

Developing sustainable smart territories by adopting a relational logic view

Abstract

This study explores the theoretical arguments regarding the creation of sustainable smart territories. Specifically, in order to demonstrate that the real ‘smartness’ in the smart territory definition lies in the spirit of a community rather than on the role played by ICT, the authors propose a typological framework based on three dimensions: a rethinking of the smart territory, the relational view and the engagement process.

1. Introduction

The global issues of environments cannot be resolved exclusively by ICT-based solutions. The imperative transition to sustainable development needs both the attitudes of entrepreneurs and the participation of ordinary people at the local level. Starting from this assumption, the aim of this theoretical paper is to propose a new typological framework for the creation of sustainable smart territories focused on human-centricity rather than on the role played by ICT. In details, this model is the result of the integration of three dimensions: a rethinking of the smart territory, the relational view, and the engagement process.

2. Theoretical background

2.1 Smart territory: a definition

Reviewing the literature, we found out that the term smart territory seems to be focused on the pervasive presence of computing technologies in order to offer services that may have a big impact and add several benefits to citizens in their daily activities (Nam and Pardo, 2011; D'Angelo, Ferretti and Ghini, 2017). According to Garcia-Ayllon (2015), the concept of smart city is based on the development of the city in strictly contact when crucial conditions occurs:

energy efficiency, information technology, transport infrastructure, resource consumption or environmental impacts. Contrarywise, there is a line of studies that argues that the definition of smart city is not necessarily uniquely linked to ICT and technological innovation, but rather to the socio-cultural dimension. According to Caragliu, Kourtit, Del Bo and Nijkamp (2009), the definition of smartness related to a territory it's not just efficient public transportation and/or innovative IT services: it is, rather, '*a mindset toward creating a more holistic community*', the way in which citizens quality of life within the society is daily improved, and this process includes the efforts of the whole actors involved (public, enterprises and citizens as well). Therefore, literature seems to be divided into several schools of thought: on the one hand, contemporary authors try to link the focus of 'smart' to innovation and the digitalization of services and development processes of a city; on the other, more classical scholars adopt a 'human' and relational vision of the territories and its actors.

2.2 Smart territories and relational logic view

The relational logic applied to smart territories creation is a fundamental aspect for those authors, above mentioned, who support the idea of smartness closely connected with that of social dimension. '*People must constitute a communicative space before they can work together to achieve mutual understanding and consensus*' – stated Kemmis (2001, p. 7). It means that the relational (communication) logic between citizens it is a priority aspect over all the development and innovation components of a territory: to discuss about IT and digitization, it is firstly necessary that individuals of a given context communicate with each other and express their idea of city, which by all means could also be far from being innovative and technologically developed. It is not a coincidence that, even before Kemmis, several authors interrogates themselves on when and how a territory may be seen as 'relational'. According to the father of relational logic thought, Lewin, this relationality linked to the territory – defined

as life space – it is crucial because determine the behavior of an individual or a group/community in a given moment (Lewin, 1936, 1948). In other words, individual and environment constantly co-create each other, as Bourdieu (1993) suggested, as the logical consequence of a profitable dialogue and a long-lasting relation. Following this view, the territory is seen as a ‘social space’ (Friedman, 2011) in which not only citizens between themselves but other heterogeneous agents, such as public bodies and enterprises which are part of the territory and harmonically discuss with each other to both reach their needs and to generate a value-in-use (Pellicano, 2017). As a matter of fact there has been a shift between the original relational view model, a static model that did not consider how ‘*cooperation, value creation, and value capture unfold over time*’ (Dyer et al. 2018), and this dynamic perspective which tend to consider social agent as part of the process of relationality within a territory. Therefore, the logic of relationality appears a horizontal, equal and dynamic effort to promote the dialogue within the territory in order to foster its sustainable development through exchanges of views and value co-creation.

2.3 The engagement process

In the marketing literature, the term actor engagement indicates an interactive co-creative process in which the actor's internal disposition is a central condition for engagement activity (Storbacka et al., 2016). According with Brodie, Hollebeek, et al. (2011), the internal disposition is a psychological state of humans. Through this theoretical lenses, a social ecosystem that promotes sustainable smart territory development is the result of a coordinated human intentionality to engage with each other in order to reach the same goals. A sustainable smart territory is not created by actors acting autonomously, but is co-created by joint action and formal and informal alliances and appears possible if citizens, political institutions, entrepreneurs capable to introduce business model based on the principles of “human

entrepreneurship” (Parente et al., 2018), and other social actors are all engaged in a common cause, and share the same values. Therefore, transparency, access, dialogue, and reflexivity are enablers of positive actor engagement in specific context.

Discussion and Conclusions

Our objective in this article have been twofold: to rethink the concept of smart territory focusing on human-centricity rather than on the role played by ICT, and to consider relationship as a fundamental antecedent of sustainable smart territory development. From our standpoint, relationality and actor engagement are prerequisites to enabling the smart territory. Technology, digitalization are just tools that should improve the quality of life. But the real smartness in the smart territory definition lies in the spirit of a community, in the capacity of common people to be active and conscious citizens. In order to give a major robustness to our ideas, future studies should concentrate on the exploration of cases and practices regarding the process of smart and sustainable territories development.

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