International Conference on Urban Data Science

Roundtable Discussion (July 25th, 2017)

Discussion Summary

Challenge Question #1 (Facilitator: Prof. Ann Howard, RIT)

1) Why haven't midsized cities not seen direct benefits from recent technology advancement?

The consensus within the discussion group was that lack of resources (both funding and skilled employees) is a major reason why mid-sized cities have not been able to take advantage of recent technology advancement. Other reasons mentioned include:

- Elected officials don't usually look to data for decision making
- Local leaders usually don't have an adequate understanding of the values associated with employing data science
- "Inertia" within government departments (this is not unique to mid-sized cities)

It was also noted that data analytics in mid-sized cities may be more manageable in terms of the volume of data available and use of that data, particularly when compared to cities like NYC.

The group also discussed what, other than population size, distinguishes mid-sized cities like Rochester from other larger cities. Shrinking, "rust belt" cities have a greater degree of concentrated poverty proportionate to total population; these cities tend to be very segregated by race and income; declining tax base; jobs tend to be growing in the suburbs and declining in the city; public transportation very poor

2) ***What are some examples of compelling use cases for the midsize cities and urban neighborhoods?***

May of the use cases in larger metropolitan areas can be scaled down to fit the mid-sized city needs. For example, a single camera can be used to collect data for specific applications, wi-fi hot spots can be created to collect twitter data, etc. Much depends upon identifying mid-level employees in specific departments who will understand the value of data collection and analysis and need specific types of data to answer questions or solve a problem. E.g. parks department collaboration with CUSP: one camera installed to track park use.

An open data hackathon, using city data, could engage students in creative ways to analyze and use the data. This could also be used as a way of encouraging tech-startups and job creation.

3) ***What roles can citizens and the leadership of the urban neighborhood and midsize cities can play?***

Citizens can become advocates for data analytics to address specific issues associated with city services and programs as well as,

- encourage the use of readily available, open source data to answer questions specific to neighborhood issues.
- participate in data collection efforts to answer questions specific to neighborhood needs

4) ***What roles can citizens and the leadership of the urban neighborhood and midsize cities can play?***

- There is consensus in the group that it should but the definition of business in the case of the group's academics and private sector members differed viz. the academics define it more in terms of assuring a continuing source of funding for research & the support of grad students, the private sector members thought more about the ability to found and sustain a business or businesses or a flow of profitable offerings for same.
- In those cases where private/public partnerships become the vehicle for realizing the societal good from the innovations, the distribution of ownership and profits requires significant thought and standardized or prototypical contract sets might be helpful.
- The group did not think specific business coursework would be universally valuable for students but that students should be taught to recognize and investigate the value created by a particular work stream.
- The work of Rebecca Henderson seems particularly relevant to
- Internships/Incubators and their ilk are viewed as good ways for students to become more well versed in how their field of inquiry fits into value creation and enterprise creation and nurturance.