Covid-19 crisis: a stress-test for smart cities

The Covid-19 emergency is trialling our technologies, infrastructure and laws. In this context the EU has released a common toolbox for contact tracing apps to support gradual lifting of confinement measures. From the frantic race against time to fight off the coronavirus, we will inherit scientific and technological knowledge that could make our cities smarter and better equipped to face such global crises in the future.

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From the Covid-19 crisis we are learning a historic lesson about transforming our towns and cities. We'll probably see a smart city concept B.C. and A.C before coronavirus and after coronavirus.

This emergency has boosted the development of new technologies and collaboration between countries. It has shown the importance of data sharing and it has put infrastructure and legislative frameworks to the test, especially in the privacy domain. In many ways, what the threat of climate change has done over the last few years, the virus has done in just a few months.

Carlo Ratti, director of the MIT Senseable City Lab, points out: "The current crisis is dramatic, but it can also be seen as a global testing laboratory. I remember a quote from Rahm Emanuel, the former Chicago mayor and chief of staff to President Barack Obama: 'Never allow a crisis to go to waste'."

Ratti continues: "We are witnessing a widespread use of smart technologies to track people's movements in cities, to measure compliance with the rules of social distancing, apps to monitor infected people. So there has been an acceleration in this sense. All these measures, probably necessary in the short term, will soon be called into question, especially from the point of view of privacy. The long-term response to

the crisis will depend on how cities react to the need to meet essential but partially conflicting needs: security and freedom, privacy and access to data."

A pan-European model of Covid-19 mobile application - #StrongerTogether Emanuele Piasini is CEO and founder of Webtek, an Italian company. At the beginning of the Covid-19 emergency they developed in a very short time a free application to map infected people's contacts, and made this tool available to the authorities. He warns: "We must rush, we are wasting too much time, we need to record data to stop the infection."

Piasini points out: "The contact tracing apps used in China directly interact with the users, giving them a signal when they approach people who are potentially infected with Covid-19. Moreover, the installation of these tools is mandatory over there. We have instead developed an app compliant with the EU's General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR), which is voluntary and should be managed by government authorities. It uses the smartphones' GPS coordinates and sends them to a server. Here an artificial intelligence (AI) system collects this data, matches it and detects the contacts occurred between people (who have previously installed the app)."

"For example, let's say that I was on a train in the morning, I got a fever in the evening and then I tested positive for Covid-19. At this point, it would be hard to remember all the people I bumped into. With the app, the authority enters my phone number into the AI system, which provides the list of phone numbers of the people I met, including where and for how long I met them. The authority then warns the citizens involved."

Several private companies and public institutions are developing contact tracing applications in many European countries. The risk is the proliferation of incompatible platforms that collect fragmented information and process personal data in different ways.

Therefore, the EU Member States, supported by the Commission, released a common EU toolbox, which provides a practical guide in the implementation of contact tracing and warning apps. It is based on measures taken by the States and peer reviewed by the countries themselves and the Commission.

The apps should be fully compliant with the GDPR, installed voluntarily, approved by the health authorities, and dismantled once the crisis is over. [...]

Read the full article on: https://www.matchup-project.eu/news/covid-19-crisis-a-stress-test-for-smart-cities/ ↗

Palabras clave

smart cities, Covid-19, crisis, climate change, mobile application, data sharing, privacy, vaccine

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Última actualización: 21 Abril 2020

Permalink: https://cordis.europa.eu/article/id/415926-covid-19-crisis-a-stress-test-for-smart-cities/es