Engaging Open Data Research

Today, city administrators are making their cities "smarter" through open data platforms. Smart cities have Internet-connected devices and sensors in sidewalks and traffic lights, citizen participation solicited through smartphone apps and 311 services, and energy grids more efficiently distributing electricity. Open data platforms try to streamline data delivery to the public.

However, smart cities are complex and often contradictory. Research around the world has shown that they often increase - rather than decrease - inequalities in civic participation and representation. In 2014, the City Council of Calgary, Alberta identified 5 themes in an eGovernment Digital Strategy designed to implement "…trends in digital and open government." Mirroring other cities around the world, their top theme was "Transparency and Open Data". It would involve putting more data freely available in the Calgary Open Data Portal ("Open Calgary").

These kinds of efforts have not fostered sufficient reflection on the governance, private-sector involvement, unequal representation, and unequal participation of open data.

In Engaging Open Data Research, we look at the ways open data platforms produce and sustain inequalities in the smart city, usually unintentionally, and the roles of different economic actors in these processes. We look to the City of Calgary because of its unique approach to smart cities and open data, and hope to build a better city by critically analyzing it.

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