

A Smart City – The Place People Love



The Smart Cities concept should not be seen as the mere implementation of innovative technologies, but rather as a holistic approach. Even the most high-tech, energy-efficient city would not be considered smart if its inhabitants and tourists didn't feel comfortable there. A discussion about smart urban development should always begin first of all with the people and their needs.

It All Starts With a Vision

As the futurist Joel A. Barker said, "Action without vision just passes the time". Liesing Mitte is an urban development area in Vienna, twice as large as the city center, which was developed as part of Visions 2020 and 2050. Amongst the long-term goals are: a gradual reduction of the CO2 footprint towards the aim of zero emission by 2050, a reduction of energy and raw material consumption by at least a factor of ten, and obtaining the energy supply from renewable energy sources only. At the same time, the quality of life in the target area should be improved, and the financial viability of the measures ensured.

The promise of smart sustainable cities won't be fulfilled without the involvement of citizens, whose participation and collaboration can be harnessed to boost the development of their own cities. The Vision, Roadmap and Action Plan (which includes 100 different activities including urban farming) of Vienna's Liesing Mitte, were discussed with citizens and other external partners who were asked for their input.

Engage Your Citizens

To deliver a good quality of life, cities have to understand that vision and technology need to work both ways: not just for citizens but also with citizens. Other great examples of citizens' engagement in combination with the use of smart technologies are the 'Trash Out' project which was developed by a Slovak team, the Acqualta project in Venice, Open311 API, Helsinki Region Infoshare, and Apps4Finland in Helsinki, and the Spanish SmartSantander project. In the city of Santander, 12,000 smart sensors have been installed under the asphalt, as well as fixed to street lamps, city buses, buildings, and rubbish bins. Their aim is to measure levels of pollution, noise, humidity, light, and traffic, generating valuable information that may reduce the amount spent on utility bills, energy consumption, and traffic management by millions. The city demonstrates the real time benefits of the Internet of Things by allowing residents to have up-to-the-minute information on road closures and parking availability, as well as bus delays.

This information can be accessed through street signs equipped with digital panels, citizens' smartphones or Augmented Reality applications, so that it is just a click away.

It's people who create vibrant streets

The city of Songdo in South Korea is already regarded as one of the hi-tech capitals of the world. There are no rubbish trucks making noise on the streets. Instead, all household waste is sucked directly from individual kitchens through a vast underground network of channels to waste processing centers. It looks impressive, but its streets remain empty. As a few bloggers have said after visiting this city: "Sometimes design seems to be more important than the practical aspects of the city." or "Outside of the intelligent system that a casual pedestrian wouldn't notice, the scale of the site and width of the empty streets makes walking less than convenient and certainly not pleasurable."

If we're really to understand and appreciate cities, especially

smart cities, our focus cannot only be on technology. It has to be on people. Smart cities provide people with a way of life that is more convenient and comfortable, while still being conscious of the environment.

Many surveys have established that life on the streets and in other public spaces are major attractions, and very highly valued amenities. The focus is primarily on the importance of creating "soft edges" by way of front yards, forecourts, porches and terraces, in order to provide better opportunities for enjoying public spaces. Unfortunately, many developers and architects play with a bird's eye model until, bingo, they form a great infrastructure ideal which from the air is very interesting, but they do not think about how the place would look at eye level. Imagine walking down a street full of buildings, where the ground floors are full of black glass and there is nothing that you, as a human being, can interact with. Not exciting, right?

Cities are about people, particularly about bringing people together. So when we talk about smart cities, we should keep firmly in mind that they are fundamentally about people, about smart people, and about creating the opportunity for people to interact. We are a social species, and cities serve as the venues for interaction which generates innovation, art, culture, and economic activity.



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