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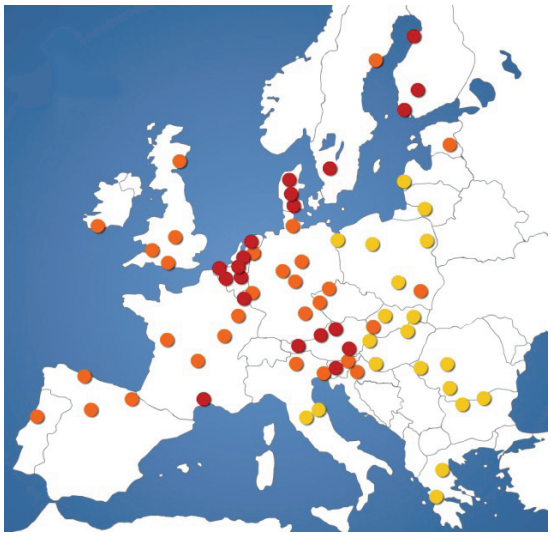
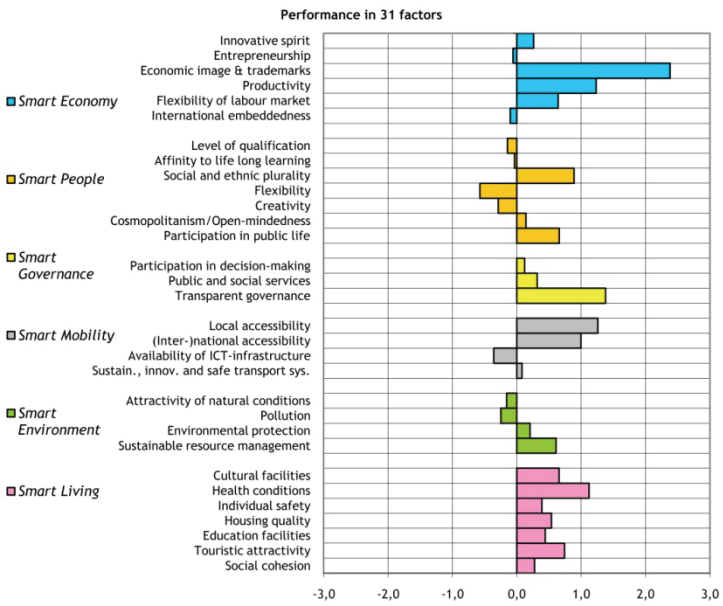
European Smart Cities: City profiles supporting effective planning strategies

European cities are confronted with radical changes which pose totally new challenges for their future development. Economic globalization, new technologies and changing political conditions have accelerated economic, demographic and spatial transformation in all kinds of urban agglomerations in different ways. In this process the term “Smart Cities” has rapidly achieved an outstanding position both in political and scientific discussion of urban development: The original understanding of that term, focusing on the technological dimension of new information and communication technologies (ICT) in cities, has recently shifted towards a more comprehensive understanding considering its application and practical use explicitly. From that perspective a city can only be considered to be “smart”, if it is able to make use of new technologies which support urban development in terms of competitiveness, economic welfare, quality of life, sustainability, equity or social inclusion. Consequently, this approach is based on an integrated understanding of urban policies, which is targeted at adapting the possibilities of new technologies to the requirements of a contemporary urban society.





In this context stakeholders need detailed information on the specific strengths and weaknesses of a city in order to create efficient strategies for a prosperous, sustainable and cohesive development. The “European Smart Cities” approach, which was developed by the Vienna University of Technology, describes, evaluates and compares relevant local conditions in different cities and delivers urban profiles for further positioning. It tries to assess a city’s ability to profit from new technologies and to face the economic, social and environmental challenges of the 21st century. The evaluation method covers 6 relevant characteristics of a “Smart City”:

- Smart Economy (competitiveness)
- Smart People (social and human capital)
- Smart Governance (participation and administration)
- Smart Mobility (transport and ICT)
- Smart Environment (natural resources)
- Smart Living (quality of life)

These characteristics are represented by 31 factors, which describe relevant conditions and structures in these 6 fields. They are measured by a total sample of 74 indicators based on national, regional or local data. In that way 70 medium-sized cities in all parts of Europe were characterized in a transparent way which allowed a targeted benchmarking and a selective comparison of differences, similarities and (dis-)advantages. The results were not only presented and discussed in scientific conferences and journals but also in city-specific workshops with relevant stakeholders. These meetings mainly served as a platform for disclosing challenges and developing strategic recommendations in close connection to local decision-makers. The evaluation method used has a highly flexible structure which allows both improvements of the indicator system and the enlargement of the city sample. Provided the availability of consistent, comparable and reliable data it is therefore possible to consider new trends or changing requirements and to integrate comparable cities, which have not been included so far.

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