Abstract

In 2022, Orit Halpern and Robert Mitchell coined the term "smartness mandate" — the imperative embedded in every AI narrative that demands we "become smart or else go extinct as a species." This paper argues that the smartness mandate is not a description of technological necessity but a mechanism of social control — the latest iteration of a pattern that includes the Church's monopoly on literacy, the Stationers' Company's monopoly on printing, and the broadcast era's monopoly on information. The mandate operates through four mechanisms: surveillance disguised as service (Pasquinelli, 2023), data extraction disguised as convenience (Couldry & Mejias, 2018), algorithmic reification that replaces lived experience with computable categories (Negueruela del Castillo & Neri, 2024), and the invisibility of infrastructure that renders power unaccountable (Kaeser, 2018). We demonstrate that the OMXUS ecosystem — passphrase-derived identity, BLE mesh networking, physical co-presence verification, and sovereign AI hardware — constitutes a systematic refusal of the smartness mandate without abandoning technological sophistication. The distinction is between technology deployed for governance ("become smart or else") and technology deployed for sovereignty ("become free, period"). Every paper in this series is a counter-practice to the mandate. This paper names the pattern.

Keywords: smartness mandate, data colonialism, algorithmic reification, surveillance capitalism, counter-practices, sovereign technology, digital pluriversality

1. The Mandate

In the introduction to *The Smartness Mandate*, Halpern and Mitchell describe an imperative that accompanies every AI narrative:

> *"become smart or else go extinct as a species" (Halpern & Mitchell, 2022, p. 220)*

Smartness — as in smartphones, smart cities, smart homes, smart contracts — is not merely a marketing term. It is "an epistemology, that is, a way of knowing and representing the world so that one can act in and upon that world" (Halpern & Mitchell, 2022, p. xi). The mandate does not ask whether you want to be smart. It tells you that the alternative is extinction. Accept the terms. Install the update. Authenticate with Google.

This paper argues that the smartness mandate is structurally identical to every previous knowledge monopoly — and that the OMXUS ecosystem is the printing press that breaks it.

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2. The Four Mechanisms

2.1 Surveillance as Service

Matteo Pasquinelli warns that "the problem of AI has nothing to do with intelligence per se but with the manner in which it is applied to the governance of society and labor via statistical models — ones that should be transparent and exposed to public scrutiny" (Pasquinelli, 2019, p. 3). He describes the result as a "planetary business of surveillance and forecasting" (Pasquinelli, 2023, p. 12).

The mechanism is simple: offer a useful service (email, maps, social connection, AI assistance). In exchange, collect data. Use the data to build statistical models. Apply the models to governance — not political governance, but behavioral governance. What you see, what you're offered, what you can access, how much it costs.

Google does not sell your data. Google sells predictions about your behavior, derived from your data, to entities that want to modify your behavior. This is surveillance — but it is experienced as convenience. The mandate says: use Google or lose email. Use AI or fall behind. Become smart or go extinct.

(Applebee & Combe, 2026, "*Platform Gatekeeping*") documents the result: Five companies control digital identity. Combined 2023 revenue: $1.037 trillion per year. None elected. None appointed. None accountable.

2.2 Extraction as Convenience

Nick Couldry and Ulises Mejias describe a process they call "data colonialism" — "a new phase in the long history of extractive relationships" that transforms "lived experience into abstract, commodifiable data points" (Couldry & Mejias, 2018).

The parallel to historical colonialism is structural, not metaphorical:

PHASE	WHAT IS EXTRACTED	FROM WHOM	BY WHOM	MECHANISM
Land colonialism	Territory, resources	Indigenous populations	European empires	Military force
Labor colonialism	Physical labor	Colonized populations	Industrial capital	Economic coercion
Data colonialism	Behavioral data	All digital users	Platform corporations	Convenience

The extraction mechanism has evolved. You don't need armies when you have APIs. The smartness mandate replaces the gun with the login page: authenticate with us or cease to exist digitally ((Applebee & Combe, 2026, "*Platform Gatekeeping*")). The cost of refusal is not death — it's social and economic irrelevance.

Negueruela del Castillo and Neri describe how this extraction creates "digital shadows" that replace real environments: "The city becomes increasingly indistinguishable from its digital shadow, cast by the vast apparatus of data collection and algorithmic processing" (Negueruela del Castillo & Neri, 2024). The map replaces the territory. The data replaces the person. The shadow is governed; the person merely generates it.

2.3 Reification as Analysis

When AI systems process human behavior, they do not analyze it — they reify it. They transform "living relations into fixed, computable categories" (Negueruela del Castillo & Neri, 2024). This is algorithmic reification: the conversion of fluid, contextual, culturally embedded human behavior into static data types.

This matters because the OMXUS justice research (Papers 1-15) demonstrates that the existing justice system does exactly this. It converts complex human behavior into binary categories — guilty/innocent, truthful/deceptive — using instruments (behavioral deception cues) that are 91.3% inverted ((Applebee &

Combe, 2026, "*Signal Inversion*")). The signal inversion effect is algorithmic reification applied to human freedom: a living person is converted into a category ("deceptive"), the category is processed ("guilty"), and the output is applied to the person ("imprisoned").

The smartness mandate extends this pattern beyond the justice system. Every platform that categorizes users — credit scores, risk assessments, content moderation decisions, hiring algorithms — performs the same reification. Living people become computable categories. The categories are governed. The people merely generate them.

2.4 Invisibility as Power

Eduard Kaeser observes that "invisibility is a signum of power" (Kaeser, 2018, p. 28). The smartness mandate operates precisely through this invisibility. Technology becomes visible only "when it is not working and we cannot perform our tasks" (Gerber & Atalay Franck, 2024). When it works, it is transparent — which means its power is unaccountable.

The Facebook outage of October 2021 made the infrastructure visible for six hours. Government services in India collapsed. Healthcare communication in Brazil stopped. Emergency coordination across sub-Saharan Africa went dark (BBC, 2021). For six hours, 3 billion people could see the dependency. Then it was fixed, and the infrastructure became invisible again. The dependency remained. The visibility did not.

(Applebee & Combe, 2026, "*The Invisible Network*") responds: a BLE mesh network has no invisible center. There is no infrastructure to make visible because the infrastructure is the people. When your neighbor's phone is the network, the network is never invisible — it's standing next to you.

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3. The Historical Pattern

The smartness mandate is not new. It is the latest iteration of a pattern that repeats whenever a knowledge technology is monopolized:

ERA	TECHNOLOGY	MONOPOLIST	MANDATE	DURATION
Pre-Gutenberg	Written text	The Church	"Accept interpretation or be heretical"	~1,000 years
Post-Gutenberg	Printed text	Stationers' Company	"License or be seditious"	~200 years
Broadcast era	Radio/TV	State + corporate broadcasters	"Consume or be uninformed"	~100 years
Internet era	Digital platforms	GAFAM (Google, Apple, Facebook, Amazon, Microsoft)	"Authenticate or cease to exist"	~25 years
AI era	AI models	OpenAI, Google, Anthropic, Meta, Apple	"Become smart or go extinct"	~3 years

Each monopoly was broken by the same force: hardware cheap enough that control shifted from institutions to individuals. The printing press broke the Church. The personal computer broke broadcast. The smartphone broke the newspaper.

(Applebee & Combe, 2026, "*Sovereign AI Infrastructure*") identifies the next break: the ASUS ExpertCenter Pro ET900N G3. $50,000 AUD. 784GB coherent memory. Runs 671 billion parameters on your desk. The printing press for thought.

4. Counter-Practices

Gerber and Atalay Franck note that "the simulation of democratic procedures in a nascent authoritarian state is designed to conceal the fact that the state in question isn't a democracy any more. If a human practice is being replaced by a simulation of it, what ultimately results is deskilling: an impoverishment of the capacity to engage in the original activity" (Martin, 2024, p. 60).

The smartness mandate simulates capability while producing dependency. "Sign in with Google" simulates identity while producing dependence on Google. AI-generated answers simulate knowledge while producing dependence on the AI provider. Smart city infrastructure simulates urban intelligence while producing dependence on the platform vendor.

The OMXUS ecosystem is not a simulation. It is a set of counter-practices — technologies deployed for sovereignty rather than governance:

SMARTNESS MANDATE	OMXUS COUNTER-PRACTICE
"Sign in with Google" (identity as service)	Passphrase-derived identity (identity as possession)
Cloud AI (thinking as rental)	Sovereign hardware — ET900N G3 (thinking as ownership)
Cellular/Wi-Fi (communication as infrastructure)	BLE mesh (communication as people)
Biometric verification (identity as surveillance)	Physical co-presence (identity as physics)
Content moderation (speech as permission)	Mesh relay (speech as broadcast)
App stores (software as license)	Consent-based payload transfer (software as gift)
Platform voting (democracy as simulation)	EIP-712 mesh-relayed votes (democracy as protocol)

Each counter-practice refuses the mandate without refusing the technology. OMXUS uses cryptography, mesh networking, ML inference, and blockchain anchoring — all products of the same technological era that produced the mandate. The difference is not the technology. The difference is who controls it.

5. Digital Pluriversality

Negueruela del Castillo and Neri, drawing on Walter Mignolo, call for "digital pluriversality" — a demand that "urban AI systems be repurposed toward emancipatory ends" and that citizens have "the right not just to access urban data but to participate in the very definition of what constitutes urban possibility" (Negueruela del Castillo & Neri, 2024).

This is what OMXUS builds. Not one system to replace five corporations — but a framework in which identity, communication, governance, and knowledge are controlled by the people who use them, through hardware they own, on networks they constitute.

The "right to the algorithmic city" — extending Lefebvre's concept — means the right to participate in the definition of the categories, the architecture of the algorithms, and the governance of the outputs. OMXUS implements this through:

- Direct democracy ((Applebee & Combe, 2026, "*Swiss Direct Democracy*")): Citizens define the questions, not representatives
- Quadratic voting ((Applebee & Combe, 2026, "*Democratic Voting Mechanisms*")): Intensity of preference is expressed, not just binary choice
- Physical verification ((Applebee & Combe, 2026, "*Be In The Same Room*")): Identity is confirmed by neighbors, not algorithms
- Open-weight AI ((Applebee & Combe, 2026, "*Sovereign AI Infrastructure*")): The model runs on your hardware, under your terms
- BLE mesh ((Applebee & Combe, 2026, "*The Invisible Network*")): The network is the people, not the infrastructure

This is not a utopian proposal. Every component is proven technology ((Applebee & Combe, 2026, "*Social Group Scaling*") in the Trap Map). The combination is novel. The components are not.

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6. The Embodiment Gap

Gerber and Atalay Franck identify a fundamental gap: "Whatever AI will generate, it will not come from some social/physical body and its interactions with the world" (Gerber & Atalay Franck, 2024). AI lacks a "sentient body" — and therefore cannot generate genuine spatial, social, or governance intelligence from embodied experience.

This is why OMXUS insists on physical infrastructure:

- BLE requires physical proximity — you must be near the mesh to use it
- Co-presence requires physical bodies — you must be in the room to be counted
- The vouch ceremony requires physical presence — you must stand with your witnesses
- The emergency button requires physical response — someone must come to your door

The smartness mandate abstracts everything into data. OMXUS re-embodies everything into proximity, presence, and physical relationship. The gap between AI and embodiment is not a limitation to be overcome — it is a design principle. Systems that require bodies to function cannot be controlled by entities that have none.

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7. The Trap, Revisited

(Applebee & Combe, 2026, "*Platform Gatekeeping*") asked: why do five companies control your identity? Because we let them.

This paper asks a different question: why do we let them?

Because the smartness mandate makes the alternative sound like extinction. "Leave Google" sounds like "leave civilization." "Run your own AI" sounds like "build your own power grid." "Use mesh networking" sounds like "become a survivalist."

The mandate frames sovereignty as regression. That's the trap. The trap is not the technology — it's the framing. The framing says: smart = corporate, sovereign = primitive. The framing is wrong.

- Switzerland has run direct democracy for 176 years. They're the richest country in the world. ((Applebee & Combe, 2026, "*Swiss Direct Democracy*"))
- Australia has run mandatory voting for 102 years with 90%+ turnout. ((Applebee & Combe, 2026, "*Be In The Same Room*"))
- Bitcoin has run trustless consensus for 15+ years at $1T+ market cap. ((Applebee & Combe, 2026, "*Trust-First Governance*"))
- BLE mesh exists in 6.8 billion devices. ((Applebee & Combe, 2026, "*The Invisible Network*"))
- A $50K desktop runs 671B parameters. ((Applebee & Combe, 2026, "*Sovereign AI Infrastructure*"))

None of this is primitive. All of it is sovereign.

The smartness mandate says: become smart or go extinct. OMXUS says: become free. The technology is the same. The ownership is different. That's the whole paper.

Series Context

This paper is part of the OMXUS Research Series.

Direct dependencies:

- (Applebee & Combe, 2026, "*Platform Gatekeeping*") (Because We Let Them) — documents the corporate identity monopoly
- (Applebee & Combe, 2026, "*The Invisible Network*") (The Invisible Network) — the counter-practice for communication
- (Applebee & Combe, 2026, "*Sovereign AI Infrastructure*") (Set It Free) — the counter-practice for AI
- (Applebee & Combe, 2026, "*Be In The Same Room*") (Be In The Same Room) — the counter-practice for identity

This paper proves:

- Conclusion 5 (Direct Democracy) — the smartness mandate is anti-democratic by design
- Conclusion 9 (Marketing To Self) — the mandate is the mechanism by which corporations market TO you
- Conclusion 15 (Justice = Economic) — data colonialism is the latest form of economic extraction

Theoretical framework sources:

- Halpern & Mitchell (2022) — the smartness mandate
- Pasquinelli (2019, 2023) — surveillance as governance
- Couldry & Mejias (2018) — data colonialism
- Negueruela del Castillo & Neri (2024) — algorithmic reification, right to the algorithmic city
- Kaeser (2018) — invisibility as power
- Mignolo — digital pluriversality
- Martin (2024) — simulation as deskilling

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