CASE STUDY – RENNES

"Building Trust, Transparency and Equity with Data amid COVID 19"

Ben Lister, Open Data Project Manager at City of Rennes & Rennes Métropole

1.   Background and concept

Since 2017 and the pre-launch of the metropolitan public service on data, Rennes Métropole has been leading a genuinely collaborative and partnership-based strategy on data. We are now entering a new stage in this endeavor, which is becoming all the more tangible with the creation of the RUDI portal. This tool will allow Rennes' citizens to take back control over their personal data and give local companies the opportunity to improve the production of services that are efficient, cost-effective and respectful of public interest.

The RUDI interface project consists in developing an innovative web portal, which grants access to the area's data in order to promote the use of this data by each of the project's partners but also by the all Rennes' citizens. Conceived as a "data social network", RUDI is based on the creation of a meta-catalog of data and offers features directed towards individuals to enhance their knowledge of, and control over their personal data, and towards the project holders to facilitate management of data rights and the implementation of innovative economic models.

2.   Goals of the project

Under the pressure of new actors in the digital sector, cities are subject to a double requirement in providing local public services: adapting to new quality standards (speed, flow, individualization…) and guaranteeing that the criteria inherent to public services are maintained (fair treatment, neutrality, continuity of service, protection of privacy). The provision of these services, while ensuring they remain both efficient and respectful of public interest, implies the ability to process very large volumes of heterogeneous data produced by a wide variety of actors Composed of 43 municipalities, Rennes Métropole is one of the metropole pioneering open data. Its innovative public policies in terms of transports, urbanism, waste management or local democracy enabled it to achieve a mature reflection on the challenges surrounding data management and a strong capacity of action to address them.

The challenging aspect of this project resides in involving administrations, private companies (startups and major groups), associations, researchers and Rennes Metropole inhabitants in the creation of an interface providing easy access to a great diversity of data in terms of nature, volume and production methods. The terms of access to, and use of data, are defined in a collaborative mode between every partner in the project.

3. Digital rights issues

The key expected result is to have an effective data-sharing portal, which is used by its different beneficiaries and produces positive externalities over the entire territory. The transparency of personal data use and the capacity for citizens to take back control over their data as well as the number of effective public services produced by this work on data are results, which will become measurable upon the completion of the project. To reach this goal, a series of workshops will be held with the cities inhabitants, to try and fully understand their needs when it comes to knowledge on data related subjects, their stance on subjects sur as trusting a 3rd party to collect/use/share their data, and the tools they could/would need to be able to fully take control of their own personal data.

4. Work done and lessons learnt

We are very early on in the project, and Covid-19 has slowed us down a bit, but as summer 2020 approaches we've held a few different workshops online. Some staying on very basic, introductory concepts and others on more technical concepts, while others focus on a particular theme (like energy). So far we've learnt (or at least confirmed what we already knew) that ordinary citizens who don't have data-driven activities know little about the inner workings of a data system or the challenges faced by the municipality, or even what risks come with personal data management. The good news is the participants so far seem keen to learn more and keep working with us over the next few years.

5. Next steps

The next steps are quite simple, we need to make our efforts wider known to the public, to multiply the workshops while keeping them thematically diverse, all while walking the fine line between educating on the subject and taking it far enough where participants can help built functional specifications for the "citizen" side of the platform. To do this, the municipality and partners involved are currently finalizing a workplan for these workshops, taking into account time, the expertise of our partners and their availability, without of course forgetting that anything planned as a physical meeting could quickly be derailed by Covid again.

6. Conclusion

As I said above, it's a bit early to reach any kind of conclusions, however we're quite optimistic that by asking even simple questions we will be able to steer the project towards building a data-sharing platform that is respectful of citizen's digital rights, useful in the functionalities it provides for its users and educational in the information given out during the different steps of its use. The participants that wish to further delve into the subject with us will also allow us to recruit our first "power users" who will also be able to help us with more detailed orientated questions we may have about their needs, desires and uses.