Organising collectives, collectivising data: working together (on) disparate data to resist evictions in Ireland

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Abstract

Focusing on work carried out by the eviction database group of the Community Action Tenants Union (CATU) in Ireland, this chapter studies the interactions between proactive and reactive forms of data activism and the rationales of a project gathering data on evictions and landlords. We argue that the constraints encountered with respect to partial, patchy and commercialised data necessitated, shaped, and provided opportunities for the collectivisation of people, skills and knowledge as a core strategy for making data meaningful and actionable. Both the organisation of collectives and the collectivisation of data create opportunities and barriers; bringing data together can present (sometimes novel) possibilities for participation and engagement, but it can also hinder those possibilities by, for instance, abstracting or excluding narrative and experiential knowledge.

Keywords

Data Activism; Evictions; Ireland; Housing; Social Movements; Direct Action

Introduction

Milan and van der Velden (2016) conceptualised data activism as existing along a spectrum between 'proactive' (affirmative engagement with data such as data-based advocacy) and 'reactive' (resisting mass data collection such as anti-surveillance action and encryption practices) forms. Drawing on other work that has built on their framing, we propose here to emphasise the 'collective' dimension of data activism: specifically, the relations between *organising collectives* on the one hand, and *collectivising data*, on the other. This duality, we argue, cuts across the proactive/reactive spectrum. It is particularly relevant to activism which repurposes, but simultaneously critiques and struggles with, the partial, patchy, commercialised and inaccessible qualities of public information sources. Referring to the work of the eviction database project undertaken by the Community Action Tenants Union (CATU) in Ireland, we argue that (proactively) making such data meaningful and actionable, whilst at the same time (reactively) negotiating with its potential harms, necessitated and enabled collective labour of multiple kinds: pooling (of resources and skills), negotiated interpretation, and shared maintenance. These forms of labour express specific relations between organising collectives and collectivising data which provide opportunities and constraints for housing action.

Despite eviction and the threat of eviction being exceptionally harmful to tenants, whether carried out through the procedure required by the state (legal evictions) or not (illegal evictions), there is minimal publicly available data on evictions in Ireland. The most relevant consolidated official data source is the Residential Tenancies Board's (RTB) Data Hub, which provides basic data on the number of eviction notices received and the number of disputes raised by subject of dispute, but these data lack detail and granularity regarding the nature of the tenant, landlord, location, and case judgements, meaning they are of little use in addressing or resisting evictions. This gap between the severity of the impact of evictions on tenants – particularly acute in the context of an ongoing housing crisis in Ireland – and the inadequacy of available data created both an analytical problem and the potential to build solidarities through organising collective work. The eviction database project was thus an example of data activism that repurposed existing, publicly available and patchy documentation – in the form of RTB dispute records alongside records of land and business ownership – to create actionable data and information for tenant organising. Through collaborative data scraping, processing and analysis, the project sought to transform fragmented, bureaucratic records into a coherent resource for understanding patterns of landlord behaviour, identifying repeat offenders of evictions, and supporting both individual tenant cases and broader collective interventions.

Data Activism

Data activism may be defined as the range of 'bottom up', sociotechnical practices that interrogate, harness and/or resist datafication to contest injustices and transform power asymmetries (Milan and van der Velden, 2016; Kitchin, 2022). Milan and van der Velden (2016) identify two main forms of data activism: proactive and reactive. The former involves activists producing or sourcing (by accessing open data or public records) data to conduct analysis that challenges the status quo or hegemonic interpretations of socio-political issues. The latter seeks to limit, regulate and dismantle data-driven systems that reproduce inequality and discrimination. Rather than seeing these two forms of data activism as opposing or mutually exclusive, Milan and van der Velden (2016: 61) posit that activists continually 'position and reposition themselves and their tactics' along the continuum between proactive and reactive approaches. The authors have refined and elaborated upon this framework (Beraldo & Milan, 2019;

Milan, 2024; Milan & Beraldo, 2024) and others have contributed to the conceptual framing since the article's publication. This has clarified that data may be deployed as part of activists' 'repertoire' (that is, as a tool), and/or may form the 'stakes' (issue or problematic) of action itself (Beraldo & Milan, 2019); and that groups may proactively look to repurpose 'official' data for their own purposes, whilst at the same time remaining critical of the data and their potential harms, adopting a position of 'epistemological ambiguity' (Muravyov, 2024). Our contribution lies in conceptualising the distinctive role of collective work that emerges when both people and data are collectivised in housing activism contexts.

We argue that contemporary data activism, particularly in housing contexts, is characterised by a dual collectivisation process: the simultaneous collectivisation of people (through organising) and data (through collaborative extraction, aggregation and interpretation). The novelty of this argument lies in identifying how data work not only produces tools or resources for harnessing and/or resisting datafication; rather, the specific material practices necessary to access, bring together and interpret public data sources – which are often partial, patchy, and not intended for analysis – can themselves facilitate solidarity-building that parallels and shapes traditional organising practices. The framework we outline here examines the co-constitutive relationship between collectivising data and organising collectives.

Collective Data Activism

Several collective aspects of data activism are highlighted in the literature. Firstly, work in social movement studies has posited tensions between digital society/datafication processes and activist organising models, arguing that the growing influence of social media and associated identity politics necessitates a flexibility of organising which sits uneasily with more traditional, group-based models (Bennett & Segerberg, 2011). In a different sense, this is echoed in Milan and Beraldo's (2024) concept of 'datafied movements', wherein data and data-driven infrastructures (such as social media platforms) are not simply tools for social movements to deploy if they so choose, but rather constitute an inescapable structural condition shaping the environment and logics through which they operate (see also Milan, 2018). Initially therefore, questions may be raised as to the tensions between data-led approaches and organising as a specific strategy for enacting change through mass, inclusive and collective power-building (see McAlevey, 2016: 208). Indeed, data activism is not necessarily collective in nature, often involving individual acts (Milan & van der Velden, 2016: 68). Nonetheless, as Dalton (2020: 1104) has observed, the power of grassroots organisations' deployments of data activism lies in possibilities for building solidarity through 'lines of connection'.

Secondly, empirical cases of grassroots initiatives have noted that the forms which data activism take – precisely how data are collected, wrangled, and used – are shaped by the range of attitudes, backgrounds, aims and epistemological positions of people involved in a project: varying understandings of what meanings can or should be inferred through data. For instance, within housing data activism it has been observed that while researchers tend to seek broader patterns in data (often aggregating or anonymising data in the process), activists are more likely to seek disaggregated data which allows for the identification of individual cases for the purpose of engaging with specific community members affected by an issue (Hatch et al, 2023). This ties in with the argument for data in activist contexts to be valued not just for 'accessibility' but also 'actionability' (Tran et al, 2024; see also Johnson, 2014), as data are enrolled as mobilising forces beyond participation in academic or policy debates. Milan and van der Velden (2016) similarly argue that 'the "social" dimension of taking action (such as mobilising and organising) is mediated by the "technical" of information and technology' (2016: 66); in this way data

and their infrastructures are enrolled into both 'knowing the world and turning it into a point of intervention' (2016: 63-4).

Thirdly, not only the *products* of data activism, but also the *processes* of participatory data collection offer possibilities for facilitating organising and solidarity. As Hatch et al (2023: 2090) claim, processes of data gathering 'constitute publics'. For Tran et al (2024: Section 7.3), '[data] tools can be a means to social relations', and sustaining those relations is sometimes more important than sustaining or perfecting the tool itself. This chimes with the importance of the processual and embodied dimensions of activist work. For instance, Routledge and Derickson (2015) emphasise the affective and situated aspects of (scholar-)activism, asking us to acknowledge and harness the role of emotions in motivating and shaping such work, including those emotions seen as 'negative', such as anger. They emphasise the importance of 'situated solidarities'; spaces and times opened up through shared endeavours relative to a common aim. Below we examine how such solidarities are mediated through the work of accessing, collect(ivis)ing and interpreting disparate data, with particular attention to the internal dynamics of collective membership and engagement.

Finally, evictions data demand collectivisation precisely because the representation of evictions (and the landlord-tenant relationship more generally) is heavily shaped by a neoliberal imaginary of individual responsibility determined by the behaviour of 'good' and 'bad' landlords and, in particular, tenants (Power & Gillon, 2022; McElroy, 2023). This discourse obfuscates (and thus reinforces) the structural conditions shaping these relationships, underplaying the disproportionate power of landlords and the possibilities of solidarity among tenants. There is thus power in the combinatory labour of bringing together multiple, pre-existing, 'mundane' sources of data and information (Dalton, 2020: 1100). At the same time, those pulling together disparate evictions data contend with the risk that these data will be co-opted to deepen exploitation, for instance through 'tenant screening' mechanisms (McElroy, 2023; So, 2023; Dalton, 2020). As such, the relationship between organising collectives and collectivising data is neither straightforward, nor necessarily positive in nature, presenting potential constraints and risks as well as opportunities. Understanding these tensions requires attention to the specific forms of collective work undertaken to make data actionable.

The Eviction Database Project

CATU is a tenants and community union which works through a local branch, mass membership and direct action model across the island of Ireland. The core of its work is focused on community organising and 'member defence' – supporting individual tenants facing eviction, rent increases, and poor housing conditions through collective solidarity and direct intervention. Beyond immediate member defence, CATU recognises the strategic importance of data and research in understanding systemic patterns of exploitation, learning from histories of tenant resistance, and building broader campaigns for housing justice (see Gavin & O'Callaghan, 2024; Lima, 2025; Tubridy, 2024).

The eviction database group emerged out of a broader 'landlord research' working group within CATU, in which one author (Tubridy) was deeply involved. This working group sought to develop and share skills for accessing relevant information about landlords primarily for use as a tool in member defence cases. Depending on the case, such research might involve identifying businesses or other properties owned by the same landlord or gathering information about previous examples of their mistreatment of tenants, enabling actions such as (digital or physical) pickets or door-knocking, involving speaking to other tenants of the same landlord to gather information, and potentially build broader campaigns. The

various public sources from which landlord information could be accessed were gathered into a resource booklet shared across the union, authored by Tubridy alongside other CATU members.

While these efforts were productive, it proved challenging to share skills amongst the wider membership and to develop the research capacities of individual local branches, meaning the burden of research work continued to fall on a small group of people – or simply wasn't carried out. In addition, the decentralised model of the union meant members were often not aware of research that had previously been carried out by specific subgroups or branches – even where members were confronting the same landlord. The eviction database project thus arose in response to a desire to, first, systematically build up research capacities within the union by providing a structure in which the relevant skills could be collectively developed and practiced and, second, to consolidate research findings in a single location where they would be accessible and relevant to members and the public. As well as responding to these internal, structural challenges, the eviction database project also sought to address the abovementioned lack of available, meaningful data on both illegal and legal evictions in Ireland.

The project involved both manual scraping of illegal evictions and code-assisted extraction of legal eviction cases from the RTB disputes archive, covering cases from early 2015 until mid-2024. Work was coordinated through monthly online meetings, a scoping workshop in March 2024, and a member skills workshop in June 2024. As well as the database itself, the project led to the publication of a website including maps of illegal and legal evictions, profiles of the most prolific evictors, and a report documenting the issues in greater detail (Tubridy et al 2025). The Data Stories project based at Maynooth University began collaboration with CATU on this project in March 2024. Collaboration entailed the participation of two researchers (Mutter and Hynes) in the project as CATU members, as well as other specific engagements, for example the work of the Data Stories creative technologist, Oliver Dawkins, who developed an automated tool for extracting RTB disputes data, which was used to identify legal evictions. The findings of this chapter were drawn from participatory ethnographic reflections on these engagements.

RTB Dispute Records: Exposing evictions

The RTB is a quasi-judicial state agency mandated to deal with disputes between landlords and tenants. The results of these disputes are narrative documents published as downloadable files on the RTB website. Relative to data made available through the RTB data hub, the dispute records are a potentially rich information source. Each Determination Order (DO) contains the address over which a dispute (such as an eviction) arose, the date of determination by the RTB, the nature of the determination, the amount of damages awarded (if any) and the landlord's (and tenant's) name(s) and, if present, that of each party's agent(s) and legal representative(s). Notably these are the sole available public records which identify the landlords involved in carrying out evictions and, related to this, can provide insights into the types of landlords involved in eviction cases, for example whether individual or company landlords. Where a Tribunal has taken place – in most cases due to one party appealing the finding of the original Determination – there is an additional Tribunal Report (TR) which contains context and narrative detail of the case, including testimony and reasoning for judgements made by the Tribunal.

However, both DOs and TRs are available only as individual case file PDFs. Limited metadata is provided for each case, which can be filtered or searched through the web interface. This metadata omits certain pertinent details. Notably the property address is excluded, and while the subject(s) upon which a

case was raised are included, the specific judgement (which party the RTB found in favour of, and on what basis) is not. Moreover, all DOs are scanned copies of paper documents and are non-text searchable. This meant converting the documents into consolidated data required manual scraping by multiple working group members for illegal evictions, and automated data extraction by the Data Stories creative technologist Oliver Dawkins for legal evictions.

The manual scraping was undertaken by filtering the RTB adjudication and tribunal order search results for the subject of 'unlawful termination' or illegal eviction. Filtering results in such a way returns all cases brought to the RTB relating to illegal eviction, but, as mentioned above, the RTB did not find that an illegal eviction had been carried out in all these cases. Each case was read to ascertain the ruling made. After examining 1,387 cases that occurred between January 2015 and May 2024, we found 353 were determined to be illegal evictions. Through a shared online spreadsheet with 34 top level fields, members recorded pertinent facts about each illegal eviction into a single data resource. This manual scraping was not feasible when it came to identifying legal evictions due to the high volume and poor quality of the data; with over 19,000 DOs and TRs with no metadata indicating if a legal eviction had occurred. Whilst it was feasible to manually comb through 1,021 cases, 19,000 was well beyond our means. In order to facilitate our analysis of legal evictions, we turned to automated data extraction.

The process of extracting data focused on legal evictions was automated by Dawkins, in conversation with Tubridy, using Python[1]. Metadata and PDFs for all publicly accessible DOs and TRs on the RTB website were accessed using browser automation with Selenium. Since many PDFs were scanned images (rather than machine-readable text), optical character recognition with Tesseract was used to make them searchable. Property addresses and the names and roles of landlords were then extracted using pattern matching with regular expressions (RegEx). Where RegEx failed, a slower process was undertaken to extract the remainder via API calls to a local instance of the Llama3 8B parameter model running in Ollama. Tubridy manually verified and cleaned the extracted data as RTB documents lack standardisation, making accurate automated data extraction difficult. We outline the manual verification and cleaning steps undertaken here, in order to highlight that data extraction was not a smooth process, highlighting the work required to make messy data usable, even with the assistance of automated tools. The initial script Tubridy and Dawkins designed extracted ~4,400 cases containing the keyword 'vacate'. Tubridy grouped these cases by landlord (requiring data cleaning as at times the same landlord would appear under different names), removed false positives (duplicate TRs/DOs and irrelevant 'vacate' mentions), then Dawkins ran a second extraction for 'shall vacate and give up possession' (~4,000 cases), which excluded TRs as these led to many duplications. After Tubridy compared datasets to recover falsely excluded cases, removed duplicates, and manually added missing details, the final 4,300 cases still required manual correction for 20-25% that contained errors after automatic extraction.

This automated process was far more individual than the manual scraping illegal evictions data, as we discuss further below. Although members often worked individually and remotely to extract the illegal evictions data, the shared space of the spreadsheet led to moments of collaboration, with some members

[1] Code available on GitHub: https://github.com/virtualarchitectures/DS-CATU. Note that RTB website changes or updates may break the existing script. When using browser automation, apply rate-limiting and backoff strategies to prevent server overload and IP bans. Always respect website terms of service and 'robots.txt' files.

validating others' work, sharing interesting details or patterns, or raising issues that were discussed in subsequent project meetings. The project remained open to new members throughout, with continuous efforts – including the aforementioned workshops – made to recruit those interested among the wider CATU membership.

Notably, the meaning of information present in case files was rarely self-evident. This owed to both the frequency of legalistic terminology used by the RTB and its Tribunals, and the vagueness of information in some cases. Collective work was often required to interpret, decode, or translate data into something coherent and meaningful to those not familiar with tenancy law. This could mean deciding to translate technical language (for instance, 'unlawful termination') into more familiar terms ('illegal eviction'), or recording narrative detail within TRs to capture specific issues and stories. Another important aspect of the work was presenting a less individualised narrative of evictions, highlighting the structural and systemic factors that allow evictions to occur. We did this by bringing together these multiple data sources into one cohesive report (Tubridy et al 2025), as well as through mapping where evictions had occurred across the Republic of Ireland, visually displaying the extent of evictions (see topevictors.ie). Through providing both an overview of the extent of legal and illegal evictions, and linking this to the political and regulatory landscape within which they occur, we were able to present a structural critique of evictions, challenging the widespread individualised, neoliberal representation.

This exercise however had to be balanced with both the need to give a fair and accurate representation of the data, and ethical questions such as whether publicising detailed narrative information about a case within the database could cause further harm or distress to tenants (despite never re-publishing the names of tenants, a decision made early on and in line with other scholar-activist research into evictions (McElroy, 2023; Tran et al 2024)). This interpretive work also involved critique, not only of the accessibility and quality of data, but sometimes going beyond this to question the reliability or consistency of judgements themselves, for instance where group members disagreed with a Tribunal's decision not to classify a landlord's actions as an illegal eviction.

LandDirect and VisionNet: Establishing ownership, tracing interests

Property ownership information is essential for housing activism, facilitating both a broader understanding of actors involved in evictions and the commercial logics behind them, as well as facilitating the actionability of data by developing knowledge of pressure points to target through picketing or other actions. This is particularly important since the number of institutional landlords is growing in Ireland (and elsewhere), resulting in ownership information increasingly being obscured behind complex corporate ownership models (Shelton & Seymour, 2024; Hangen & O'Brien, 2025). As such, tying together evictions data, property ownership and commercial interests/investments of landlords is a potentially powerful exercise.

LandDirect provides online access to the Irish property register as well as the registry of deeds. It can be used to find documents ('folios') containing the names of property owners (whether individuals or companies) associated with a particular property. Like the RTB dispute records, LandDirect is oriented towards accessing individual records, in this case a single folio – and is primarily used by legal professionals as part of conveyancing processes. It is not intended to be used for systematic analysis of patterns of ownership. Within the context of the eviction database project, it allowed us to establish the identity of a landlord at a particular address, or whether a single landlord owns multiple properties. When

combined with the RTB disputes data, it also facilitated the tracing of whether a property where an eviction took place was still owned by the landlord who carried out the eviction. VisionNet meanwhile allows access to company records, such as ownership structures and financial statements. Unlike in some contexts (for example Companies House in the UK), Irish companies' information is not universally accessible. The official Irish register (the Company Registration Office) requires payment for most information and is beset with issues of usability, to the extent that private alternatives such as VisionNet – a subsidiary of global business analytics company CRIF – tend to be used as an alternative.

Both of these resources present issues of data accessibility and quality. While LandDirect is ostensibly public, a verified account is required to access all features, which is not straightforward to set up. Even with an account, the information provided free of charge is basic, with a fee of €5 per folio charged for more detailed information. This resource is additionally afflicted by multiple issues: the platform is frequently glitchy, with pages and map layers failing to load and requests needing to be repeated; and the interface is difficult to navigate, with numerous tabs and functions which are not intuitively understandable. Meanwhile, land registration in Ireland is itself patchy due to complex historical and cultural factors (see Davret et al, forthcoming). This leads to problems of incompleteness – with address searches not infrequently returning the response: 'no folio' – as well as accuracy and timeliness, wherein the entity (individual or company) listed as the owner of a folio may not be up to date. VisionNet meanwhile can be accessed within Ireland only, requiring a VPN for access from elsewhere. Similar to LandDirect, only barebones information is available free of charge. However, a full version of VisionNet is accessible via public library memberships in some (but not all) Local Authorities.

Access to LandDirect was facilitated by a CATU institutional login which was shared among members involved in the research. To alleviate some of the issues of navigability encountered, the aforementioned landlord information booklet featured step-by-step instructions for accessing relevant information, alongside annotated screenshots. At the skills-sharing workshop, this was supplemented by video tutorials, including 'tips' and workarounds which enabled the free retrieval of information usually requiring payment to access. To facilitate access to VisionNet, members working on both the landlord information and eviction database pooled library logins. This required maintenance, as some logins expired over time and new logins were obtained by members joining the project. This constitutes a complex mobility of data access, wherein public data is commercialised, then made semi-public (again) through the libraries, albeit on a geographically selective and individualised basis, and this access is then collectivised by the mundane data work of activists (Dalton 2020).

Collective Data Work(arounds): Pooling, Translating, Maintaining

The project necessitated multiple collective practices to bring data together: pooling resources, sharing access keys, developing tactical knowledges (tips and workarounds), and interpreting and translating obfuscated records into meaningful, actionable information. As opposed to more conventional data processing work, which involves 'cleaning' with the aim of achieving a 'pristine' dataset (Plantin 2019), we aimed to highlight issues with the data, emphasising instances of injustice and retaining the narratives contained within records. As well as making sense of the data, critique involved drawing attention to judgements and classifications which, to group members, quite simply did not make sense, contributing to a broader critique of the regulatory and political landscape (see Tubridy et al 2025).

Furthermore, the collectivisation of fragmented data depended upon and fostered solidarities, which were 'situated' in the sense that they produced a shared sense of endeavour and a shared (albeit not always 'face-to-face' or synchronous) space and time. Having 'work to do' and being able to assign tasks to members operated as a means of getting people involved, thus building solidarity and engagement internally. Included within this process were affective qualities. Though experienced differently across the project, there were undoubtedly elements of the work, particularly cross-referencing of data on evictions, property ownership and company records, which held an attractive 'investigational' urge, and this was something which was emphasised to attract new participants and maintain interest in the tasks at hand. At the same time, a specific issue that needed to be guarded against was that of 'rabbit-holing'; that is, deeply investigating a single potential evictor, becoming fixated on combing detailed financial records, looking at local newspaper articles, old Facebook posts, long lists of individual and company names, and even death records on memorial sites. Investigational intrigue could easily become frustration or boredom which, if left to an individual, would likely be incapacitating. To avoid this, advice was shared, both in the skills workshop and project meetings, simultaneously acknowledging these tendencies whilst seeking to 'stay on track'. Sharing frustrations then opened possibilities for mobilisation via critique and the development of further workarounds.

Collective Constraints

As already noted, organising collectives and collectivising data are not necessarily positively correlated. While the project created new possibilities for solidarity, skill-sharing and action, as it developed, we encountered several limitations. First, despite frequent efforts to collectivise tasks, it is important to emphasise that this did not lead to workloads being equally shared among the group members. In relation to the manual scraping of illegal eviction data, for example, Tubridy completed a large proportion of the work. Another group member (Anushka Dasgupta) took on the majority of the logistical organising, scheduling meetings and creating agendas for meetings, while a third (Michelle Connolly) was largely responsible for creating the profiles that appeared on the website and was published in the report. Finally a fourth (James Corscadden) created the website itself. Whilst each of these group members did not only contribute to these aspects of the project, and did not complete these tasks alone, the work was at times siloed and unequally distributed. It is important to note here that CATU is a volunteer organisation, however in this case the majority of contributors were either paid directly through a grant received for the project and whose roles as doctoral or postdoctoral researchers allowed them to contribute, at least partially, during their working hours - which raises questions about the replicability of this project. When work requires a significant time commitment, and the skill level needed to contribute is high, it is particularly challenging to collectivise the work unless resources to support this are available.

Second, given the scale of RTB data on legal evictions there were limits to analysis the working group could collectively carry out. The volume of legal eviction cases proved too large and unwieldy for manual processing. This resulted in turning toward the more individualised, technical analysis method of automated scraping described above. This was far from a neat, straightforward process, requiring considerable coordination, clarification and manual verification work to identify keywords that effectively located legal eviction cases through pattern matching, and deal with data quality and consistency issues. Nonetheless, participation was far more narrow for this process than for the collectivised manual data combing and input conducted in analysing illegal evictions. This reconfiguration highlighted a tension: the collectivisation of data work at the scale of the eviction database working group was unable to contend with the abundance and fragmentation of data sources, necessitating technical skills which narrowed the range of participants able to meaningfully contribute.

Third, constraints emerged regarding the kinds of data that could be included. Multiple members of the eviction database working group were aware of the importance of including qualitative, experiential data, largely absent from official sources such as the RTB, LandDirect or VisionNet. Indeed, considerable work was done to collect such data, with working group members door-knocking several addresses where an illegal eviction had been carried out in the previous 5 years and the property had not changed hands in that time. The qualitative data gathered from this, including information about further malpractice by the landlord, such as illegal rent increases, not carrying out maintenance, and overcrowding, was not included in the final database or on the website. While some of this narrative information was included in the report (Tubridy et al 2025: 52), ethical concerns, including the potential to expose vulnerable tenants to risks, combined with regulatory restrictions under GDPR, meant that these dimensions of eviction were largely omitted. Simultaneously, legal concerns, such as the threat of defamation claims, limited the extent to which information gathered about landlords in this way could be integrated to 'fill in the gaps' within and between official data sources. In other words, it was possible to go from the database to the ground, but more difficult to take knowledge gathered from the ground and work it back into the data.

These constraints reveal the ambivalence of collectivisation in data activism. On the one hand, bringing data and people together was a generative process that created new solidarities and infrastructures. On the other hand, the structural qualities of eviction data (its scale, regulatory frameworks, and legal sensitivities) worked to fragment participation, delimit inclusion, and restrict the actionable scope of the work. Recognising these constraints does not diminish the value of the project; rather, it underscores that the politics of data activism lies as much in its limits and frictions as in its successes.

Conclusions

Beyond 'data activism', if there is an activist politics to data, it lies not *only* in the datasets or their uses, but in the collective labour of making data meaningful. The CATU eviction database project demonstrates that such a politics is as much epistemological as material: it affirms the value in the process of knowing as a collective exercise, and that data become meaningful and actionable precisely through the solidarities fostered in their production, despite the challenges present in collectivising data work. Akin to the bottom-up repurposing of data, this collectivisation in itself subverts conventional perspectives on data labour as individualised, technical, or 'clean' background process. This relation distinguishes this form of data activism on an epistemological level from the approaches of other actors who seek to collate and connect data, such as data brokers.

Our contribution is distinctive in two ways. First, it moves beyond the proactive/reactive spectrum to highlight a collective/relational axis of data activism. Second, it shows that the obstacles of patchy, inaccessible, and commercialised data are not simply barriers, but conditions under and through which activists seek to generate new practices of solidarity, skill-sharing, and critique, and to use these to produce interpretations that resonate with their publics. In doing so, we further advance work that articulates data activism as a collective, material process of sense-making, linking critical data studies with literatures on feminist epistemologies and activist organising.

Given the constraints noted in our case, further research is required to examine how collective data practices can make disparate data actionable whilst more effectively incorporating lived experience, sustaining engagement over time, and resisting co-optation. For activists, the key lesson is that the value of data activism lies not only in producing datasets, but in cultivating the solidarities that render them actionable.

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