

The Smart Socially Innovative City Advancing in Italy

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Abstract: Cities of tomorrow are planning a smart city framework in order to drive urban growth and social innovation. The aim of the study is to elucidate that cities aim at dealing with urban innovation issues, designing a smart city view in order to shape the city an urban community as an engine of collaborative and innovative spaces. The study relies on the analysis of one case study. The city of Firenze is rethinking on the urban future, adopting a smart city framework that supports a collaborative view for social innovation, enabling smartness as a capability to develop social issues and contribute to urban value. The findings elucidate that a smart city framework enables the city to evolve as urban community and engine of social innovation, shaping urban collaborative meeting places for innovation.

Keywords: Smart Cities, Smart Communities, Urban Innovation, Social Innovation.

1. Introduction

The future of a smart society relies on cities able to play a proactive role in engaging the urban stakeholders that contribute to constructing a virtuous pathway for social innovation within urban spaces. Cities of tomorrow will be intelligent, smart, socially innovative by driving community-led and people-driven innovation, leading to smart city development and shaping collaborative urban ecosystems for innovation (Mora *et al.*, 2023; Dolmans *et al.*, 2023; Nam and Pardo, 2011; Eger, 2005), fostering smart innovative communities (Caragliu and Del Bo, 2019; Appio, Lima and Paroutis, 2019; Paskaleva, 2011). Sustainable urban future relies on social innovation for good life, by promoting collaborative and multi-actor innovation, and following a human-centred view to smart urban innovation (Yigitcanlar, 2021; Sørensen and Torfing, 2018; Nilssen, 2019). As organizational spaces (Knox, 2010), and net action (Czarniawska, 2002), cities shape urban communities that contribute to supporting collaborative spaces for social innovation, adopting a smart view to urban growth to improve the quality of social life for citizens (Lazariou and Roscia, 2012), and following a human-centric view for a smart, socially innovative urban community (Costales, 2022). Smart city planning supports the city to shape an urban community (Gil-Garcia *et al.*, 2016), and relies on driving community development (Stratigeia, 2012) and fostering urban collaborative innovation (Dolmans *et al.*, 2023). The smart city enables the city as human-centred, collaboration-driven and socially innovative community. Urban innovation refers to a sociotechnical innovation (Meijer and Thaens, 2018). Cities use the potential offered by digital and intelligent technologies to shape human-centred, innovation-led urban communities that enhance collective intelligence and cooperation (Yigitcanlar *et al.*, 2023), leading to net action and multi-actor collaborative spaces and processes, opening up to knowledge-led and technology-driven social innovation, by involving civil society, research, private and public organisations (Czarniawska, 2002; Zhang and Wang, 2022; Sørensen and Torfing, 2018).

While there are many studies that focus on smart city visions and approaches as means to drive sustainable urban development, few studies investigate the role of smart city planning and vision as a driver of urban innovation. Which urban future development do cities aim to achieve? How do cities interpret a smart social vision to urban innovation and growth? The research question refers to how cities are rethinking the urban future, shaping the city as socially innovative urban community. As intelligent communities, cities are planning the future urban development by selecting a smart view to driving urban growth and innovation, and shaping future urban innovative communities. The case study concerns the choices of *Firenze Smart City Plan*. It is analysed and presented. The aim of this study is to elucidate how smart city urban planning enables cities to rethink on the urban future, by designing smart socially innovative communities. Cities are adopting a smart city framework, becoming engines of sustainable, social growth and innovation by strengthening urban multi-actor collaboration. Smart city strategy, planning and policies contribute to shaping the city as socially inclusive and innovative urban community. The paper is articulated in five sections. After introduction and theoretical background, in the third section methodological section follows. Findings, discussion and conclusions are set out.

1.1 Towards Cities as Smart Social Innovation-led and Collaboration-Driven Communities

As organisational spaces (Knox, 2010), arenas of innovation (Zhang and Wu, 2019), cities are following a smart view in order to drive urban competitiveness, ensure better quality of life and support innovation in long-term horizon (Appio, Lima and Paroutis, 2019; Paskaleva, 2011). Sustainable urban development relies on cities that adopt a smart city vision in order to contribute to public value creation and innovation (Pardo, Gil-Garcia, Gascó-Hernández, Cook and Choi, 2021). The smart city is emerging as the hub for driving smart global societies (Joss *et al.*, 2019). A city is going smart by shaping a smart community in order to drive urban innovation and achieve sustainable and inclusive growth, focusing on people and human capital, and shaping innovation-led as well as inclusive and people-centred communities (Nam and Pardo, 2011; Paskaleva, 2011), by fostering collaborative planning and innovation towards citizen-centred and societal smart cities (Alizadeh and Sharifi, 2023). Smart cities contribute to enhancing the role of the urban community as an agent of collective action, as the driver and the issue of smart city initiatives, policies and applications in order to promote the urban wellbeing for citizenry and drive the city a better place for work and life, encouraging public and private actors that work together Gil-Garcia, Pardo and Nam, 2016; Stratigeia, 2012). Smart cities contribute to bottom-up, cooperative and multi-actor innovation (Dolmans *et al.*, 2023; Sørensen and Torfing, 2018). As engines of social innovation (Anttiroiko, Valkama and Bailey, 2014), human-centric smart cities help enable urban platforms for technology-driven social innovation (Costales, 2022). Smart-led urban innovation relies on cities that intentionally and proactively shape technology-driven processes for new and creative ideas and qualitative urban change, enhancing collaborative approaches (Meijer and Thaens, 2018; Mora, Deakin, Reid and Angelidou, 2019). Smart urban innovation relies on city's smartness as the ability to attract and mobilize human capital in collaboration with urban actors and stakeholders by using information and communication technologies (Meijer and Bolívar, 2016). Promoting a smart city growth supports cities to meet social challenges and urban sustainability priorities, following collaborative approaches and developing capabilities within smart urban ecosystems for innovation (Mora, Appio, Foss, Arellano and Zhang, 2020; Gupta, Panagiotopoulos and Bowen, 2023). As smart innovative communities (Eger, 2005; Nam and Pardo, 2011), cities contribute to the community development and transformation driving urban innovation and supporting stakeholder collaboration, leading to multi-actor and cooperative processes for urban wellbeing (Nilssen, 2019), by engaging citizens in social open innovations (Paskaleva, 2011), and focusing on smart, sustainability-oriented, social and human-centred innovation (Tura and Ojanen, 2022).

2. Methodological Section

The study employed a qualitative, descriptive and exploratory methodology to analyse how cities are rethinking on the future urban development, shaping smart urban innovation and communities, rediscovering the smart city framework as an opportunity to drive social innovation issues. As engines of urban innovation and socially inclusive growth, cities are adopting a smart city vision to support urban innovation and growth, revitalising the city as a community. The study focuses on one exploratory and illustrative case study with regards to Firenze, a city which is planning urban growth by going smart by rethinking on smart urban future for becoming a smart socially innovative urban community in order to explore and provide a comprehensive understanding of a phenomenon still in progress and emerging in contemporary times, whereas the boundaries between the phenomenon and the context are not clearly evident, by following a case study methodology through an empirical inquiry without the rigidity of a predefined structure for observations and analysis (Yin, 2009). The study relies on the analysis of a document related to urban planning framework. The research method involved case selection and data collection from policy document as the smart city strategy framework drawn from *Firenze Smart City Plan* as the information source in order to collect and analyse data and information, and to investigate how an Italian city is planning the urban future development, shaping the urban community as an engine of urban innovation and social growth, coherently with a smart city view. Investigating smart city strategy design helps to understand the pathway of cities shaping urban social innovation (Angelidou, 2017; Mora and Bolici, 2017; Sancino and Hudson, 2020). The case study refers to the smart city vision as urban development framework in order to revitalise the city as socially innovative community towards urban sustainability.

3. Findings

Cities are planning the future urban development by selecting a smart vision to urban growth and innovation. In particular, in Firenze the pathway for a smart city-led urban innovation is following a social innovation view. The urban community aim at becoming an agent of social change by strengthening information, involvement, integration and innovation, and relies on reinforcing urban energies and competences provided by private, no

profit, business, research and academia, public actors that are involved in collaborative processes for urban value creation. Rethinking smart innovative cities relies on driving smart city planning and implementation in order to shape cities as smart-driven, innovation-led and human-centred communities. One single case study is analysed and presented. In Europe, cities are rethinking about the urban future by adopting a smart vision planning in order to support innovation and drive sustainable urban development, shaping innovative and intelligent communities.

In Italy, the city and the municipality of Firenze is understanding the importance of designing the urban planning as hub for innovation by following a smart city framework, and using the potential of digital and contemporary technologies in order to shape the city as community which is working to stimulate and drive urban innovation processes, by involving private and public urban stakeholders to build collaborative spaces for innovation and value co-creation for wealthy urban communities and better quality of urban life. The idea of urban planners is to provide guidelines that contribute to freeing urban energies, competences and intelligences in order to create spaces for social innovation and change, empowering citizens, private, public and no profit actors to identify innovative solutions for policy and services co-production that help contribute to improving the urban life and sustainability of a city that is becoming a socially innovative community.

In the *Firenze Smart City Plan*, cities are living organisms made up of people within the process of urban transformation, leading to intelligent urban communities. Smart urban innovation relies on citizens who are able to play a proactive role in identifying some pathways for urban development and quality of life improvement. In particular, planning a smart urban vision supports the city as an engine of innovation and a community of people able to produce meanings and culture, and to enhance human and civil progress. Promoting smartness relies on using information and communication technology in order to make cities more innovative, sustainable and intelligent communities that are capable to drive innovation, reinforcing social relationships within urban ecosystems. A smart city refers to a city that is changing and constructing new social, urban, and economic responses to environmental and historical pressures. The smart city plan is an open space for debate, confrontation, exchange of information and knowledge among all urban stakeholders which support urban, social and economic development. A smart city master plan helps the city to drive a continuous pathway for sustainable urban innovation, and to improve the quality of life within community, and relies on distributed and collective leadership and vision. Planning a smart city framework for urban growth should support city to image its future focusing on a city learning to becoming a community where all the urban stakeholders contribute to urban value creation processes and issues, advancing towards social innovation view. Smart urban innovation relies on promoting collaboration among all the involved stakeholders (public administration, research centres, cultural institutions, businesses, associations, groups, citizens) along the urban value chain. A smart city strategy and practice relies on promoting open innovation by involving the urban stakeholders and embracing the four *Is*: the *integration* of all possible aspects in charge of a municipality's competences and background; the *innovation* as the development of innovative services and solutions through digital and interactive information technology; the *involvement* as a means to enable stakeholders to identify, plan, share, and implement strategic, long-terms vision and goals; and the *information* relies on the use of information and communication technology as a way to reinforce and consolidate the relationships between municipality and citizens, by monitoring the implementation of urban smart strategy.

This analysis elucidates that the city of Firenze is designing the urban planning and rethinking about the future of urban communities, adopting a smart vision in order to shape the city as sustainable and innovative community by strengthening a collaborative framework, and designing urban collaborative spaces that enable various stakeholders to drive innovation processes in order to improve the quality of life of citizens within urban communities.

4. Discussion and Conclusions

The concept and practice of smart city is related to urban innovation issues. The smart city planning enables a way to drive social innovation within urban spaces. Thereby, the smart city framework is emerging as a platform and label that is encouraging the efforts, the competences and organisational arrangements of cities towards social innovation as the issue for achieving urban sustainability beyond the potential offered by technology. Cities of tomorrow are planning the urban future as well as smart innovative urban communities that contribute to ensuring high quality of urban life, shaping urban communities as *loci* of social innovation. Smart cities and communities contribute to sustainable urban growth and social innovation. As engines of urban innovation and smart communities, cities drive multi-actor collaborative innovation, transitioning from a technology-enabled to a community-oriented and human-centric approach, putting the people first, focusing on human and social

capital, promoting community development, shaping urban collaborative and socially innovative spaces, and strengthening stakeholder participation and involvement to drive urban collaborative, inclusive and innovation-led communities.

In the city of Firenze, the smart city planning focuses on searching for bringing together integration, innovation, involvement, and information. The smart city framework enables several urban stakeholders to work together for shaping the urban community as an engine of social innovation. Planning a smart city view means enhancing the potential of technology as an enabler of urban, social and collaborative innovation and community development. As engines of innovation, cities are tracking a smart city-led pathway for future urban innovation, by strengthening community participation and driving social and collaborative innovation within urban spaces for urban wealth. Socially inclusive and technology-led innovative urban communities make the city a better place for social value creation and social innovation. Cities of the future will aim at understanding the potential of information technology in order to adopt a human-centred vision to developing the city as smart, socially innovation-driven community. Further research perspectives imply to investigate how other Italian cities are planning the urban future, following a smart city vision and framework to urban innovation and growth.

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