

## **Smart cities: a new model of democratic lifestyle**

“Smart cities” is the next stage of the urban development: cities built around networks that can connect the smartness of their citizens, their local government as well as their businesses.

### Why do we need smarter cities?

Firstly; this is one of the solutions that can help us creating more sustainable cities: limiting the waste of energy, of resources and of time because each one of them is used in a “smarter” way, while fostering sustainable economic development and higher quality of life.

Secondly, this is also a solution to create better links between the citizen-inhabitants and their local government: in a smart city, the citizens can become truly actors of their city and interact easily and more directly with their local administrations or services: citizens become genuinely involved every day in local matters of public policy.

Smart cities are cities that can solve their problems through the promotion of innovation, the extensive use of networks, to facilitate the circulation of information, and through the ability to make everybody an actor of their city, and not just a simple passive user. In a word, smart cities are much more than a simple sum of the bricks and mortar of all the buildings, or the mere addition of all their inhabitants.

For example, in a smart city, the inhabitants can share the use of tools or vehicles. Who, in this assembly, owns a drill? I guess a large share of us. And who has used it over the past, let’s say, two months? Not so many of us. It is better, smarter, to share such a tool than to own it, particularly in cities where space is a scarce resource. Smart cities help creating local networks where inhabitants can share things, can share services. This is not that many different from what currently exist. But the only difference is that because a smart city facilitate the gathering and circulation of information, it becomes easier to do so. And therefore more people do so.

Another example: imagine a massive water leakage that would severely disrupt transport networks. In a smart city, all the water pipes are equipped with sensors that would immediately detect the leak, but would also transmit data to transport authorities that would be able to both redirect the local traffic and avoid traffic jam, and help the intervention team to reach the area faster.

### Why should the young generation be concerned?

Firstly, because smart cities are tomorrow’s cities. So, the cities we will be living in. That’s a fair reason, isn’t it?

But, also because smarter cities are likely to come along with two possible futures: a very positive one and a very bad one. These two futures could happen at the same time.

### **Smarter cities for smarter democracy**

As I mentioned, smart cities means creating more direct links between the citizens and both the administration and local government.

Some cities have already started developing and deploying some application that you can get on your smart phone. These application allows you to report things you spot on the streets and you would like your local government to fix: for instance, a street light doesn’t work, a trash bin is overflowing, a pavement needs to be cleaned, a water pipe is leaking... you just take a picture of the thing, locate yourself on the map and send a message through the application. That is an example of a smart

interaction between you and the city services. A solution to get better services from your local government.

But a smart city also brings new opportunities for you to interact and communicate with your local elected city councillors. For instance, the city council can consult the inhabitants of a particular neighbourhood on matters of very local politics. The mayor wants to know whether the city should invest in new Christmas decorations in a given street. When you enter the street, an application on your phone communicates with a wireless device put by the city and asks you to rate the decorations and if necessary to suggest improvements. This is local democracy at work: your elected official can truly know what their electors think and they can get their opinion to improve the city you are living in.

A smart city is a city built around networks. This can also help the citizen to gather and act together in order to protest or just to make their opinion heard from their local government. On each specific issue (let's say building a new car park), people sharing the same opinion on this topic, can share information and make their case to the city councillor, but also create their own local consultation.

One very important feature of smart cities is the availability of data: smart cities should indeed also be "open data" cities. Information on a large share of topics should be available: energy consumption of public buildings and spaces, weather, number of people crossing a street, etc. Based on this information, some citizen can create their own smart application, share it and try changing the behaviour of the inhabitants. For example, by mapping the use of energy, and made this information available on all smart phone, each one of us the users can know how much energy is consumed and he or she can act accordingly.

### **"Smart cities" but not "spy cities"**

The concept of smart cities heavily relies on data. All these data are stored in big databases, each one of them connected. These connections are crucial, since a major aspect of the smartness comes from the ability to mix information from diverse sources.

A smart city is a city literally covered with sensors of all kind: sensors in the trash bin that detect if it is full, cameras to follow people, sensors detecting variation of the weather, cameras reading car number plates or recognizing the faces...

But this smartness can also turn into a nightmare, a spying city that knows everything from you: cameras record all your movements, transport networks know when and where you travel, wireless sensors know what kind of stores you prefer, etc.

With all this information available, the local government could use them to spy on the citizens (by arguing that security is involved), connect information from diverse sources and even try to control their lives. When so much information is gathered and connected from so many sources (sensors, live cameras, wireless transmission with a smart phone...) it may become very tempting to use them for bad reason. For instance, local politicians may try to precisely target their electors in order to influence them.

It may sound as a bad movie scenario, but one should always keep in mind two things. First: democracy is fragile, particularly when a large share of the citizens do not believe anymore in it and do not vote. Secondly, the dictatorship system of the 21<sup>st</sup> century is likely to be based on big data and control the citizens through the Internet.

That is why, we, and particularly the young generation, should pay very close attention to the development of smart cities. I do not say that we should not develop them. But we must always keep in mind the potential negative aspect of them and build the safeguards at the same time as we build the cities of the future.

Thank you.

Miroslava Demkova  
President Young Democrats for Europe YDE