Intersection #4

Data-driven monitoring to understand current and future environments

In recent years, tech developments have enabled communities to use technologies like **low-cost sensors and drones** to fight back against harms like polluting, deforestation, and land-grabs by fossil fuel companies, bringing hyper-local knowledge of harms – augmented with digital data – to arenas where they can hold companies to account. But these benefits need to be carefully weighed against **data privacy and surveillance risks.**

"For communities that have experienced historical injustices and live the realities of continued injustices, the unrestricted opening of data can foster particularly significant harm."

- Open Environmental Data Project[01]

Environmental monitoring is also a key part of the development of so-called **'smart cities'.** Proponents of smart cities argue that the collection of more data can lead to deeper citizen engagement and can further sustainability goals. However, this data is often collected through **opaque public-private partnerships,** and digital rights advocates raise concerns around how this data may be used to profile populations.

A number of actors are also currently proposing to use **AI** to foster sustainable land-use and water efficiency, control pollution and predict climate events – but here it's important that AI itself become sustainable (rather than just be a tool for sustainability), and that AI be used in a 'just' way.

"Artificial intelligence developed in the name of benefiting the environments is not the same thing as establishing environmentally and socially conscious AI systems."

- Theodora Dryer of the AI Now Institute[02]

01 Open Environmental Data Project (December 2021). **Opportunity Brief: Environmental Data as a Public Good**
02 Dryer, T. (April 2021). **A Digital and Green Transition Series: Will Artificial Intelligence Foster or Hamper the Green New Deal?** AI Now Institute.

Opportunities for the digital rights space to promote just and responsible approaches to working with environmental data

There are a number of areas where important work happening across DR and EJ-CJ spaces would benefit from further support and expansion. This could include, among other things:

- Working to understand how collected data might **be shared and stewarded** in the most responsible and just way, and also leveraged most effectively for environmental and climate governance efforts
- Strengthening connections between Digital Rights and environmental **data governance** efforts
- Challenging the **data practices** of commercially driven **'smart' environments** like smart cities and 'living labs'
- Bringing **responsible data** considerations into '**AI for good'/ 'AI for planet'** and data-driven environmental, climate, and sustainability initiatives.

Find more intersections, opportunities and recommendations in our report:

At the confluence of digital rights and climate & environmental justice – a landscape review

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