

# Future Cities: Challenges, Yes, But Hope Too

Carl Piva, VP of Strategic Programs for TM Forum, discusses Smart Cities



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**Carl Piva is serving as VP Strategic Programs at TM Forum. Carl is passionate about market and technology disruptions, and about helping TM Forum's members to transform into successful digital service providers in the emerging digital economy.**

**F**ollowing an amazing week chairing our [Smart City InFocus](#) event in China last week, I am now trying to reflect and make sense of the experience. There was so much to take in.

Smart City InFocus, delivered in close partnership with ZTE and City of Yinchuan, saw over 1,000 smart city practitioners from 105 international and 65 Chinese cities gathered together in China's smartest city, Yinchuan.

Since its inception just a year ago, the event has been upgraded to one of only three state-supported ICT events in China and the only one focused on smart cities. This is huge, considering that China could very well have the largest global impact on and derive the highest value from the smart city movement.

This growth and endorsement of the event reflects the imperative for cities to become smart and their centrality to our lives. By 2050, 66 percent of the world's population will live in cities, up from 54 percent in 2014. During that time, population growth and urbanization could add 2.5 billion people to the world's city-dwelling population. The real and pressing question is: What will our lives in these cities be like? Ensuring our cities are efficient, safe and sustainable places to live is really one of the most important issues for the whole world. And that's what the event focused on.

We kicked things off with a tour of one of Yinchuan's smart communities and City Hall, followed by a [glittering Gala Dinner under the stars, enjoying some amazing Chinese hospitality](#). This was followed by two days of fast-paced, thought-provoking presentations by global experts from cities as varied as New York, Toronto, Dubai, Masdar (Abu Dhabi), Dholera (India), Atlanta, Brisbane, Tel Aviv, Palo

Alto, Vancouver, Mississauga, Buenos Aires, Johannesburg, Nice and many more. The conference was also aired on CCTV, China's equivalent of the UK's BBC 1.

Getting to know people, their plans and ambitions, and how they tackle challenges in different countries around the world is what brings value over time. These are my top five takeaways from the event and I will expand further in a series of articles to follow:

### 1. Citizen focus trumps everything else

It came through loud and clear that without a relentless focus on citizen value and social inclusion, smart city initiatives will fail. This was echoed and demonstrated throughout the presentations, from early-stage initiatives such as Johannesburg, South Africa to more mature projects like Waterfront Toronto, where Rob Meikle, CIO, Toronto, outlined his city's ambition with North America's biggest revitalization initiative.

### 2. There are more similarities between cities than differences

Of course, all cities have an interest in differentiating themselves from others – in order to attract tax dollars and top talent, as well as improve life for people who already live in the city.

When pressed, most city leaders will agree (if sometimes grudgingly!) that there are more things that bind them together than separate them. Compared to the private sector, there isn't a strong culture of building shared assets between cities.

Take a look at the global telecommunications industry – where would we be if we hadn't teamed up together and created the common standards that allowed us to differentiate on top? Imagine trying to phone home if the appropriate standards hadn't been put in place. Cities are slowly starting to realize that by teaming up they can both share an investment and unleash innovation on a grander scale – this is an area where the TM Forum's Smart City Forum will play a vital role.

### 3. City sustainability can pay off

Anthony Mallows, Director of the greenfield Masdar City project in Abu Dhabi, offered an excellent perspective on the economies behind new city development. The financial model behind Masdar City evolved from being a state-funded project during the financial crisis to what it is today, a commercial enterprise based on the notion of a green, sustainable city. With a combination of solar energy, pedestrian clusters, narrow shaded streets, high performance buildings and a well thought-through mobility strategy they have already achieved a much better living environment (e.g. by having the temperature in the city 15-20 degrees below that in the surrounding desert). This has been achieved through a sound business model, delivering return on investment (ROI).

### 4. Those who share, win

Imagine two groups of cities: The first group decides to work together to drive best practice and create common assets

for how to engage with citizens and businesses. The second group don't work together, but instead attempts to solve every problem individually. In ten years' time, which group of do you think will have the most innovative, fastest-moving, vibrant cities attracting the best talent? This is indeed one of the reasons we are seeing cities starting to come together to solve common challenges.

### 5. One city is not a marketplace

Juanjo Hierro, Chief Architect, FIWARE, talked about the next stages of data-driven cities, from sharing static, open data to creating an economy of data by enabling the use of real-time data, open platforms and common APIs (as it happens, a combination of FIWARE city contextual APIs and [TM Forum's digital partnering open APIs](#)).

Jarkko Oksala, CIO, Tampere, made the point that "one city is not a marketplace" when discussing scaling the use of data, and outlined the Six Cities initiative between six of the largest cities in Finland. Establishing a vibrant economy of data requires critical mass and the right scale but also an implementation-driven approach based on a sound city platform.

In addition, there were a number of other really interesting concepts worth highlighting:

- **Building a greenfield city doesn't guarantee you make all the right choices:** It's easy to forget the citizen and spend too much time on envisaging how things will play out. Footpaths are sometimes created where people find it convenient to walk, not where city planners necessarily intended them to go.
- **City planners need to envisage taking the 'car' out of carbon.** Many modern cities are still being designed with cars playing too big a role. We had [many good discussions on taking the car out of carbon](#) and building cities with public transport at the heart.
- **Technology could still take us all hostage.** The idea of smart cities is very closely related to the concept of safe cities. Many countries are faced with terrorism and security issues and we sometimes hope that technology will come to our rescue – but it also creates new risks. We need to be very careful how we use technology to manage cities or monitor citizens.
- **There is hope.** By coming together in a movement like this, we have a real chance of changing the direction of travel and creating a sustainable way of using our planet's resources. Join us.

I hope you enjoy the smart city discussion in this InterComms release!

Best wishes,

*Carl Piva*

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