The Urban Lab of Europe!

NEWS

PROJECT

RUDI - Rennes Urban Data Interface

Rennes Metropole, France

TOPIC

Digital transition

EDIT 28 JANUARY 2021
BY CHIGNARD SIMON, UIA EXPERT

Rudi: climbing the learning curve

See on UIA website

An innovative project rarely comes out of the blue, and Rudi makes no exception. The project is based on almost ten years of experimentation on local data governance. This second blog post by UIA Expert Simon Chignard goes back to the Rudi project's foundation. How did this experience help to forge the questions raised by Rudi? Where do we stand on the learning curve?

As a territory with a robust digital ecosystem, based on public research and private companies, Rennes has a long history with digital innovation for the public service. At the beginning of the 2000s, the city invested in geospatial data and infrastructure to build and exploit one of the territory's first 3D digital twins. In 2010, Rennes Metropole was among the pioneers in the French open data landscape and was recognized as such by other major players in the field.

In 2015, the local urban authority set up an internal instance, led by elected officials, in charge of the Smart City strategy. It soon appeared that there's a strong need for quality data for each public policy (waste and energy consumption, participatory budgets, etc). It is impossible to design a smart waste collection program without data about the exact volume of waste in each neighbourhood, or even better at the street level. Hence, the city put data at the core of its Smart City strategy.

Exploring a new role for the local authority

From 2016, the local authority designed a "metropolitan public data service" with the ambition to "accompany the evolution of public services in an environment where data is becoming increasingly important".

From 2017 to 2019, the local authority started the prefiguration phase of this new service, with the French government's financial support (PIA, programme d'investissement d'avenir). Four thematics were investigated: water, energy, mobility, socio-demographic data. Each thematic group gathered together the local authority and key local and national partners. They were meant to identify the opportunities and difficulties of data sharing. For instance, the local actor in charge of aggregating and analyzing socio-demographic data proved itself very reticent to share and open more data, given the subject's political sensibility.

The first lesson is that this thematic approach wasn't as practical as initially thought. As thematics, mobility or energy are too broad and include too many different realities. Furthermore, some key players of the territories are acting on different thematics, making it more time-consuming for them to participate in each group.

Still, this approach gave a better view of the data ecosystem on four different topics. Simultaneously, several operational projects have been launched on the territory, for instance, on the data collection of bike counters on the public space (Eco Compteurs) or “floating car data” acquisition (a technique to evaluate traffic speed and congestion, based on mobile phone data). The urban planning agency worked on a new description of the territory using several data sources, including energy data. Each of these projects benefited from the data team's support and expertise. Starting from use cases, rather than from a broader thematic approach also proved more effective. It also helped to make a regular back-and-forth between the project's expectations and the availability of data.

Strengthening a local ecosystem

In 2018 and 2019, Rennes Metropole organized four one-day events, gathering more than 150 participants each time. This format, combining discussion panels in the morning and collaborative workshops in the afternoon proved very successful at many levels. First, it allowed key questions to be adressed (such as trust or consent) with national experts' help and the inputs of other European and national local initiatives. Second, it helped raise awareness of these issues among local actors, independently of their proximity to digital and data. That is no surprise than most of the 12 partners involved in Rudi were actively taking part in this first prefiguration phase.

> This approach has led to the creation of a group of territorial actors who wish to collaborate, share data and bring out new cases of use in the general interest (C:ronos, evaluating the metropolitan public data service, December 2019).

A need for a more formalized governance

The experience accumulated on this territory over the past years contributed to shaping Rudi as a project. The prefiguration phase revealed the need for a more formalized collaboration framework between partners. Data sharing, especially between private and public actors is no easy task. Governance is a crucial challenge, and it lacks a formal framework at the European and national levels. Building such a framework, based on a series of rules agreed by each partner, is one of Rudi's objective. Governance usually appears as a mere concept, but we can also translate it into operational questions. Who should be given access to privately-held data? Should a producer have a veto right, that is the possibility to deny access to their data for a specific project? Who decides which project is of general interest? These are difficult questions. For sure, the past ten years' experience - and the sense of community that came with it - are of great help to find suitable answers!

Digital transition

See on UIA website