DR SARAH BARNES

Open City? Platform Urbanism and the Data-Driven Urban Innovation Agenda

Abstract

“That machines now run the world on our behalf is not just a technological revolution. It is a historic shift in how we build and manage cities”. So writes Anthony Townsend in his book *Smart Cities: Big Data, Civic Hackers, and the Quest for a New Utopia* in which he pits corporate-controlled urban operating systems against a resurgent civic movement that uses the smartphone as a platform for reinventing cities from the bottom up. In this Seminar Presentation I will chart the emerging spatial politics of data-driven urbanism, including the rise of open data as a civic good, and the tools, practices and policies promoted by technology-enabled civic laboratories as agents of urban transformation. Giving definition to what I’m calling ‘platform urbanism’ within the broader politics of smart cities, I will raise a number of critical questions for further investigation, including: 1) the forms of spatial knowledge privileged by data scientists and the open data movement; 2) notions of open data as a public space and the reframing of the role of government 3) the data infomediary’s role as an urban actor and change agent.

Biography

Dr Sarah Barns is an Urban Studies Foundation Postdoctoral Research Fellow based at ICS. In November 2013 she commenced a three-year Fellowship for a project titled ‘Platform Urbanism: The role of city labs, data infomediaries and open government experiments in urban governance’. The project examines how practices of urban knowledge-making are being shaped through smart technologies and pervasive data, and will address new institutional alignments and governance arrangements emerging in key digital cities (New York, Shanghai, Christchurch). Sarah brings extensive industry, government and practice based approaches to her work on digital cities, having previously worked for organisations like the Australian Broadcasting Corporation (ABC), global engineering firm Arup, the Creative Industries Innovation Centre (CIIC), the Australian Communications and Media Authority (ACMA), the Australia Council for the Arts and the Network Insight Institute. In 2011 she established a creative collaboration through Esem Projects in which she has led the delivery of innovative public art and urban heritage interpretation projects. This practice, along with her digital cities research, builds on her doctoral thesis *The Death & Life of the Real-Time City: Re-imagining the city of digital urbanism*, which incorporated ideas from cultural geography, urban studies, sound history, utopian studies, and social and cultural theory, to locate and critique the geographical imaginations of contemporary digital urbanism, and resulted in a series of practice-led research interventions across Sydney, Newcastle, and Canberra.