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Data, Society and the City: Technology, Territory and Population

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The rapidly urbanizing world reflects the dynamism of urban agglomeration and city-centered growth. World cities have been traditionally recognized with the dominant economic models and have traversed from being industrial to Fordist to post-Fordist to technological to logistical cities of today. These cities are now categorized and conceptualized as ‘intelligent city’, ‘information city’, ‘wired city’, ‘knowledge city’, ‘smart city’ and ‘digital city’. These ideas and articulations share convergent technological perspectives, information and communication centrality, and dependence on cloud computing, big data, Internet of Things (IoT) and modern techniques of data management.

Catering spatiality to these processes, cities like Navi Mumbai represent integrated cyber-physical spaces of institutions and strategic meeting points of the extraordinary circulation of technology, operations, logistics, and services, which directly and indirectly caters to governments, businesses and citizens. Through the paper, we explain how specialized landscapes within Navi Mumbai that cater to collection, interpretation, storage, dispersal and control of data and information flows and how it is mediated through dedicated geographies and physiologies of ‘data centres’. The paper explicates how data infrastructures as data centres and cities mutually produce an intensified relationship through which function, administration and governance of one-another is operationalized.

Through the trajectory of Navi Mumbai, the paper connects the city’s processes, infrastructure development, patterns of governance, and land use patterns with the genesis of institutionalization, operations, and professional aspects of the data centre. How data centre, its geographical location, and physiological operation can provoke and influence our understanding of the city, its activities, transformations, social fabric, infrastructure, and overall governance? Additionally, we attempt to explore how the city and its various aspects are intertwined or en-meshed in the mega processes of data production, analysis, consumption, and exchange? In an attempt to explore this, we have inquired how the city becomes central to state and corporate governance through processes and operations manifested in the security-finance-governance complex of data infrastructures and how do we make meanings of the emerging forms of governance.