

Will the Safe City Concept be the Ticket to a Safer World?

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Residents expect their elected officials to provide a safe environment where they can live, work and play. In the gloomy aftermath of terror attacks in well-known and beautiful cities around the world, we are seeing a blurring of lines between individual civil liberties and the need for society to protect the many.

As with many difficult problems there are no simple remedies. It is unquestionably so that new technology makes it possible to identify suspicious patterns, to predict crime or to boost the capabilities of local law enforcement in multiple ways. But where does it leave us if this happens at the expense of our personal freedom? In the hands of the wrong political leaders, how could this capability be misused?

My personal view is that people, especially the young, have already accepted the lack of privacy in most things they do - social networks have taken care of that. What some

of them haven't yet experienced (at least not consciously) is having this lack of privacy being exploited for the wrong political or commercial purposes.

Some might argue that GDPR will solve these issues. But even if legal frameworks are bolstered we will still have technical platforms capable of monitoring all of us, surpassing anything we have seen in recorded history.

Video surveillance grids combined with facial recognition is a good case point where many legal frameworks haven't been quick to respond. Imagining what could happen if those fairly light legal frameworks were suspended is a disturbing thought. Our every move could be monitored in real time and the people we meet and actions we take recorded and stored for post-processing. Combining this with data readily available via government and public sources, it would be easy to map our political affiliation, or why not our sexual orientation and other individual preferences.

Is this an inevitable future or perhaps even the current state of affairs? What we can say for sure as urbanisation continues, is that these moral dilemmas will be raised in cities. Cities will have the highest density of sensors and devices. It will be in cities where commercial interests will push the envelope and where societal needs will welcome part of this evolution. And granted, under the right political leadership and civil governance this could be a good thing.

From a TM Forum perspective, we are proposing an open, scalable city as a platform concept based on our Open APIs. We have laid out the key principles in our City as a Platform Manifesto that I launched in China in September, now signed by 130+ leading cities and organisations around the world. We invite you to review these principles and get behind this effort. One of the key principles is the enforcement of privacy and security of confidential data. Cities have a big responsibility in making sure that the future we design today is the future we want to enjoy tomorrow.

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