



## FUTURE SMART CITY DEVELOPMENT Social, territorial and technological innovation

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World Urban Development Congress - Report

The smart city is here! But didn't we have that before? The century which we have left had modernism as their smart city movement. We developed well planned cities by means of rational blue print planning: ringroads, central business districts (CBD's), in short: the CIAM prescriptive. And what did we get? Congestion, pollution, segregation, inequality. Yes, the city is back on the map, all over the world. And it's doing fairly well but there are a lot of problems to be solved. But the cities, are not only the problem, they are also the solution. Mitigation and adaptation of climate change, energy transition, clean tech, smarter mobility, in all cases we need the city's playground, the knowledge, the capital and the smart people to develop better, more sustainable solutions.

So, it was logical idea from the Board of INTA to choose for the smart urban "thing" as theme for their 38th annual congress, focusing on technology and innovation and the opportunities and effects on cities. How can and will technology and innovation change urban patterns, in all kind of urban manifestations, territorial, economically and societal? What should be better options for cities and people by means of the new technologies of this century?

### **Questioning the new paradigm**

First of all we should be careful with this "new paradigm". There's no reason to get too excited and assume we now are reaching the stage of an urban utopia (see for instance Edward Glaesers's "Triumph of the City"). We are far from sustainable and resilient urban systems, very far! On the other hand there is certainty about the stage in history we are in. In the 20th century we went from an industrial city to the modern car dominated and enlarged cities and now we are on the brink of a new transition, whether we like it or not. The present urban system is at the end of its shelf time. And maybe the smart city could help. But it is certain that that alone won't be enough. We need smart urbanism as a more complete approach towards the problems cities face today.

Maarten Hajer, a Dutch scientist states (in "Smart about Cities") that we are too optimistic about smart cities and tend to forget about the failures of the past. He sees the failure of urban planning to conceptualize a relation between cities and their natural environment as one of the tragedies of 20th century planning. Our urban metabolism is completely out of sync. So when thinking about the transition which we are looking at, thinking of smart city concepts, we should not only consider the failures of planning, but more importantly we should stress the need to conceptualize conditions for a sustainable and resilient urban system. And that

demands a more comprehensive and inclusive approach than the euphoria we sometimes see about the technical solutions the smart city has to offer.

### **Social innovation, a prerequisite in smart cities**

INTA 38 at least showed that without social innovation we won't have the smart city. It was an excellent choice to have the conference in this part of the world. The Baltic countries and the Scandinavian countries are practicing smart city concepts with a strong emphasis on public participation. Malmö for instance has installed open urban platforms, citizens and city planners, and focuses on value based planning which is socially sustainable. This approach asks for more political skills than we are used to (visionary leadership), it asks for smart and responsible citizens. Christer Larsson from Malmö made it clear that building up this kind of smart alliances, is the real challenge for cities.

Mrs Veera Mustonen from Helsinki took us to new city development in the Finnish capital and made it clear that technology is a new and profound layer in urban planning, together with spatial design, economy and mobility. In her view smart urbanism must focus on the convenience of people, making life easier. Technology can and must contribute to a greater share of personal time for people. Quality of life is not only realized in the public domain, in the accessibility, functionality and quality of it, but also in personal advantages for citizens. In a new area development in Helsinki the goal of the planners is to give the residents more personal time by optimizing the functionality and convenience of the place, the logistics and the amenities.

In general in Helsinki the way the smart city technology is implemented in the city is based on three steps or principles: start small, learn fast and scale up. These steps are being taken by urban platforms consisting of planners and citizens.

### **What about spatial planning? Does it still matter?**

This raises the question of the role of urban planning as an ultimately spatial approach of the city. Will the technological approach overrule our long time focus on spatial requirements? I don't think so, but it is certain that there is a "new kid on the block". The new technology will have big impacts on city life. It will make our mobility in cities easier, saving us time, making households easier to run. These things don't have much to do with spatial manifestations. But on the other hand there are also profound impacts on the urban environment, on the use of space. We can, as a consequence of the internet of things, do with less shops in cities, we can do with less spacious houses, with fewer cars maybe and our sophisticated logistics will save us not only time but also space. So smart urbanism will still have to deal with spatial and design affairs in the public realm. The change is that space is no longer the only layer with which we have to deal with.

But what about the actors? During the INTA congress there was a statement which said that it's still the government that has an initiating role when it comes to urban change. That maybe true but change is also going to come here. Smart cities, it is a strange combination. Can cities be smart? No, citizens can be smart. A smart city is a city with smart citizens. In cities we find the best educated people. The time where government could monopolize knowledge in the planning realm is over. Well

educated and trained citizens sometimes have more expertise on relevant public issues than the government has. In the age of the smart city governments have to rely more and more on the expertise and views of their citizens. Governance will replace government. This change in the roles of the government and the public could have far reaching consequences for local democracy. Sure, the institutional framework with elections forming governments will stay in place. But next to it we can expect new forms of democratic governance in territorial development and in introduction of new technology. Government and the public, forming open platforms, starting innovative processes on a small scale, learning fast from each other and scaling innovation up when it's ready for implementation.

We could see a glimpse of these new kinds of approaches in Tallinn and its neighbouring countries: smart urbanism as a new planning paradigm, both in content and in process, in redeveloping cities and regions in a more sustainable way.

Jaap Modder

Brainville urban and regional planning  
Deltametropolis Association  
The Netherlands

[jaapmodder@brainville.nl](mailto:jaapmodder@brainville.nl)  
+31653394590

INTA rapporteur

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