



Big Cities, Smart Cities?

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My students made a beautiful presentation about smart cities of the future, and it got me thinking about how they, as representatives of the future, are going to live and where. What kind of food are they going to eat? How are they going to commute to work?

When talking about the future and cities, innovative technologies and sustainable living always come together in a nice bundle. The United Arab Emirates have some examples of such approaches to living, including the [Zayed Smart City Project](#) with artificial intelligence integrated everywhere and extensive sustainable agenda.

The United Nations defines [a smart city](#) as follows:

"A smart sustainable city is an innovative city that uses information and communication technologies and other means to improve quality of life, efficiency of urban operation and services, and competitiveness, while ensuring that it meets the needs of present and future generations with respect to economic, social, environmental as well as cultural aspects."

The National Geographic has a [visualization](#) of what the future cities might look like. Around 54% of the world's population lives in cities, and experts say that the number will only increase. In terms of population, Tokyo is still the biggest megacity with more than 37 million people.

Have you ever thought about where you want to live? Is it a big noisy city? Is it a big, cozy city? Is it some type of a big countryside but within the city limits? Or maybe it's a small village like in Switzerland, in the middle of a beautiful nowhere? What will our living environment look like in the future? There are so many questions and, I bet, as many individual answers.

In 2019

When the pandemic hit, I was in Paris-not Tokyo but still a European megacity. While talking to my friends and colleagues, I always heard the same wish: everybody wanted to go out in a park or be closer to nature. Nobody I knew lived in a house, only in apartments. Those living in the apartments with windows facing the park were suddenly happy and grateful. Those who lived very close to the parks were the happiest. Those who lived on the 15th floor in a faceless block of flats with windows facing another cement & glass wall were doing their best to find those precious green (and blue) spaces. Kate Green Tripp has a lovely piece about [soft fascination](#) and her forest walks during the pandemic. It seems like we all, to a different extent, turned to nature for some peace of mind.

Smart City Observatory created the [Smart City Index 2021](#), which reports on how the city's residents perceive their cities, especially how efficient they think technologies are applied in the health system, activities (green spaces, cultural spaces), mobility and other key factors:

"The pandemic has seen an acceleration of digital and ecological transformations in smart cities. This acceleration is redefining resilience, which is increasingly becoming a local objective. And cities that have been seen as handling COVID challenges in an effective way rank high in the report."

In this report, you'll find the rankings of 118 cities. If you want to know the winner, scroll down this article. Meanwhile, can you guess the smartest city of 2021?

Megacities and the Bodies of Water

Whatever smart strategy or futuristic view you have about a city, the aspect of sustainability and urban planning is there. I'm currently working on an interdisciplinary project about megacities and sustainable green-blue infrastructures. Apparently, people want more of that, especially taking into account the difficult circumstances that we all faced over the past two years.

We just need to identify where we want these green-blue spaces (near work, home or both), what kind of space it would be visually (park with a fountain?), sonically (fast water streams or a zen garden pond?) and how people want to interact with it. I wish I were an architect right now and can imagine these things already created and running. At least, I can pretend that I am.

Blue spaces are significant for urban areas as much as green ones, though they are still less developed. Such spaces are the much-needed connection to the natural world. They are the sources of fresh air, which offer places for physical activities and provide the feeling of psychological and social connectedness.

For example, water in motion is rich in negative ions, which help to absorb oxygen and improve the mood chemical serotonin. It relieves stress and anxiety, and you begin to feel energized and rejuvenated. Proximity to waterfalls or the seaside may have that effect on you. The green space blended with the blue space (a park with a pond) is even more appealing, both aesthetically and in terms of physical health and psychological well-being.

By the way, Singapore is the number one smart city in the world for a second consecutive year.