The smart city paradigm

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hot hot hot!
In the city

with special guest
Kensaku Seki
hot hot hot! in the city

Sounds like a famous TV show, a sexless remake if you want, but we’ve added all the crispy ingredients so we can make the switch and **find the courage to look the crisis in the face and genuinely connect with it on an emotional basis, without flinching.** *A new season is on air.*

hot hot hot! in the city

We’ve decided to highlight the invisible pollution when most media are focused on the plastic iceberg. What we don’t see, in the city, and elsewhere, is what we need to consider as an equal threat than the material waste. Air. Micro-particles. Gaz. Circulating lies. Infinite Data storage. Toxic behavior...

hot hot hot! in the city

This season isn’t a soap opera, or a drama show, more of an anticipative thriller. It’s a place where grasshoppers are exquisite. It’s a world where we replace the words, environment and ecology, under the simple title: Health. It’s an existence with cosmic eyes and wheat based play-doh lipstick. It’s a planet where women are equal to men.

hot hot hot! in the city

It’s a labour of love and conviction. You can spy/copy/hack us, we’ll never lose our freedom. Running naked 🌿 in the city. Laser fighting stereotypes. Dancing our heads off. #aboutlastnight.

hot hot hot! in the city

ribbon Hello tomorrow. Together we need to make a change, never cool down, we need you to be hot hot hot! Invent tomorrow. Together we need to **harness the transformative power of hope, so it can be turned into creative and innovative solutions** *.

Follow us through the heart of the city, on the rooftops and on the walls, where every cross-road is a new beginning.

* see page 275
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One of the myths of the smart city is that the material dimension of our life is losing importance in favour of the immaterial, digital, virtual and simulated. But without the data centres, sensors, networks, computers the digital transition would be impossible. The smart revolution is dependent on its physical counterpart, it is shaped by the physical world, and in turn shaping the physical space that we inhabit.

From smart meters to smart buildings, from smart materials to smart grids, from smart communication to smart citizens. Increasingly our cities are becoming smarter. Throughout history cities have undergone major transitions, the smart transition is in full swing and will remodel the city fundamentally.

The “Smart City” has become the catch all phrase to indicate the advent of a charged technological shift that has been propelled by the promises of more safe, more convenient, more healthy and more efficient forms of living (Figueiredo, Krishnamurthy, & Schröder, 2018). The majority of politicians, planners, architects, civil servants, security specialists, corporation representatives and many more seem to agree that the smart transition of cities is self-evident and inevitable. But behind this apparent consensus many contradictions and open questions emerge.

What is the “Smart City”? This question seems hard to answer as the “Smart City” brings together a broad range of different challenges, stakeholders, timeframes, spatial scales, and technologies: shared driving, autonomous living of elderly, ubiquitous computing, democratic participation, safety monitoring, connectivity and unprecedented efficiency, and many more. And it is precisely vagueness that enabled the success story of the “Smart City” as it became a welcomed projection surface for a broad range of stakeholders.

The “Smart City” must be understood as a concept. And the concept becomes interpreted in many divergent ways. Often “Smart City” concepts tend to be discussed superficially. As if networked sensors, data, algorithms and artificial intelligence would automatically lead to a better world.

Major drivers of discourses are huge corporations like Cisco, Siemens, Microsoft, IBM, Hitachi and others as “Big corporations see big money as growing cities turn to tech” (Booten, 2015). They sell technology solutions “to address real and urgent problems such as those related to health and aging, traffic congestion and environmental quality”. Citizen-led “bottom up” initiatives that propose open platforms and participation in decision making stand in strong contrast to corporate initiatives. Important is to overcome the dichotomy of “big tech” versus “bottom up” solutions (Hajer & Dassen, 2014, pp. 14-15).

References


We all breathe the same air. Pollution in China can travel up the Central Valley in California.

Instead its more promising to explore specific discourses and projects by exploring how technologies can contribute to solve the most pressing socio-spatial challenges of our times: sustainability, climate change and the environmental impacts of urbanization, transformations in the nature of work, increasing economic and social inequality, etc.? 

We must explore “Smart City” discourses and projects by engaging into a broad understanding of smart technologies - one that conceives them not merely as “efficiency oriented practices, but [as practices that] include their contexts as these are embodied in design and social insertion” (Feenberg, 1999). Such a broad understanding includes questions of responsibility, accountability, ethics, participation, knowledge (necessary to both produce and participate), and many more. This way we can explore how “Smart City” concepts become interpreted and translated into specific contexts.

The future direction of our cities is largely shaped by the discourse and practices that become prevalent and thus push specific agenda. Therefore, it becomes of huge importance to engage in critically exploring “Smarty City” interpretations and intervene with alternative proposals to bring about the transformation that are necessary and desirable. In what kind of world do we want to live in the future?

Torsten Schröder is currently Assistant Professor at the Chair of Architectural Design and Engineering at the Eindhoven University of Technology (TU/e). His key research interests are sustainability, resilience and circular economy within architecture and cities. Torsten aims to develop innovative, comprehensive and compelling design strategies for sustainability in specific architectural and urban design projects. Currently, he is investigating how STS and “Research by Design” can make crucial contributions to the vital question: How or in what kind of world do we want to live in the future?