



Call for Proposals

International Conference

Smart cities as safe cities:

Theoretical, political, and legal perspectives

Dates: October 9th to 11th, 2024

Location: Université Catholique de Lille

Deadline for sending proposals: May 31st, 2024

Confirmed keynote speakers:

- Dr. Azadeh Akbari, Co-Director of the Surveillance Studies Network and Assistant Professor in Public Administration and Policy Science at the University of Twente
- Dr. Francesca Musiani, Deputy Director of Centre Internet et Société and Associate Research Professor at CNRS

Scope and topics:

The late 2000s marked a pivotal era in urban transformation, introducing the "smart city" concept into the mainstream against a backdrop of technological proliferation and economic challenges (Courmont and Le Galès 2019; Green 2022). As smart cities continue to evolve, driven by digital innovations, they promise urban "paradises" of efficiency and connectivity (Picon, 2015). Yet, this vision, predominantly championed by technology giants, has sparked debates about its techno-deterministic utopia and implications for privacy, social control, and governance (Anthopoulos 2017; Akbari 2021).

At the same time, Antoine Courmont (2018) points out, the early concept of the "Smart City" stumbled in the 2010s due to the technological challenges companies faced in grappling with the complex operations of urban environments, which proved resistant to simple quantification through data and algorithms. In response to these challenges, the notion of the "Safe City" was introduced, aiming to address these issues (Tesquet 2020; Rigouste 2022). Companies like Thales, renowned for their expertise in aerospace, defense, security, and transportation, began to apply their surveillance technologies in cities such as Mexico and Nice.

This shift marked a transition from the idealistic vision of the Smart City to the more pragmatic Safe City, which focuses on surveillance and social control (Tesquet and Rigouste 2022). Moreover, the promises of digital innovation in smart cities, where traditional networks and services would be made more efficient using digital solutions for the benefit of their inhabitants, have not been fully kept. This is particularly true from the perspective of citizens' needs (Lietheiser and Follman 2020; Cortés-Cediel et al. 2021). The challenges concerning data protection issues, low engagement of citizens and relevant actors, excessive influence of private companies, inefficiency of digital governance, and cybercrime show that significant weaknesses persist in the existing, essentially top-down model of smart cities (Feeney et al. 2020; Przybilowicz et al. 2020; Mabi 2021).

This evolution suggests that the original promise of "smartness" in urban settings is increasingly being overshadowed by the priorities of security and control and is largely driven by "surveillance capitalism" (Zuboff 2022), not only for marketing purposes but also - and especially - to shape, predict, and guide human behavior, perceptions, and decisions (Zuboff 2022; Sadowski 2020). Other scholars argue that, beyond surveillance capitalism, smart city developments are also driven by "surveillance theatre" (Melgaço and van Brakel's 2021), where the performative aspects of surveillance play a crucial role in sustaining smart city initiatives as discourse, imaginary, and promise. Surveillance technologies, in this sense, are used not just for security, but also as a means of political propaganda, investment attraction, and the portrayal of technological prowess, often without substantial effects on crime reduction or city management. Akbari (2022), in turn, demonstrates how different political regimes, including authoritarian ones, influence the design, implementation, and governance of smart cities. She highlights the increasing need to challenge the often-assumed democratic or apolitical settings of smart city initiatives and to examine the role of socio-political structures in shaping urban technologies and policies.

Moreover, according to these scholars, much of the existing research on smart cities has focused on the Global North, with less attention to developments in other regions. We need comparative studies and contributions from diverse geographical contexts, including the Global South, to provide a more comprehensive picture of how smart cities are conceptualized, implemented, and experienced worldwide (Melgaço and van Brakel's 2021; Akbari 2022).

We, therefore, invite scholars from the fields of philosophy, political science, law, urban studies, and media and communication studies to submit proposals that address one or more of the following:

- Theoretical/philosophical implications of surveillance, safety, and security in smart cities.
- The politics surrounding data ownership and its distribution in the digital urban landscape.
- Legal stakes and infrastructures of smart city governance.
- Media representations of and public discourses on smart cities, particularly as safe and/or secure.
- Governance models in smart cities: operational dynamics and citizen engagement.
- Influence of diverse political regimes on smart city frameworks, emphasizing the intersection of technology, governance, and political ideologies.
- Impact of surveillance technologies in smart cities on political authority, social dynamics, and individual liberties. This can include examining the lived experience of individuals living in smart/safe cities.
- Comparative insights and case studies from various regions, including perspectives from the Global South.
- Ethical, social, and cultural considerations in the deployment of smart city technologies, with a focus on their unintended consequences, such as the exacerbation of social inequalities and privacy concerns.

Submission Guidelines:

Please send your proposals, in English or French, of no longer than 500 words, accompanied by a short biographical note, [through this form](#) no later than May 31st, 2024

Important dates:

- Call for papers release: March, 2024
- Deadline for sending proposals: May 31st, 2024
- Notification to authors: June 30th, 2024
- Publication of the final conference program: June 30th, 2024
- Conference: October 9th to 11th, 2024.

Organizers:

Dr. Mehdi Ghassemi - ISTC/CEThicS - UCL

Dr. Delphine Dogot - FLD - UCL

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