

Review of: "Safe City Concept in Smart City Planning"

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The study, *Safe City Concept in Smart City Planning*, by Aysha Najma Ikbāl and Sanu K. Thekkath, examines the concept of “Safe cities” from a 2017 Economic Intelligence Unit report. It defines Safe Cities as “a community that uses technology to help governments, communities and businesses reduce the possibility of crime and provide an environment where people can feel safe and comfortable”.

The phrasing in the EIU document includes the wording of “inclusivity”, presumably inferring that many participants will be included in the process, particularly members of the community. This is reiterated later in their discussion about “walkability and mixed-use practices... social diversity”.

That is a laudable goal. The reader then sets out to see examples of that and how, precisely, those goals are satisfied in the Smart City planning (or how, precisely, they are not).

The study goes on to define the “Smart City” as a city that incorporates Information and communication technology to for economic growth and high quality of life, along with participatory governance. This language is reminiscent of the same principles that define 3rd Generation CPTED (Mihinjac & Saville, 2019; Saville & Mihinjac, 2022), a recent addition to the Crime Prevention Through Environmental Design movement – although there is no reference to that new concept in this paper.

Concepts then start to get blurred in the paper. For example, in the case study example of Mumbai it lists tactics to address personal security such as monitoring public spaces through security cameras. It does not say who exactly does the monitoring, why that is an effective response, or how that strategy is inclusive.

The same problem emerges with a strategy to tackle environmental security when they describe smart poles with incident response controllers, communication infrastructure and LEDs. The reader is left to wonder; What “controllers” will address incidents? How does communication infrastructure improve the environmental sustainability, and how does LEDs enhance safety, sustainability or inclusiveness? These issues have appeared over the years in the scientific literature on Crime Prevention Through Environmental Design, as well as the geography of crime research. We know, from that research, there are some rational answers to those questions, but readers are left to put the pieces together on their own.

It is the same problem for the other Indian cities mentioned in the case studies. But, fortunately, there are a few exceptions. In the cities of Kohima and Ahmedabad the authors reference the Jane Jacobs concept “eyes on the street”, known in 1st Generation CPTED as natural surveillance. This is reminiscent of the many CPTED by-laws and ordinances already in place in hundreds of cities around North America. In such places these design tactics have become a mainstay

of inclusive urban design. The reader is not sure why these other examples from the 1980s and 1990s are not added to the worldwide Smart City examples, but perhaps that quibble is less important than the scope of this study.

Many of these quibbles result from the scope of this study – it is a top-down study with a summary of general strategies. It never really digs down into the details of the strategies to analyze how they satisfy the goals mentioned at the start of the article. Inclusiveness and social diversity, in particular, are left hanging with no clear analysis about how any of these Smart City initiatives help.

That is unfortunate, since there is a growing literature on both 3rd Generation CPTED and SafeGrowth from North America that dives quite deeply into how those goals are properly implemented with inclusive design. That, it seems, is a valuable lesson for the Smart City movement to which it should pay more attention. In fact, the omission of any North American examples leaves the reader wondering why such research pertaining to Smart Cities was excluded, especially from a personal safety perspective in Indian cities. There is much to be gained from expanding and deepening this kind of broad case study approach. Perhaps the authors can describe areas for future research in the conclusion to make up for this shortfall?

The authors conclude that their study highlights that safety and security issues remain unaddressed in the planning of Indian Smart Cities. That is certainly also the story in North American cities, but with the difference that a body of evaluation research already exists to show the way forward. Imagine the insights that might emerge from a broader survey of case studies including North American cities – and areas like Europe where plenty has been done as well. We desperately need a deeper dive into the specifics of safety and security, not just from a Smart City perspective, but from a city-building perspective.