



Community and Economic Development in North Carolina and Beyond Blog: New CED Data Resources Keep Rolling Out: The Opportunity Atlas, The Eviction Lab, Every Building in America and A Look Back to How Data Can Help in Disaster Recovery

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Data are clearly no longer the purview of academics and government officials writing research reports with five pages of text and one hundred appendixes. This post focuses briefly on several amazing datasets that are available with detailed information for CED professionals, as well as a reminder of how important data can be in tracking progress on long-term disaster recovery.

Our new-found ability to explore massive amounts of detailed data on socially complex CED problems is astounding. The Opportunity Atlas is just the most recent example. Based on information on 20 million Americans from childhood to over 30, we can see the pattern of socio-economic results for individuals from the perspective of where they grew up. In other words, we can see how your hometown influences your middle age – your social mobility. The data are at the census tract level. In many cases, the lessons are sobering.

For many people, simply comparing where you are personally versus general economic mobility for your hometown is interesting. However, the more important lesson for CED professionals is that we can now understand the mobility implications of raising a family in any community. When you have millions of data points, it is hard to ignore that some communities offer greater promise over the long-term than others. The data are publicly available and likely will be used in business and personal decisions on where to live and work. With these data comes power, however – the power for communities to be proactive in thinking of long-term policies to increase economic opportunity and well-being, to target efforts to specific areas left behind, and come face-to-face with neighborhoods where personal economic promise is not being fulfilled.

Another incredible resource for CED officials is the data available from the Eviction Lab. The Eviction Lab at Harvard University grew out of the effort by Matthew Desmond to document the eviction crisis in American housing. The result of Desmond's work was the 2017 Pulitzer-prize winning book *Evicted*. The data underlying the patterns in many cases are? the result of local policies and culture, from housing to the courts. Can something as simple as making it easier for someone to avoid being late to a court hearing to pay a fine lead to a reduction in the much more costly result, to individuals, local governments, and community resources, of a family being evicted?

It is hard to not be lured into the NYTimes presentation of *Every Building in America*, built from what it describes as a massive database offered by Microsoft, and built in turn off of satellite images. Have you really looked at the built environment of your community? What story does it tell? The images are beautiful and captivating. Beyond that, for the CED official, how could you use it for rebuilding from a flood, or seeing how where and how we've created our towns in the natural geography block by block — has our building history contributed to damage or avoided calamity? Can we use this information moving forward?

Finally, it is worthwhile to look back to a piece from *Governing Magazine* and the Brookings institution published in 2017. It highlighted the New Orleans Index, a compilation of data used after Hurricane Katrina devastated New Orleans and the surrounding area in 2005, giving policy-makers a clear pattern of progress on moving the area back to fully-functional housing. Comparisons were made between pre-hurricane housing and each year moving forward, highlighting by planning district which areas were lagging, and in the details, suggested reasons why.

As North Carolina communities struggle with the long-term recovery from the double whammy of Florence and Michael, data may be as useful as hammers and nails.