

Smart technology applications for the optimal management of underground facilities

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Abstract:

This study centers on the use of smart technology to improve the lifecycle management of underground facilities. It presents a comprehensive digital solution that addresses the challenges of underground facilities, particularly those related to the extensive use of underground space, as well as the requirements for safety, sustainability, and quality of services. The proposed solution emerged from discussions with experts, companies, and cities involved in the design, construction, and management of underground facilities. In this paper, we first discuss the major challenges of underground facilities, then, we present the development of a smart solution to address these challenges. This study demonstrates a promising perspective for the use of smart technology in the optimal management of underground facilities, and paves the way for its implementation.

Keywords: Artificial Intelligence; Lifecycle; Safety; Smart City; Maintenance; Smart Technology; Underground Facilities

1 Introduction

This study presents a smart solution for the lifecycle management of underground space, which plays a major role in urban areas (Nelson, 2016; Darroch et al., 2018). Underground space hosts vital urban infrastructures for water, energy, telecommunication, and transportation services, as well as structures built to accommodate residential, industrial, and service purposes (Sterling et al., 2012; Broere, 2016). This space also plays a major environmental role as it reduces traffic jams and contributes to the reduction of energy consumption, as well as urban greenhouse gas emissions. Furthermore, it acts as an excellent thermal insulator for buried constructions, which leads to a high energy consumption economy. This space could be used as an energy source via geothermal energy. In large and crowded cities, underground space presents an effective alternative for the construction of new infrastructures or extensions of existing ones. It also presents a reliable driver for urban socio-economic development. However, owing to high population growth, rapid urbanization, and increasing concerns in sustainable and livable cities, underground space is subjected to increasing pressure and numerous challenges. It is already crowded with facilities, constructions, and objects that were built throughout the city's history with the principle of "first come, first served." In addition, this space is heavily exploited by several public and private stakeholders, who lack coordination, cooperation and a common sense of shared perspective and vision for its use and development. Underground space also faces a legal challenge concerning its ownership and maintenance. This issue raises several questions, including: who is responsible for the structure, equipment, indoor environment, surrounding soil, and security of underground space? To determine the responsibilities and roles of the authorities and companies involved in the management of underground space, these crucial questions should be addressed.

Underground space is also subjected to specific safety challenges (Eskesen et al., 2004; Hu & Huang, 2014), lifecycle management (Reilly & Brown, 2004), and sustainability (Sterling et al., 2012; NAS, 2013).

Because these challenges will be predictably increasing in the future, owing to the pressure of population growth, urbanization, and climate change, it is necessary to develop innovative solutions that improve the efficiency, safety, and quality of services related to underground space. Innovation is also required to monitor underground space and share data among the stakeholders of underground space.

Recent progress in the field of smart cities and related issues such as smart grids,

intelligent transport, and smart buildings, offers new opportunities for the development of comprehensive solutions that improve the management of urban systems, including urban infrastructure, services, and governance (Momoh, 2012; Lin et al., 2013; El-Hawary, 2014; Anthopoulos, 2015; Shahrour et al., 2016; Tuballa & Abundo, 2016; Cheng et al., 2016; Bagdadee & Zhang, 2019).

This study presents the application of smart technology to underground space. The scientific novelty of this study is illustrated in Table 1, which shows the evolution of a number of scientific records indexed by ISI-WEB in the last decade, based on the following topics: (i) "smart city", (ii) "underground space and urban tunnel", and (iii) "underground space and urban tunnel" and "smart city." This table shows intense scientific activity in the first two topics, including the recent emergence of the application of smart city solutions in the field of urban underground space. The synthesis presented in this study is based on the analysis of 58 references, which are given in the reference list.

The remainder of this paper is organized as follows. First, the paper presents the challenges of urban underground space to determine the requirements for an innovative solution. Next, it presents the smart city concept and its application to underground space. Finally, it provides some recommendations for the implementation of the "smart underground space" solution.

Topic year	Smart city		Urban underground Underground space, urban
		space and tunnel	tunnel and smart city
2010	74	335	$\boldsymbol{0}$
2011	142	348	$\boldsymbol{0}$
2012	225	425	1
2013	444	543	$\overline{2}$
2014	778	431	1
2015	1388	557	$\overline{2}$
2016	2073	743	8
2017	2897	653	6
2018	2998	806	6
2019	2409	734	3

78 Table 1. Scientific ISI-Web records for topics related to "smart underground space"

2 Methodology

The methodology of this research is based on an extensive literature review as well as on discussions with companies and local authorities relevant to underground facilities and smart city solutions, including the academic and professional experience of authors in the field of underground space and smart cities (Shahrour et al., 2016; Farah & Shahrour, 2017; Abbas et al., 2017; Abou Rjeily et al., 2017; Shahrour et al., 2017; Xie et al., 2018; Saab et al., 2020; Shahrour & Zhang, 2020), and the results of a series of international conferences "Smart Underground Space" organized by the authors in 2017, 2018, and 2019 (SUS-Shanghai, 2017; SUS-Shanghai, 2018; SUS-Lille, 2019).

3 Underground space challenges

3.1 Overview

Underground space plays a vital role in urban areas because it hosts critical urban infrastructures such as utilities and facilities for transportation, water, energy, and telecommunication. However, this space is subjected to a multitude of challenges. It is exploited by several public and private stakeholders, with a general lack of coordination, cooperation, and a shared perspective and vision for the use and development of this space. Although some stakeholders, such as public authorities and owners, have long-term and holistic perspectives, others, such as operating and maintenance companies, usually have short- to medium-term perspectives with a focus on specific issues relating to this space. Owing to its high heterogeneity, density, foundations, constructions, utilities, and diversity of hosted facilities, underground space is very complex. In general, cities do not have a clear map for underground space, and this sometimes results in accidents that cause damage to some underground utilities owing to construction activities. Such damage can lead to significant disruptions both above and below the ground.

The following sections focus on two specific challenges of underground space. The first is related to safety, which is particularly essential for the underground space owing to the limited access to this space and the large economic and environmental consequences of severe incidents in it. The second challenge is related to the lifecycle management, which is particularly complex because of the long lifetime of underground infrastructures, such as tunnels and utilities, several stakeholders in this space, and the difficulty in conserving and transmitting data and information throughout the lifetime of underground projects.

3.2 Safety of underground space

Owing to its high vulnerability, as well as its vital role in providing urban services (transport, water, energy, communication, etc.), safety is considered a major challenge in underground space. Safety in this space is more critical than in the surface space because of the restricted access to it in the event of a severe accident. These accidents could cause structural instability, water infiltration, fire, electrical outage, and air contamination. Additionally, incidents such as floods or fires could cause a chain of events with severe damage to the structure of underground space, its equipment, and hosted services. In the metro tunnel, these damage could disrupt the traffic of both the metro system and other transport networks above the ground.

Guidelines have been established for risk management in tunnels and underground projects. The working group 2 of the International Tunneling Association published guidelines for tunneling risk management in 2004 (Eskesen et al., 2004). These guidelines provided owners and consultants with best practices for the risk assessment of tunnels, and described the process of risk management throughout the entire implementation of a tunnel project. According to these guidelines, risk management should be included as an integrated part of the planning and construction of any major underground project. In China, the first guideline for the risk management of tunnels and underground projects was issued in 2007. It was then updated as a national code for the risk management of underground projects in urban rail transit in 2012 (Hu & Huang, 2014).

Hu & Huang (2014) presented sophisticated risk management standards for tunnels and underground projects in China. They indicated that the risks in large projects were previously

managed by engineering decisions during the design and construction phases. This practice however resulted in a lack of a standard procedure for implementation and verification. For the implementation of risk management in tunnels, the key factors to consider are the identification of potential risk sources, elaboration of corresponding preventive measures, and preparation of an emergency rescue plan. Dynamic risk management should be established on construction-based information and site monitoring (Hu & Huang, 2014).

To address the safety issues of underground spaces, it is necessary to develop a comprehensive management system that includes historical and real-time data on the structure of underground space, its equipment, use, and adjacent environment.

3.2 Lifecycle management

Underground space projects, especially the construction of tunnels, utilities, and large facilities, are very complex and expensive with a long lifecycle that includes four long stages: planning, design, construction, and exploitation. Each stage is operated by specific experts, who utilize and generate a high amount of data that are necessary for the management of the current stage and subsequent stages. These data are generally related to the physical components of underground space as well as its operating activities such as maintenance, usage, incidents, expenses, and performances. The management of existing underground facilities, legacy infrastructures in particular, involves the collection of construction and operating historical data, as well as their integration with the information system of the facility. One of the major challenges to the lifecycle management of large construction projects is the loss of data and information at the transition between subsequent stages. An international survey of several tunnel projects showed that it was difficult to obtain specific and relevant information on these projects because once they were completed, the data they generated were either archived or dispersed among the project stakeholders (Reilly & Brown, 2004). Because data loss could result in severe problems in the management of underground space, which leads to substantial additional expenses, it is necessary to develop and apply digital tools in storing the data collected throughout the lifecycle of underground space.

4 Smart City solution

4.1 Use of data for comprehensive and knowledge-based city management

The smart city concept is based on the use of digital and social innovations to improve the efficiency and security of urban systems as well as the quality of life of its residents and their involvement in urban development. It also aims at creating a friendly urban environment that reduces the consumption of natural resources and pollution via emissions. This concept is based on an interdisciplinary approach of a city that utilizes technical, social, and environmental data to develop a knowledge-based management of the city (Anthopoulos & Fitsilis, 2013; Anthopoulos, 2015). Data were collected using the smart monitoring of urban systems, including its water, energy, and transportation infrastructure, as well as its urban environment and activities (Momoh, 2012; Buchholz & Styczynski, 2014; El-Hawary, 2014; Shahrour et al., 2016; Tuballa & Abundo, 2016). Smart monitoring is based on the use of smart sensors, social media, and authorized data to conduct a real-time survey of urban systems. Operating data are stored in large datasets, together with information on infrastructure assets and other useful data such as climate information, traffic, and user profiles. The data obtained include images, videos, and audios, resulting in the development of urban big data (Mayer-Schönberger & Cukier, 2013; Chen et al., 2014). The analyses of both real-time and historical data provide an enhanced understanding of the functioning and performance of urban infrastructure. It also allows the optimal management of urban systems by improving asset management and reducing the consumption of natural resources and the emission of greenhouse gases. Furthermore, the smart city concept is based on a sustained interaction with citizens. Today, social media offers the outstanding ability to establish two-way communication and cooperation between the city and its residents. It provides residents with pertinent information concerning urban services, including environmental and safety issues. In return, it enables city managers to receive feedback from residents.

During natural or human-made hazards, smart monitoring allows authorities to collect data on the actual functioning and performance of urban systems, as well as the behavior of residents. Using advanced analysis tools, such as artificial intelligence, the analysis of these data provides an enhanced understanding on the actual reactions of technical and social systems to urban hazards. Owing to the learning capacity of the smart city concept, the analyses of real-time and historical data permit the early detection and management of incidents, as well as the restriction of their extension to larger areas. Regarding large faults in urban systems, smart technology allows the efficient self-healing of complex urban systems.

In a smart city, sensors, data information systems, social media, and other emergent technologies work together to track, share, and analyze data concerning resources, demands, and urban-system performances at different scales and under various conditions. This allows urban stakeholders to develop and implement a comprehensive city management plan, which improves the efficiency and security of urban systems as well as the quality of life of its residents.

4.2 Implementation of the smart city solution

The implementation of the smart city solution requires the development of a smart platform that coordinates operations related to a smart city, such as data collection, data processing and analysis, system control, and interaction with city stakeholders (Shahrour et al., 2017). Figure 1 illustrates the architecture of this platform, which is connected via wired and wireless communication technologies to urban systems, urban infrastructure, users, and urban environment. By utilizing these connections, the platform collects data, ensures data integrity, and stores both raw and cleaned data in the information system. Additionally, the cleaned data include asset data obtained via the connection to digital modeling tools of urban systems, such as the geographic information system (GIS) and building information modeling (BIM).

The platform incorporates software for data analysis using both engineering and information technology tools, such as artificial intelligence, to convert real-time and historical data into operational data, which ensures the optimal and safe management of urban systems and a friendly environment for citizens.

Finally, the platform adopts friendly graphic tools for its communication and interaction with city stakeholders, including its residents, socio-economic stakeholders, urban managers, and policy makers.

Fig 1. Architecture of the smart city platform.

5 Smart solution for underground facilities

5.1 Presentation

The development of a comprehensive smart solution for underground facilities is an emerging topic. Previous works on smart tunnels mainly focused on the development of advanced systems for monitoring the soil and structural displacements during tunnel construction. Inexpensive sensors and optical fibers were used during the construction of a tunnel in London to monitor soil movement during tunneling (Bennett et al., 2010). A "smart tunnel" was constructed in Kuala Lumpur in Malaysia (Zaini et al., 2012). The smart depiction of this tunnel involved its multi-usage for the reduction of both flood damage and traffic jams. A smart solution for underground space aims at the construction of a comprehensive system based on a comprehensive monitoring of this space and the use of advanced data analysis tools to improve:

(1) the quality of life and services of residents;

(2) asset management, particularly the efficiency and maintenance of this space;

(3) safety and security in underground space, as well as in surrounding constructions and environment.

The architecture of this smart underground solution is similar to that used in smart cities (Fig. 1). It is built around a platform that collects data from sensors, authorized sources, and social media, and transforms these data and algorithms via a software into operational data to operate the optimal and safe management of underground space and provide high-quality services to users. The performance of the smart underground solution depends on the quality of the collected data and their applications in the lifecycle management of underground space. The following sections discuss these issues while focusing on the underground information system and the use of data during the construction and operational stages of the underground space.

5.2 Underground information system

The underground information system includes data and information on underground space throughout its lifecycle. Figure 2 summarizes the collected and generated data at each stage of the underground space project. The collected data include data collected on the urban environment, subsoils, structural elements, surrounding buildings, and facilities.

The information system also includes data on underground space equipment, such as the electrical grid (tension, frequency, consumption, etc.), water system (pressure, flow, quality), ventilation system, access control, air quality, safety, emergency equipment, and video protection. It also includes other useful data such as those related to traffic, weather, urban activities, events (sports, spectacles, etc.), and density of users, as well as information concerning the safety and security of users.

The information system could be connected to digital systems, such as GIS, BIM, and civil information modeling (CIM), which provide powerful management tools for buildings and facilities (Penttilä, 2006; Aji et al., 2013; Cheng et al., 2016).

To harness massive amounts of both structured (files, tables, sheets, etc.) and unstructured data (images, audios, and videos), researchers recommend the use of big data tools (Mayer-Schönberger & Cukier, 2013; Chen et al., 2014; Karimi, 2014; Breunig et al., 2020) and artificial intelligence methods (Bouayad & Emeriault, 2017; Vo Pham et al., 2018; Xu et al., 2019; Shreyas & Dey, 2019) for data storage, processing, and analysis.

The maintenance of underground information systems is vital because of the critical feature of this space, as well as its complexity. This maintenance should be handled by a committee of public and private stakeholders in underground space. The committee has the responsibility of setting operation rules related to data collection, management, sharing, access, protection, and valorization.

Fig. 2. Information system for the lifecycle management of underground space.

5.3 Smart solution applications in the construction stage

Underground space is subjected to various risks during the construction stage, such as those related to:

- (1) hazardous soils, owing to the eventual presence of utilities, blocks, cavities, ancient deposits, and water;
- (2) excessive deformation and soil settlement, which could result in the significant collapse and interruption of construction works or/and severe damage to surrounding constructions and facilities; and
- (3) disruption of urban services such as transportation, water, energy, and telecommunications services (Liu et al., 2005; Wu et al., 2015; Qian & Lin, 2016).

Over the last decade, an increasing trend in underground construction accidents has been observed in China (Ou et al., 2008; Yoo & Lee, 2008). The smart underground solution benefits from the significant progress made in the application of structural health monitoring (SHM) in underground construction works (Bhalla et al., 2005; Chai et al., 2011; Qian & Lin, 2016). This technology allows the tracking of soil and structural deformations during tunnel deformation, and then adjusts the excavation process to limit induced deformation.

A recent review on the use of artificial intelligence and tunnel monitoring allowed the enhancement of TBM tunneling efficiency and safety (Shahrour & Zhang, 2020). Xie et al. (2018) demonstrated how the use of settlement monitoring, together with deep learning, provided a reduction in the soil settlement during the construction of a station of the Nanning metro in China.

Geo-risks related to the lack of data and information on the subsoil, incorporated utilities, and other objects also constitute a crucial safety challenge for the construction and operational stages. Smart technology could help address this challenge by incorporating and updating data on the soil and maintaining the utilities in the underground information system presented in section 5.2 (Alqadad et al., 2017). Another approach to addressing this challenge is by utilizing digital tools such as BIM, GIS, and mobile augmented reality applications for the 3D visualization of the subsoil during urban construction projects (Huston et al., 2017).

Furthermore, the smart solution could benefit from tracking technologies used in underground projects such as radio frequency identification (RFID), global positioning system (GPS), wireless local area network (WLAN or Wi-Fi), ZigBee, and indoor localization (Ergen et al., 2007; Behzadan et al., 2008; Khoury & Kamat, 2009; Tu et al., 2009; Rao & Chandran, 2013; Jiang et al., 2015). In addition, the smart solution could be enhanced by recent developments in the early-warning decision support system (Lin et al., 2013; Jiang et al., 2015; Qian & Lin, 2016). Recent developments in the applications of augmented reality offer functional capacities to visualize buried utilities and objects, and consequently to avoid damage during construction (Ortega et al., 2019).

5.4 Smart solution applications in the operational stage

The operational stage involves the management of both the assets and equipment of underground space, such as:

(1) the electrical system, including the electrical grid, substations, transformers, lighting, and generators;

(2) the water system, including storm water, drinking water, and sanitation;

(3) the ventilation system, including air quality control, pumping equipment, air distribution system, and air treatment;

(4) the heating/cooling system, generally associated with the ventilation system;

(5) fire protection system;

(6) access control and emergency exit.

In this stage, each system requires specific monitoring. The electrical system benefits from the substantial experience in the field of smart grids, smart public lighting, and smart buildings (Bagdadee & Zhang, 2019; Verma et al., 2019). The technology in these areas is mature and currently widely used. Smart technology provides substantial improvement in the security of operations by confining local faults via the smart monitoring of electrical substations and appliances.

The management of the water system could also benefit from smart water technology via the smart monitoring of water flow, water pressure, and water quality (Abbas et al., 2017; Abou Rjeily et al., 2017; Farah & Shahrour, 2017; Saab et al., 2020). This system allows the rapid detection of water leak, accidental water contamination, and flood risk.

The management of the ventilation system is vital for the safety and comfort of users. It requires the monitoring of ventilation equipment, airflow, air quality, and comfort conditions (temperature, humidity, etc.). In addition to improved safety and comfort, the smart system allows essential energy savings.

Safety is a crucial issue in the management of underground space. Smart technology is particularly necessary for the early detection of incidents, which could be related to fire, air contamination, water infiltration, flood, structure collapse, and malicious actions (Singh et al., 2018). This early alert system includes sensors and video surveillance equipment. According to the type of incident, the system allows the user to transmit data and information instantaneously between services and authorities relevant to the event, take appropriate measurement and actions via control devices (switches, valves, pumps, etc.) to confine the incident and trigger emergency actions, share data during emergency actions, and post-analyze collected data to enhance the resilience of underground space.

Inspection and maintenance are crucial for the safety and performance of underground space. Figure 3 illustrates how smart technology could help improve the quality of the inspection and maintenance of underground space. Besides digital identification and the localization of underground components, each component could be equipped with inspection and maintenance RFID tags that are connected to the smart platform via mobile application. These tags provide access to the inspection procedure, documents, and historical data. The system enables specific protocols to ensure inspection quality control and online reporting, which is automatically transmitted to the relevant staff with alerts in case of a need for urgent intervention. Maintenance RFID tags are used in the same way as inspection tags to improve efficiency and control the quality of the maintenance. Robots equipped with sensors and cameras could also be used for the inspection of limited access areas.

The availability of massive amounts of digital data on underground inspection and maintenance allows the use of digital tools, such as artificial intelligence, to categorize and explore the type, frequency, localization, and causes of component faults or degradation, as well as establish a predictive strategy for underground space inspection and maintenance (Tang et al., 2019; Wei et al., 2020).

Fig. 3. Inspection and maintenance data of tunnels and hosted utilities.

6 Conclusion

Underground space plays a vital role in urban areas. It hosts urban infrastructure such as those related to water, energy, telecommunication, and transport. Owing to urban densification, underground facilities will play an increasing role in the future. Regarding surface structures, the management of underground facilities is subjected to specific challenges. Safety is considered the most important factor because of the critical role these facilities play and the limited access to them. A serious incident in underground space could lead to substantial economic and social losses. The lifecycle management of underground facilities also constitutes a significant challenge owing to the activities of several stakeholders and the difficulties related to each stage of the lifecycle management of these complex facilities.

Recent developments in the use of smart technology in urban areas such as smart grids, smart water, smart district heating, smart building, and smart city provide powerful tools for the optimal management of urban systems. Analysis of real-time and historical data enables an enhanced understanding of the behavior of these systems and their interaction with the environment.

The application of smart technology to underground spaces allows the construction of a comprehensive system that utilizes digital technology and data collected throughout the lifecycle of the underground facilities for their optimal and safe management. It also reinforces the involvement of different stakeholders in the optimal management of underground facilities. Furthermore, it presents a promising perspective that assures an optimal "continuity" in the management of underground facilities from the planning stage to the operational stage.

Declaration-of-competing-interests

The authors declare that they have no known competing financial interests or personal relationships that could have appeared to influence the work reported in this paper.

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