

Exploring “Denizens” (Digital Citizen) Urban Practices in the Seoul Capital Region: A Critical Examination of Smart City Dynamics

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As smart planning continues to shape urban spaces, the integration of sensors and cameras in public areas has become a pivotal aspect of urban development (Goldsmith & Crawford, 2014). This research seeks to analyze the intricate relationship between digital planning and the lived experiences (Lefebvre, 2000) of urban inhabitants.

Beginning with an exploration of city planners’ conception, the study delves into the Seoul Capital Region, focusing on two smart city cases: Songdo (Peyrard & Gelézeau, 2020) and Digital Media City (DMC) (Mot, 2013). Through in-depth analysis of master plans and fieldwork research, specificities are shown between the smart urban planning approaches of both cities. However, in both cases, the designation of a smart city emerges more as a “loud narrative” (Yang, 2019) based on futuristic city models than as an innovative developmental process. Indeed, the urban configurations of Songdo and DMC mirror those found throughout the capital region. The landscape is dominated by high-rise apartment complexes (*apateu danji*) (Gelézeau, 2003) and shopping centers linked by extensive highways. This analysis raises essential questions about the economic and political strategies that have shaped the urban technological identity of this region. Is there a distinctive environment to smart urban development? How closely does the planned urban space align with the actual experiences of its inhabitants?

Shifting the focus to the “Denizens” (Digital Citizen) perspective, the study examines then how inhabitants navigate into these two technological urban environments. Based on ethnographic research conducted since 2018, this research shows that residents often perceive the smart tools as invisible. Being surrounded by cameras and using a smartphone is just common experience in urban South Korea. The residents only notice the digital pervasiveness when it is triggered by alerts. How residents respond to these technological alerts? What kind of issues the urban sensors are trained to detect? What impact does have this constant monitoring on the inhabitants’ behaviors? From “info-pollution” to “infobesity” (Sauvajol-Riolland, 2013) inhabitants expose concerns about this urban smart development while requiring to be more and more to be connected.

In conclusion, this paper critically questions the principles that define the smart urban development of the Seoul Capital Region, exploring how smart systems resonate with the daily experiences of its inhabitants. Furthermore, by incorporating a comparative element, it seeks to unravel similarities and distinctions among smart urban projects, offering a new perspective on the evolution South Korea's urban landscape.