalities, and lack of citizen control over personal data. On the one hand, we describe the process of implementing a sprint approach for collaboratively writing a topic-specific manifesto, in the context of the broader EU project DECODE (Decentralised Citizen Owned Data Ecosystems). On the other hand, we present and analyse the main results from the content structure of the manifesto over its initial and final versions, which moved progressively as a cohesive text away from a scholarly and policy-oriented tone.

Open Peer Review

Approval Status ✗ ✓ ? ✓ ✓ ✓

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REVISED **Amendments from Version 1**

In response to reviewers feedback, we have made several significant revisions to the manuscript to enhance its theoretical grounding, relevance, and clarity. These changes include:

- Clarification of the theory of change: We expanded the introduction to provide a clearer explanation of the "theory of change" proposed in the manuscript. We linked this theory to alternative sociotechnical imaginaries, addressing the need for participatory governance models that integrate narratives, infrastructures, and collective expectations. This revision helps situate the paper's arguments within broader debates on data governance.

- Integration of key literature: To strengthen the contextualization of the paper, we incorporated several key references, including foundational works by Ostrom (1990), Morozov (2015), Fuchs (2021), and Calzada (2021). These references support our discussions on data commons, digital sovereignty, and community-driven governance, providing a more comprehensive academic framework.

- Clarification of the DECODE-Decidim project's contemporary relevance: We revised the discussion section to clarify how the DECODE-Decidim project remains relevant to contemporary issues such as AI disruption and data sovereignty. This added context emphasizes the continued importance of decentralized and commons-based governance in addressing modern challenges like algorithmic decision-making and surveillance.

- Reframing the manifesto as a technopolitical artefact: We reframed the Digital Democracy and Data Commons Manifesto as a technopolitical artefact, highlighting its role as a living document that challenges technocentric, AI-driven governance models. This revision underscores the manifesto's potential impact on policy, infrastructure, and participatory technology design.

- Enhancing the abstract: We revised the abstract to provide clearer details on the outcomes of the collaborative writing sprint and the evolution of the manifesto, making the paper's objectives and results more explicit.

Any further responses from the reviewers can be found at the end of the article

Introduction

Growing public debate is taking place around personal data protection in the digital society. More and more aspects of people's lives are mediated by digital media channels, and a myriad of platforms is exploiting huge quantities of data from billions of users (Figueiras, 2021). Corporations and states gather and process them with the aim of surveilling and interfering with people's lives, usually for profit and/or with social control purposes. This emerging socio-economic paradigm has been variously named data-capitalism (West, 2019), platform-capitalism (Srnicek, 2017) or surveillance-capitalism (Zuboff, 2019) and has provoked increasing criticism. In order to better understand and contribute to alternative visions regarding such debate, as well as to advance towards a real digital public sphere and the digital commons (Fuchs, 2021), defying these frameworks from a sociotechnical perspective is needed. From an actor-network theory perspective (Callon, 1987; Latour, 2007), sociotechnical systems (Callon, 2004) involve social and technological actors, factors and dynamics. Thereby, these systems can be seen as co-produced or composed by different realities that influence their stabilization and transformation (Miller & Jasanoff, 2004): regulations (Borrás & Edler, 2020), infrastructures (Bowker, 1996), narratives (Goffman, 1974; Scheufele, 1999), social imaginaries (Taylor, 2004) and expectations (Wilkie & Michael, 2009), all taking part in the construction of the sociotechnical. In recent years, discussions on data commons have grown, encompassing various aspects of data governance, privacy, and public value (Fuchs, 2021; Ostrom, 1990; Purtova & van Maanen, 2023). These works outline how commons-based approaches can provide alternatives to proprietary models of data control, aligning with the growing call for more democratic and community-oriented frameworks in the digital realm. This article challenges the prevailing techno-determinism by proposing a participatory model that integrates narratives, infrastructures, and shared expectations, essential for collective governance. We argue that this theoretical approach, which combines storytelling with socio-political dynamics, is a necessary framework for practical interventions in data governance. This article challenges the dominant paradigms in data governance by proposing a more participatory model. As Micheli *et al.* (2020) and Fischli & Muldoon (2024) argue, data governance requires not only technical solutions but also governance frameworks that promote collective control and democratic participation.

In this sense, the concept of sociotechnical imaginaries (Jasanoff & Kim, 2015), defined as "collectively held, institutionally stabilized and publicly performed visions of desirable futures, animated by shared understandings of forms of social life and social order attainable through, and supportive of, advances in science and technology", seems key for understanding how the symbolic layer of "data" is perceived, exploited, performed, sustained, and challenged by various actors -such as corporations, governments, think tanks, activists and communities of practice. This is also true for sociotechnical systems, considering how narratives and imaginaries are co-constructed within the social (e.g. communities, practices) and the technological (e.g. devices, knowledge), as two realities that are inextricably entangled. This implies, therefore, that transforming sociotechnical systems requires the articulation of alternative narratives and imaginaries.

For such articulation, building alternative forms of dealing with data can benefit from co-developing alternative sociotechnical systems and contributing to transforming the processes and practices by which they are built. While the process aimed for inclusive participation, expert stakeholders from the DECODE consortium played a central role in shaping key aspects of the manifesto. Their influence was particularly evident during the initial debates, where technical frameworks were established, which later shaped the manifesto's structure. However, every effort was made to ensure that the collective process allowed all voices to contribute equally. This can be done either by following the traditional "technocentric" and "technocratic" approach (in which

technology is the central object of attention, and experts primarily shape the system), or from a more "sociocentric" and "sociocratic" angle (where a variety of actors shape technologies through a variety of negotiations), as sometimes described by STS scholars (Douglas, 2012). For the latter, a valid approach is to enable participatory and deliberative models to transform sociotechnical systems promoting social transformation, as an opportunity for citizen re-appropriation and governance of data commons, without exclusive intellectual property (De Rosnay & Musiani, 2020). Trying to avoid techno-centrism, and applying narrative and participatory techniques to a complex topic such as data, can allow us to experiment with multiple and interlinked facets, while seeking to galvanize communities around such narratives. In other words, aligning narratives and communities as the base for sociotechnical transformations which are not, and cannot be, merely "techno-centric".

The DDDC pilot

This socio-centric approach was a key aspect of the Digital Democracy and Data Commons (DDDC) pilot, a 6 month-long participatory process embedded within the EU project DECODE. DECODE (acronym for Decentralized Citizen Owned Data Ecosystems) was a three-year Horizon 2020 EU project oriented to build new technological, legal, economic and narrative tools to rebuild our relation to data, moving it from the current forms of data extractivism and surveillance towards a model defined by data sovereignty and data commons. A model in which people could have more personal and collective control and get more benefit from the data they generate in their digital life. In this context, the DDDC (Digital Democracy and Data Commons) pilot was a 6-month process run both in Barcelona and online through several digital strategies and 10 face to face meetings. The process articulated three elements: (1) open technologies based on the open source software Decidim –a digital platform for participatory democracy, used by more than 1 million people and 450 organizations worldwide, ranging from states to cities and from activists to economic organizations (Roth *et al.*, 2019)–; (2) community-focused co-creation processes and engagement activities around such digital infrastructure, online and offline (in Barcelona); and (3) the development of alternative narratives around the concept and practices of data commons. Within the DDDC process, the co-creation took a series of steps: kick off, face to face debates, online proposals, and, crucially, a DDDC "manifesto sprint" whose main aim was to develop a collective discussion and writing process for creating a concrete, shared narrative about data commons (Figure 1).

This paper presents and analyzes the results of the collaborative process for co-creating the "Digital Democracy and Data Commons Manifesto" (DDDC Manifesto). The process instantiated the key notion behind our approach: the practice of co-creating critical sociotechnical narratives. As a key output of the mentioned pilot, the manifesto was based on the techno-political and democratic purview of the Decidim and DECODE projects. Unlike the previous tradition of manifestos, the DDDC Manifesto was not the product of an individual reflection or authorship, nor was it only focused on socio-political claims; it was the result of an open and collaborative process of writing and deliberation. The participants in this co-creation process ranged from tech-enthusiasts to data commons advocates, each bringing diverse perspectives on data governance. While some had concerns about corporate data practices, others were already aligned with commons-based approaches. This diversity influenced the direction of our discussions, as we sought to challenge both complacency and corporate influence in data governance.

Our aim is to describe and analyze the overall process of the DDDC Manifesto co-creation, contributing to the study but

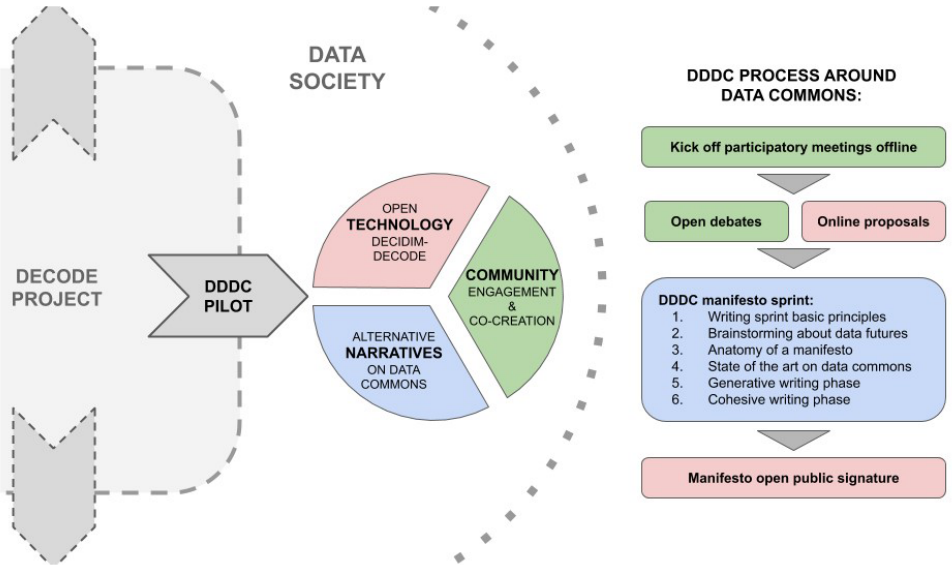


Figure 1. Overall process of the manifesto sprint in relation to DDDC Pilot and the DECODE project. Own elaboration.

also development of sociotechnical narratives in current debates and fast-paced disruptions around data extractivism and data sovereignty. The paper is structured into six sections. The second one (after this Introduction) delves into the theory of manifestos and the role of deliberation and participatory processes in their creation, as well as on the relationship of these topics to the theory of commons and commoning. Section three explains how and why the manifesto was conceived as part of the DDDC Pilot. It also specifies the methodology followed for the creation of the manifesto. Results of the whole process are presented and discussed in section four, additionally relating the described findings to previous studies and literature in section five. Conclusions, in section six, include account of the limitations of our case-study methodology and evaluative approach, as well as a discussion of further research needed.

Co-creating visions: manifestos and design methodologies

In modern times, a paradigmatic channel for articulating alternative narratives and visions of society was the manifesto. From the *Communist Manifesto* in the nineteenth century to the *Accelerationist Manifesto* in the twenty-first, they have been drafted to synthesize ideas, articulate demands, mobilize human collectives and embody social visions. These two paradigmatic, well-known examples tended to focus on markedly social or economic claims. The *Communist Manifesto* referred to technology more as a ready-made tool for economic and social emancipation, while the *Accelerationist* one saw technology more as a space to be constructed, shaped and inhabited according to political ideals and material practices. Manifestos themselves were understood, in this sense, as "means" rather than "mediations" (as *intermediaries* instead of *mediators*, in Latour's, 2007 terms): only as a tool created by a few authors in order to convince others, rather than a process in which both the authors' and the audiences' visions emerged concurrently.

From well-known examples in the political and artistic domains in the XIX and early XX centuries, to more recent examples involving digital technologies, such as the *Cyborg Manifesto* in the 80s, the persuasive features of manifestos are usually counterposed to traditional academic language (Ashby *et al.*, 2017). However, manifestos have been considered a performative textual and narrative format (Hanna, 2019) with potential to bridge scholarly or expert knowledge with wider audiences, and they have also been noted as civic engagement strategy tools (Freedman, 2018). Usually in relation to the public sphere, manifestos have been studied as modern discursive forms with extremely plural and open formats, as narrative artefacts expressing and reacting to sociopolitical changes and uncertainties. From "classical" pre-war avant-garde manifestos, to post-WWII counterculture and cyberfeminist ones, the genre has evolved as a sort of transdisciplinary writing practice with a persuasive, transformational style. They are programmatic texts that invite action without proposing a closed political program, and where knowledge is usually asserted rather than developed (Yanoshevsky, 2009). However, due to its multiformity, there's no clear agreement on which narrative forms should strictly be considered as manifestos, when as defined by Lyon (1999) "each manifesto is context dependent, composed under historical and geographical specificities, differing both from other kinds of documents, and from other manifestos".

Due to a recent proliferation of digital and technology related manifestos in Europe, and more concretely in the field of Human Computer Interaction, it's currently possible to find new perspectives within this genre that incorporate critical reflective attention to the impacts, values and challenges of digitalization, like for example in the field of the Internet of Things (Fritsch *et al.*, 2018). Their intended function as frameworks of directions to improve the practice of digital design and development, and for more ethical approaches to technology, tend to point to questions such as transparency, openness, justice and responsibility. They move from the descriptive to the prescriptive and even the prospective, working rhetorically, "between what has been done and what will be done, between the accomplished and the potential" (Caws, 2001).

In order to consider the relationship between the genre of manifestos and recent advances in the theory and practice of the Commons, we must start from how these operate as cultural and symbolic resources that can create new avenues for collective action (Sandström *et al.*, 2017), also activating imaginaries that can build a sense of community based on mutuality and rationality (Harcourt, 2019). It is from this perspective that we can approach and understand recent manifestos around the concept of digital commons that start to incorporate, albeit timidly, mentions to the usual extractivism of large platforms capturing the value of social exchange by monetizing the data and selling user's 'attention' to advertisers (Bauwens *et al.*, 2019). Or manifestos that, starting from feminist and transition perspectives, address the importance of the commons as a shared culture, prior to the structuring of alternatives (Troncoso & Utratel, 2019), as well as the key concept of public service around digital commons (Fuchs & Unterberger, 2021). In this sense, as indicated by De Rosnay and Stalder (2020) "the constitution of data commons also needs to overcome the apparent contradiction between personal data and property, and between privacy and open access, as a personal data commons would not lead to sharing personal information, but to govern their reuse according to values of the digital commons".

The DDDC Manifesto involved the idea of technopolitical democratization (Calleja-López, 2018) that characterizes the Decidim project. In that sense, it situated participation and deliberation at its core. Participation was understood as a form of "taking part as peers" (Roth *et al.*, 2019) and thereby as a commitment to openness and inclusion of anyone and everyone (Ranciere, 2005) on equal terms (rather than as a function of knowledge, expertise, money or credentials), and in the tradition of participatory democracy (Barber, 2003). This approach to deliberation, in turn, implied a commitment to the exchange of publicly accessible and

reasoned proposals, views, and judgments, oriented to reach agreements open to amendment in the future (to put it with Gutmann & Thompson, 2004), in a process in which the only acceptable force is the force of the better argument, as reclaimed by Habermas. Crucially, though, nurturing inclusion on the deliberative front implied exploring other forms of reasoning, interacting and world-making beyond the logo-centric and passionless modes typically associated with the deliberative tradition. As we show below, alternative methodologies of deliberation involving speculation, imagination and play were deployed during the co-creation of the DDDC manifesto.

The data commons manifesto within the DDDC pilot

In particular, the DDDC Manifesto follows a systematic co-creation approach (Senabre Hidalgo *et al.*, 2022). The pilot had the key goal of enriching and testing a technological architecture developed to give users more control over their data. In the terminology of the project, it would increase privacy and data sovereignty (Hummel *et al.*, 2018), which goes against the grain of the current model of data extraction and storage by corporations. It was a process of sociotechnical construction whose core was not primarily the design or even the test of a technology (which certainly played a role), but rather, the co-creation of a narrative involving a community.

The Open University of Catalonia, as a part of the DECODE consortium, ran the DDDC pilot between 2018 and 2019. The participatory, online-offline process was oriented to collectively imagine an alternative data economy and society while implementing DECODE technology. The pilot took place for 6 months and was developed in several phases, running between October 2018 and April 2019. Throughout the process, different face-to-face meetings were held, connected with the activity developed on the Decidim platform.

The three key expected outputs of the pilot can be reframed in terms of the technological, narrative, and social dimensions mentioned earlier: first, a technological output was developed to test the integration between the DECODE architecture and the Decidim platform (Sagarra *et al.*, 2019); secondly, a textual output created to test the collaborative development of a critical narrative around data; and lastly, a sociotechnical result to generate a public debate and a community around these issues.

Co-creation approach for drafting a manifesto on data commons: community, technologies and narrative

For the specific methodology for the creation of the manifesto, drawing on the need to combine different knowledge backgrounds and perspectives from scholars and practitioners in the context of the DDDC pilot, we describe and analyse below the co-creation process of a manifesto as a sociotechnical process. The main strategy was to establish a collaborative discussion and writing process that could make previous conversations around the DECODE project crystallize in a shared narrative, which afterwards could be published online within the Decidim platform, therefore entering a second stage of discussion, support and dissemination. The methodological rationale of this approach was twofold: first, applying participatory design as a key practice of co-creation (Sanders & Stappers, 2008) to manage the diversity and complexity of transdisciplinary collaboration (Sanders *et al.*, 2010), and specifically adapt it to the experimental format of "writing sprints" (Hawkins, 2016) and "writing retreats" (Benvenuti, 2017). Second, opting for a manifesto as an interaction-based outcome, considering it from a co-creation perspective as a performative textual and narrative format (Ashby *et al.*, 2017; Hanna, 2019). Such an approach can bridge diversity of knowledge as a social impact and communication strategy (Freedman, 2018). Our methodologies for this manifesto co-creation served to explore and build a shared vision (rather than merely putting a pre-existing one into words), and also contributed to going beyond the paradigm of the "expert-author", by opening the process up to a variety of actors. This final stage of open sharing brought together a network of collectives interested in the issues addressed by the manifesto, in a way that not only the object (the manifesto itself) but also the subject (the related network), co-emerged during the mentioned DDDC pilot process.

The collaborative writing of the DDDC Manifesto had three main phases. First, an open debate with the participation of communities of experts and stakeholders. Second, a co-writing sprint manuscript, led by DECODE partners (from Internet Interdisciplinary Institute at Universitat Oberta de Catalunya), based on the outcomes of the debate, and finally, a manifesto open public signature and dissemination phase. The outcomes and results of the process are presented and described in this section following the three core aspects of the DDDC pilot, under a threefold sociotechnical perspective: (1) "Community": participants, knowledge base and overall engagement process, (2) "Technologies": manifesto co-creation process, techniques and tools used, and (3) "Narrative": content analysis and use of the resulting manifesto.

Derived from the overall community engagement process and the content generated in the two preliminary workshops described above, the DDDC Manifesto co-writing sprint represented a challenge to structure the necessary narrative, following a coherent participatory approach. Dotson (2017) highlights that community exists along a spectrum, from 'thin' forms of association to 'thick' ones, where individuals strongly identify with the group. In the case of data commons, understanding this range is key to fostering participation. The community we engaged with reflected a range of interactions, from 'thin' membership, characterized by casual participation, to 'thick' membership, where individuals viewed their involvement as crucial to their identity and the comons' success. Understanding this spectrum was vitalto navigating the challenges of creating a cohesive manifesto. The starting point, in terms of content generated until that stage, was a core structure according to three axes previously defined (legal, economic and governance aspects around data commons) and required to consider a total of 82 concrete

proposals gathered via Decidim for each of the three mentioned axes. Departing from the premise of generating a new text from scratch following a manifesto format, it was necessary to establish key interaction bases that could allow for both the integration of the outcomes of the DDDC pilot and its elaboration, in an iterative and distributed way. For this reason, the manifesto sprint opted for a co-creation dynamic in which various rounds of brainstorming, writing, discussion and review of the text could take place while being developed. Specifically, in order to connect the needed narrative to a process of collective intelligence and creative "commoning", we chose to articulate convergence and divergence sequences as a basic principle grounded in design thinking (Sanders & Stappers, 2008), unfolded iteratively for the development of the first manifesto draft.

Basic principles for a collaborative writing sprint

Adopting an approach that dates back to the principles of Open Space Technology (Owen, 2008), the sprint started with the setting of a flexible workspace where participants could interact together, consisting of a central area with empty wall space for sticky notes and visualizations, and a large main screen to visualize progress. Another prerequisite was to have comfortable "writing corners" with tables and chairs to work autonomously, either individually or as separated clusters, when needed, to write in smaller groups. Another key element in setting the approach and philosophy of the sessions for the two-days sprint, was to display a series of core principles on a small poster with the "Norms of the space for a manifesto sprint", which stated: "(1) Writing is (even) more important than talking!; (2) Reading (our own work) is more important than writing; (3) We are aiming at a manifesto (not an article, nor a book); (4) Let's respect timing and iteration phases". Besides these principles, the establishing of a main facilitation role was also required, adopted by one of the participants to guide the whole process, confirm time frames for each stage, clarify or unblock when necessary during the interactions, and to moderate discussions in the various "convergence" phases. Considering both the setting of the space and the physical artefacts (walls, posters, sticky notes, etc.) as key "soft-technology" resources, this preliminary preparation allowed for the unfolding of a co-creation process guided by principles of shared capacity, reflexivity and flexibility.

"Warm-up" brainstorming about data futures

Before addressing the collaborative writing process itself, it was also necessary to start the sprint stating the importance of taking into account both personal viewpoints and shared visions regarding the topic, as well as a "breaking the ice" technique for discussing and addressing challenges around data commons. For this, a short interaction was conducted among participants at the very beginning of the sprint, consisting in adapting the use of the "Instant Archetypes" toolkit, containing different cards with roles and positions regarding digital and data-related futures. Using this interpretation of the major Arcanes of the tarot deck, as used in previous studies (Desjardins *et al.*, 2020), participants could express personal beliefs in short sentences about prospective scenarios under several diverse viewpoints, such as "The State", "The consumer", "The Academy" or "The hacker", among others (Figure 2).

Once various ideas about possible futures were made explicit by each participant by choosing one of the 20 available cards to visualize a specific viewpoint, a discussion was organized to try to homogenize the different personal visions. Reconstructing the phrase "I believe..." used for each card with a



Figure 2. Results of the interaction using Instant Archetypes.

shared narrative under the formula "We believe...", this was articulated in coherence with the need to depart from plural imaginaries and perceptions about digital technologies, whilst at the same time, including other key issues beyond data (such as power, knowledge, freedom, labour, etc).

Anatomy of a manifesto

Afterwards, as another necessary preliminary step to set the co-writing process, diverse aspects of the structure and content of various manifestos on similar topics were discussed. This was necessary not only for participants to be more familiar with such textual and discourse format, but also to keep adding new perspectives on technology and data-related narratives. Starting from a list previously prepared by some of the participants, among several positioning texts around the question of data (with similar or discordant positions), the main focus was on the "Manifesto in favor of technological sovereignty and digital rights for cities", the "MyData Declaration" and "The Data-Centric Manifesto".

This approach also allowed for participants to familiarize themselves with the core language and characteristics of these manifestos, from their basic structure (in terms of introduction, diagnosis, goals and specific calls to actions) to their descriptive or normative approach, as well as references to actors or narrative styles (such as more aphoristic or argumentative ones, for example).

State of the art in previous DDDC proposals

Another necessary step, to connect with the previous DDDC community engagement and co-creation processes, consisted of a phase in which all contributions in the form of DDDC proposals generated until then could be taken into account for the manifesto. For this, based on the ideas from participants in the two previous workshops, as well as the period of open online participation through the Decidim tool mentioned above, a total of 82 paper cards were printed with their title and description (Figure 3). This allowed their ordering and the prioritizing of those which could provide important ideas and insights during the elaboration of the manifesto, by targeting key issues as well as specifying key policies or principles to take into account for the final structure of the text.

These cards, extracted and printed from the Decidim online interface, represented an opportunity to convert concepts from a digital format into an offline one, where they could be rearranged and re-appropriated in order to gain wider significance and coherence under a co-creation approach.

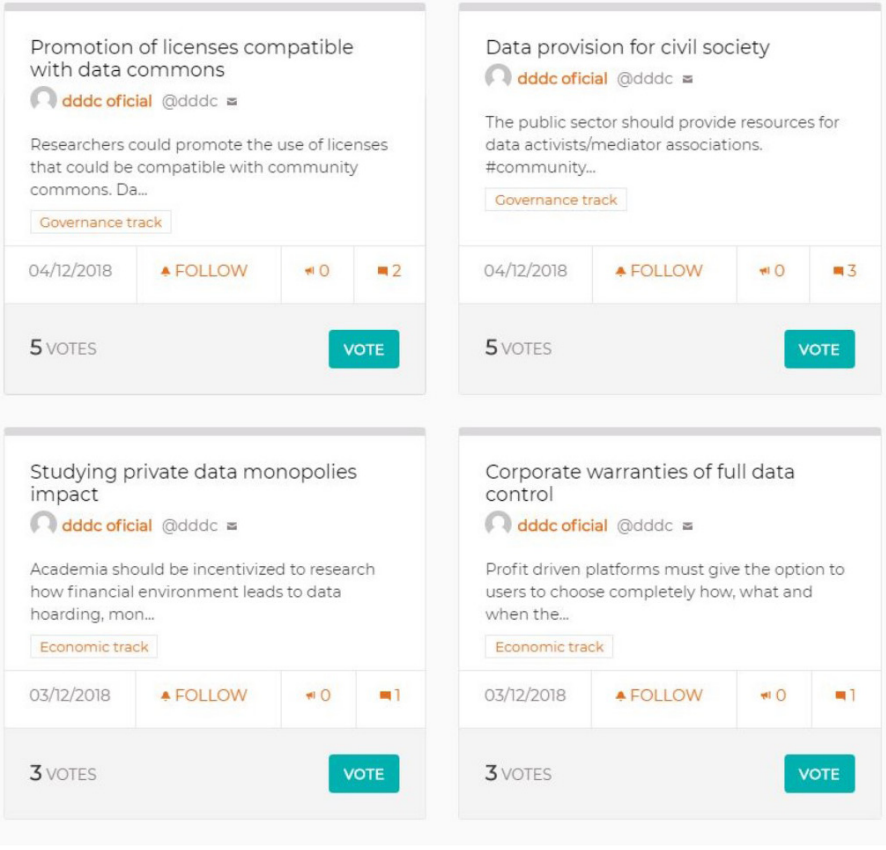


Figure 3. Sample of four cards with previous proposals for the manifesto (source: Decidim platform).

Generative writing phase: sequence of divergence

The co-writing process began with a division into small work groups based around a different set of cards and their DDDC proposals. In this way, there could be an initial autonomous development of content according to the identified areas in relation to data commons: legal, economic and governance aspects. For this, groups of 3 or 4 participants were allocated in different areas of the space and each one discussed and sought to develop previous contents, using a synthetic format of "bullet points" and lists of concepts. The groups first worked on their own digital document on a digital PAD, as a co-creative phase of divergence, which allowed adding as many ideas as possible. Subsequently, prior to merging the different sections into a single digital document (in order to move forward in an integrated way), each group "rotated" to another table to review and try to improve or expand what had been written. This type of informal "peer-review" was based on the "World Cafe" methodology (Steier *et al.*, 2015), where a member of the original group remained in place to present and clarify what was previously written and decided in that specific section of the manifesto draft.

Cohesive writing phase: sequence of convergence

After repeating another writing review sequence, at the end of the first day there were different texts as subsections developed on each pad. These were merged on a single digital document, which served as a starting point for the next sprint day. This second, cohesive writing phase started with a visualization of the manifesto draft based on the open source Voyant Tools text analysis software, which allowed participants to have an overview of keywords, recurrences, and general structure of the manifesto as generated the previous day. Afterwards, a complete version of the manifesto draft was printed on large format paper, with identical copies placed on different tables, allowing different groups of participants to continue working in parallel on the text via analogical reading and paper annotations.

At the end of the second sprint day, after digitalizing the annotations and conclusions derived from the parallel review of the manifesto draft, a final group discussion took place with two experts in data commons and digital policies as external participants. This allowed the group to focus on the introductory section of the manifesto and to identify necessary improvements prior to publication. Then, a final version of the text was agreed, needing subsequent "touch-ups" online (for a limited time in the following weeks), but already with a broad consent for its publication and dissemination.

Results of process and the DDDC Manifesto

The DDDC pilot described consisted of a six-month process, and a variety of actors were involved as a result. The community of participants began to coalesce at a preliminary "kick off workshop" that took place in October 2018 at Fabra & Coats (Barcelona), in the context of the event "Digital Cities, Digital Freedoms: Digital Commons, Ethical Standards and Free Software for Cities". The gathering was a starting point for a participatory diagnosis about the state of legal, governance and economic models currently emerging around data, supported by analyses previously developed in the context of the DECODE project. This initial phase allowed us to address the novelty and complexity of knowledge areas intersecting with the topic of data commons. This first workshop engaged 35 participants to discuss and confirm the need to advance, in parallel, in the three main areas: legal, economic and governance perspectives. Based on the diagnosis of the initial meeting, a second preliminary workshop was organized during the Sharing Cities Summit, in November 2018, which generated additional proposals for the three mentioned axes of the DDDC pilot (legal, governance and economic). Proposals which emerged during that co-creation process were added to the Decidim digital platform to be debated and voted on. Working in specific areas, 223 participants and platform users were able to include 82 additional proposals for these axes as well as general ones, which as described constituted the raw content for the subsequent manifesto sprint. The final online document consisted of a 1,363-words corpus of text with three main sections, for which we reflect here some of the most relevant excerpts:

Diagnosis

- "Today, everything can be turned into data. Digital technology is deeply changing the world and the way we work, learn, move, share, decide; even the way we love". [...]

- "Free software, hardware, knowledge, and culture point towards a digital society without artificial scarcity, grounded on a logic of fairness and cooperation rather than exploitation and competition". [...]

- "There is a need to advance from open data to data commons, from "my data" to "our data". Data commons mean data of, by and for the people".

Beliefs, principles and values

- "Privacy and data protection are key: furthermore, people have the right to be free from all forms of unlawful or unfair interference in their digital life". [...]

- "Data should primarily nurture emancipatory social transformation instead of unjust perpetuation, blind disruption or mere innovation". [...]

- "Corporations should respect people's digital life and rights worldwide, the State should work for this, and the people ascertain it". [...]

Goals and actions

- (Rights and society. Constructing a well-regulated and fair digital society) "Develop and promote technological, legal and practical tools that provide privacy, security, and ethics by design". [...]

- (Democracy. Building an augmented democracy) "Generate spaces where citizens can participate in data-based research agendas, specially, based on public data". [...]

- (Economy. Moving towards a commons-based digital economy) “Incentivize the development and scope of digital platforms that do not base their sustainability in user’s data exploitation, but in a commons oriented sustainability model”. [...]

To observe and reflect the evolution of the manifesto’s narrative between the different phases of co-creation, we performed a contrast of content versions. To do so, we used again Voyant Tools, which allowed us to focus on how different key aspects of the content evolved after the initial and final drafting of the manifesto, rather than focusing on issues such as number of sprint participants, their origin or transdisciplinary background.

When we compare the final version of the manifesto (as agreed and published after the co-writing sprint) with previous versions of the draft (in the preliminary stages of collaborative writing on PADs), some relevant factors could be observed around the evolution of its dimension, structure and narrative. A first consideration when we analysed textual content and discourse between previous and final versions was how key concepts stood out from the rest (Figure 4), reinforcing their presence in the case of the words “data” (from 44 concurrences in the draft to 71 in the final version), “digital” (from 12 to 19) and “commons” (from 11 to 19). Subsequently, the other most relevant terms used in the final version of the manifesto were “public” (10 concurrences) and “people” (9 concurrences), above terms used more often in preliminary versions such as “promote” (8 concurrences) and “society” (8 concurrences), in a sort transition from an administrative style to one of political agency –of claiming public responsibility beyond abstract demands. This also suggests that the manifesto’s final content elaboration contained more clear and accessible language than in its preliminary draft, reflecting how the co-creation process in relation to narratives and discourse moved progressively away from a scholarly and policy-oriented tone.

A general visualization of the frequency in which these terms were distributed throughout both versions of the manifesto in (Figure 5), also suggested that the term “data” was used more prominently and recurrently in the final one. This changed from a few lines to 847 words in the draft during the sprint manifesto, and afterwards 1,378 words in its final version. Another order of comparisons related to how the initial tripartite topic structure evolved. Focused on the issues of legal and rights, socio-economic context, and governance and democratizing aspects, with just a brief introduction, the draft version moved to a much more cohesive document structure in the final version of the manifesto, containing short sentences rather than initial convoluted ones, as well as a more direct tone.

Regarding key new concepts in the final version, the positions and proposals around data commons were preceded by a more detailed diagnosis after the first sprint interactions. For example, when proposing the need to advance in the key area of the network society, clear allusions were made to challenges regarding social control, economic benefit of data, technological determinism and sustainable socio-economic alternatives, among others. An initial section on “Beliefs, principles and values” also stood out in the final structure of the manifesto, preceding the concrete proposals derived from the participatory process of the DDDC pilot. Specifically, these were positions regarding the need to advance in the context of data commons, guided by principles of freedom, equality and sorority, with a desire for processes of augmented democracy, and a sustainable data-based economy respectful to people’s rights.



Figure 4. Comparison of recurrent terms in two versions of the manifesto.

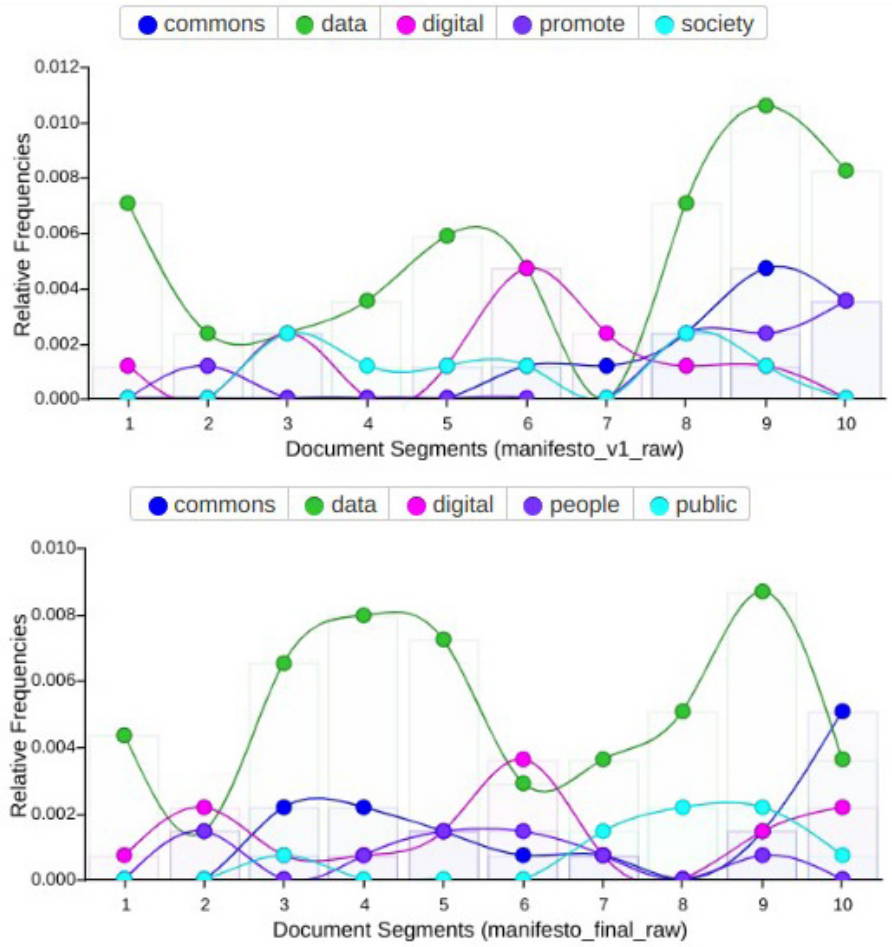


Figure 5. Evolution of the most frequent terms in both versions of the manifesto.

The manifesto's final version, after the co-writing sprint (https://datacommons.barcelona/our-vision/), was presented to the DDDC Final meeting in April 2019. This public event included the open final stage of its digital signing, as the first testing of an alpha version of the DECODE-Decidim technology. It was followed by an open debate with scholars and experts in the field of technology policies and digital economy.

Discussion

This section considers some of the key debates posed by the DDDC pilot process and the resulting DDDC manifesto, highlighting its possibilities and limits. A first key topic relates to the variety of ways for approaching the development of sociotechnical systems. Crucially, the DDDC pilot was a process of sociotechnical co-creation whose core was not primarily the design or even the test of a technology (which certainly played a role), but rather, the co-creation of a narrative and a community. Furthermore, the co-created narrative was about a technological society, rather than a specific or set of technologies. This implied going beyond techno-centric approaches in sociotechnical construction and placing, at its centre, the relationship between narratives and actors. Debates around frames and scripts, not on concrete technologies but on technological paradigms, seem crucial at this moment, in which conceptual and theoretical frameworks around data are still in their infancy. Furthermore, to activate alternative imaginaries represents a crucial approach in the current predicament, where multiple crises seem to haunt existing models of society, politics and economy. To an extent, the DDDC pilot process was a way to counter Jameson's famous quote where "it is easier to imagine an end to the world than an end to capitalism". As Morozov (2015) and Fisher (2009) also argue, imagining non-capitalist futures in a heavily commercialized data economy is a significant challenge. The manifesto seeks to explore such alternatives, though this remains a work in progress. The point was to imagine another possible world in relation to data, a non-capitalist one, where projecting and debating alternative technological societies is as crucial today as building alternative technologies, since they are part of the same process of transformation.

However, it is probably not enough to push only for alternative visions. As our case study reflects, the DDDC approach should not only be understood as a challenge to technocentric approaches to digital developments, but also to more traditional, narrative and socio-centric forms of social transformation.

DDDC and the resulting data commons manifesto put technologies, and not just its social aspects, as a key element for debate. Furthermore, it seeks to provide a political vision of technologies and the social, where the manifesto collaborative writing was itself part of the development of a technology. The key point here can be formulated by rephrasing the traditional Kantian formula around the relations between concepts and intuitions: technologies without narratives are blind, while narratives without technologies are empty.

There is a third key element in the construction of sociotechnical systems relating to this case: the social part, driven by community building, which shaped, and was shaped by, both the technology and the narrative. In this sense, the creation of both technologies and narratives emerged from communities around DECODE and Decidim. This brings us to an additional key point for discussion, the specific form of constructing sociotechnical systems deployed in DDDC: the use of methodologies of co-creation and participation, which put the social and the community at its centre. Community engagement strategies are crucial for raising awareness and addressing the shortcomings of both the existing digital economy and the possibilities of data commons. For this, the principles and methods adopted from participatory design that we described, when applied to the "collaborative writing sprint" format, effectively contributed to outline an alternative narrative of sociotechnical systems, connecting a variety of perspectives that went beyond these in order to succeed. In this sense, having anchoring points, in this case with legal, governance and economic dimensions, was key for advancing understanding and awareness in a wider data commons narrative. Beyond this, the manifesto format afforded a type of participation more open than a purely "policy-oriented" process, in that a wider diversity of people could connect to the political debates that emerged in parallel. As noted before, a final key result of this type of participatory process, guided by co-creation methods, was the constitution of the local Barcelona Data Commons network, an informal link between various Barcelona-based organizations working in the field of data commons, from theoretical to applied perspectives, and from the university to the private sector.

A further key aspect, related to the issue of participation, was the "emergentist" approach adopted for the DDDC pilot. The three elements in sociotechnical construction (technologies, narratives and communities), and in particular those of narrative and community, were not ready-made but a result of the co-creation process itself. The narrative did not begin with a set of co-authors with a vision, or an existing community that wanted to reach further, as has usually been the case in modern or "traditional" manifestos. Instead, at the beginning of the DDDC process the vision and the community already existed, but were not explicitly formulated. Only a set of preliminary elements and actors were there in advance, coming from the DECODE project, which meant a broad starting point (unknown for most participants), where the DECODE project members (as part of a pre established consortium) took the role of facilitators rather than "experts". As a result, a sort of collective authorship emerged in the process of building a narrative, a vision, and the technology itself that could implement part of it. The relation between the subject and the object were tinkered through co-creation within the same process, as we have tried to describe.

However, while proving their potential to construct and perform narratives, technologies and communities, the approach in the DDDC pilot also showed several limits, either of principle or practice. Narratives, technologies and communities are key elements in social transformation, but they are difficult both to create, align and sustain. Explicitly multiplying the number of factors under construction for articulating a shared discourse, as exemplified in the manifesto sprint, increases the resources required and widens the probabilities of narrative consistency. In the case of DDDC, the success on each of these fronts could be considered asymmetric. A technology was tested, but only in an alpha version that would require extra resources to be fully functional. Beyond that, there is also the core issue of the wider adoption of the DDDC pilot. On the narrative side, the manifesto took a powerful rhetorical form, but its internal structure still displays flaws: the listed policy proposal currently has a weak connection with earlier parts, for example. Also, some proposals lack a principle of organization and the action points remain unclear, so overall, the final version of the text does not follow a fully consistent development. Much of this has to do with the participatory nature of the process of its drafting, as well as the time limits framed by the context of a project with different aspects, participants and especially deadlines, which can set clear areas of discourse but can also affect others in its intention or extension.

There were also limits of participation itself. A key one had to do with selection bias, which can take a quantitative form (total number of people in relation to the ideal number of people) and a qualitative form (social profiles excluded from, or not sufficiently enticed by the process). This selection is especially significant regarding technology, when mostly "white, male, middle-age, middle-high income" profiles tend to predominate. Regarding the selection bias in the case of the DDDC pilot, more than 200 people participated in the overall process, and the data we have suggests that while there was no gender disparity, other gaps, such as racial disparities, were patently present. A second limitation is participation bias, that is, the balance between different participants, internal power dynamics and various ways of engaging in practice. Even though the DDDC spaces were mediated and oriented forms of equal participation, certain actors, especially those of the DECODE consortium, played a central role throughout the process, not only as facilitators, but also as content producers. In that sense, the break with the "expert" figure was less clear than desired. Finally, a third participation hurdle related to complexity. Participation implies bringing in a variety of voices with different perspectives and levels of knowledge, and for the successful development of a multi-authored text in this case, during the face to face manifesto sprint, limitations in number and type of

participants collecting and writing according to the 82 received proposals were evident as well (12 sprint participants in total, through the overall process previous to online sharing). On the other hand, even with a proper structure, it is difficult to manage the social and, in this case, complexity of data as a topic. As a result, the manifesto can be seen as still unconcluded and far from a perfect piece both in rhetorical and policy terms, and therefore as a sort of "beta version".

Conclusions

The present paper presents and analyzes the results of a collaborative writing sprint carried out in the framework of the DDDC pilot (DECODE project). The methodological approach to the study stems from the theory of manifestos and deliberative and participatory democracy, with special emphasis in the contributions of the theory of sociotechnical systems, commons and co-creation. Though the DECODE-Decidim project concluded in 2019, its principles of decentralized governance and data sovereignty remain highly relevant in the face of contemporary challenges posed by AI and algorithmic systems. As AI technologies increasingly disrupt various sectors and fuel concerns around data exploitation and surveillance, the principles embedded in the Digital Democracy and Data Commons Manifesto offer a technopolitical counter-narrative that emphasizes human-centric and democratic data governance.

The Digital Democracy and Data Commons Manifesto transcends its role as a mere textual document, functioning as a technopolitical artefact designed to challenge the dominant AI-driven and data-extractive models of governance. By advocating for decentralized and commons-based alternatives, the manifesto offers a blueprint for community-oriented data systems that resist the technocentric and extractivist logics of current platforms. The writing sprint represented an effort to gather the needs expressed by participants, at different stages, to increase privacy and data sovereignty, facing the current model of data extraction and exploitation by big tech corporations. The phases for its creation were consistent with divergence and convergence iterations typical in participatory design, moving from an informal corpus of content to structured sections and specific ideas and claims in the resulting text.

As a result, the co-creation of the manifesto was not only able to integrate the previous outcomes of a participatory process via the Decidim platform, and via specific workshops with diverse participants, but also to evolve through several versions in a relatively short time, which ended up in a structured corpus of an alternative narrative addressing shared visions about data commons.

Among the main limitations of our case study, beyond the complexity of adopting comparative approaches with other similar cases (due to the novel methodological and technical process adopted and described here), the main one was selection bias regarding the viability of including all previous participants into the two-days sprint, due to its face to face and intensive nature. While the manifesto provides a robust rhetorical foundation, we recognize that a more detailed alignment between its narrative and actionable steps would improve its uptake. The challenge lies not just in the content but in transforming these ideas into lived sociotechnical realities that engage communities at a deeper level. We acknowledge that constructing alternative sociotechnical imaginaries requires more than articulating ideas on paper. The success of such efforts lies in fostering continuous engagement and community practices that embody these ideals, linking policy to everyday data governance practices. Indeed, Purtova & van Maanen (2023) emphasize the importance of aligning data governance models with practical outcomes that address the specific challenges of data capitalism. The manifesto attempts to bridge this gap, though further work is required to align its vision with policy. Indeed, recent works on digital sovereignty and urban data governance have highlighted the importance of commons-based frameworks in addressing the challenges posed by smart city infrastructures and AI-driven data economies. For instance, Calzada (2021) emphasizes the significance of 'data sovereignty' in smart cities as a means to resist data extractivism and promote participatory urban governance. Scholars like Fuchs (2021), Morozov (2015), and Ostrom (1990) also underline the importance of participatory models that challenge the extractivist practices of big tech and offer viable alternatives for community-centered data governance.

In this sense, however, we consider the manifesto and the results of the process that led to its collaborative writing, as a sort of sociotechnical narrative commons in practice, and therefore as an open outcome -both regarding this article and the manifesto itself.

Data availability

No data are associated with this article.

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✓ **Carla Bonina**
University of Surrey, Guildford, England, UK

This article delves into the collaborative creation of the Digital Democracy and Data Commons (DDDC) Manifesto under the EU Horizon 2020 DECODE project. It highlights the importance of participatory design and data governance that prioritizes community control, ethical considerations, and democratic participation. The authors detail the co-creation process involving in-person and digital practices, leading to a manifesto advocating for transitioning from data extractivism to a commons-based model. By framing the manifesto as a technopolitical artifact, the paper contributes to ongoing debates about digital sovereignty and sociotechnical imaginaries.

I thoroughly enjoyed reading the article. My review acknowledges that the Open Letter has undergone several rounds of peer review, which provided valuable feedback for improvement. The authors have already incorporated critical suggestions, such as enhancing theoretical and case contextualization, integrating key literature, and clarifying the Manifesto's relevance. I found the section on "Co-creating Visions" particularly robust and very informative.

The following minor suggestions aim to further enhance the manuscript.

Diversity and Inclusivity in Participation. One key theme that I commend in the article has to do with the integration of community, technological, and narrative dimensions in the co-creation process, and its focus on inclusivity and participation. The paper documents that this process involved challenges (which are common in participatory designs); the manuscript rightly acknowledges the different selection, participation and complexity bias in the discussion, highlighting a gender balance but racial and socioeconomic gaps among participants. I was particularly curious to understand the participant demographics, and how the participants were invited/selected at different stages in the project. Adding this point could add value to other participatory process, and I'd suggest the authors to explain briefly how the invitation and selection was done, as well as a summary of the profile of the participants over time. A clear fit would be in the Co-creation approach for drafting a manifesto..." section.

In addition, because the selection bias is highlighted as a main limitation, it'd be interesting to outline those specific lessons learned in the recruiting or selection process that could be helpful to mitigate the bias in future processes.

On the Sociotechnical Design and the Co-Existence of Face-to-Face and Online Co-Creation Dynamics. The manuscript does a very good job of describing how the Decidim platform was used in conjunction with other participatory practices conducted outside digital means. The conclusions could include a brief note about future work, suggesting the provision of more detailed examples of specific functionalities of Decidim that supported participatory design and how these functionalities reinforced the manifesto's feasibility and relevance in data governance debates. By doing so, it could contribute more broadly to the extensive literature on online deliberation and illustrate how the process of co-creation may shape its outcomes.

Overall, I find the piece engaging and with the potential to spark debate in a growing and highly relevant area of data governance. Its integration of participatory methods with sociotechnical systems design is insightful, and the focus on building an inclusive process is commendable. The suggestions offered above are intended to refine specific aspects of the manuscript and enhance its impact on both academic and practical discussions.

Is the rationale for the Open Letter provided in sufficient detail? (Please consider whether existing challenges in the field are outlined clearly and whether the purpose of the letter is explained)
Yes

Does the article adequately reference differing views and opinions?
Yes

Are all factual statements correct, and are statements and arguments made adequately supported by citations?
Yes

Is the Open Letter written in accessible language? (Please consider whether all subject-specific terms, concepts and abbreviations are explained)
Yes

Where applicable, are recommendations and next steps explained clearly for others to follow? (Please consider whether others in the research community would be able to implement guidelines or recommendations and/or constructively engage in the debate)
Partly

Competing Interests: No competing interests were disclosed.

Reviewer Expertise: Data governance, digital platforms, digital inclusion, policy

I confirm that I have read this submission and believe that I have an appropriate level of expertise to confirm that it is of an acceptable scientific standard.

Reviewer Report 06 December 2024

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Claude Draude
University of Kassel, Kassel, Germany

The Open Letter reconstructs and discusses the six-month development process that resulted in the "Digital Democracy and Data Commons Manifesto". The manifesto development was conducted as part of the EU-funded DECODE (Decentralized Citizen Owned Data Ecosystems) project and gives insight into the Barcelona Data Commons network.

The authors' intention with the Open Letter is two-fold: tracing the writing sprint that enabled contributors from various backgrounds to co-create the manifesto as well as analyzing how the co-creative and iterative process shaped and altered the content structure of the manifesto.

The Open Letter seeks to illustrate how collaborative, participatory design approaches can address pressing concerns related to datafication and empower citizens in the digital sphere through data commons. The evolvement from manifesto to technopolitical artefact which is retraced in the revised Open Letter is particularly interesting.

The Open Letter has already been subject to several rounds of peer-review that provided valuable feedback and comments for improvement. In the current version, suggestions such as integrating key literature, providing contextualization etc., have been incorporated and led to an improved version of the original paper.

At this stage, I have only a few minor suggestions that could be integrated to enhance readability and understanding, particularly for a broader audience.

1. The introduction starts with the problem scope and then switches to the manifesto and DECODE project. The project is then explained in the DDDC pilot section. For people unfamiliar with the background it would be beneficial to introduce the DECODE project and background when first mentioned, at least briefly.
2. Links to the Communist Manifesto and Accelerationist Manifesto would increase accessibility of the Open Letter.
3. The link to the DDDC Manifesto appears to be broken.
4. Further references have been included as a response to previous reviews. The use of references and the explanations of concepts is executed at different levels of depths, however. In line with the Open Letter format my suggestion is to go through the manuscript once more and make sure that concepts are not only substantiated through literature but also briefly explained. Examples are "design thinking" or, more importantly, because it is central to your approach, "participatory design".
5. Questions of power and the redistribution of power, in particular, are central to participatory design practices. While you mention power dynamics in your paper this aspect

could be taken up in the conclusion and made more prominent.

6. The discussion and conclusion section could connect back to, or further develop, some of the arguments and findings introduced in the introduction. This would enhance the discussion and conclusion by providing a more critical and in-depth analysis—not only of the collaborative writing sprint but also of this (or similar) approaches in the broader context of a datafied society.

Is the rationale for the Open Letter provided in sufficient detail? (Please consider whether existing challenges in the field are outlined clearly and whether the purpose of the letter is explained)
Yes

Does the article adequately reference differing views and opinions?
Yes

Are all factual statements correct, and are statements and arguments made adequately supported by citations?
Yes

Is the Open Letter written in accessible language? (Please consider whether all subject-specific terms, concepts and abbreviations are explained)
Partly

Where applicable, are recommendations and next steps explained clearly for others to follow? (Please consider whether others in the research community would be able to implement guidelines or recommendations and/or constructively engage in the debate)
Partly

Competing Interests: No competing interests were disclosed.

Reviewer Expertise: Sociotechnical systems design; participatory design; design applications, methodologies and theories for more inclusive, socially just digital systems

I confirm that I have read this submission and believe that I have an appropriate level of expertise to confirm that it is of an acceptable scientific standard.

Reviewer Report 25 November 2024

https://doi.org/10.21956/openreseurope.20313.r45628

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Matthew Hanchard

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The paper is well-written and has clearly been through several rounds of proofing and peer-review. It presents Decidim, DECODE, the DDDC manifesto (and the need for it) alongside the emergence of the Barcelona Data Commons network very well.

However, I might have expected a little more on the wider context in which a manifesto might sit. For example, there is no mention of the OSTP's Nelson Memo, or COAlition S's Plan S, UNESCO 'Recommendation on Open Science' , or even the recent Barcelona declaration. These all direct contemporary research policy towards open access data (forming a particular policy landscape), and could easily have been drawn on by the author(s) to evidence the significance the paper itself more forcefully – and with it, the need for a manifesto and more emergentist and participatory ways of working.

Similarly, a broader discussion on the role of open data amidst a shift in the way science and democracy are configured, could have perhaps drawn on discussion of longer-standing movements towards open source, open access, open research, and open science in general – including the politics of the copyleft movement vs. a standardisation of data repositories. At times these are hinted at, with head-nods – but then never quite followed up. Their importance is all-the-more-so when the author(s) speak of extractivism and the notion of a commons (with the spectre of capitalism hinted at, but never fully drawn out). Other manifestos discussed in the paper do this specifically and explicitly as political intervention. Instead, democracy (deliberative or otherwise) is spoken of in methodological terms, and linked to participation at the level of epistemics and not ontology. This leaves the paper feeling a little descriptive, and lacking depth in terms of the author(s) voice and personal politics; it is a thesis *for* participation in which the author(s) hold back on their own participation.

A short paragraph in the discussion section could have summarised the above and linked them back to the introductory section, adding voice and personality. Within the author(s)' own framework – which I might add, is very well articulated in the Introduction section – this indeed could have leant on Jasanoff (and Kim) to work around sociotechnical imaginaries, or looked to place a data commons manifesto as a niche intervention within a particular sociotechnical regime or configuration of open data, or even offered a Latourian mapping. In any new/revised version drafted, that would certainly make a welcome addition – but it is a 'nice to have', not a necessary or required change for me.

Otherwise, there are no major faults in this paper. It sets out its aim, charts a theoretical approach and methodology, discusses the research, and presents an argument for a manifesto and a commons. In doing so it meets its promises well, and with an appropriate level of rigour. While it is tempting to nit-pick faults just to 'prove my worth' as a reviewer, doing so would be entirely unnecessary – the paper is sound as it is, and has clearly already been strengthened by addressing the previous round of reviewers' comments. There is little more I can add, and I shall look forward to reading future work by the author(s)

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6. UNESCO: UNESCO Recommendation on Open Science. 2021. Publisher Full Text

Is the rationale for the Open Letter provided in sufficient detail? (Please consider whether existing challenges in the field are outlined clearly and whether the purpose of the letter is explained)

Yes

Does the article adequately reference differing views and opinions?

Yes

Are all factual statements correct, and are statements and arguments made adequately supported by citations?

Yes

Is the Open Letter written in accessible language? (Please consider whether all subject-specific terms, concepts and abbreviations are explained)

Yes

Where applicable, are recommendations and next steps explained clearly for others to follow? (Please consider whether others in the research community would be able to implement guidelines or recommendations and/or constructively engage in the debate)
Yes

Competing Interests: No competing interests were disclosed.

Reviewer Expertise: Open access, Digital society, Digital sociology, Research Methodology (including Participatory methods), and Science and Technology Studies (STS).

I confirm that I have read this submission and believe that I have an appropriate level of expertise to confirm that it is of an acceptable scientific standard.

Reviewer Report 21 November 2024

https://doi.org/10.21956/openreseurope.20313.r45515

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Thank you for the revised version in which you accommodated our feedback. We think that the authors revised their paper in a satisfactory manner, and we especially appreciate the changes made in the conclusions of the paper.

We have several comments that have to do with the location in the text of newly added sentences. We are not sure whether the section starting with “While the process aimed for inclusive participation …” is integrated well. Please make sure that the sentences before and after this insertion are well-connected to the included sentences. Please do the same thing for the added section on Dotson (starting with “Dotson (2017) highlights that…”). Here it feels like these sentences are directly inserted in the former text without changing the flow of the text and the order of the themes discussed there. The authors indicate that ‘understanding this spectrum was vital to navigating the challenges of creating a cohesive manifesto’. Yet, the paper does not clearly state how this would be indeed the case concretely. Alternatively, the reference to the thin / thick community spectrum may also consist of an analysis lens leveraged only a posteriori, which is not necessarily a bad thing either but would also have to be expanded. In short, the reference to the community spectrum, as it is, looks a bit artificial and contrived. Perhaps further reflections on Dotson’s distinction could find more space in the conclusions section, to better integrate it within the overall analysis. Lastly, the sentence “Indeed, Purtova & van Maanen (2023) emphasize the

importance of aligning data governance models with practical outcomes that address the specific challenges of data capitalism. The manifesto attempts to bridge this gap, though further work is required to align its vision with policy." (from the Conclusions section) could be fleshed out to include a warrant against top-down, paternalistic approaches to policymaking which impose ideal models of data commons based on different contexts and experiences. This adjustment would be in line with the paper's commitment to democratic participation and deliberation.

Is the rationale for the Open Letter provided in sufficient detail? (Please consider whether existing challenges in the field are outlined clearly and whether the purpose of the letter is explained)
Yes

Does the article adequately reference differing views and opinions?
Yes

Are all factual statements correct, and are statements and arguments made adequately supported by citations?
Yes

Is the Open Letter written in accessible language? (Please consider whether all subject-specific terms, concepts and abbreviations are explained)
Yes

Where applicable, are recommendations and next steps explained clearly for others to follow? (Please consider whether others in the research community would be able to implement guidelines or recommendations and/or constructively engage in the debate)
Yes

Competing Interests: No competing interests were disclosed.

Reviewer Expertise: Political theory; Science and Technology Studies; data governance

We confirm that we have read this submission and believe that we have an appropriate level of expertise to confirm that it is of an acceptable scientific standard.

Version 1

Reviewer Report 14 August 2024

https://doi.org/10.21956/openreseurope.18393.r39846

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Igor Calzada
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This paper tackles the timely and crucial topic of data commons, offering insights into its potential significance amidst contemporary sociotechnical landscapes. While the paper introduces an important contextual topic, namely data commons, the integration of references appears somewhat lacking in thoroughness. Nevertheless, given the potential contribution to the ongoing literature review on data commons, the article merits consideration for indexing.

A notable aspect that requires attention is the positioning of data commons within the broader literature. The manuscript could benefit from a more comprehensive integration of existing literature on the subject to enhance its contextualization. Furthermore, the reference to DECODE-Decidim, though relevant, prompts questions regarding the currency of the research, considering the project's historical nature. Clarification from the author regarding how their manifesto addresses contemporary concerns surrounding AI disruption and paranoia would be valuable.

The suggestion to present data commons not only as a manifesto but also as a technopolitical artefact offers an intriguing avenue for exploration. Such an approach could provide an alternative perspective to the prevailing technocentric, AI-driven global narrative. Accordingly, I recommend that the manuscript undergo a thorough revision to address these points and strengthen its positioning within the current discourse.

Additionally, the absence of key literature on the topic is a notable gap that warrants attention. Including relevant literature would enrich the scholarly contribution of the paper and provide readers with a more comprehensive understanding of the subject matter.

The abstract effectively highlights the paper's focus on addressing concerns regarding the proprietary and exploitative use of personal data, framing digital commons as a potential alternative. The experimental approach outlined, aimed at co-creating the Digital Democracy and Data Commons Manifesto, demonstrates a commitment to principles of openness, diversity, and inclusivity.
However, the abstract could benefit from clearer delineation of the specific outcomes of the collaborative writing sprint and the subsequent analysis of the manifesto's evolution. Providing more detailed insights into the methodology and results would enhance the abstract's comprehensiveness and clarity.

In conclusion, while the paper shows promise in addressing pertinent issues surrounding data commons, several areas require refinement to strengthen its scholarly contribution and relevance. With revisions to improve the integration of references, address historical context, and enhance clarity and comprehensiveness, the manuscript has the potential to make a valuable addition to the literature on this important topic.

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Is the rationale for the Open Letter provided in sufficient detail? (Please consider whether existing challenges in the field are outlined clearly and whether the purpose of the letter is explained)
Partly

Does the article adequately reference differing views and opinions?
Partly

Are all factual statements correct, and are statements and arguments made adequately supported by citations?
Partly

Is the Open Letter written in accessible language? (Please consider whether all subject-specific terms, concepts and abbreviations are explained)
Partly

Where applicable, are recommendations and next steps explained clearly for others to follow? (Please consider whether others in the research community would be able to implement guidelines or recommendations and/or constructively engage in the debate)
Partly

Competing Interests: No competing interests were disclosed.

Reviewer Expertise: technopolitics, datafication, social innovation

I confirm that I have read this submission and believe that I have an appropriate level of expertise to confirm that it is of an acceptable scientific standard, however I have significant reservations, as outlined above.

Author Response 17 Oct 2024

Ricard ESPELT

Thank you very much for your insightful and constructive feedback on our manuscript, "Co-creation of the Digital Democracy and Data Commons Manifesto: Alternative Sociotechnical Visions of Data." We appreciate your detailed comments and suggestions, which have helped us to improve the manuscript significantly. Below, we address each of your points in detail, outlining the changes we have made to strengthen the integration of key literature, clarify the historical context, and enhance the overall clarity and contribution of the paper.
1. Integration of References and Contextualization of Data Commons You noted that the manuscript could benefit from a more comprehensive integration of existing literature on data commons to enhance its contextualization within broader academic discourse. We fully agree with this suggestion and have taken steps to address this. Changes made:

- We have expanded the literature review in the Introduction and Discussion sections to integrate key works on data commons, digital sovereignty, and governance. These include foundational works by Elinor Ostrom (1990), as well as more recent studies by

Fuchs (2021), Morozov (2015), and Purtova & van Maanen (2023). These scholars provide a broader socio-political framework that emphasizes the need for commons-based approaches to data governance.
- Additionally, we have incorporated Igor Calzada's (2021) work on smart cities and data sovereignty, which aligns well with the paper's focus on community-driven governance. Calzada's emphasis on urban data commons as an alternative to extractive models in smart city environments strengthens the manuscript's connection to contemporary issues in data governance.

Relevant Text Added: "In recent years, scholars have increasingly focused on data commons as a critical framework for addressing inequalities and governance challenges in digital ecosystems (Ostrom, 1990; Fuchs, 2021; Morozov, 2015). Furthermore, Calzada (2021) emphasizes the need for 'data sovereignty' in urban settings, presenting the concept of urban data commons as a viable alternative to the extractivist practices of AI-driven smart cities. These contributions provide a robust theoretical foundation for our exploration of data commons as a technopolitical response to contemporary governance challenges."
Reference added:
- Calzada, I. (2021). Data co-operatives through data sovereignty. Smart Cities, 4(3), 1158-1172..

2. Clarification of the DECODE-Decidim project's relevance You raised a valid point regarding the historical nature of the DECODE-Decidim project and its relevance to contemporary concerns, particularly surrounding AI disruption and paranoia. We have revised the manuscript to clarify how the manifesto's principles remain pertinent to current challenges.
Changes made:
- We added a paragraph in the Discussion section that addresses how the outcomes of the DECODE-Decidim project continue to be relevant today, particularly in light of emerging concerns about AI, surveillance, and algorithmic governance.
- The revision links the manifesto's advocacy for data commons and decentralized governance to current debates about AI's impact on privacy and the growing need for data sovereignty.

Relevant text added: "While the DECODE-Decidim project was completed in 2019, its principles of decentralized data governance and data sovereignty remain highly relevant in addressing contemporary concerns surrounding AI disruption and data paranoia. As AI technologies increasingly automate decision-making processes and exacerbate data-driven surveillance, the manifesto's call for community-centered and commons-based governance presents a technopolitical response to these pressing challenges." 3. Reframing the Manifesto as a technopolitical artefact The suggestion to present the data commons manifesto not only as a manifesto but also as a technopolitical artefact offered a valuable opportunity to broaden the scope of the paper. Changes made:
- We have reframed the manifesto in the Conclusion as a technopolitical artefact, emphasizing its potential role as a living document that challenges the dominant technocentric, AI-driven governance models.
- This revision underscores the manifesto's capacity to inspire and guide policy development, digital infrastructure, and participatory technology design.

Relevant text added: "The Digital Democracy and Data Commons Manifesto transcends its role as a mere textual document and functions as a technopolitical artefact that challenges the dominant AI-driven and data-extractive models of governance. By advocating for decentralized and commons-based alternatives, the manifesto offers a practical blueprint

for constructing community-centered data systems that resist the technocentric logics of current platforms." 4. Enhancing the abstract for clarity and specific outcomes You noted that while the abstract effectively highlights the focus of the paper, it could benefit from clearer delineation of the specific outcomes of the collaborative writing sprint and subsequent analysis. Changes made:

- We revised the abstract to include more specific details about the outcomes of the collaborative writing sprint, the methodology used, and the evolution of the manifesto.

Revised abstract: "This paper presents the co-creation of the Digital Democracy and Data Commons Manifesto through a collaborative writing sprint, drawing on principles of openness, diversity, and inclusivity. The manifesto articulates a technopolitical vision for data governance that prioritizes community control over data. We analyze the manifesto's evolution throughout the process, demonstrating its capacity to address contemporary concerns such as data extractivism and algorithmic governance." 5. Incorporation of key literature Finally, you highlighted the absence of key literature on the topic. We have taken steps to address this by incorporating several influential studies that reinforce the paper's theoretical foundation. Changes made:

- We added key references to works by Ostrom (1990), Fuchs (2021), Morozov (2015), Purtova & van Maanen (2023), and Igor Calzada (2021). These references have been integrated throughout the manuscript, particularly in the Introduction and Discussion sections, to strengthen the contextualization of data commons and their relevance to current digital governance challenges.

Relevant text added: "Scholars have increasingly focused on data commons as a framework for addressing inequalities and governance issues in digital ecosystems (Ostrom, 1990; Fuchs, 2021; Morozov, 2015; Purtova & van Maanen, 2023). Calzada (2021), in particular, highlights the significance of urban data commons as a tool for promoting data sovereignty in smart cities, presenting an alternative to extractive models driven by AI and big data."

Competing Interests: No competing interests were disclosed.

Reviewer Report 03 June 2024

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Introduction:
In times when data are considered one of the key ingredients of oppressive and exploitative regimes of, among others, 'data capitalism' and 'platform capitalism', ideas, initiatives and models on how to govern data better have gained prominence in both academic, public, and commercial spheres of society.

The article written by Hidalgo *et al.* can be considered as part of these discussions. What makes Hidalgo *et al.*'s contribution interesting and relevant in light of the growing interest in data governance, is its explicit focus on and reflection about the kind of 'theory of change' needed when attempting to put data governance in practice, namely, one brought about by changes in how we think and talk *about* technology. The authors, in other words, argue for a reversal, or at least a problematization, of the latent techno-determinism still often present in data sharing, governance, or donation initiatives. Hidalgo *et al.*'s starting point is that not only technology, but also rules, infrastructures, stories, and mutual expectations are key to take into consideration and study when researching our sociotechnical reality (Hidalgo et al, p. 1).

By thus going beyond *both* the mere formulation of models, frameworks, and theories, *and* tech and data-deterministic forms of thinking, Hidalgo *et al.* offer a valuable contribution to the EU data governance debates in relation to local (digital) democracy (Fischli & Muldoon, 2024; Micheli et al., 2020).

In the remainder of this review, we take you step by step through Hidalgo *et al.*'s argument and highlight several pointers for further discussion, debate, and research.

Sociotechnical imaginaries:
One of the methodological starting points of the paper is the idea that you cannot understand (and in a second step, change) technological systems without paying attention to 'social' actors and dimensions. 'Sociotechnical systems' is the term used in the field of 'science and technology studies' (STS) to draw attention to the more-than-technological dimensions of technology. Crucial here, for Hidalgo *et al.*, are the widely shared beliefs and visions about technologies and data that support tech companies in their abilities to easily gather, store, and trade data. You need stories about the relevance and value of data, the argument seems to be, to be able to make a living from it. This interrelationship and interdependence of the social in the form of narratives and imaginaries, and data and technology, is for Hidalgo *et al.* sufficient reason to argue that "(...) that transforming sociotechnical systems requires the articulation of alternative narratives and imaginaries." (p. 3) Just like you need stories to convince people of the relevance of data, you need alternative stories to make them change their mind.

While the need to invoke stories and imaginaries when attempting to instantiate societal change is an important point, it is not clear entirely what this would amount to within the specific context of Hidalgo *et al.*'s article. Who was the audience of the project and manifesto (more on this below) and what did they think about the influence of data and technology?

What kinds of beliefs about the importance of for instance data commons did they already have

(or not)? Were those involved tech-enthusiasts without too many worries about the influence of commercial actors on our societies, or did they already agree with the author's problem analysis that there are genuine problems with respect to the governance of data, and these can best be approached via democratic and commons-based approaches?

These are important questions to answer because they will specify the problem to be dealt with - is it really one of a lack of consensus about the problematic nature of big tech, or something else? - and subsequently, the kind of solution best tied to that specific problem-analysis - is that one of narrative-change or the transformation of such narratives into policy? Answers to such questions will be informative for the specific function attached to the co-creation of the manifesto, and hence the success of the project.

Digital democracy, data commons, and community:
Hidalgo *et al.*'s project was part of a 6-month pilot called Digital Democracy and Data Commons (DDDC), that was part of the larger EU funded DECODE ('Decentralized Citizen Owned Data Ecosystems') project organized in Barcelona. DDDC aimed to nurture online and offline discussions by citizens on digital infrastructures, and the collective authoring of a data commons manifesto. Hidalgo *et al.*'s paper discusses this last exercise: the writing of the manifesto.

The authors situate the project within a longer tradition of Manifesto-writing - from the *Communist Manifesto* in the 19th century, to Haraway's *Cyborg Manifesto* in the 1980s - and ask how such texts could function as "cultural and symbolic resources that can create new avenues for collective action," and are also capable of creating "a sense of community based on mutuality and rationality." (p. 4) The writing and publishing of manifestos could thus be of relevance, the authors suggest, for projects like digital and data commons that aim to develop more sustainable and democratic forms of data production, use, and governance.

Hidalgo *et al.* discuss in detail how they organized the collective writing process of their data commons manifesto. Over a period of six months, in several writing and discussion 'sprints', and by making use of various thinking tools and techniques, all participants (a total number of 200 individuals who participated in the process) managed to compose a manifesto which can be found here: (https://datacommons.barcelona/our-vision/; last accessed May 2 2024).

This was, unexpectedly, a complicated and time-consuming process. Many different individuals during different phases needed to be able to have some sort of input into the collaborative writing exercise. That such a process is also fraught with difficulties relating to who and what kind of participants were in the end capable of influencing the process is for readers with some familiarity with deliberative democratic procedures unsurprising. As the authors themselves note in their discussion, limitations with respect to the desired degrees of representation in the group of participants were noticeable. Experts members of the DECODE consortium, for instance, had more of a say in the content that was being produced during those moments. What could have been clarified in the author's analysis of the process is the extent to which experts have shaped co-creation of the manifesto itself. From the brief overview of the various writing phases, an open debate involving 'communities of experts and stakeholders' preceded the co-writing sprint that formed the core of the article's analysis (p. 6). However, the results of such an open debate are not overtly discussed. Even more fundamentally, it is not evident who qualified as a 'stakeholder', nor is discussed the extent to which the outcome of the open debate has shaped and influenced as a blueprint the subsequent phase of co-writing sprint. Moreover, is not explained how the commons

ended up as a solution to the problems under consideration. All these questions are worth paying attention to when trying to grasp which actors influenced the writing process in what way.

Possibly more interesting from the perspective of theories on the digital and data commons, is however the author's usage of the label of 'community' to designate the group of people involved in the collaborative process. As is being argued in the conclusion of the paper,

"Crucially, the DDDC pilot was a process of sociotechnical co-creation whose core was not primarily the design or even the test of a technology (which certainly played a role), but rather, *the co-creation of a narrative and a community*." (p. 11) [emphasis added]

The usage of the concept of community within discussions on commons specifically, and tech development in general, is prevalent. As such, the associations made by the article between 'commons', 'groups', 'collectives', and 'community' is understandable and from a practical point of view probably also desirable. Words and narratives matter for how technology is supposed to work, as the authors explained, and how an initiative is described (or framed) matters for its success.

How the relationship between commons and community is to be understood is, however, a complicated question discussed in both empirical and philosophical literature. In an exchange going back almost 30 years, commons scholars Elinor Ostrom and colleagues Sara Singleton and Michael Taylor discussed the relevance of attaching the label of 'community' to a commons (Ostrom, 1992; Singleton & Taylor, 1992). To what extent does 'community' add to our understanding of what a commons could mean? Ten years later, political theorist Elizabeth Frazer placed her doubts on the often vague and ambiguous usage of the word community by her 'communitarian' peers (Frazer, 1999). Why use the word 'community' for describing a 'neighborhood' when it does not add much to what the latter concept already conveys? What do, we henceforth ask, Hidalgo *et al.* try to convey with their usage of 'community' when describing their project?

In general, we think that there is room for 'community' in the 'commons', although the usage of this term does deserve scrutiny and specification. Network scholar Taylor Dotson identifies seven dimensions of 'community', located on a spectrum ranging from very 'thin' forms of 'community', to very 'thick' ones (Dotson, 2017). Communities whose members, for instance, have a very strong self-identification with that community can be located on the 'thick' end side of the spectrum. For such individuals their membership is of existential importance and leaving the community ('exit') is almost unthinkable for them (cf. Marglin, 2010). For members of more 'thin' communities, by contrast, membership of their community is comparatively speaking less important, often characterized by more contract-based and infrequent interactions, and leaving the community is accordingly also relatively easy and burdenless. Community, in other words, has different dimensions, related to different types of living or working together.

The work of Dotson invites to be specific about the kind of community one is talking about within the context of digital or data commons, in order to better understand the kind of commons one is talking about. How much of the identity of members of the common depends on the existence of the said common? How important is its flourishing for them? Questions like these shed light on what one can expect of the members of a commons, but also on the narratives and imaginaries needed to be able to create these senses of collective self-identification.

And this allows us to move our discussion from the processes to create a manifesto, to the manifesto's content. How is the manifesto tied to what kind of understanding of community, and subsequently, to what kind of idea on what the data commons ought to be?

The data commons manifesto:
The manifesto starts by concisely listing the often-heard harms and dangers present in our digitized economies: the datafication of everything, the lack of control we have about our data and about who controls 'our data', the inequalities, precarisation, et cetera., all caused by the unequal redistribution of the value extracted from data, resulting in the degradation of democracy and the environment.

The manifesto calls for the development of 'strong data commons': data commons that are not merely or only premised on openness (of data, and access to data), but that also take data production, protection, governance, and the 'social responsibility' for their impact into account. Data commons are more than individual data control, and have 'collective dimension'.

In several subsequent sections, the manifesto unpacks the direction data commons should have to go. Key values like freedom, equality, fraternity and sorority should guide the development of a "radical and augmented democracy", where "everyone is allowed, able and willing to rule, and where collective intelligence, deliberation and action are boosted." Commercial actors should 'respect' this, states check whether they do so, and citizens should keep an eye on their political representatives.

More concretely, the manifesto makes cases for several related policy proposals, among others:

The co-construction of a 'model of data commons' where is ensured that the interests of all involved parties are reconciled in a "trustworthy, privacy-protection and mutually value-producing way."

- The regulation, monitoring, and auditing of data by the public sector, with a specific emphasis on interoperability, data portability, data sovereignty.
- Tools to provide privacy, security, and ethics by design, as well as better privacy agreements.
- The promotion of data ecosystems.
- More democratic governance models and data-based citizen participation.
- Educational efforts to increase citizen's 'data-awareness'.
- The empowerment of people through the advancement of data control, data sharing, and data exploitation.
- The promotion of free and creative common licenses that also contribute to "personal and community rights," various data-related citizen science projects.
- And projects revolving around a more 'commons-based' digital economy, including, sustainable digital platforms, open data, 'commons-oriented business', and 'commons communities and ecosystems.'

And not to be forgotten here, is the manifesto's call to go 'beyond data': "(...) data is only a small piece in such endeavors. People and life are their centers."

For readers familiar with the different ways in which - both historically and more recently - the digital and data commons have been understood, a variety of strands in the commons literature can be read into the manifesto (Purtova & van Maanen, 2023). One can recognise the arguments from the commons-based peer production literature about the importance of knowledge sharing for democracy. One can see the more radical interpretations of the commons that argue for strict separations between market, state, and society/commons. Also noticeable are the strands in the literature that do think there is value in citizens themselves to extract the value of data as a means to 'take back some control' over those digital means of production. And woven through those different calls to arms, are proposals to strengthen democratic institutions with the help of digital tools, citizen participation, and citizen-based knowledge production.

The manifesto, in other words, captures nicely and concisely the great plurality of ways in which the digital and data commons can be understood. Because of this, the manifesto's scope has the potential to attract a wide audience. Precisely for this reason, readers of Hidalgo *et al.*'s paper could be a bit at loss when trying to grasp the manifesto's uptake. While the authors write in the conclusion that the 'core issue' was "the wider adoption of the DDC pilot," they seem to explain this by referring to the 'internal structure' of the manifesto:

"(...) the manifesto took a powerful rhetorical form, but its internal structure still displays flaws: the listed policy proposal currently has a weak connection with earlier parts, for example. Also, some proposals lack a principle of organization and the action points remain unclear, so overall, the final version of the text does not follow a fully consistent development." (p. 12)

The question to be asked about this analysis is whether the cause of the apparent lack of uptake of the manifesto can fully be explained by the content of the manifesto. Or, in other words, how much is to be expected from sentences on a piece of paper? And how does one translate those sentences into indeed the stories and imaginaries that are needed - according to the author's theory of change - to bring about the desired sociotechnical change in the world. A more encompassing reflection on the extent to which the product of the project - the manifesto - can be considered an alternative 'sociotechnical imaginary', would have been appreciated. Note that this question does not warrant a binary answer; the question asks in the end how one construes a narrative that is not put on paper, but also lived by people in practice.

Relatedly, but from a different angle, is the question of whether the authors of the manifesto have rightly identified the issue at stake that should be solved with the help of a new 'imaginary'. For instance, the power of big tech companies derives from, among many other things, complicated legal constructs like Intellectual Property that are quite resistant to beliefs and stories. How citizenry stories should relate to these more rigid dimensions of our digitized universe (if at all) is worth unpacking.

Lastly to be noted, is the broader question of why data commons should be the solution to many if not all of the problems listed. *If* one, for instance, thinks that the problem is best characterized by 'data capitalist' practices of profit-oriented data-gathering, does one wants to keep that extractivist model and simply be in control of it through better data governance, or is one interested in getting rid of that issue altogether by imagining a non-capitalist future (cf. Morozov, 2015)? The different strands of commons literature noticeable in the manifesto – from reformist ones, to more revolutionary ones – are illustrative of the immense difficulty of imagining a world so

radically different from our current one (cf. Prainsack, 2023; Fisher, 2009).

On manifestos and narratives:
This brings us to the question - via a long detour - with which this section started: what kind of community was present in or through the manifesto, and how did this invoke a type of data commons?

As suggested above, the manifesto catered for a broad variety of interpretations of what the digital and data commons could mean. Many different groups, collectives, and communities would be able to see something reminiscent of their beliefs and theories about how a better digital society should look like in the manifesto. That is, arguably, also its strength.

At the same time does the text lack - these are obviously our speculative reflections - a *concrete audience*, a *community*. The problems and solutions presented are *everyone's*, and therefore, to a certain extent, *no one's* (cf. Fisher, 2009, p. 66). What might be missing here is what Ostrom once called the 'CPR situation' (Ostrom, 1990, p. 191). Ostrom talked about CPR situations within the context of a discussion on the relationship between theoretical models, and actually existing forms of collective action in the form of commons. As she writes, "Clear analytical models provide an important part of the theoretical foundation for good policy analysis, but not the entire foundation." (Ostrom, 1990, p. 191). And while

"[m]odels suggest to the analyst likely behaviors and outcomes in a situation with a *particular* structure. They do not tell the analyst how to discover the structure of the situation in order to conduct an analysis." (Ostrom, 1990, p. 191)

The usage of relatively high-level models and theories - the ones many of us start our papers with ('data capitalism', 'informational capitalism', et cetera) - lack, by virtue of their theoretical nature, a more concrete analysis of what this then means for those affected by it, which are within the context of commons then also those burdened with the task to do something about the problem. Similarly, are solutions presented to these problems - data governance theories and models - equally abstract. What, in other words, does the manifesto and the subsequent establishment of Barcelona Data Commons network, mean for those who participated in the process? What are the problems to be dealt with there, and in what way do these present a CPR situation motivating common governance?

These reflections warrant asking the question of how to translate the often abstract arguments (models?) for data commons into stories that allow people to recognize the 'CPR situation' they're in, and the subsequent need to engage in practices of commoning. The question is thus not whether Hidalgo *et al.* are right in thinking that narratives are crucial for sociotechnical change - we think they raise an important dimension of good tech governance here. The question is rather what kind of narratives, told by whom, to whom, when, and where, allow citizens to recognize their specific CPR situation, and convince and motivate them to act accordingly. A good narrative, it almost goes without saying, is only part of the story. Sustainable data common governance is a multi-dimensional endeavor requiring - next to a good story about its raison d'être - the right legal, political, communal, etc. conditions to become a success. Important here to consider are the situation-specific relationships between those different elements: a good narrative without the proper infrastructure for data storage and usage won't result in much of a success; the presence of a high tech data sharing technologies without a convincing story for why it will be of use will not

do much good either. A proper analysis of what precisely the good is that is to be governed in common is crucial; this, notwithstanding, to avoid developing solutions for a type of problem better to be solved in a different, possibly less-communal way (Ducuing *et al.*, 2024; Purtova & van Maanen, 2023).

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Is the rationale for the Open Letter provided in sufficient detail? (Please consider whether existing challenges in the field are outlined clearly and whether the purpose of the letter is explained)

Yes

Does the article adequately reference differing views and opinions?
Yes

Are all factual statements correct, and are statements and arguments made adequately supported by citations?
Yes

Is the Open Letter written in accessible language? (Please consider whether all subject-specific terms, concepts and abbreviations are explained)
Yes

Where applicable, are recommendations and next steps explained clearly for others to follow? (Please consider whether others in the research community would be able to implement guidelines or recommendations and/or constructively engage in the debate)
Yes

Competing Interests: No competing interests were disclosed.

Reviewer Expertise: Political theory; Science and Technology Studies; data governance

We confirm that we have read this submission and believe that we have an appropriate level of expertise to confirm that it is of an acceptable scientific standard, however we have significant reservations, as outlined above.

Author Response 17 Oct 2024

Ricard ESPELT

We sincerely appreciate your valuable feedback on our manuscript. After reviewing your comments and suggestions, we have made significant revisions to the paper, addressing your concerns in the following areas. Please find below a detailed response to your points, organized by section, along with a description of the changes we have implemented.

1. Clarification of the theory of change (Introduction) You pointed out that while the paper introduces an important idea of a "theory of change" for data governance, it was not clear how this concept operates within the specific context of the article.

Changes made: We have expanded the introduction to clarify the proposed "theory of change," linking it to the need for alternative sociotechnical imaginaries. Specifically, we emphasize that the paper challenges the dominant techno-deterministic approaches and proposes a participatory model that integrates narratives, infrastructures, and shared expectations, as Micheli et al. (2020) and Fischli & Muldoon (2024) argue, data governance requires governance frameworks that promote collective control and democratic participation. This revision ensures that readers understand how the model can be applied in practice.

2. Role of participants and community engagement (sociotechnical imaginaries) You asked for more detail on the role of participants in the manifesto process, questioning what pre-existing beliefs they had about data commons and how these were accounted for during the project.

Changes made: We have added a paragraph in the Sociotechnical Imaginaries section that explains the diversity of the participants involved in the manifesto process. Specifically, we now discuss how the participants ranged from tech-enthusiasts to data commons advocates, each bringing a different perspective on data governance. This diversity shaped the narrative development, ensuring that the process challenged both complacency and corporate influence on data governance. We have also drawn on Dotson's (2017) spectrum of 'community' to highlight the varying levels of commitment participants had to the commons-based approach.

3. Expert influence on the process (Digital Democracy and Data Commons) You pointed out that the influence of experts, particularly from the DECODE consortium, could have been more thoroughly analyzed, especially concerning how they shaped the manifesto's outcome.

Changes made: We added a more in-depth reflection on the role of experts in the process, acknowledging that while the process aimed for inclusive participation, expert stakeholders from the DECODE consortium played a central role in shaping the technical frameworks. This influence was particularly evident during initial debates, which established the manifesto's structure. However, the revision clarifies that efforts were made to ensure equal contribution from all participants, including non-experts, throughout the co-writing process.

4. Concept of community in Data Commons (Community and Commons concept) You requested clarification on how the concept of community was used in relation to commons and suggested drawing on philosophical and empirical literature.

Changes made: We have elaborated on the use of "community" in the Community and Commons Concept section, referencing Taylor Dotson's (2017) seven dimensions of community. We now specify that the engaged community ranged from "thin" forms of casual involvement to "thick" forms where individuals viewed their participation as vital to the commons' success. This allows a clearer understanding of how the community was constructed during the process and how it influenced the manifesto.

5. Manifesto's structure and practical impact (Manifesto Content and Narrative) You highlighted the need for reflection on whether the manifesto's structure contributed to the uptake or if more practical elements were required to translate the narrative into practice.

Changes made: In response, we expanded the Manifesto Content and Narrative section to reflect on the connection between the manifesto's structure and its practical impact. We acknowledge that while the manifesto provided a strong rhetorical foundation, its internal structure could benefit from clearer links between narrative sections and policy proposals. Drawing on Purtova & van Maanen (2023), we emphasize that further work is needed to

align the manifesto's vision with actionable governance models to ensure its successful adoption. 6. Integration of bibliographic references We have incorporated the bibliographic references suggested by the reviewers to strengthen the theoretical foundation of the paper. Here is where we integrated each reference:

- Micheli et al. (2020) and Fischli & Muldoon (2024): These references were added in the introduction to support the argument that data governance requires more than just technical solutions. They help frame the article's focus on governance frameworks that promote collective control and democratic participation.
- Ostrom (1990) and Prainsack (2023): These references were included in the Sociotechnical Imaginaries section to support the argument on the importance of shared narratives and collective action in transforming sociotechnical systems.
- Dotson (2017): This reference was used in the Community and Commons Concept section to clarify the spectrum of community engagement in the data commons process.
- Morozov (2015) and Fisher (2009): These references were added in the Manifesto Content and Narrative section to discuss the difficulty of imagining non-capitalist futures in the context of data governance and how the manifesto seeks to explore such alternatives.
- Purtova & van Maanen (2023): This reference was integrated into the conclusion to emphasize the need for practical alignment between governance models and the challenges posed by data capitalism.

We believe the revisions made based on your feedback have strengthened the manuscript by providing more clarity on the theory of change, the role of participants, and the manifesto's impact. The integration of the recommended references has also enriched the theoretical framework, ensuring that the paper is well-grounded in current academic debates on data governance and commons. We look forward to your further comments and hope that the revisions meet your expectations.

Competing Interests: No competing interests were disclosed.

Reviewer Report 13 May 2024

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Beckett Sterner
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The article discusses the process and results of a pilot effort, Digital Democracy and Data Commons, as part of the EU Decentralized Citizen Owned Data Ecosystems project. The article focuses on a six-month effort to write a collaborative manifesto on digital democracy and data

commons. The authors situate the effort in broader scholarship on manifestos as a type of genre and co-creation as a methodology. The authors also present some analysis of how the manifesto developed across versions, including relative changes in emphasis on data compared to democracy and commons.

An overall comment is that the manuscript seems to fall in between an open letter and a research article. According to the submission instructions, "Open letters are short, peer-reviewed articles discussing policies relevant to a broad research community, presenting guidelines or white papers, or announcing new initiatives. An Open Letter should usually represent the views of a Horizon 2020 and/or Horizon Europe project or group of projects; publication does not imply endorsement by the European Commission.
An Open Letter should not include new data and analysis." I think this applies well to the manifesto itself, but the manuscript focuses more on describing and analyzing the process of creating the manifesto. I would suggest that the authors make a decision about whether the primary focus is the content and importance of the manifesto itself (open letter option) or the process of writing the manifesto (research article option).

1. More context about the DECODE project and the Decidim software would be helpful. The current text does not provide enough concrete specifics about who the immediate audience of the manifesto is supposed to be, why the project sought to develop a manifesto in particular, and the significance of DECODE adopting the manifesto. For example, the last paragraph of the "data commons manifesto within the DDDC pilot" subsection doesn't help the reader understand how the manifesto exactly connects to the technological, narrative, and social dimensions. This would also help motivate why the project believed it needed a new manifesto as opposed to adopting one of the several others that are cited in the text.

2. In participatory/co-creation research, it is essential to characterize who was invited to participate (what was the general population being recruited? How were they recruited?), who actually contributed, and how the project handled issues of power and inequality. Right now the manuscript only addresses those questions too late as limitations mentioned in the discussion. The authors should provide more specifics about the demographics and prior backgrounds/experiences of participants in the "Co-creation approach" section. The authors should clarify their position in the manifesto process along with any other project leadership. I noticed that the manifesto does not list authors online. How was the decision about authorship of this article made?

3. The quantitative analysis of draft versions is interesting, but it would be more useful to understand the major points of disagreement that happened during the writing process and how they were resolved or set aside. Also, were there key points that were taken for granted based on the prior beliefs and values of the participants? A closer analysis of the text of the manifesto drafts (or of discussion during the writing process) would be valuable for a research article format.

Is the rationale for the Open Letter provided in sufficient detail? (Please consider whether existing challenges in the field are outlined clearly and whether the purpose of the letter is explained)

Yes

Does the article adequately reference differing views and opinions?

Yes

Are all factual statements correct, and are statements and arguments made adequately supported by citations?
Yes

Is the Open Letter written in accessible language? (Please consider whether all subject-specific terms, concepts and abbreviations are explained)
Yes

Where applicable, are recommendations and next steps explained clearly for others to follow? (Please consider whether others in the research community would be able to implement guidelines or recommendations and/or constructively engage in the debate)
Partly

Competing Interests: No competing interests were disclosed.

Reviewer Expertise: Philosophy, Science and Technology Studies, Knowledge Commons

I confirm that I have read this submission and believe that I have an appropriate level of expertise to state that I do not consider it to be of an acceptable scientific standard, for reasons outlined above.