

Lethal in small doses: environmental metaphors for privacy protection in the infosphere

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Luciano Floridi coined the term infosphere to update the concept of the "ecosphere" for the information society. Just as with the ecosphere, the infosphere is a fragile environment where ruthless commercial practices can cause lasting economic degradation. Mining for data can in this sense be seen as harmful as mining for tin, and if "big data" is really the new oil, then we must be wary of ruthless data barons causing data spills.

The paper reports some of the findings and research of an EPSRC funded project on "cumulative revelations", the risks that are generated through seemingly small and individually innocuous disclosure of information, which nonetheless over time accumulates critical potential.

We explore how we can use ideas and concepts from environmental science and environmental law to think of better ways to create sustainable data infrastructures in the presence of such "de-minimis" risks that are ill catered for in traditional risk-based approaches to regulation