

Chapter 45

Crafting Smart Cities in the Gulf Region: A Comparison of Masdar and Lusail

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ABSTRACT

This chapter looks at these trajectories by specifically focusing on the interstices of smart cities and competitiveness through the role played by communication technologies. An initial question to tackle pertains to the definition of a smart city, as this concept is used in diverse ways in the literature. Transforming the cities into smart ones is a newly emerging strategy to deal with the problems created by the urban population growth and rapid urbanization. Smart city is often defined as an icon of a sustainable and livable city. Why are Gulf countries investing in smart cities? Is the emergence of smart cities a mere reflection or neoliberal urbanization or are there other dynamics that we need to take into consideration? This chapter attempts to convey the message that smart cities are crucial means of building social capital and also attaining better governance mechanisms in the Gulf.

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*Lusail City is where Qatar's imagination comes to life
&
Masdar City...Highest quality of life with lowest environmental footprint...*

INTRODUCTION

This study approaches the development of Smart Economic & Sustainable Cities in the GCC through the application of these ICT based infrastructural platforms in a comparative perspective. Qatar's Lusail Smart City and United Arab Emirates' (UAE) Masdar City constitute two of the most recent examples of smart cities in the Gulf Region. Although there is an increase in frequency of use of the phrase "smart city", there is still not a clear and consistent understanding of the concept among practitioners and academia. Only a limited number of studies investigated and began to systematically consider questions related to this new urban phenomenon of smart cities (Chourabi et al., 2012). Smart city forerunners like San Diego, San Francisco, Ottawa, Brisbane, Amsterdam, Kyoto, and Bangalore are all now setting a trend for others to follow (Allwinkle & Cruickshank, 2011).

The concept of smart city entails common characteristics that are key indicators of smartness in a city: a smart economy (sustainable economic growth), smart mobility, smart environment (wise management of natural resources), smart people, smart living (a high quality of life), and smart governance (participatory governance). In the literature, there are widely accepted measures of what a smart city constitutes. For instance, the smartness of a city should be measured by its participatory governance, its smart economy, its smart urban mobility, its smart environmental strategy and management of natural resources, and the presence of its self-decisive, independent, and aware citizens leading a high-quality urban life. Three necessary conditions are defined to create a spatially enabled society: first, citizens have to be "spatially literate"; second, "a conducive environment" for sharing spatial data is needed; third, globally unified Geospatial standards are needed (Roche, 2013). The practical application of this view refers to the individuals' ability to use geospatial information and location technology as a means to improve the way they interact with the space and other individuals on/in/through space.

To illuminate the connection between smart cities and ICTs, Richard Florida's "Creative City" (2008, 2006, 2005, and 2002) thesis is a fertile analytical approach for understanding how cities, especially in periods of neoliberal globalization, have become central to the attainment of competitive advantage. Resulting from the internalization of neoliberal values by national governments, local authorities, municipal leaders and other actors, it is now possible to detect a form of "hollowed out" nation state (Jessop, 2002), or the downloading of the capacities, responsibilities and authority of nation states onto cities. Consequently, as Florida's "Creative City" thesis¹ illustrates, the real economic competition today plays out among cities, not nation states. Florida's thesis positions the three T's - Technology, Talent, and Tolerance – as responsible for attracting the "Creative Class", contributing to the national economy and establishing the requisite framework for sustaining competitive advantage. While communication technologies should not be perceived as the only determinant of "creativity", they are indicative of the "new technologies of power" which have arguably become the momentum behind the intensification of a neoliberal ethos in urban spaces. As such, Florida's creative city thesis and its accompanying buzzwords, "creative class" and "creative economy", celebrate the increasing hegemony of the neoliberal market mentality.

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