



Integration Challenges of Immigrants in Smart Cities: A Human Approach Based on a Case Study

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ABSTRACT

The most recent interpretations of the concept of smart city (SC) highlight the need for adopting a more holistic vision of SC, which includes other relevant features for understanding the dynamism of urban development and face new challenges. The study of a social entrepreneurship initiative (SPEAK) that aims to empower immigrants living in the main Portuguese cities is the method used in this research to understand the extent to which social innovation can make smart cities more human and sustainable. The results illustrate how a social entrepreneurship initiative can positively impact the creation of social value to immigrants in cities. As the evidence shows, the full integration of foreign migrants in cities may contribute to the sustainable resolution (or avoidance) of many severe social dysfunctions, as well as for the improvement of the quality of life of foreign migrants and local citizens. The approach adopted, based on the empowerment of the human element, is able to produce a sustainable response and contribute to other dimensions of SC.

KEYWORDS

Migration, Portugal, Smart Cities, Social Entrepreneurship, Social Innovation, Urban Challenges

1. INTRODUCTION

Migration is a common phenomenon worldwide, in which people move to other countries looking for new opportunities for personal and professional development. However, the migration flows often involves substantial challenges for people who are moving to a new location, for example a period of economic and social integration into the new community, which could take a long time or be not entirely achieved. The linguistic and cultural barriers faced by immigrants in the hosting city significantly hinder the integration process. This can result in a spiral of social exclusion that can lead to other significant social problems, such as barriers in the access to employment, housing, financial difficulties, lack of trust and sense of isolation, among many others.

Further, the migration movements most often occur into to the biggest cities, leading to an exacerbation of already existing urban imbalances. Indeed, wealth creation in most countries of the world is centred on cities. Currently, cities held 55% of the global population, although they represent only 2% of the geographical area, with population growth expected to reach 68% by 2050 (UN DESA, 2018).

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The implications of urban concentration for the cities' life, public entities and civil society movements have been increasingly demanding new approaches to improve the quality of life of people living in cities. For instance, the concept of smart city (SC) arose from the recognition of the need to use new information and communication technologies for data collection and policies implementation that contributes to increasing the quality of life of citizens (Fontana, 2014; Negre & Rosenthal-Sabroux, 2015; Kondepudi & Kondepudi, 2015). Although the first definitions of SC focused essentially on the use of information and communication technologies to improve the wellbeing of citizens, a different approach of SC highlights the human component of the concept. In this case, citizens are placed at the heart of the decision-making process, with emphasis on how decisions are implemented, monitored and evaluated, bearing in mind the ability to develop new services (Castelnovo, Misuraca & Savoldelli, 2016; Cowley, Joss & Dayot, 2018). For example, Castelnovo, Misuraca and Savoldelli (2016) analysed the role of the citizen in the SC decision-making process, as well as the means through which public decisions were implemented, monitored and evaluated in the context of developing socially inclusive, environmentally friendly and economically sustainable services.

For the European Parliament (2014) SC are those cities that seek solutions to problems of common interest through information and communication technologies based on municipal and multi-stakeholder partnerships. The European Commission (2015), in turn, claims that SC are a place where traditional networks and services become more efficient through the use of digital and communication technologies for the benefit of residents and local businesses.

The discussion around the SC concept highlights the demand for greater integration of people into the urban development process. Therefore, the active participation of citizens in social entrepreneurship initiatives and their sustainability over time need to be evaluated at the micro-level. Indeed, the creation of SC-related projects is often a bottom-up process, encompassing local communities and projects promoted by civil society entities, discovering and exploiting opportunities to solve or at least attenuate urban imbalances and to produce social impact. Although very promising, these projects are still largely under-exploited. In order to face this literature gap, this research, based on the case study method, intends to explore the extent to what a social entrepreneurship project can contribute to making cities more innovative, humane and sustainable. To attain this purpose, the paper analyses the strategy pursued by the project SPEAK to identify the manifestations of social entrepreneurship in the context of SC and assess whether these initiatives can contribute, or not, to the promotion of a more human vision in cities.

Keeping this purpose in mind, the paper is organised as follows. Firstly, a literature review on SC was developed, placing at the centre of the discussion the approaches that emphasise the human side of cities. After that, we have proceeded to an analysis of the concepts of social entrepreneurship, how social entrepreneurial initiatives can contribute to enriching the SC approach, how their sustainability goals can be achieved, and how social value can be created for immigrants. The following section presents the methodology used. After that, the case is analysed and discussed. The article ends with a discussion of the results and the practical implications for the debate of SC.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 The Human Side of Smart Cities

In academic circles, research on the concept of SC has developed over the last twenty years (Cosseta & Palumbo, 2014; Mora, Bolici & Deakin, 2017), and different definitions can be found in the literature (Caragliu, Del Bo & Nijkamp, 2009; Harrison & Donnelly, 2011; Yigitcanlar et al., 2018). For example, for Cosseta and Palumbo (2014), a city is smart when the investments (such as social and human capital, traditional transport system and the communications infrastructure), are made to: (i) produce sustainable economic development, (ii) provide a higher quality of life for citizens, (iii) manage the natural resource, (iv) and promote participatory governance. Harrison and Donnelly

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