ASCIMER

ASSESSING SMART CITY INITIATIVES FOR THE MEDITERRANEAN REGION

1st ASCIMER WORKSHOP

Focus groups

European Investment Bank · Institute

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KEY ELEMENTS OF SMART CITY PROJECTS
Focus Group Summary

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What is a Smart City Project?

A Smart City Project (SCP) is a project that generates a change and produces an impact towards a Smart City. However, the Smart City definition should include technology in a wider sense, and not only ICTs (e.g. new materials). SCPs should be tools which make cities more comfortable to live in and able to maintain complexity, multiply interactions, recognize diversity and manage uncertainty. All of these factors are inherent characteristics of urban dynamics and constitute the attractiveness of cities and their current intelligence. Such attractiveness is also generating negative externalities of space and time that SCPs should help to solve, reducing both collective and individual costs.

Which are the elements that make a Project Smart?

Each of the following key elements should be inherently part of a SCP. None of them should be left behind or in the background.

1. **Sustainability and participation.** A comprehensive global strategy should set the objectives and the priorities of SCPs, define the framework and be a long-term guide for the specific initiatives. Although different views exist on the latter, a common understanding is shared on the fact that individual initiatives should not lose sight of the global objectives of sustainability, which have to be set through a public process debate, with the implication of relevant stakeholders, building collaboratively shared visions for the future of the city (social contracts).

2. **Integration and system approach.** Initiatives should be crosscutting among vertical areas of governance, combining knowledge, capacities and competences horizontally towards the objectives defined by the sustainability framework. A SCP should help the creation of interconnected systems in which flows of materials, energy and information are managed coherently. A SCP should also improve dialogue between institutional representatives and citizens and it should increase the horizontal relationship inside the municipality and the interchange with other institutional and civil society entities.

3. **Innovation and learning.** SCPs should promote environments of technological cooperation (platforms) for the development of new solutions to old urban problems. Technology is a tool to solve them, not an end in itself, so it should not create new necessities nor new barriers. Innovation is unexpected but it doesn't happen in a vacuum, a key point is creating the conditions for innovation to happen, prioritizing the needs and providing facilitating frameworks. Innovation has to be assessed on the comparison with the older situation. Change and innovation are expected in many domains and constituencies, but for some participants is the administration´s technical structure the main target of innovation through organization learning.

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http://eiburs-ascimer.transyt-projects.com/
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Wednesday, 16th of July 2014, 4:30 – 6:30 pm
Number of participants: 18 + 17

4. **Inclusiveness and openness.** Smart City Projects need to put attention on the different levels of access by citizenship: access to economic resources (distributional equity) and access to information and technology (digital divide). Is this choice possible, or do 'lock-in' mechanisms create physical, economic, social and cultural constraints? It is important for SCPs to be as inclusive as possible because win-win solutions are rare and losers and conflicts are inevitable. On the one hand some participants think that SCPs should always be connected with people, and citizens need to know them and be able to design them. On the other hand, others believe that there are two kinds of projects: ones that are engaging with people and others where citizens are a passive element and they may not be aware of them. In the latter ones, it should be necessary to explain the benefits of the projects to citizens. Transparency and openness are believed to be a key element for smart city initiatives.

Still open questions.

- Distributed agency? Who should take the initiative? Who is setting the agenda of Smart City development? The strongest opinions lean to appoint public agents on this role.

- Smart Projects are too young for us to know the real effects they will have on cities and on citizens.

- Is a critical mass population density needed for a SCP to succeed? The scale of a city is an issue because it is unclear if a critical mass is necessary for some sort of initiatives that need the engagement or adoption from the citizens.

- Are key elements of a SCP independent from the context and socioeconomic reality of each city? Or on the contrary are they extremely dependent on the specific characteristics and needs of distinct urban settings?

- SCPs should enable both bottom-up and top-down approaches during design, implementation and evolution. However, there is a low level of mix between top-down and bottom-up initiatives, so making both work together is a challenge.

- Fast reaction speed on social networks is an opportunity to improve SCPs adaptation, giving quick answers to citizens needs and giving insights on rapidly changing demand and new practices. However, it may difficult projects whose outcomes need time and slow adaptation (e.g. the Stockholm's congestion charging case).