Culturally smart cities
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When we talk about progress, digital societies or smart cities, the first thing that comes to mind is digital technology: sensors, virtual platforms of service management, the internet, systems for the acquisition and storage of data, or transport management services. We basically think in terms of the physical or material infrastructure and little do we think of what might be called a symbolic infrastructure. There is an obsession with high-tech in all ambits of the policies of innovation. This has its logic, new technologies are more visible than institutional reforms; economic success is more calculable than social cohesion, and social innovation is hardly something that can be sold or patented.

In my opinion, this way of understanding society is down to a confusion, or better said, a set of confusions. It reflects an imbalance in the shape of our societies and implies that we have a re-ductionist conception of technology. Our confusion is embedded in the widespread confidence that technological or technical innovations will ensure the improvement in the conditions of all ambits of our lifestyles. Across the whole political and ideological spectrum, from right to left, all are seduced by the irresistible temptation to believe that technological solutions can be used to fix political problems (from those on the right who have total confidence in the democratic legiti-macy of economic recovery, to those who we could call the 'digital left' who see the revitalizing of democracy as the result of internet, and a social media free of mediation).

>> CULTURE IS A SPACE FOR REFLECTION,
INTERPRETATION AND SELF-UNDERSTANDING.

At the origin of this confusion and many others, is often the fact that 'intelligent' or 'smart' is thought to be equivalent to 'technologically developed' or 'sustainable': a city is smart when the government uses information and communication technology and when this technology is extend-ed to the provision of services, trade, mobility, the management of waste, and when free WiFi is available in more and more locations. But consider, are we doing justice to the term 'intelligence' with all the amplitudes that this concept covers, when we reduce its meaning to simply the form of organizing humans, the city, the government or society as a whole?

I think that the technological narrowing of intelligence is at the heart of many misunderstandings, like that of confusing quality with impact, performance with contribution, authority with fame, con-nectivity with communication, development with growth, the new with the transgressive, the best practices with more extensive routines...and I start to think that this 'big data' in fact corresponds to an illusion that with the examination of the correlation within this data, allows us to abandon theories so that we have: big data, small theories.

Taking for granted the value of the usefulness of technology, whilst at the same time underesti-mating the contribution of culture, is what leads us to an unbalanced society. There is a clear im-balance between the techno-scientific euphoria and what I would describe as the illiteracy of civic values. I would go so far as to say that this is monstrous, in that a monster is something whose dimensions have grown enormously whilst stunting the growth and development of others, thus resulting in a complete absence of harmony, a unilateral and deformed presence. There will be no true human development or mature societies unless we correct this way of thinking, a mindset that doesn't give credit to those 'less exact' ways of thinking such as the intuitive, the creative and the artistic; and whilst we depreciate those things that cannot be transformed into technological devices, into immediate financial returns or to indisputable evidence.

Technological ecstasy is usually coupled with a deterministic vision and reductionist technology which does not take into account any kind of social or cultural phenomena in such a way that the
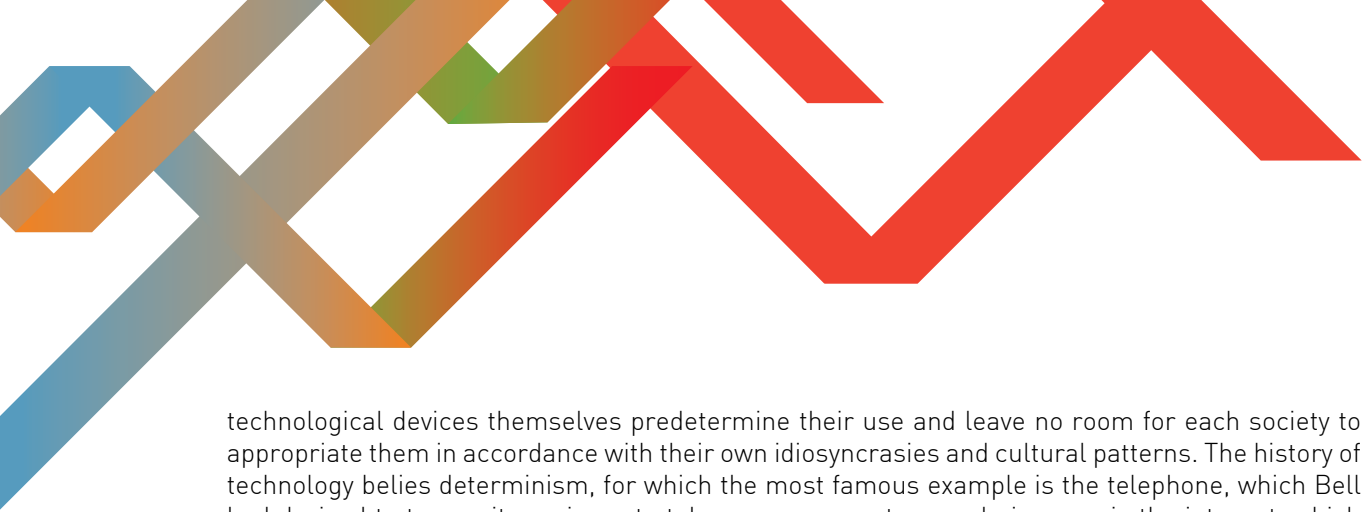
technological devices themselves predetermine their use and leave no room for each society to appropriate them in accordance with their own idiosyncrasies and cultural patterns. The history of technology belies determinism, for which the most famous example is the telephone, which Bell had devised to transmit music, or to take a more recent example in case, is the internet, which can be used as an instrument to both expand our freedom as well as an instrument to spy on us with unsuspected limits. Another example which further illustrates the said reductionism is that we conceive the digital divide as an inequality in access rather than the use people make of these opportunities opened up by digital technology.

As far back as 1944, Polanyi argued that industrialization and growth were less driven by technologies based on capital, than by the science of organization, that's to say that the main impulses of the industrial revolution were discoveries in the sociological field, not simply technical inventions. From the technical to the reduction of the singular artifact, we must stress its inclusion in social practices. It is not so much the potential of the new technological device or new technique, as the cultural and social aspects that decide how new technologies invade the world.

By referring to deterministic reductionism, I do not mean to say that I hold a lack of appreciation of technology, but rather the opposite. I consider that we do not do justice to the whole phenomena of technology. Technology does not consist solely of artifacts, but also of social uses and cultural provisions, within which technological innovations provide service to certain values. We have reduced the digital revolution to a mere investment in technology, in the same way we have degraded the communication society to the information society – which is in turn is largely understood to be a society of devices used for searching for information and for storage of data. It is almost as if the aspect of interpretation were irrelevant. Of course we must increase the quality of life of people through technology, but ultimately this cannot be achieved without an inclusive concept of intelligence, development, innovation and competitiveness.

Today we can find evidence of the exhaustion of this narrow way of thinking of human development. We have proof of this via the fact that there has been an increase in the meaning of social and cultural components or 'soft factors' of innovation and territorial competitiveness, such as qualifications, communication or types of behaviour. This highlights the importance of these factors of competitiveness of "non-market linkages" (networks, trust, social capital etc). While there exist some remnants of the neoclassic economic rationality, the 'soft' or fluctuating factors are no longer being considered as something accidental or secondary. While the traditional analyses of regional development focused almost exclusively on industry, the clusters, and the businesses, the idea of 'environment of knowledge' invites us more and more to direct our attention towards cultural factors of social life and the qualitative meaning of social structures in economic processes. We are now waking up to the fact that many non-market elements can be found at the core of the economic development of territories.

>>> A SOCIETY DOESN'T TRULY ADVANCE WITHOUT A SPACE FOR REFLECTION AND CRITICISM IN WHICH TO DISCUSS DIFFERENT POSSIBLE INTERPRETATIONS OF ITSELF.

The typical perspective of the industrial era, was that places grew either because they were situated on a busy transport route, or because they were located next to natural resources that encouraged companies and businesses to locate there. Today we know however, that the key to change is not the reduction of cost, but instead access to educated and creative individuals. It is necessary to move the focus from low cost to high creativity. In the knowledge economy, creative potential is a fundamental element for the growth and success of cities and territories.

In the face of expectation of collective progress focused on the development of knowledge understood from the model of scientific accuracy and technological practice, we should draw attention to the fact that what really matters is not so much data and information, but their meaning, i.e. the way in which we interpret what is desirable, legitimate, fair, or convenient. To put it another way: above the physical infrastructure of the knowledge society, there's a whole symbolic superstructure where the real issues of individual and collective existence are played.

Thus we come to the crucial question that arises regarding the value of culture in relation to the harmonious development of human beings and democratic societies. What sense does culture have if it is true, as said the German philosopher Hans Blumenberg, that in any cultural element – even in its most modest sense – there is something like a moment of broken or interrupted economy? What explains that human beings, always pressed by the necessity to survive, have not given up the apparent suspension of utility and abandoned culture altogether? My answer would be simple: because culture is not useless.

Culture is a space for reflection, interpretation and self-understanding. A society doesn't truly advance without a space for reflection and criticism in which to discuss different possible interpretations of itself. In the diversity of cultural expression, human beings don't do anything else except propose interpretations of who we are and imagine futures we fear or to which we aspire, in a dimension that has more to do with the meaning we give to things and less to do with facts and objectives. The divorce laws can't change the fate of Agamemnon, nor is the psychiatrist an answer to the drama of Oedipus; the problems encountered by Faust can't be fixed by the International Monetary Fund, nor can Ulysses or The Flying Dutchman solve their travel problems with a travel agency; it would be a blunder to think that the fate of Lear would be resolved by a nursing home; the profound torment that Antigone and Creon experience can't be solved by a reform in

funeral rites. In none of these stories is the presence of miracle cures or solutions to the problems that the characters face, but what is true is that a humane solution to any of these hardships will not be found unless we have made a concerted effort to fully understand them. And what better way to start to gain a proper understanding of these hardships than exploring the masterpieces of literature?

>> CREATIVITY IS ARTISTIC, SOCIAL, TECHNOLOGICAL, SCIENTIFIC OR URBAN; IT ARISES IN UNEXPECTED PLACES. ALTHOUGH THIS POP-UP OR EMERGING CHARACTER OF CREATIVITY DOES NOT EXEMPT US FROM WORKING TOWARDS THE ESTABLISHMENT OF CONDITIONS OF ITS UNLIKELY APPEARANCE.

This is why culture is so insistent on the same subjects, it provides so few solutions and instead generates more uncertainty. Culture provides a space in which the arts and humanities don't so much dedicate themselves to showing off their competence and skill, as to cultivate a series of issues in which human beings are never fully competent, a sort of compilation of the major unresolved issues that reveal to us the abyss of our ignorance: the meaning of life, the scope of our freedom, the mystery of beauty, the value of justice, the nature of time, our mortality, the duties of citizenship, the possibility of the existence of something beyond us. All these are issues or questions which we have always pondered, yet a definitive answer or solution eludes us. It is the incorrect deeming of these subjects as unimportant or indeed as issues that we have overcome, that can inflate us with the ignorance of pride, the worst form of stupidity.

To what extent is the meaning that we give to things, how we interpret events or the transformation of information in our own judgment, important? What does culture have to do with all this? Let's look at it through a mental experience of provocation. Playing at prophesying, Ray Kurzwell assures that in 2048 our mail boxes will receive a million emails a day, but that we will have a virtual assistant that will manage these so that we don't have to worry about them personally. It will perhaps also be possible that nano-receiver-transmitters can directly connect our synapses to super-machines enabling us to think a million times faster than today. The problem is, what exactly is meant by the word 'think' in these circumstances? Against the reduction of intelligence to a reading of data or acceptance of predefined shapes, it is important to note that knowledge requires not only free access to information, but also requires the ability to eliminate the 'noise' of what is insignificant. It is not the accumulation of knowledge that is important but the interpretation of the information. The problem is not availability of information, but the value we give to it in terms of level of reliability, relevance, sense and meaning, and how this information can be used.

At the core of our main collective failures there is a perspective which understands knowledge as the execution of accuracy, communication as the transmission of standardized information, and the political organization of society as the management of objectives. And now if we think of cases such as the economic crisis, largely caused by the mathematisation of the economy, or ecological imbalances that are caused by certain technologies, then we have the contrary to this image: the pretensions of accuracy and thoughtless, rash development has given rise to irrational decisions and it is only the culture of interpretation (those critical environments in which things are questioned, such as the insertion of technology into the social fabric, and where the social applications of these technologies are highlighted from an ethical perspective) which can result in a change of policy to give some relief and correction to social inaccuracies.

If we consider our democratic societies as those which interpret themselves, we then have more chance of escaping the dominant paradigm that understands the knowledge society as a vertical encounter between the experts and the masses. Society is a common bet, fragile and troubled, our interpretations more democratizing than submission to some supposedly objective data. The cultivation of interpretation is the most important contribution of culture to democratic societies. It is not difficult to imagine this if we take into account that all the so called realists have always appealed to data for the exploration of the possible. But we know that this is nothing but a subtle form of power that is to insist on data without calling into question the hegemonic practices from which precisely this data is acquired whilst other data is not. This critical dimension of interpretation we have learned in the cultivation of that which we call humanities and the arts, which are without doubt, the best education for citizens.

What does it mean in this context to capitalize on culture and foster environments in which to develop this form of creativity that characterizes the arts and humanities, as well as humanistic knowledge?

>> THERE ARE NO STRATEGIES THAT CAN GUARANTEE CREATIVITY. FOR THIS REASON, IT IS IMPORTANT NOT TO FORGET THE LIMITATION OF CULTURAL POLICIES.

To promote culture is the equivalent to encouraging a certain level of unpredictability. The most interesting creations of mankind are not the result of planning, but instead improbable emergencies in a context of diversity, with little control, open to the long term and to patience. There are no strategies that can guarantee creativity. For this reason it is important not to forget the limitation of cultural policies, they are not automatic magic formulas. There are no lack of examples of both small and large failures in the promotion of creativity. The dissemination of the creative model has often led territories to all act the same way and always play the same cards. The construction of a rigid cultural infrastructure does not guarantee cultural revitalization, and a frequent occurrence is that cultural creation flees from these formatted and planned cultural sectors. This reality has invited leaders and city planner to modesty, being that creativity can neither be planned or programmed. Creativity is artistic, social, technological, scientific or urban; it arises in unexpected places. Although this pop-up or emerging character of creativity does not exempt us from working towards the establishment of conditions of its unlikely appearance.

In any case, if we wish to shape the future of our societies, we should begin with culture because there is someone who takes to the letter, the book in which Woody Allen ironically asks ˝*How do we, for all our sakes, do away with culture?*˝*.

* **Woody Allen,** *Getting Even,* **1971**. The book was translated into Spanish with the following title: ˝*Cómo acabar de una vez por todas con la cultura*˝ (How do we, for all our sakes, do away with culture?)˝

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