

The ethnography of the Dublin Dashboard

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The Programmable City
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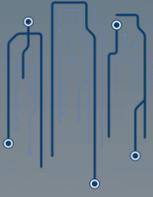
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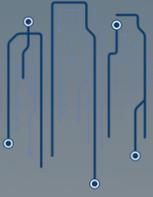




Summary of research

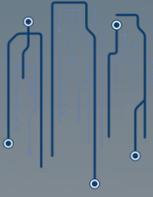
- ‘[If] one were inventing a method of enquiry by which to grasp the complexity of social life, one might wish to invent something like the social anthropologist’s ethnographic practice’ (Marilyn Strathern)

An ethnography of the building of the Dublin Dashboard to understand its praxis and politics



Key findings

1. The dashboard is a complex socio-technical assemblage of actors and actants that work materially and discursively within a set of social and economic constraints and power geometries to assemble, produce and maintain the website.
2. The production, maintenance and on-going research and development of dashboards unfold contingently and relationally.
3. The process of creating a dashboard has wider recursive effects. Just as building the dashboard was shaped by the broader institutional landscape, producing the system inflected that landscape, sometimes in profound ways.
4. The data, configuration, tools, and modes of presentation of a dashboard produce a particularised set of spatial knowledges about the city.



Key lessons

- Dashboards are useful but their limitations should be acknowledged.
- Useful in visualising what cities are and are not doing well and then can be a tool in helping cities to manage their resources more efficiently and possibly more effectively, which is also important with limited budgets.
- Useful for companies wanting to tailor packages to cities.
- They can also when used correctly be useful a useful communication tool and increase citizen engagement.
- They should be re-imagined, explicitly recognizing their inherent politics and contingencies including the complexity of the networks – human, material, social, technical - that go into producing them and how that these influence what they show.
- Remember that they are not complete, they're only as good as the data they have available to show and the way it is presented so we need to remember to ask questions not only of the data that is visualised on the dashboard but also questions of the data we can't see.

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