MOBIDATALAB
Labs for prototyping future mobility data sharing solutions in the cloud

Viva la revolución! Initiatives to a democratic approach to mobility data

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(r)evolution

Information is at a new high. From exchanging with your friends, gathering intel on your sports exercise or finding interesting information on just about everything. In the past decade platforms like Facebook, Google, Amazon have taken a dominating role in our information exchange. These platforms have grown into the neural network of information distribution. The way in which they manage and control information centrally has led to new business models, with extensive effects on society.

In view of these giants, what is left for all others? Is history repeating itself with the feudal system, with all the smaller entrepreneurs and citizens paying their share to the aristocracy for safekeeping and preferential treatment? In view of privacy preservation and regaining the freedom of thought, choice and movement, the democratic establishment has to realise this state of play, and how to counter it effectively.

Foundations of the feudal system

In data, the 'ownership' question is often raised. Ownership has a legal and an economic aspect. Legally we want to be able to have a say in what data can be (re)used, economically we want to reap the rewards of this emerging value equally. As in any exchange of values, a legal framework combines amongst others, parties, a description of the services and the compensation, its economic aspects. In the growing complexity of value exchange on digital highways, platforms sought the role of 'trusted third party'. With a central role in identifying the businesses and the consumers. The monopoly of identity

provision and the meta-understanding of the transaction both in number and in detail, gave the platforms their powerplay position. Turning the tide is by no means easy. It means that we have to find alternatives to overcome the platform hegemony and combine efforts to reroute information in an equitable fashion.

'To a man with a hammer, everything looks like a nail' - A. Maslow

The main goal is to level the playing field, by creating transparency and allowing for fair competition. Lacking an unbiased governance or democratic model, the free reign has led to more and more externalities, proving that commercial and even political gain have won over common sense and appreciation of human rights. The European Commission is actively regulating to align with governing European principles. Kicked off by GDPR currently many acts follow, ready for implementation. But as we have seen with GDPR, organisations remain set in their old ways. Instead of changing their course of business progressively to align with the regulation, platforms invest in ways to circumvent the actual goals through mitigating measures to cover up breaches. Regulation and enforcement to this effect are not all overcoming.

Role of public officials

A multi-disciplinary approach is required. In the coming years reference technology frameworks and architectures are being rolled out across Europe in the European Data Spaces projects. Central in this approach is not the choice of technology but the standardisation of data processing that will support transparency and trust. Companies and authorities will be able to collaborate around commercially sensitive information thanks to technical and legal provisions supported by a decentralised identification process and data clearing processes, understanding each other through consensus on semantics (vocabulary, like NeTEx/Siri, DatexII). The public realm cannot be asked to become data financial or privacy professionals. But they can support the level playing field, by specifically requesting (certified and validated) open-source solutions and independent infrastructure components in the tender process.

Their main role is to ensure that citizens can interact safely with control over their data and digital identities thanks to privacy-enhancing technologies.

Democratising developments

In the Nordics and the Alps projects of NeTEx/Siri implementations in similar profiles have led to small but tangible results, like multimodal route planners across borders (Data4PT). On the level of European projects, NAPCORE is establishing processes which will allow national access points to organise data similarly, to be findable (discovery and vocabulary services). On the level of decentralised identification, authentication and authorisation management between legal entities iShare.eu has established a legal/technical trust framework, and on top of this fairsfair.org developed a data clearing house for democratising information and privacy enhancement.

Overall, it is safe to say that the call from POLIS, EMTA and UITP in democratising ticketing data for cities and regions, as well as for operators to have access to data and information is being heard and answered.

By fostering data sharing in the transport sector, providing mobility organising authorities with recommendations on how to improve the value of their data, and contributing to the development of open tools in the cloud, **MobiDataLab** showcases the multidisciplinary aspects. These initiatives support understanding the state of play, and how to counter the platform hegemony effectively, to turn the tide together.

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