

# Geographic Data Science - Lecture II

(New) Spatial Data

[Dani Arribas-Bel](#)

# "Yesterday"

- Introduced the (geo-)data revolution
  - What is it?
  - Why now?
- The *need* of **(geo-)data science** to make sense of it all

# Today

- Traditional data: refresher
- New sources of spatial data
- Challenges
- (Cool) examples

*Good old* spatial data

# *Good old* spatial data

[[source](#)]

# *Good old spatial data (+)*

Traditionally, datasets used in the (social) sciences are:

- Collected for the purpose --> **carefully** designed
- **Detailed** in information ("*...rich profiles and portraits of the country...*")
- **High quality**

# *Good old* spatial data (-)

But also:

- Massive enterprises ("*...every single person...*") --> **costly**
- But **coarse** in resolution (to preserve privacy they need to be aggregated)
- **Slow**: the more detailed, the less frequent they are available

# Examples

- Decennial census (and census geographies)
- Longitudinal surveys
- Customly collected surveys, interviews, etc.
- Economic indicators
- ...



New sources of (spatial)  
data

# New sources of (spatial) data

Tied into the (geo-)data revolution, new sources are appearing that are:

- **ACCIDENTAL** --> created for different purposes but available for analysis as a side effect
- Very diverse in nature, resolution, and detail but, potentially, much more **detailed** in both space and time
- Quality also varies greatly

# New sources of (spatial) data


We can split them at three levels, based on how they originate:

- **[Bottom up]** "Citizens as sensors"
- **[Intermediate]** Digital businesses / businesses going digital
- **[Top down]** Open Government Data

# Citizens as sensors

- Technology has allowed widespread adoption of sensors (bands, smartphones, tablets...)
- (Almost) every aspect of human life is subject to leave a digital trace that can be collected, stored and analyzed
- Individuals become content / data creators (sensors, *Goodchild, 2007*)
- *Why relevant for geographers?* --> Most of it (80%?) has some form of spatial dimension

# Example: Livehoods



The screenshot shows the Livehoods website interface. At the top, there is a navigation menu with links for Home, Maps, About, Research, Press, and Contact. The main content area features a large map of New York City with various colored clusters (blue, purple, red, green) representing different livehoods. Below the map, there is a text overlay that reads: "By analyzing check-in patterns throughout the city, we discover its structure." Below this, there are two columns of text. The left column is titled "Re-Imagining the City in the Age of Social Media" and describes how Livehoods analyze social media check-in patterns to conceptualize city dynamics. The right column is titled "Using Machine-Learning to Study Cities" and explains the research hypothesis that urban character is defined by place types and the people who use them, based on data from approximately 18 million check-ins. At the bottom, there is a section for "Current Maps" with buttons for New York City (NYC), San Francisco (SFO), Pittsburgh (PIT), and a "More Maps" button.

livehoods

Home Maps About Research Press Contact

By analyzing check-in patterns throughout the city, we discover its structure.

**Re-Imagining the City in the Age of Social Media**  
Livehoods offer a new way to conceptualize the dynamics, structure, and character of a city by analyzing the social media its residents generate. By looking at people's checkin patterns at places across the city, we create a mapping of the different dynamic areas that comprise it. Each Livehood tells a different story of the people and places that shape it.

> MORE

**Using Machine-Learning to Study Cities**  
Our research hypothesis is that the character of an urban area is defined not just by the the types of places found there, but also by the people that make it part of their daily life. To explore this idea, we use data from approximately 18 million check-ins collected from the location-based social network foursquare, and apply clustering algorithms to discover the different areas of the city.

> MORE

Current Maps

livehoods.org

NYC > New York City SFO > San Francisco PIT > Pittsburgh > More Maps

# Businesses moving online

- Many of the elements and parts of business activities have been computerized in the last decades
- This implies, without any change in the final product or activity per se, a lot more digital data is "available" about their operations
- In addition, entirely new business activities have been created based on the new technologies ("internet natives")
- Much of these data can help researchers better understand how cities work

# Example: Walkscore

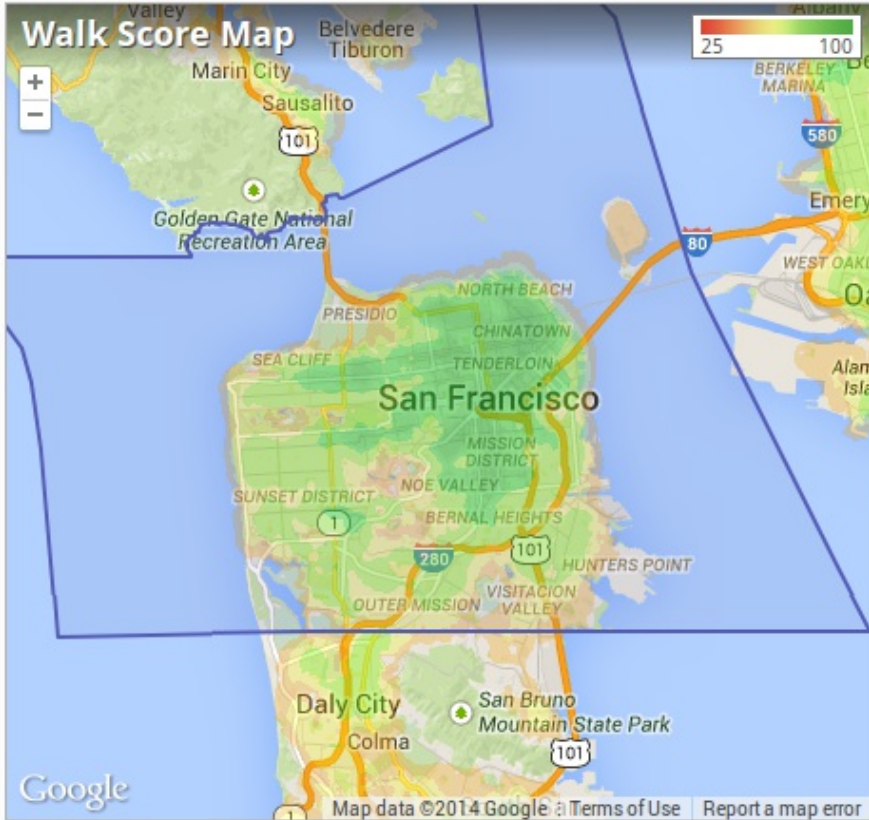
San Francisco Apart... x

https://www.walkscore.com/CA/San\_Francisco

**Walk Score**  
**84**

## San Francisco is Very Walkable

Most errands can be accomplished on foot.



**Walk Score Map**

Sutro Baths

Presidio San Francisco

San Francisco is the 2nd most walkable large city in the US with 805,235 residents.

San Francisco has excellent public transportation and is very bikeable.

Find apartments in San Francisco's most walkable neighborhoods: [Chinatown](#), [Financial District](#) and [Downtown](#).

United States > California > [San Francisco](#)

**San Francisco Apartments for Rent**

**San Francisco Homes for Sale**

View all [San Francisco apartments](#) on a map. The average rent is \$3,750 and the average home price is \$1,099,999. ?

# Open data for open governments

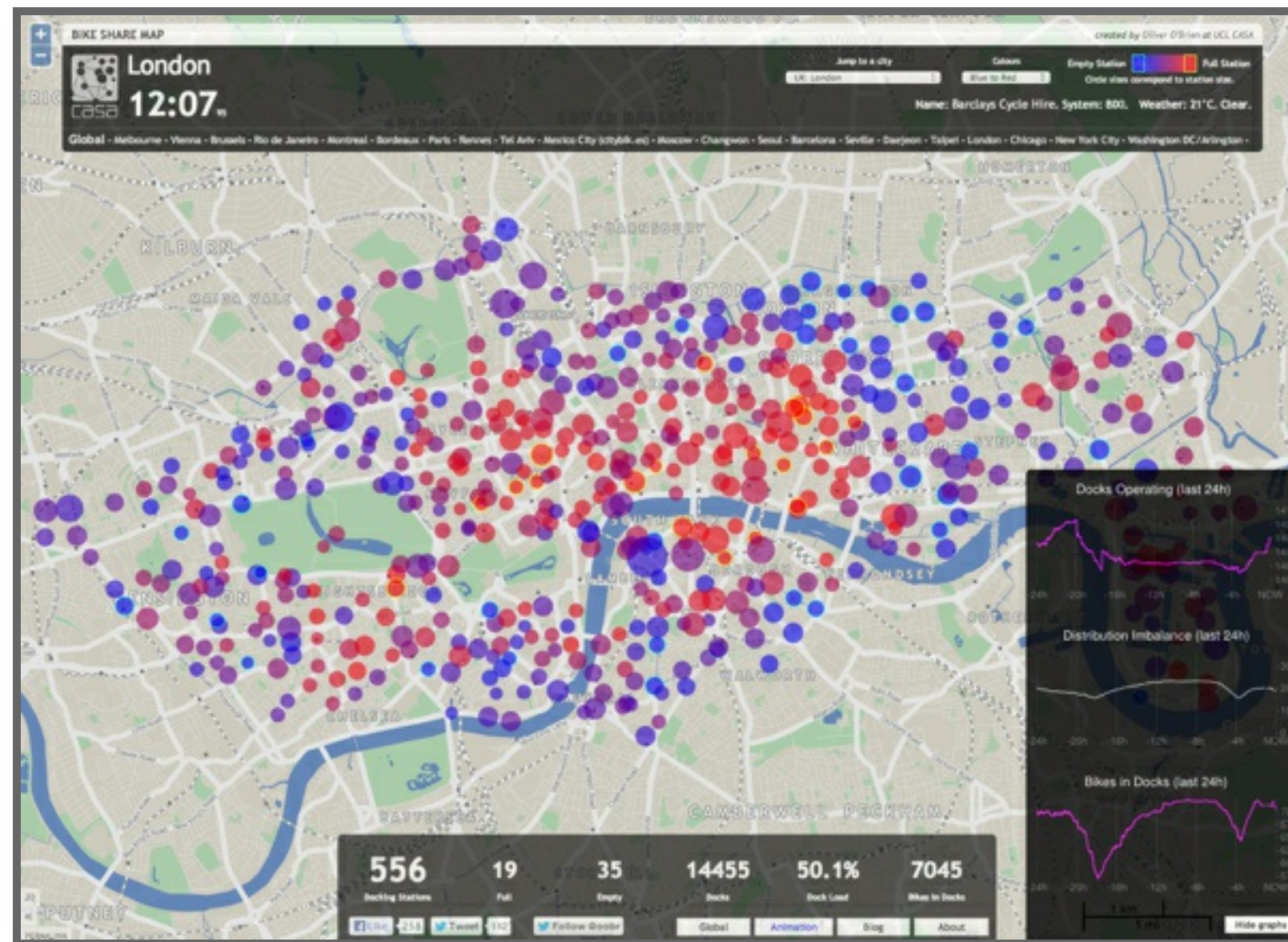
Government institutions release (part of) their internal data in open format. Motivations ([Shadbolt, 2010](#)):

- Transparency and accountability
- Economic and social value
- Public service improvement
- Creation of new industries and jobs





# Example: BikeShare Map



Source

# Class Quiz

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In pairs, 2 minutes to discuss the origin of the following sources of (geo-)data:

- Geo-referenced tweets
- Land-registry house transaction values
  
- Google maps restaurant listing
- ONS Deprivation Indices
- Liverpool bikeshare service station status

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# Challenges

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- Bias
- Technical barriers to access
- The need of new methods

# Bias

- Traditionally, data used by urban researchers meets some quality standards (representativity, accuracy...)
- The *accidental* nature means new data sources will not always meet such standards
- This implies researchers need to have extra care and put more thought into what conclusions they can reach from analyses with new sources of data
- In some cases, bias can even run in favour of researchers, but this should never be taken for granted

# Technical barriers to access

- Much of these data are available
- However, their accidental nature makes them not be *directly* available
- Usually, a **different set of skills** is required to tap into their power
  - Basic programming
  - Computing literacy (understanding of the internet, APIs, databases...)
  - Software savvy-ness (a.k.a. "go beyond Word and Excel")

# (New) Methods

The nature of these data is not exactly the same as that of more traditional datasets. For example:

- Spatial aggregation: Polygons Vs. Points
- Temporal aggregation(frequency): Decadal Vs. Real-time

Some of this does not "play well" with techniques employed traditionally to analyze data in Geography.

# (New) Methods



[[source](#)]

# (New) Methods

To be able to extract as much insight as possible from these new sources of data --> *borrow* techniques from other disciplines, or even *create* new ones

Examples:

- Visualization
- Machine learning

But also others like bayesian inference, network science...



# Methods - Visualization

- Display of graphical summaries
- Arguably, not new to Geography, but more emphasis should be put on it
- Powerful to both *obtain* (explore the data) and *communicate* findings (tell stories with data)

Example: [Public Transit in Boston](#)

# Methods - Machine learning

- Originated in computer science, blended with statistics
- Focus on prediction and pattern recognition
- Two main types of learning:
  - **Supervised:** present the computer some true relationships to "learn" a model, then use the model to infer others where no prediction is available (e.g. [Google flu trends](#))
  - **Unsupervised:** "let the data speak"... and the machine pick up the structure (e.g. [Livehoods](#))

# New Vs Old?

## **Traditional data:**

- High quality, detailed, and reliable
- Costly, coarse, and slow

## **Accidental data:**

- Cheap, fine-grained, and fast
- Less reliable, harder to access, and potentially uninteresting

# New and Old!



[[source](#)]

# Avoid the **streetlight effect**



[[source](#)]



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