Session: SESSION 17: De-constructing the Smart City, Reassembling Urban Life

Title:
New " technological élites" as a tool for the citizens-relationship management in the smart city. The icity project in Bologna.

Authors: Valentina Bazzarin & Pina Lalli

Affiliation: Department of Political and Social Sciences, University of Bologna (Italy)

Aim of this research is to use an empirical case in order to critically analyse the definition of a smart city ecosystem. We will focus on Bologna (Italy) and on the engagement actions planned in the "icity" project funded by the European Commission. Icity main objective is to identify new ways of collaboration using new technologies. Citizens are supposed to promote the civic demands to access public information to re-use it as well as to explore other ways of offering public services that usually are guaranteed by public administration only. In particular, icity aims at building a common platform where "civic hackers" could realize a progressive crowd-working to create smart application. Since January 2014 we observed the engagement actions run by the Municipality of Bologna. We attended five so-called "engagement meetings" in Bologna, we observed the participation processes in the on-line social platforms and we interviewed in depth four participants. Moreover, we are considering the parallel on-going process in which the civic network of the City of Bologna "iperbole2020" is updated and re-designed, in order to compare the activities of participants in the two processes. Our results show that although icity project partially failed in its technological aims, it is succeeding in raising, engaging and mobilizing an important group of people: what we called a "new elite of technological citizens". In this project we can identify a "skilled citizens-relationship management" able to develop both social capital - bridging the elite of technological citizens with some local schools, for instance - and bounding a new community of civic hackers as a new type of social influencers. Concluding we can say that icity project in Bologna catalysed the reassembling of urban social networks even failing in its technological determinism. The long tail of this project could promote a widespread digital empowerment, especially if its promoters will be aware of their role as curators and managers of the network relationships of the "new technological elite".

Corresponding author:
Valentina Bazzarin, PhD
Dipartimento Scienze Politiche e Sociali
Università di Bologna
valentina.bazzarin@unibo.it
tel. +39 3925881516
twitter: vbazzarin