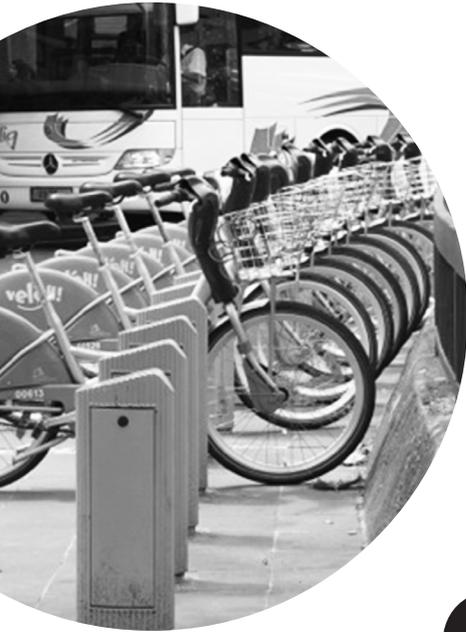


shaping healthy communities



Urban synergies group

A Perspective

healthy and intelligent communities

by Gregor H. Mews

bridges for healthy urban ecosystems

Planetary health for all is dependent on creating bridges from one small island of civilisation that is surrounded by a sea of barriers reaching out to other such islands. If we want to deliver healthier and more sustainable urban communities through the implementation of the New Urban Agenda, we need to understand how to connect these islands well. Surely we can create beautiful beaches and green sanctuaries on them, but until we learn how to reach out to others we will not succeed in solving some of these wicket problems we are facing today. In order reach those other islands it is imperative to create innovative bridges that can serve the greater good. One of those bridges serving to connect is named **Smart Cities**. This concept functions as a strategic device strongly associated with the use of information technology in relation to modern urban production ecosystems (Caragliu, Del Bo, & Nijkamp, 2011).



exploration of the concept

In light of the possible effects and domination of technological and network driven infrastructures this article attempts to redefine the Smart Cities concept and to explore its implications on urban health and well-being.

The term “smart” stands for bright and fresh in appearance. “Cities” in its most simplistic form can be defined as a large or important town where people come together. Putting the two terms together this would mean that Smart Cities are just about the bright appearance of an important town where people come together. This appearance can be perceived as somewhat superficial or shallow, but are Smart Cities then superficial constructs of important towns? Perhaps not, as many people choose not to live in important towns, although they can be considered as bright in appearance. However, the definition of “city” also includes people. “Smart” people would imply a certain level of shallowness as it is again all about the appearance. Instead of “smart” the term “intelligent” might be more appropriate, meaning to have a good understanding or a high mental capacity to quickly comprehend. In this context intelligence reflects the **collective wisdom** of a group of people.

The collective intelligence of a community is the accumulation of contributions of all its members regardless of their individual capacity.

The term “community” refers to a group of any size whose members reside in a specific location. Gaining a better understanding of a community, which leads to a higher collective capacity to comprehend and being aware of the conditions around us, one may argue that this indeed leads to **consciousness**. Associating consciousness with a group of people at a certain location would result in the term Conscious Community. Intelligence in the context of information technology, has something to do with the capacity to process and therefore is something in the making. In contrast, consciousness is something that

is waiting us at the end of a process. Therefore, we suggest to depart from the term Smart Cities and introduce the term **Intelligent Communities** if one theorises on the advance of urban performances to enhance people’s lives.



smart cities are about intelligent

How can people's lives across communities be enhanced and deliver better outcomes for **health and well-being**? The concept of health-and wellbeing has changed over time and varies between cultures and stages of life. The World Health Organisation refers to health as the physical, mental and social well-being and not merely the absence of disease and infirmity (World Health Organisation, 2006). Diseases and infirmity are directly associated with suffering in the physical and mental state of existence. The concept of suffering is manufactured and created as part of the human mind. To overcome this struggle and suffering of diseases one needs to work on their internal freedom in the absence of fear. Once this fear within our collective mindset can be overcome, positive contributions are possible. An Intelligent Community takes advantage of tools that enable us to be part of a **collective mindset** that ultimately enables long lasting positive contributions. This collective wisdom enables informed decisions towards better outcomes of the overall health and well-being of these urban ecosystems and its people.

These tools offer a range of benefits including access to information for better knowledge exchange, mechanisms that enable participation in democratic decision making processes and simulations that help us to better understand and improve these complex urban systems. Each of those urban systems is an island. If we start understanding settlements as an integrated circular system that ultimately should serve to improve our own health and well-being, we need to start being free of fear and embrace **transformational change**. Intelligent Communities can be successful in three spaces: the lived, conceived and perceived spaces (Lefebvre, 1991).

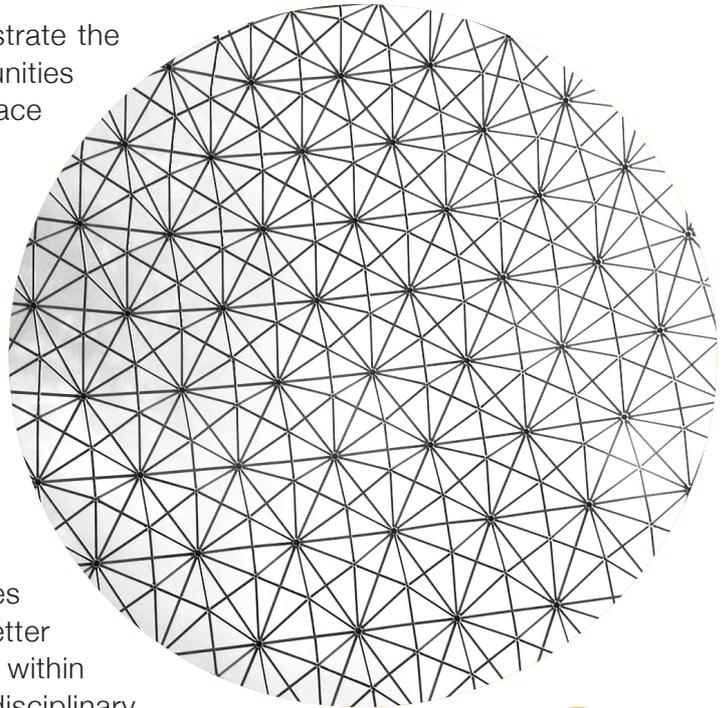
The lived space refers to the way people understand the material space around them in context of their bio-history, imagination and memory. Modern technology is a useful tool to get a better understanding of the state of the collective memory of a community, their values, filtering out the negative attributes and creating opportunities to experience togetherness. The conceived space is the abstract and theoretical understanding of these spaces where big data can be useful to researchers and professionals negotiating better outcomes for people's health and well-being. The perceived space is the space where people experience the world around them as part of their everyday life. This **real encounter** with objects and different forms impacts on our health and well-being.



examples

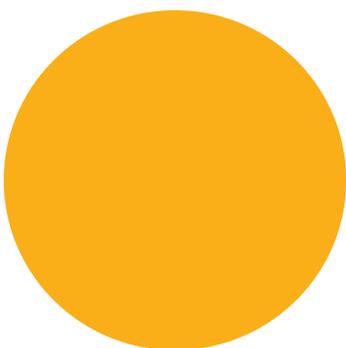
The following three examples demonstrate the usefulness of an Intelligent Communities approach in relation to all three space dimensions.

a) In order to overcome internal suffering or fear the human condition benefits of sanctuaries that offer peace for their minds. Evidence suggest how important access to green spaces with high biodiversity is for the regeneration of physical and mental health (Dannenberg, Frumkin, & Jackson, 2011). If we collectively and genuinely choose to overcome barriers that lead to diseases and infirmity, we need to gain a better understanding of these dynamics within these three spaces with an interdisciplinary approach. The collective wisdom generated through this process will enable us to improve the **objective and perceived** measures of the environment around us.



b) In relation to the lived space our team found though a community led design process that there is now a need to question the narrative of maximum productivity and introducing the concept of optimal productivity, enabling people to spend more time contributing to their community through **social capital** (Urban Synergies Group, 2016).

c) Superimposing these two dimensions can reveal tension and barriers in current policies, preventing better outcomes for people's overall health and well-being. For example, a policy aimed to increase and enhance the flow of motorised vehicles can compromise **opportunities** for walking and cycling. This can be disruptive and create negative health outcomes over the entire urban system cumulatively.



perspective summary



In summary, smarter cities are inherently about intelligent communities. We need to be clear that technology remains a tool to restore the balance between the three spaces and to create solid bridges. Bridges that serve to connect Intelligent Communities need to embrace an ethical code of conduct, which is based on trust and equity. Only if those well- connected and committed islands become the global majority by sharing their wisdom and resources, only then advancements to **planetary health and well-being** outcomes for civilisations is possible.

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about urban synergies group

Urban Synergies Group is an **international think + do tank** based in Canberra, Australia, that provides services, training and raises awareness.

Our mission is to find the best ways to improve urban systems without borders by creating effective synergies in a complex global environment that enable better health and well-being outcomes for all people.

We are creating bridges between cutting edge academic research, non-government organisations, governments and practices, enriching community spirit by sharing our success.

Urban Synergies Group is funded by donations from companions such as trusts, individuals and commissioned services. We operate internationally and offer independent advice in support of the overall health and well-being of urban systems.

become involved

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***“The electric light
did not come from
the continuous improvement
of candles.”***

Oren Haran

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