

# 9 Tourism destination metagovernance and smart governance in Milan, Italy

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## Introduction

The governance of smart cities and smart urban destinations is a relevant yet oftentimes overlooked dimension of the 21<sup>st</sup> Century city (Andreani et al., 2019; Appio et al., 2019; Buonincontri & Micera, 2016). Since the pioneering work of Buhalis (2000), research on smart destinations has shifted over the years (Jovicic, 2019), leading to a reframing of the political and governance dimensions in tourism policy and planning (Amore & Hall, 2016). This has implications for research in smart cities and smart destinations, the latter being defined as a destination that *“successfully implements smartness which is fostered by open innovation, supported by investments in human and social capital and sustained by participatory governance”* (Buhalis, 2015, n.p.). Sound urban tourism governance should lead to *“greater net benefits for the host community ... and improved functioning of the total, interdependent industry within the urban environment”* (Edwards et al., 2009: 102). In such context, Information and Communication Technologies (ICT) act *“as an operant and operand”* (Boes et al., 2016: 118) in the support and implementation of long-term strategies that reflect the instances of the many destination-relevant stakeholders (Buhalis, 2020; Sigalat-Signes et al., 2020).

Tourism destination marketing and management organizations (DMMOs) have the potentiality to be key enablers of effective destination governance (e.g., Amore & Hall, 2017; Pike & Page, 2014; Luthe & Wyss, 2016). Pechlaner et al. (2012) and Pechlaner and Volgger (2013) highlight that DMMOs are spatially embedded organizations combining elements of

territorial (political) and corporate (business) governance. DMMOs are the reflection of the changing policy environment at the macro-and-meso level over the years (Hall & Veer, 2016). This is particularly observed in a review of destination management organization archetypes in European cities (Boes et al., 2016; D'Angella et al., 2010; Sigalat-Signes et al., 2020). Numerous cities around the world are shifting towards modes of smart governance to anticipate and address foreseeable challenges (Carmero & Alba, 2019; Cowley & Caprotti, 2019). ICT is widely acknowledged as a means to foster multi-actor, multi-sector and multi-level responses to overcome ecological, logistic, economic, and social challenges of cities (Manville et al., 2014; Paskaleva, 2009). Scholars and practitioners argue that implementing smart governance exceed the scope and capabilities of the current institutional arrangements and governance structures (Bolívar, 2016; Caragliu et al., 2011; Desdemoustier et al., 2019; Gil-Garcia et al., 2015). Regardless of the context and the extent of technological innovation involved, the absence of suitable government arrangements seems to be the most prominent obstacles to the smart governance transformation (Nillsen, 2019; Praharaj et al., 2017).

Further research is needed to understand *“the processes of information knowledge transfer, sharing and conversion in smart tourism destinations”* (Del Chiappa & Baggio, 2015:145). This applies, in particular, to longitudinal studies on destination governance and planning and the evolution of organizational structure and scope of DMMOs over time. This chapter, therefore, provides empirical evidence from Milan, Italy, through a longitudinal analysis of destination metagovernance and smart governance processes between 2004 and 2019. From a destination metagovernance perspective, the genesis of Milan as tourist destination saw a shift from a networked hierarchy (De Carlo & D'Angella, 2011) to a more collaborative and adaptive mode of smart metagovernance. The insights from Milan provide a timely reflection on the nexus between new technologies, governance archetypes and metagovernance responses and how these contribute to the development of the city into a culturally vibrant and smart destination.

### **Smart city governance**

According to Desdemoustier et al. (2019), the notion of smart city is fuzzy and often improperly used. Smart cities encompass different features and characteristics, including enhanced quality of life, economic competitiveness, transport and mobilities, energy efficiency, public and social services, and citizen participation (Appio et al., 2019; Desdemoustier et al., 2019). A good extent of the literature on smart cities tends to focus on the role of technology as driver for efficiency, planning and resource co-ordination (Marsal-Llacuna et al., 2015; Meijer & Bolívar, 2016). However, recent advancements

in the field have shifted the focus from technocratic to human-centred understandings of smart cities (Andreani et al., 2019; Angelidou, 2015; Caragliu et al., 2011). As Desdemoustier et al. (2019) observe, the integration of notions related to human and social capital allows for an enhanced conceptualisation of smart city governance in which technology acts as a medium to reach certain ends, rather than an end. This echoes Andreani et al. (2019: 24) argument that *“a city can be truly ‘smart’ only if it uses technology to empower citizens and enhance democratic debates about the kind of city it wants to be”*. Moving beyond the technocratic approach to smart cities enables stakeholders and urban communities to unleash the potential of creative collaboration and co-creation (Desdemoustier et al., 2019; Kummitha & Crutzen, 2017), and for cities to improve the quality of life of their citizens (Appio et al., 2019).

Governance is central to the success of smart cities. Accountability, collaboration, cooperation, leadership, partnership, and transparency are among the essential features of smart city governance (Desdemoustier et al., 2019). According to Nilsen (2019) and Meijer and Bolívar (2016), smart city governance fosters pro-active and innovative governance structures which, in turn, benefit the socio-economic and ecological performance of the city. Through ICT, smart governance can monitor and reflect on the dynamics and decision-making processes among stakeholders (Desdemoustier et al., 2019) as well as on the roles of different actors in the urban strategy (Nilsen, 2019; Sørensen & Torfing, 2011). This echoes the European Commission’s (2014: 6) definition of smart city governance as the *“place where traditional networks and services are made efficient using digital and telecommunication technologies, for the benefit of inhabitants and businesses”*. The result is a step forward from traditional top-down governance (Engelbert et al., 2019), whose limitations and excessive bureaucratism have been widely acknowledged and reiterated in both planning theory and urban studies (Jessop, 2011). Thus, metagovernance best encapsulates such a transition towards a *“mixture of hierarchies, networks and markets”* (Meuleman, 2008: 73) in cities. As Jessop (2011: 119) notes, *“metagovernance comprises a complex array of more or less reflexive social practices concerned with the governance of social relations characterized by complex, reciprocal interdependence”*. Adaptability and reflexivity are central to the notion of metagovernance (Meuleman, 2008) and collaborative planning as a structured and ongoing leaning process.

### **Smart tourism destination governance**

Research by Del Chiappa and Baggio (2015) shows how smart tourism destination environments are more efficient and effective in multi-stakeholder knowledge creation and sharing. The emphasis on network marketing and