Smart cities and human factor—the social challenge

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People do not seek urban regeneration. This is because they do not see it as a necessity.

Miguel Ángel García is an architect and expert in energy efficient buildings and cities at the CARTIF Technology Centre, an applied research institute, located in Valladolid, Spain. He is also the coordinator of the European REMOURBAN project, which will be completed in 2020. It aims to develop a sustainable and replicable urban regeneration model. To do so, the project is focusing on three showcase districts in the cities of Valladolid, Spain, Nottingham, UK, and Eskisehir, Turkey.

García talks about the strategies required to increase the level of citizen engagement, to help overcome the multiple challenges of urban regeneration.

What progress has been made to date on sustainable urban regeneration?

Over the past few years, some projects have focused on retrofitting based on renewable energies. Their aim was to achieve nearly zero-energy-consumption buildings and districts. Now, we are trying to scale such intervention up to the whole city. This can be done by integrating energy retrofitting techniques with efficient mobility measures, using information and communication technologies (ICT). The idea is to integrate infrastructures to drive the change towards more sustainable

and smart cities.

Our main challenge is to develop a holistic model. All of the approaches we focus on have already been proven successfully independently. But they are, usually, not used in an integrated manner at the scale of a district. In addition to developing the model for three showcase districts, we will also test its replicability by implementing it in the cities of Miskolc in Hungary, and Sereign in Belgium.

What role does technology play in urban regeneration?

Citizens will be the central players of our model. And ICT will help in ensuring that is the case. Specifically, ICT is used to integrate the energy and mobility infrastructures into a common city information platform. Thus, it will contribute towards the development of high-value services to citizens and help implement smarter and more sustainable cities.

Relevant information will be made available through the [web portal](link) of the City Hall in each showcase city and via apps. Citizens will be able to access information about how long it takes to go from one place to another, giving the list of transport facilities required. It will also indicate how much energy they spend on the journey. Further information will also include a map of the charging points for electric vehicles and that of the new electric taxi fleet funded by the project as well as the detail of areas of the city where Wi-Fi and broadband are available.

What is the role of citizens?

The project is now undergoing an audit phase in the three showcase cities in relation to energy, mobility and existing infrastructures

performance. The challenge of such an audit is to engage with citizens so that they feel involved in this holistic urban transformation. Without them, we are unlikely to succeed. This is why we are looking for ways to make sure that citizens are informed throughout the project. This can be done through local roundtables and different communication tools like the municipalities' web portal. Our objective is to create a demand for urban regeneration by demonstrating its benefits and showing its feasibility.

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