

Memorandum

To: U.S. Department of State, EAP/MLA, ASEAN/EAS Unit
From: Hayley Lunsford & Margarita Nunez, Students, Wilbur Wright College
Subject: Smart Cities—general introduction and recommendations
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Many cities across the globe are in the process of becoming “smart”, but many average people are unaware of what that really means. Not only are they unaware of what it means, but they are unaware of the both positive and negative effects it will have on them in everyday life. Therefore, it is essential that we increase awareness of the topic. To put things simply, a “smart city” is a municipality that uses certain information and communication technologies to share information across the public, increase operational efficiency, and improve government services and citizen welfare. It sounds scary and it seems to be uncharted territory, but the truth is, most cities already have certain programs that do these things. These programs are just disguised as something that the public won’t fear as much.

In “Smart Cities: Digital Solutions for a More Livable Future,” McKinsey & Company analyzed “how dozens of digital applications address these kinds of practical and very human concerns. It finds that cities can use smart technologies to improve some key quality-of-life indicators by 10 to 30 percent—numbers that translate into lives saved, fewer crime incidents, shorter commutes, a reduced health burden, and carbon emissions averted.” This means that many smartphone apps have been created and will continue to be created to help improve the overall quality of life in these cities. The Uber app, which is an app with services like ridesharing and food delivery, is technically a part of a smart city program. It is an app that allows people from around the United States of America to band together in the span of minutes to provide services to one another. Therefore, smart cities are already integrated in many areas without the public necessarily knowing.

Challenges

The article “Exposing the Dark Side of Smart Cities” focuses on the five smart cities challenges:

- **Public education and engagement:** not many people know about smart cities, so they are not aware of the different ways they are being implemented. Therefore, they are not engaged into making educational decisions or decisions at all into what should or should not be done. Lack of education is society’s biggest downfall, that is why it lacks engagement.
- **Infrastructure:** all over the world, hundreds of billions of dollars are being spent on smart devices, networking equipment, hiring professionals, and upgrading and buying new systems and resources. As everything is completely new it must be built from the ground up, so it’s expensive.
- **Power:** sensors that are commonly used in IoT devices, which help the smart cities run, use regular batteries. This is very inefficient; our resources should not be used to exchange batteries. As well as, it is not environmentally friendly to use batteries.
- **Privacy and security:** smart cities require a lot of data collection which risks citizens privacy if someone were to hack a system and leak their information or somehow use their information for the wrong purposes.
- **Data bias:** data may sometimes unintentionally discriminate against certain groups of people.

Recommendations

Often the word “smart” is slapped across anything and everything. There are smart cars, smart appliances, smart houses, smart phones, and smart watches. When you add the word smart in front of cities it can be daunting. The public can handle the word smart in front of certain things, for example, a smart watch. You just slap it on your wrist and it’s small so you can control it and you know it’s there to help you. You can make calls and texts from it. However, you slap the word smart in front of the word car, and you have a Tesla, a car that drives by itself. The idea that you don’t use your hands or feet is daunting. What if it crashes? What if you hit someone? What if it loses control? This idea is too farfetched for people. So, imagine the fear of seeing the word smart in front of city. I recommend changing the term smart city. It would deter a lot of people from being scared and being more open-minded to the idea.

Conclusion

We need to think critically about whether the good outweighs the bad. Would the convenience of speedy parking outweigh the tasks of changing out batteries and sensors? Would possible data hacks be a small price to pay in exchange for possibly less traffic? These are all things needed to be considered in advancement of smart cities.

Sources:

McKinsey Global Institute. “Smart Cities: Digital Solutions for a More Livable Future” June 2018.

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