Open Data for Improved Land Governance

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SUMMARY

Critics of open data often circle around issues of privacy, data quality, and lack of authoritativeness as reasons why open data is less trusted than closed repositories. These are not problems of open data, but rather problems of a lack of data management, and apply equally well to any data set if it is to be made fit for purpose. The authoritativeness of data derives not from being held in an open or closed repository, but rather from whether good data management practices are applied.

Open access to data is not a panacea to land-related problems, and we must refrain from promoting it as an objective in itself. Whether closed or open, high quality data remains high quality, and poor quality data is poor quality. The key difference is that exposing data to the public opens it up to be studied, challenged, and improved. Open data is the great facilitator of research, innovation, and new knowledge.

Therefore, land administration data, far from currently being complete or authoritative on a global level, can be improved by opening up the data. Open data will allow non-traditional spatial data sources in the land sector to be harnessed to shore up shortcomings in official data sources to improve decision making. This can serve to broaden the base of information and data that can be used as the basis for land governance decision making in society.

Opening land data is only the first step towards improving it. For the open data-innovation-improvement cycle to occur, the information must be not only findable, but accessible, interoperable, and reusable. These four terms make up the FAIR principles, foundational to the open data revolution.

The Land Portal supports data management practices that increase actual accessibility of data and information about land. We support data management practices through our investments in

metadata and the creation of the land thesaurus , LandVoc, as well as initiatives such as the Open Up Guide for Land Governance. The Open Up Guide initiative aims to improve data literacy at the government level and guide governments to opening up country-level data in an accessible way (Bayer & Booth, 2021). LandVoc (as a semantic standard) provides a framework to link data in an intelligent way across different repositories in different geographical and thematic contexts . Making data inter-operable means the government and other data producers use and apply global standards that make the same data “work” in different contexts (Cagdas, Meggiolaro, & Stubkaer, 2021), (Mey & Meggiolaro, 2020). We support capacity building measures to improve data management practices at the operational and policy levels.

Evidence shows that very little land governance data is open. There is a poor record of publishing land administration data in support of the core land administration functions (tenure, use value, development) and no data on public land holdings, with Davies et al, (2019) stating that there is no structured open data “on government landholdings, purchases and disposals”.

Land administration has changed from being a parcel data record to an integrated information and decisions support system in pursuit of sustainable social, economic and environmental management (Williamson, Enemark, Wallace, & Rajabifard, 2010) (Zevenbergen, De Vries, & Bennet, 2016). The research argues that the land data derived from the functions of modern land administration systems should be opened up in an effort to improve land governance.

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