

SMART CITY. BUSINESS BUSINESS STRATEGY AND BRANDING OF NEW URBAN DEVELOPMENTS

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After commenting in previous days on the issues [terminology](#) and the [components](#) main aspects of what is called *smart city*, I think it is interesting to expand some information by reviewing its clear use as a marketing strategy and as an urban emblem.

Business business strategy

If in the previous chapter I related *smart grids* as the technological component that has done the most to extend the use of the term *smart city*, there is no doubt that it has been their incorporation to the argument of large technology companies the main trigger of the current explosion that we are seeing. At least **CISCO, IBM, Siemens** and **Philips** have created visibility strategies for their products and technological solutions applicable to urban services, without ruling out to smaller ones. But, to a large extent, these are the main protagonists of a marketing strategy that is innovative in many aspects, above all due to the ability they have had to penetrate the general media with **very significant communication tools** (special sections in the print and digital editions of the world's leading newspapers, own web pages that act as a binder of cases and references, sponsored events, competitions aimed at city councils of everyone who receives "free" investments in technologies as a reward, etc.).



It is not just a question of marketing. These companies, large corporations have **strong technological capacities** to renew and transform traffic management, the technologicalization of urban infrastructures and to make massive investments. This, in itself, is fine. It's always good, but it raises several questions. *Agenda-setting* or something like that they call it in political analysis circles. The ability to place a topic at the center of the debate, an unexpected topic to distract attention or to **create a new story** that places new priorities and alternative discourses. It is the feeling that I have with the "explosion" of the debate on *smart cities*, which in recent times appears recurrently although it takes at least [ten years in the making](#) and yet these companies now seem be capitalizing in a certain direction.

No, I am not raising anything related to *conspiranoia*. Not me, at least. If someone has something to offer, no problem. The question is which **needs** they cover, especially considering the town halls, the ultimate recipients of this type of solution and which are always the weakest link in public funding. Where to put the limit? Are these solutions -in this case, the solutions offered by these companies, always **high-tech**- the most appropriate? Since we are going to talk about urban intelligence, aren't there intelligent solutions that do not involve the technological sophistication of the services but rather a more rational management (**low-tech** or **no-tech** solutions? /strong>)? **Won't they distract us from what's important?**

Smart city as a brand of new urban developments

The second trigger is the linking of the smart city concept to new urban developments. As I mentioned in the previous post, [PlanIT Valley](#) , [Songdo](#) or [Masdar](#) are cities that have been presented to the world as smart cities, but they are not the only ones. [Yokohama](#) is the laboratory where Japan will experiment with its own solutions, [Taipei](#) has announced the start of a new high-tech development ([FarGlory](#)) and [Shenyang](#) (China) , [Sisak](#) in Serbia or [Lavasa](#) In India they also take the same path. But we have many others, cataloged in more or less accurate lists of the [10 smartest cities on the planet](#) or [Top Seven Intelligent Communities of 2011](#), presenting models of entire cities, specific neighborhoods or specific actions. Actually, all of them fall into the lack of perspective that we have mentioned in previous chapters. They appeal to the smart city when, in reality, they are sectorial approximations of energy content or experimentation of digital ubiquity. Are these the smartest cities in the world? Here I think the same thing will happen to us as with the promise of the [eco-cities](#), which with the excuse that we need laboratories to experiment with new constructive and urban solutions based on sustainability models (in our case, based on the massive technology of the city) we can fall into the trap of supporting developments that are unnecessary or that do not necessarily lead to better urban management or lower levels of urban unsustainability.

In short, the argument that laboratories are needed and [cities that are the first to experiment](#) also seeking to improve the urban services they offer their citizens, is valid but not absolute. In principle, it will be more realistic if this is not the only strategy for intelligent urban management and if city intelligence is not limited solely to technology, much less to high-tech solutions. In this regard, [Kaid Benfield](#) is very spot on in the article [Is there a downside to "intelligent cities" or "smart cities"?](#):

But futuristic technology won't fix many of our basic urban problems, any more than "gizmo green" add-ons to buildings will overcome the unsustainability inherent in lousy building locations or lousy architecture. Sprawl will still be sprawl; disinvestment will still be disinvestment; traffic will still be traffic; sprawl-aided obesity will still be obesity.

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