

Smart cities—transforming urban growth and development

The intersection of globalization, technology and urbanization – a hallmark of the 21st century – is transforming where we live and how we live. This is especially true as it regards the world's cities.



Jerry Haar

Globally, more people live in urban areas than in rural areas, with 54% of the world's population residing in urban areas in 2014. In 1950, 30% of the world's population was urban, and by 2050, 66% of the world's population is projected to be urban.

Today, the most urbanized regions include Northern America (82% living in urban areas in 2014), Latin America and the Caribbean (80%) and Europe (73%). The urban population of the world has grown rapidly since 1950, from 746 million to 3.9 billion in 2014. Asia, despite its lower level of urbanization, is home to 53% of the world's urban population.

Harnessing the seemingly limitless capabilities of technology, urban communities are embracing the concept of "smart cities" to meet both the challenges and opportunities of urbanization.

Smart cities are urban areas that integrate information and communication technology (ICT) to manage a city's assets and deliver efficient and cost-effective services across a wide spectrum of services. These include infrastructure, health, education, social services, public safety and waste management. The two

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overarching characteristics of a smart city are orchestration of intelligence (establishing institutions and community-base problem solving and collaborations) and empowerment intelligence (open platforms to cluster innovation in specified districts).

The development of broadband networks and e-commerce services cartalyzed the smart city movement. Singapore – a smart nation as well as a smart city – has been one of the pioneers in improving the quality of life for its citizens via technology-enabled solutions to urban problems and opportunities to create more user-friendly government services.

However, smart cities are increasingly a worldwide phenomenon.

For example, Amsterdam's smart city initiative utilizes interconnected wireless devices to reduce traffic, save energy and improve public safety. Barcelona employs sensor technology for urban irrigation and network data analysis for improved public transport. Medellín launched a Metrocable line in 2004 to serve the poor and integrate them into the city, with access to jobs and combined libraries and parks into safe spaces for all.

And only recently, three Israeli companies won an international competition to build from scratch a high-tech city for low-income Brazilians (Croatá Laguna Ecopark).

Here in the US, cities as diverse as Santa Cruz, CA; LaGrange, GA; and New York City have incorporated smart city thinking into the management of public services. Dallas is launching a Dallas Innovation Alliance, IBM is deploying a Smarter Cities Challenge in Detroit, and Siemens is supporting a Carbon Neutral Cities Alliance.

At the federal level, the Obama Administration announced last September a \$160 million Smart Cities Initiative comprising investment in federal research and the leveraging of more than 25 new technology collaborations to help communities tackle major urban challenges.

In Miami, the tripartite engine of technology entrepreneurship – the Knight Foundation, eMerge Americas and Miami-Dade County government – has enhanced the visibility and impact of smart cities.

eMerge has featured smart city speakers and panels since its launch in 2014, the Knight Foundation has supported scores of events and activities featuring smart cities and the Knight Enterprise Fund has provided financing for start-ups such as Soofa, a maker of smart, solar-powered benches for urban spaces, and Urban.US, a venture fund for start-ups that make cities better.

As for the county, three years ago it joined with IBM to deploy data analytics,

reduce water costs, increase transparency and improve transportation via a smart cities initiative. And only a few weeks ago Miami-Dade County announced a partnership with AT&T to deliver smart cities solutions in public safety, transportation and traffic.

In the view of Susan Crawford, author of "The Responsive City," smart cities do more than enhance the social and economic fabric of communities. They strengthen democracy by bringing citizens and their government closer together and utilize information and communication technology to solve (or at least alleviate) major urban problems.

Cities that can achieve that goal are smart, indeed.

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