Report:

Smart City – A Stepping Stone to a Smart Society

Civil Service College
Auditorium
28 March 2016

Highlights at the lecture:

Eindhoven's method

Can companies organise societies better than governments?

We need to know what's *not* working

Dealing with Singapore's new S-curve

Data are owned by the people themselves

Can there be hospitals without beds?

Smart City vs Smart Society
By Leong Wen Shan

There are as many cities calling themselves "smart cities", but they are only bringing in technology without bringing value… a smart society is one where the people are involved; it is a circular economy.

According to the OECD, Eindhoven in the Netherlands has an average of 22.6 patents produced per 10,000 residents, making it the most inventive city in the world. (In comparison, San Diego, which claims second spot, produces 8.9 patents per 10,000 residents.)

But just two decades ago, in the mid-1990s, the city lost a third of its labour and faced a severe economic crisis.

Eindhoven Mayor Rob van Gijzel described how the city had invited corporates, creative institutes and entrepreneurs to make proposals in solving the crisis. By 2000, the city embarked on its Open Innovation strategy.

This strategy departs from the usual "closed" innovation model, where firms do their own R&D, manufacturing and marketing — leading to high entry barriers for newcomers that lack funding. In open innovation, for example, IP is not locked up for internal use; firms are encouraged to commercialise their IP by sharing them as much as possible. The Eindhoven government would also share the risk of expensive research, while benefitting from a more efficient exchange of ideas in the marketplace.

The mayor described recent examples, including Eindhoven's Living Lab where Philips had asked the government to bring together stakeholders to test a health-monitoring prototype device for the elderly. Hospitals, patient care centres, and the elderly were invited to the experiment, which found the device very effective — but lacking in human contact. Philips is now creating a completely different product, he said, to meet the more compelling needs that arose.

Eindhoven is also introducing a new night-lighting system. By working with youth, shop owners, lighting designers and security firms, city lights are reduced to a small glow when streets are empty, and turned on fully when a person approaches. Residents and shop owners can also adjust lighting colours to their preference.

Mayor van Gijzel noted that the increasing speed of technological innovation has made it much harder for cities to plan for the future:

I was recently invited to Beijing where they shared their 20-year plan… It is hard to plan within such a wide timespan… Having knowledge and being smart are important, but [it is] most critical is to be adaptive. Just as we see in Darwinism — the most adaptive species will survive — it is also true [of cities].

Trial and error are necessary to invent the future, said the mayor, and this requires adaptability. "When heads of states sign agreements, nothing happens," he said, but when governments work with entrepreneurs together with research institutes, better solutions come about more quickly.

Governments have "to admit there are solutions on the ground," he said, raising examples where disruptive technologies — Uber, Airbnb, Netflix and Google — have had to deal with legislative blocks.

Similarly, as a city mayor, it is important to loosen "control" and not be fixated only with successful solutions.

"To become a frontrunner is to let go," he concluded.

About the Speakers

Speaker:
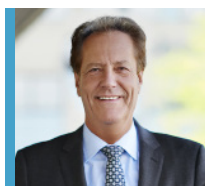
Rob van Gijzel

Mayor of Eindhoven, the Netherlands

Rob van Gijzel has been the Mayor of Eindhoven, the fifth largest city in the Netherlands, since 2008. Prior to this, Mayor Gijzel worked for the Dutch Labour Party at the European Parliament in 1980 and became a Member of Parliament for the Dutch Labour Party in 1989. Rob van Gijzel is also chairman of the Eindhoven Metropolitan Region, the Brainport Foundation and the International Community Forum Foundation (ICFF), based in New York.

Moderator:

Professor Low Teck Seng

CEO, National Research Foundation

Prior to joining the NRF, Professor Low was the Managing Director of the Agency for Science, Technology & Research (A*STAR). He is presently a tenured professor at the National Technological University (NTU) and holds an appointment as Senior Advisor to President, NTU.