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★ The urban data governance landscape: lessons from India's Smart Cities Mission ▲

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Paper short abstract:

This paper draws on work with 4 cities in India participating in the Smart Cities Mission to illuminate key challenges of urban data governance and to identify lessons for designing effective data governance.

Paper long abstract:

This paper surveys contemporary challenges related to urban data governance. Urban data includes geographic or spatial data, demographic statistical data (including service data), and sensor-based "big data" on the real-time functioning of urban processes. Each of these types of data has their own types of governance structures and actors. However, in contemporary cities - especially smart cities - these types of data are coming together in new ways, with important governance implications. Two important additional developments are compounding the challenges: 1) social media has also become a source of data on citizens of the city, and 2) citizen's identities (via social media and national ID systems) are enabling authorities to link data about individuals from across these types of data as well as previously disparate domains of human interaction. Traditional governance actors associated with the different types of data appear to be slow in appreciating the ways data systems are evolving across domains and types of data. Further, the rapid pace of both technological and social change means both citizens and authorities are operating well outside their experiences, meaning both are making decisions about privacy and security without a deep sense of the risks. We argue that the particular risks and challenges for governing urban data have not been fully articulated and understood - either in the literature or by urban authorities. This paper draws on observations from an EU-funded research and capacity-building project in which we worked with 4 Indian Smart Cities to design effective and inclusive data systems.

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