

DESIGN WITH SUBSTANCE

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DESIGN FOR SMART CITIES

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Earlier this year I read an interesting article on the arrival of Smart Cities in our near future. For anyone new to the concept – imagine a computer operating system that can take care of city services. A system that keeps buildings, traffic and operational services running smoothly.

When we consider the population growth challenges faced by major cities around the world, the benefits of these systems become clear. However creating an effective City OS is no small feat. It requires major collaboration across several industry sectors and key areas of expertise.



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We believe that a company that positions themselves as consultants must have an opinion. We hope to encourage readers to challenge, colour and inform our thinking. Why not get in touch opinion@purpose.co.uk

Do we really need Smart Cities?

To many the prospect of a major computer operating system collecting data on our lifestyle habits may not seem particularly appealing. However with global population growth showing no signs of slowing down, the need for smarter more efficient ways to manage our energy consumption is only one example of the many benefits.

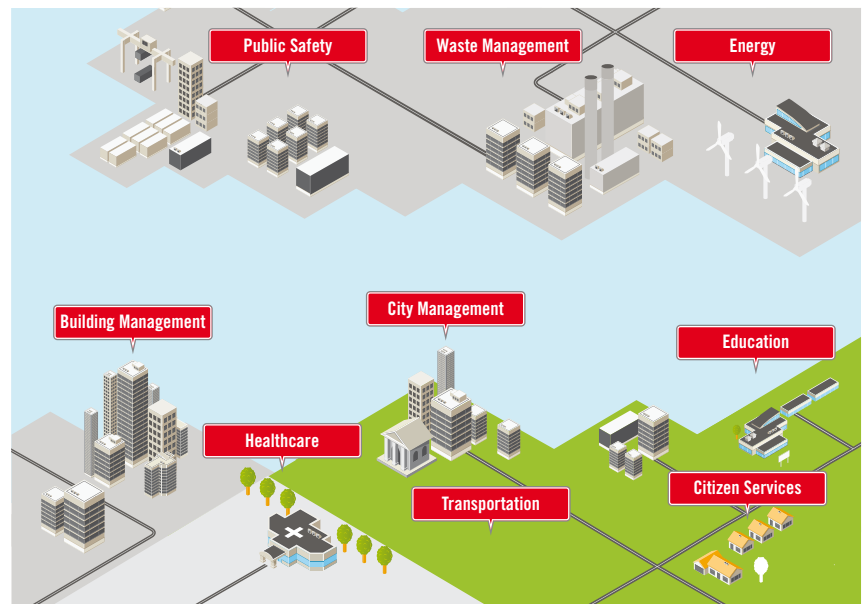
Ultimately Smart Cities have the potential to learn about human behaviour on a macro scale and in turn adapt our environment to suit our changing needs.

So we could start to see:

- Buildings that intelligently manage their own power usage
- Sensory technology that dynamically manages traffic flow
- Digital information boards that present real-time information to city visitors

See some potential areas for innovation below

Ultimately Smart Cities have the potential to learn about human behaviour on a macro scale



Whilst there has been lots of conversation around the technology, one seemingly less discussed area is the design of the user experience

What will Smart Cities look like?

A project is already underway in Portugal to deliver a €10bn Smart City with partners that include Microsoft, Cisco and PlanIT all involved in deploying a range of technology solutions.

The houses and infrastructure of the city will be dotted with sensors and computer technology that seek to connect everyone to everything. Citizens will be able to access central administered facilities via the cloud so they can manage their everyday life events and data.

Whilst there has been lots of conversation around the technology, one seemingly less discussed area is the design of the user experience. The following pages outline some interesting references that envision an Urban OS.

Technology that seamlessly integrates into our everyday lives

This film about future media landscapes by London design consultancy Berg envisions a future where technology is integrated in an ambient way, rather than an all too often glossy picture of the future.

vimeo.com/16423199

please use the link above to watch the film



Sensors on the street that know which parking spots are free

This Wireless Parking project in San Francisco uses mobiles to direct motorists to free parking spots which is great for traffic flow and the environment. Another example of the environmental benefits.

vimeo.com/22248575

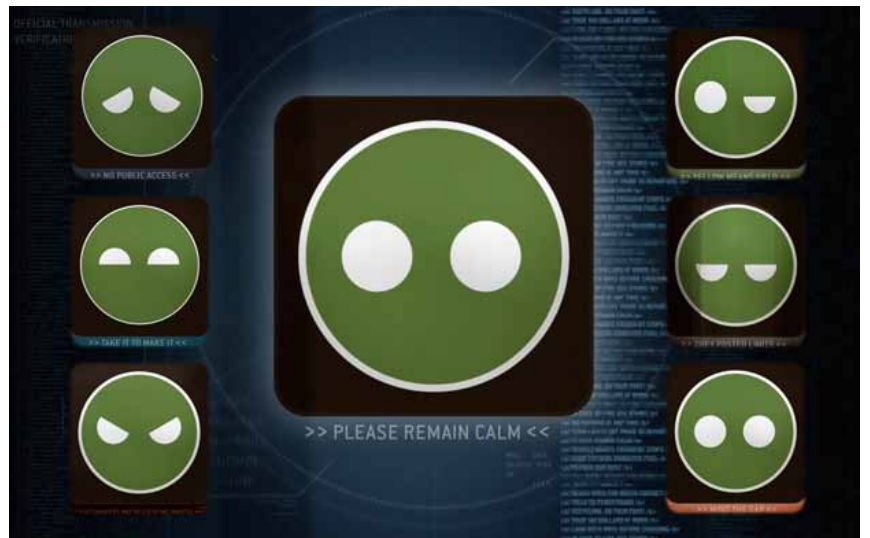
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Urban OS with a personality?

In the popular video game Halo – A computer construct in charge of making sure the infrastructure of the spiraling city of New Mombasa run smoothly. Whilst still the stuff of science fiction, I think an Apple Siri style interface would be much more engaging than your typical governmental information portal.

To truly engage the future inhabitants of these cities – design and user centred thinking must play a key role



A role for design thinking

Creating Smart Cities will require expertise and collaboration across a range of industries and sectors. Technology, communications, public sector and engineering partners will need to work together. To truly engage the future inhabitants of these cities – design and user centred thinking must play a key role. Among other things there is the potential for:

- Championing the needs of the end users
- Envisioning and prototyping the end product
- Defining the emotional human interaction with the systems
- Working with partners to facilitate innovation
- Developing a personality

This is an emerging sector ripe for innovation and we're certainly excited about it. For more on this subject why not read this article by Fast Company.

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Ranzie is a Creative Director in Purpose's London office. He leads teams of designers, technologists and strategists to deliver engaging brand experiences across a range of interactive media.

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Our strategic, design and production skills enable clients to communicate more effectively – to stand out, to connect, and to prosper.

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