

THE SMART CITY IS BORN IN THE SQUARE



DEC 19, 2016

[Press review](#)

An integrated platform is needed to support a dynamic multifaceted smart city. To demonstrate this concept a smart square pilot was conducted in the Borgo Campidoglio neighborhood on the periphery of Turin. A combination of technological and social oriented features were introduced to the smart square.

The pilot was created in response to the Torino Living Lab project promoted by the City of Turin in collaboration with the Turin Smart City Foundation and the Circostrizione IV. The goal is to transform an existing suburban area in Turin into a smarter space with innovative solutions. The municipality does not provide financial help, instead they support companies who are researching and developing smart technologies. Planet Idea is one company that has responded to this call. Planet president Gianni Savio states that the company has two identities, "one is active in Brazil with social housing projects, realizing small cities (or neighborhoods) using smart infrastructure. For example, the first social smart city in the world is being built near Fortaleza, Brazil. When complete it will house 25,000 inhabitants. At the same time, Planet Idea works in Turin for an ambitious project to bring together various smart city themes and projects." Francesco Tresso, Planet's technical director, elaborates further – "the concept is to have an integrated and non-specific vision, that is why we are working on a smartness index with Arup."

Piazza Risorgimento is an open air public space located on the outskirts of Borgo Campidoglio. The pilot will bring together various experiments, both technological and social. The objective is to bring the square back to life as a center for exchanges, socialization, and as a meeting point. "By offering residents certain tools this project facilitates the growth of communities rather than just being a technology exhibit", explains Planet's communication manager Marco Savio. The heart of the pilot is the Planet App, a true user dashboard in the hands of administrators and citizens. After two months it was downloaded by about 500 users, allowing them to administer events, meetings, debates and initiatives. The urban garden (with automated irrigation) is an example of a smart feature which facilitated the establishment of a particularly active and social community. Other notable features include the Gas initiative, the Solidarity Buying Group, and even a hydroponics project, which fertilizes the water that returns back to the gardens.

The square was mostly abandoned, but now is reinvigorated by the presence of a diversity of people. Residents passing through the square have access to an outdoor gym that produces energy while it is being used. Or they can relax on an intelligent bench that "detects environmental and statistical data, plays music, and offers technologically advanced support to users." In addition, there is electrical savings due to "a complete energy management service that allows you to control how much, when, and how energy is used by different systems reducing energy consumption and costs." Other smart features used include special, heat-insulating and eco-active paints able to normalize the ambient temperature, an interactive totem displays information about the square, telescopic and video surveillance provides security, and a charging station for vehicles and electric bicycles.

In addition, 100% of the electricity demand for the square's Infopoint lighting is produced by a photovoltaic system combined with an inverter and storage system. Also an ecological air purification system creates a comfortable environment for Infopoint visitors. What makes this project really unique however, is the link between smart features and community. For example, the bookcrossing was extremely successful and inclusive starting with 30 books and growing to over 160 in only two months. This level of participation was quite unexpected.

Due to the smart features the square has been reborn as an inclusive aggregation space. A app serves as an interactive digital dashboard: from big data to video surveillance to a digital events agenda. The public response was extremely encouraging. The urban gardens were enjoyed by local gardeners, the square was revived as a meeting and play area (gym and bocce pitch), and social activity increased (about 2 per week between meetings, seminars and open debates). The project has notably encouraged socialization and collaboration among residents in the community. Thus the smart solutions have formed a type of social architecture. The smart city might invoke ideas of futuristic features such as home automation controls for the rich. Instead, Planet's smart square is a model for public spaces which embraces human's universal need to feel a part of a community and to be together. Meanwhile in Fortaleza, Brazil, a second square will be inaugurated by mid-2017.

Source: *Nòva-il Sole 24 Ore*, article by Simone Arcagni.

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