EVERYDAY SCENES IN A SMART CITY

Posted on 26/01/2012 by Naider

Surely these notes will seem somewhat naive, but I can't resist sharing them. Given the abundance of sophisticated promises around the idea of the smart city, proposing everyday facts as proof that the smart city goes beyond the idea of technologies may seem light.

Let's take the case of public transport. We strive to create solutions that automate the information processes in real time for users, offering screens, mobile applications to find out the waiting time, updating maps to locate the fleet in the city, SMS warning systems, etc. We want instant information in real time to make the decision to take the bus at one stop or another, speed up the pace to try to arrive on time when it passes.

And a woman sees the **bus** at the stop and starts running to try to catch up with it. Reach? Are you running because you looked at your phone and it told you that the bus is about to leave? No, he just has it in sight and has noticed that all the waiting passengers have already boarded. There are barely 30 meters that separate the temporary distance from having to wait 30 minutes for the next one. And she manages to get on the bus, thanks to two intelligent behaviors: a group of kids have moved away when they saw her start to run, thus facilitating her heated journey. And a lady, who was waiting for another bus, approached the bus about to leave and asked the driver to wait, pointing to the woman who had only 10 meters to go when the bus seemed to speed up.

A **metro** that arrives. The digital screens announce that it is about to resume its march. Accelerated passengers pass their tickets with "invisible" information about the type of ticket, the station of origin, the fare they have paid. Some even bring their smart card, which includes a connection system with their bank, to pay for trips without worrying about recharging it or buying tickets. Four exit doors, which will only open if the passenger has a valid ticket. They are the same four doors available to enter. Thirty people leave, occupying all the doors, impossible to enter for the two people who have seen from outside how the subway arrived. They'll miss the boat, even now that they have their smart card. But among those who were leaving, a person has stopped and instead of validating his exit ticket, he has decided to release that door, make those behind it wait, to be able to let those people who wanted to get on the train pass. . These two people finally manage to get on the train, without really knowing how they managed to do it.

A red **traffic light** for pedestrians. With its LEDs and automated from an integrated control center for city transport. A young man waits for it to turn green so he can pass, on a road where cars circulate at about 50 km/h. He waits and notes, instinctively, that a small child is approaching. Mechanically, almost without thinking, he extends his arm and stops the boy's career, about to cross the pedestrian crossing. He doesn't quite know what made him extend his hand, but as he thinks about it, the traffic light turns green and he starts walking, while the boy's grandparents approach and explain to the boy not to let go of his hand again.

Nine at night, time to take out the **garbage**. The yellow bin is overflowing with waste. The man hesitates: do I leave the bag next to the container? Do I leave it in the blue container? He thinks about it for a second more. He decides to upload it back home and try the next day.

A **playground**. A chaos of shouting, bikes, balls, kids running and adults chatting in different circles. Nobody knows, but a girl cries because she can't find her mother and on the other side of the park, a father is looking restlessly for his daughter, who hasn't seen her for a while. It's a dimly lit park, but at least there are security cameras. A boy crosses the park quickly, he is in a hurry. But he sees the girl and stops. Talk to her, find out that she is missing. It's an adult, a stranger, talking to a girl. He stays with her until his father appears, who, frightened, barely manages to thank the young man as he leaves looking at his watch. You will be a little late for your appointment.

In any of these situations, and every time, technology is present. Not the technology we call smart today, but artifacts in the broadest sense. A street bank is also technology. The smart promise -in real time, ubiquitous, etc.- is only an additive that we can add thanks to technical progress. But in

none of the cases is it decisive for resolving daily circumstances, **real experiences** of people who share life in the city and provide real solutions to other people who live in that same city. When I wrote that the intelligence of the city is on the street, in part I refer to these situations. It is not a contraposition to technological sophistication. On the contrary, it is a reminder that this sophistication needs to take into account daily life in the city so as not to fall into the trap of technological determinism or think that technology will solve people's daily lives.

Every day, on every street, thousands of voluntary and involuntary acts make life easier (or difficult). The attitude of care and the awareness of sharing the same space are, in all cases, the most relevant aspect of the outcome of the story. I don't know if they are intelligent behaviors, but they are relevant. Including these keys in the **design of technological solutions** for urban operation is key so that these solutions are user-oriented, dimensioned to the real scope of the limits that the technological solution can offer, are understandable and have a useful urban function. Including this type of key in the **implementation of technological projects in the city**would help to better understand how the city works, how citizens behave and how to integrate unpredictability as something inherent to urban life.

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