

Chapter 66

Cities Really Smart and Inclusive: Possibilities and Limits for Social Inclusion and Participation

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ABSTRACT

This chapter discusses the idea that a really smart city needs not only to innovate in technologies, but also to assure that these innovations will increase social capital and participation possibilities to all citizens. In this domain ICT's to promote new forms of democratic engagement, collective collaboration or creativity stimulation are very important components of a really smart city, more human and social-valued. The focus of the discussion is thus the potential of Smart Cities to develop new possibilities to reduce social isolation and to increase new forms of autonomy, and the factors to have in consideration to avoid digital-divide. The chapter debates also questions associated with the use of surveillance and registration processes and the connected issues of liberty and privacy versus security.

INTRODUCTION

The political and scientific interest around the concept of “smart city” has grown exponentially in the last two decades. However the term remains inconsistent, and because of that, it is applied, by some cities, as a self-defining conception not always correctly confirmed by concrete data. This “self-congratulatory” classification, as it is referred by Holland (2008), needs in fact to be surpassed in order to assure a more profound and integrated conception of what a smart city is really about. The most important actually is to identify the development domains prioritized and how they are understood, namely by citizens, as promoters of a more intelligent form of life in urban contexts. As Komninos (2002) underline, to become smarter, and especially “intelligent”, a city must not only apply a wide range of electronic and digital technologies, but to assure that such practice enhance the innovation, learning, knowledge and creative approaches to problems, challenges and citizens’ expectations. Like this, “smart and intelligent cities”

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are “territories with a high capacity for learning and innovation, which is built-in to the creativity of their population, their institutions of knowledge creation and their digital infrastructure for communication” (Holland, 2008, p.306). Community, in a smart city, needs to learn and adapt in a very rapid and efficient way. So, the preoccupation with the “human capital side of the equation, rather than blindly believing that IT itself can automatically transform and improve cities” (Holland, 2008, p.306) is a central point in the definition of “smart” applied to urban territories. For this matter a reflection about the “balance of power” concerning the access, the use and the comprehension of the information technology by structures and ordinary people is critical for our debate (Holland, 2008, p.316). In other words it is essential to promote a holistic and integrated evaluation of the development strategies promoted by self-designated “smart cities”, not neglecting human factors associated.

The use of technologies by citizens, governments, job creators, etc., must thus be conceived in terms of relational and human capital. In the same way the so-called digital society should be evaluated considering its potentialities, but also the possible polarization between (info) integrated and excluded people and the consequent negative outcomes.

This chapter will reflect about the potential of Smart Cities to develop new possibilities to reduce social isolation of vulnerable populations, to increase new forms of autonomy, and to enhance and improve forms of collective engagement, open innovation, entrepreneurial initiatives and democratic participation. In the opposite way, it will also discuss the factors to have in consideration to avoid isolation and exclusion (by not having access, for instance, to technologies or adequate information/ knowledge), as well as questions associated with the use of surveillance and registration processes, and the connected issues of liberty and the right to privacy and confidentiality versus security.

To articulate potentialities and avoid negative impacts in the construction of REALLY smart cities it's essential, as it will be argued, the existence of integrated evaluations (technological, social, political and economic) and public policies engaged, not only with technology development, but also with sustainable and cohesive social and human development.

BACKGROUND

The number of people living in urban areas is augmenting exponentially and rapidly in the last few years. In fact, as the United Nations data (2012) points out, in 2050, almost 70% of the global population will inhabit in cities. Consequently cities, in the present time and in the future, are an essential nucleus of economic and social development. On the other way urban territories consume nowadays between 60 and 80 percent of energy worldwide and are one of the main responsible for pollution problems associated with garbage production and GHG emissions (UN, 2008). The concerns about quality of life, social cohesion and sustainable development strategies, in such conditions, are thus very real and pertinent, claiming for new responses and combined resources. The actual complex challenges, either in global or local spaces claim in fact for new alternatives and solutions capable of creating a new sense of belonging, wellbeing and togetherness. The responses designed in the past, in urban areas, are not working anymore. The financial crisis, the cultural plurality, the new social risks and the progressive degradation in trust and confidence, call for innovation in policy making, in services and in collective engagement processes. It is needed today, in our countries and cities, not only the application and dissemination to all citizens of technologies, but also, and fundamentally, a massive thinking and behavior transformation. In other words, it is essential to promote the paradigm of a human and cooperative smart city.

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