

(Un)Plugging Smart Cities with Urban Transformations

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ABSTRACT

The trouble with modern theories of behaviourism, is not that they are wrong but that they could become true. (Arendt)

We may wish for easier, all-purpose analyses, and for simpler, magical, all-purpose cures, but wishing cannot change these problems into simpler matters than organised complexity, no matter how much we try to evade the realities and to handle them as something different. (Jacobs)

In this paper, the author argues that the development of the so-called smart city term and practices on its use in planning inner cities is intimately bound up with required current urban transformations. In particular, with the notion of urban governance, which encompasses economic transformations, big data, social innovation and urban living labs, as some timely key ingredients that should be addressed in contemporary cities (Urban Transformations ESRC portfolio, 2016). By contrast, it is noteworthy that although smart cities are already building around us, they differ considerably from the simplistic, *one-size-fits-all smart-city-in-the-box* mainstream approach (Townsend et al., 2011) that has been hegemonic so far. It mostly goes back to basic notions of deconstructing the governance interactions that actively requires a holistic approach considering urban transformation trends occurring in our cities in a different manner. Based on previously published Journal of Urban Technology paper entitled Unplugging: Deconstructing the Smart City, in the author's view (shared by many scholars so far) such reimagining and repositioning need to occur across smart city technologies by avoiding just pragmatic approaches that wrongly are assumed as non-ideological and commonsensical. Hence, the paper is structured in five sections. First, the concept of the smart city as both buzzword and a fetish term will be presented. Second, the author shows how smart city policy agendas should be unpacked and plugged in again in a wider and inclusive perspective by suggesting the Unplugging framework, which consists of 10-transitions. In this section, the author depicts his own 10-dimension framework published as Unplugging: Deconstructing the Smart City. Third, based on on-going EU funded smart city project's interventions, the author underlines the importance of integrating urban transformations research findings as a strategy that would enable more emancipatory and empowering visions of smart cities beyond simplistic market ambitions of companies or the control desires of states (Kitchin 2015: 30). Finally, five final remarks are presented as the future research agenda of (un)plugging smart cities with urban transformations: urban governance interdependencies, data to decide, metropolitan and regional scaling-up, city-to-city learning and comparing smartness (benchmarking, dashboards and rankings).

Keywords:

Smart cities, urban transformations, EU, big data, city-regions, benchmarking, social innovation and governance.

To cite this article:

Calzada, I. (2016), [\(Un\)Plugging Smart Cities with Urban Transformations, 21st International Conference on Urban Planning and Regional Development in the Information Society GeoMultimedia 2016](#), 'Smart me up!', CORP, Hamburg (Germany). ISBN 978-3-9504173-0-2 (CD), 978-3-9504173-1-9 (print)