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Smart Cities: Big Data, Civic Hackers, and the Quest for a New Utopia

By Anthony M. Townsend



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Smart Cities: Big Data, Civic Hackers, and the Quest for a New Utopia By Anthony M. Townsend

An unflinching look at the aspiring city-builders of our smart, mobile, connected future.

We live in a world defined by urbanization and digital ubiquity, where mobile broadband connections outnumber fixed ones, machines dominate a new "internet of things," and more people live in cities than in the countryside.

In *Smart Cities*, urbanist and technology expert Anthony Townsend takes a broad historical look at the forces that have shaped the planning and design of cities and information technologies from the rise of the great industrial cities of the nineteenth century to the present. A century ago, the telegraph and the mechanical tabulator were used to tame cities of millions. Today, cellular networks and cloud computing tie together the complex choreography of mega-regions of tens of millions of people.

In response, cities worldwide are deploying technology to address both the timeless challenges of government and the mounting problems posed by human settlements of previously unimaginable size and complexity. In Chicago, GPS sensors on snow plows feed a real-time "plow tracker" map that everyone can access. In Zaragoza, Spain, a "citizen card" can get you on the free city-wide Wi-Fi network, unlock a bike share, check a book out of the library, and pay for your bus ride home. In New York, a guerrilla group of citizen-scientists installed sensors in local sewers to alert you when stormwater runoff overwhelms the system, dumping waste into local waterways.

As technology barons, entrepreneurs, mayors, and an emerging vanguard of civic hackers are trying to shape this new frontier, *Smart Cities* considers the motivations, aspirations, and shortcomings of them all while offering a new civics to guide our efforts as we build the future together, one click at a time.



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Editorial Review

From Publishers Weekly

Technology forecaster Townsend defines a smart city as an urban environment where information technology is combined with infrastructure, architecture, everyday objects, and even our bodies to address social, economic, and environmental problems. They're already being made, usually piecemeal but sometimes wholesale (as in planned automated cities like South Korea and Cisco's somewhat ill-fated Songdo), and involve refashioning old systems like the electricity grid as well as deploying the latest infrastructure—such as the network of radio waves operating our wireless gadgets—and much more. Of interest to urban planners and designers, tech leaders, and entrepreneurs, Townsend's globe-hopping study examines the trend toward smart cities while addressing pros and cons, as top-down corporate models develop alongside communitarian and entrepreneurial initiatives. Skeptical of the vision and influence of tech giants, Townsend points to smaller stories in making the case that local ingenuity should lead the way, albeit in concert with the corporate innovation and power. The author's perspective is based partly on direct experience (among other things, he was an organizer, in 2002, of NYCwireless, an open-source group distributing free Wi-Fi access in Manhattan). The autobiographical passages and close readings of other scrappy innovators are the most enjoyable part of this impressive survey, which tries to secure democratic impulses amid a new gold rush. Agent: Zoë Pagnamenta, Zoë Pagnamenta Agency. (Oct.)

From [Booklist](#)

Everyone these days is familiar with smartphones and smart homes (even if most can't afford the latter), but how many people are familiar with smart cities? While there is no master controller—at least not yet—who manipulates apps that keep a city running, increasingly such things as traffic patterns, sewage flow, and street lighting are all being guided by sophisticated software. In this far-reaching overview of all the ways computer technology is transforming life for today's metropolitan dwellers, urban planning specialist Townsend takes a look at how modern cities around the world are upgrading their infrastructure for the Internet age. From New York to Beijing, city mayors are partnering with organizations like Siemens and IBM to strengthen networks, communications, and crisis-intervention tools such as monitoring flu outbreaks. Although the omnipresent surveillance that accompanies this interconnectivity may make some readers nervous, Townsend persuasively demonstrates how ubiquitous information resources can provide more protection, as it did in the Boston marathon bombing case, and facilitate a more comfortable, less stress-inducing city-living experience. --Carl Hays

Review

"[A] timely and necessary guide to this age of the Franken-city." (Daniel Brook - New York Times Book Review)

"Townsend has collected fascinating stories of urban renewal and innovation from around the globe and packaged them into lessons that are neat and digestible" (Sarah Rothbard - Slate)

"Anthony Townsend sifts through the hope and the hype of the latest system upgrade for our growing, and increasingly more elusively managed, metropolises ? digital technology ? emerging with an ambitiously wide-ranging, admirably clear-eyed, and ultimately humanistic guidebook to the connected city." (Tom Vanderbilt, author of *Traffic: Why We Drive the Way We Do (and What It Says About Us)*)

"Today, it's not the height of the skyscrapers, but the depth of the code that drives the modern city. Anthony

Townsend brilliantly frames the new forces shaping tomorrow's metropolises. Read *Smart Cities* and you'll never look at a skyline or walk down a city block the same way again." (Andrew Zoll, author of *Resilience: Why Things Bounce Back*)

"Our cities are in the first act of an unprecedented technodrama. At stake is nothing less than the survival of our urban species. Combining technological sophistication, deep humanity, and an urban planner's sensitivity to the nuances of places, *Smart Cities* is an essential guide to understanding the technologies changing urban life." (Andrew Blum, author of *Tubes: A Journey to the Center of the Internet*)

"Powerful, readable prose." (Franklyn Carter - NPR)

"Of interest to urban planners and designers, tech leaders, and entrepreneurs, Townsend's globe-hopping study examines the trend toward smart cities while addressing pros and cons, as top-down corporate models develop alongside communitarian and entrepreneurial initiatives....The autobiographical passages and close readings of other scrappy innovators are the most enjoyable part of this impressive survey, which tries to secure democratic impulses amid a new gold rush." (Publishers Weekly)

"Compelling." (Melanie Moses - Nature)

"[Townsend] has written a generous book in clean prose, one that will engage both advanced geeks and cyber-dolts." (Catherine Tumber - The Nation)

Users Review

From reader reviews:

Michael Griffin:

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