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Smart Cities. Definitions and comparisons

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The concept of Smart Cities has been introduced in a situation where the economic crisis, the huge growth of population in urban areas and the increased of natural resources consumption have now reached unacceptable levels. The purpose is to answer all those social, environmental and economic cities are no longer able to cope with traditional methods, but which must be answered through new intelligent solutions in order to maintain its sustainability.

The term "Smart Cities" was coined for the first time in the early Nineties to indicate that an urban development began to gravitate towards technology, innovation and globalization. This new approach to development was to link the marketing of technology to effective public sector initiatives and private sector, with the aim of creating new infrastructure for economic growth, diversification and global competitiveness. Since the Nineties until now, the concept of Smart Cities has not yet been given a precise definition, however, the main interest is directed to the emergence of new technologies for improving the lives of citizens and the concern for sustainability.

In the political arena, the label is often used superficially minimizing the real problems in the urban context and assuming a positive attitude and rather uncritical towards urban development. In most of the Smart Cities projects central to the idea of smart development there are technology and business, considered the guiding elements for a sustainable city and international competitiveness.

But below the complacency surface of Smart Cities that have only considered these aspects, there remain some fundamental problems, since, continue to be ignored: the effects of social polarization due to the rapid and poorly organized dissemination of information and communication technology, to the increasing inequalities generated by the advent of the creative class and to the conflict between environmental sustainability and economic growth.

The purpose of the concept of Smart Cities, supported by intellectuals Holland, Streitz and Paquet, must be both economically and socially. According to this view, the primary elements for a truly smart strategy are the welfare of citizens and social cohesion.

Given the different characteristics of each urban situation, objectives and strategies that bring the city to pursue a field of smart development are very different and vary in each country.

The most marked difference is noted by comparing smart projects that take place on existing cities and those that are made in the city of new construction. The latter category includes primarily the cities that are emerging in the Middle East who are the product of an advanced technological system.



Although these cities are built with the goal of becoming CO2 neutral city, there are much controversy about their effective environmental sustainability. In these projects, the development is driven only by entrepreneurial ideas and it cannot really be intelligent.

Some Smart Cities projects, like Amsterdam and Singapore have shown, however, know how to use private resources through the conclusion of public-private partnerships very beneficial to the public entity, the company and the community.



The success of an intervention can be generated simply by the rate stakeholder involvement. This is the case of Amsterdam, in particular, which stands out for its ability in having undertaken a multi-level governance that has accompanied all of the projects implemented in the urban area.

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