

Anastasia Stratigea and Dimitris Kavroudakis (eds.), *Mediterranean Cities and Island Communities: Smart, Sustainable, Inclusive and Resilient* (Cham: Springer, 2018)

I approached this book from the perspective of a historian dealing with issues of urbanisation in Mediterranean spaces. The history of the Mediterranean is characterised – and indeed often ‘dominated’ – by the history of its urban communities. Generated by a continuous flow of human beings and multiple culture-contacts, the high level of anthropisation of Mediterranean environments has historically been one of the main challenges for policy-makers in the area. *Mediterranean Cities and Island Communities*, edited by Anastasia Stratigea and Dimitris Kavroudakis, proposes a different, intriguing approach that focuses primarily on how Mediterranean environments can now be “smartened” through the combined use of new technologies, participatory approaches, and the efforts of policy-makers. Mediterranean regions are seen here as complex environments simultaneously characterised by their liminality, vulnerability and attractiveness. In this crucial hot spot, sustainability needs to be enhanced. The region thus represents a space filled with opportunities despite the severe state of recession that has affected Southern Europe over the past decade.

In fact, while it clearly constitutes a dramatic state of affairs for the majority of the population, the economic crisis is not the only context in which changes are taking place. In the long run, it has also served as an effective stimulus for generating powerful answers to concrete challenges. As one of the authors points out, “in times of scarcity, to share resources and assets means to collaborate for more sustainable ways of living” (p. 284).

The main core of the book concerns how the smartening of urban areas could promote sustainable development. This concept could also be rephrased using the four key-words provided in the subtitle of the book: ‘Smart’ – combined with ‘inclusiveness’ when responding to challenges – goes hand in hand with ‘resiliency’, intended as the capacity to respond to complex issues in a creative manner, often resulting in a new environmental status quo. This synergy then contributes to ‘sustainability’.

The twelve chapters of the book deal, alternatively, with the different aspects of the ‘smart’ triad technology-people-governance, the combined effect of which leads to a different way of improving quality of life, with a less intrusive environmental impact. Contributions are grouped according to their thematic similarities.

The first group focuses on technology and how it can be employed to manage cities in a more efficient, sustainable manner. Chapter 1 presents virtual reality as a tool for testing smart cities. The authors explain how virtual reality can offer a far more complex level of interaction and visualisation with information in ambient intelligence, thereby increasing the capacity to test new solutions linked to urban environments (such as policing, urban planning, and transportation). Chapter 2 describes the experience of ICS-FORTH in

designing and implementing an Internet of Things and Open Data infrastructure in the Municipality of Heraklion – the largest city in Crete. The Municipality's desire to take part in an innovative project to build a smart city ecosystem attests to a long-term investment in fostering intelligent decision making. Optimising the management of large quantities of data with a view to enhancing policy making is another key issue, which is covered in Chapter 3. In this regard, the authors analyse how the migration of services to the cloud could be designed in stages (i.e., in the form of a road-map) and how it could improve governmental processes and services themselves.

The second group of papers sets out different interpretations of the synergy 'technology-community engagement'. Chapter 4 enquires into the efforts undertaken by the Municipality of Korydallos (Attica) to promote smart, participatory city management during the period 2004 to 2016. The authors also focus on the consequences of the economic crises on the process and the negative effects of the lack of a participatory culture in Greece. Chapter 5 examines how a participatory approach combined with the engagement of public institutions could result in culture-oriented solutions to urban planning. This is the case with the urban walk in Gdansk (Poland), for example, which led to a democratisation of art by bringing it into the public arena. Chapter 6 explores the interaction of artists and the general public, taking the virtual city of Abadyl as a case in point. As part of the People Smart Sculpture project carried out in the cities of Kristianstad and Copenhagen, the project *Wanderlost* proposed an emotional rediscovery of the urban space. Chapter 7 employs the concept of 'Integrate Valutation of Ecosystem Services' to identify specific approaches to territorial tourism in the Italian region of Basilicata. This approach is expected to foster more informed policy decisions, as well as more carefully considered natural and cultural tourism programmes. Sustainable, place-based tourism in a culturally wealthy rural area is also the subject of Chapter 8, which describes the application of a multilevel participatory spatial planning framework in the Cretan Province of Kissamos. The focus here is on how competitiveness can be achieved through the employment of technologies for mapping natural and cultural assets and the involvement of different stakeholders.

The third group of papers deals with resource management. Chapter 9 analyses the positive effects of serious game and gamification techniques for enhancing consumer engagement and awareness of Demand Response in relation to energy supply. The playful interaction between consumers and technology is seen to result in more conscious, flexible energy usage, with a positive effect on future Demand Response programmes. Chapter 10 deals with an attempt to build an integrated participatory approach to Sustainable Urban Mobility Plan in Rethymno (Crete). The case study examined focuses on how to harness the maturity of participatory planning in Greece to overcome the lack of trust typical of the region, in

Anastasia Stratigea and Dimitris Kavrouidakis (eds.), *Mediterranean Cities and Island Communities: Smart, Sustainable, Inclusive and Resilient* (Cham: Springer, 2018)

order to foster more active public engagement in mobility plans. Chapter 11 analyses the possible spatial distribution of aeroevacuation vehicles in the Aegean island. The spatial optimisation of helicopter bases and the use of spatial analytics are described as a way of promoting better-informed decisions on such a crucial issue as the provision of health services. Finally, Chapter 12 examines how the sharing economy has changed the tourist accommodation sector in Greece. Through well-known platforms such as Airbnb, the sharing economy is creating new challenges (such as taxation) and trends (such as the peer-to-peer approach) in the tourism sector.

The book is a fascinating collective volume that offers a useful overview of what is feasible at the very local level, adopting an intriguing perspective according to which “mayors can change the world”. However, a strong connective framework, which would establish a coherent place for each contribution, seems to be lacking. For example, the two chapters that deal with non-Mediterranean case studies are not sufficiently connected to the Mediterranean space that is described, from the book cover onward, as the focus of the volume. Furthermore, the papers offer a non-homogeneous fresco of both the problems and opportunities offered by new technologies. In fact, while the problems linked to privacy and data protection in data management are clearly identified in Chapter 3, Chapter 12 fails to report the disastrous repercussions of Airbnb on the long-term rental markets in Athens and on the Greek islands.

Share this:

- [Share](#)