A Metacommunity of practice for italian smart cities: the case of City Vision

Una Meta-comunità di pratica per le città intelligenti in Italia: il caso di City Vision

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Abstract. This article explores City Vision - a platform connecting public administrators, businesses, innovators, researchers, and professionals - as a metacommunity of practice in the context of smart cities. It examines the shift from an events system to a community-centric governance model, emphasizing the role of the editorial director and lean team in shaping the community's identity and vision. The establishment of strategic partnerships with organizations dedicated to urban innovation further solidifies City Vision's position as a leading platform for intelligent city transformation. Territorial events play a crucial role in fostering knowledge dissemination, collaboration, and localized problem-solving. The article highlights the significance of a media partnership in strengthening City Vision's visibility and recognition. By exemplifying the potential of communities of practice, City Vision demonstrates how active community engagement and collaboration can drive sustainable and inclusive urban development in the context of smart cities.

Abstract. *Questo articolo esplora City Vision - una piattaforma che connette amministratori pubblici, imprese, innovatori, ricercatori e professionisti - come una meta-comunità di pratica nel contesto delle smart cities. Esamina il passaggio da un sistema basato sugli eventi a un modello di governance centrato sulla comunità. La creazione di partnership strategiche con organizzazioni dedite all'innovazione urbana rafforza ulteriormente la posizione di City Vision come piattaforma leader per la trasformazione intelligente delle città. Gli eventi territoriali svolgono un ruolo cruciale nella diffusione della conoscenza, nella collaborazione e nella risoluzione dei problemi localizzati. L'articolo mette in evidenza l'importanza di una partnership con i media nel rafforzare la visibilità e il riconoscimento di City Vision. Attraverso l'esempio del potenziale delle comunità di pratica, City Vision dimostra come il coinvolgimento attivo delle comunità e la collaborazione possano favorire lo sviluppo urbano sostenibile e inclusivo nel contesto delle smart cities.*

Keywords: *Smart city, Community of practice, City Vision, Metacommunity of practice*

1. Introduction

This article explores the concept of metacommunity of practice (MCoP) and its intersection with the field of smart cities. Communities of practice (CoPs) are social groups where individuals with common interests come together to share knowledge, experiences, and best practices (Brown and Duguid, 1991; Lave and Wenger, 1991). Literature on CoPs is vast, and its theoretical lenses can be applied to a variety of empirical settings. Less is known on how CoPs can sustain the development of smart cities, through the actions of a MCop. We claim that in the realm of smart cities, a MCoP plays a crucial role in driving innovation, collaboration, and sustainable urban development, leveraging a network of CoPs. In line with the insights from Biggs et al. (2023), we establish the concept of a MCop as an overarching community that encompasses multiple specialized CoPs, akin to interconnected working groups, illustrating the symbiotic relationship between smart cities and communities of practice.

Our work is based on a qualitative research design (Yin, 2003), and insights come from a case study focused on City Vision, a platform that serves as an example of a MCoP operating within the context of smart cities. City Vision serves as a vibrant community in which people from different CoPs (public administrators, businesses, innovators, researchers, professionals, and citizens) interact to first get to know each other and then develop a common language so that an effective dialogue can be built. We could define City Vision as an opportunity to overcome the barriers of individual CoPs and to define a shared space in which people with different professions and cultural backgrounds can effectively communicate and develop common interpretive categories and define shared priorities regarding the development of the city. By doing so, City Vision can be considered a place where members of different CoPs, who are actively involved in the intelligent transformation of urban areas, can meet and exchange knowledge, practices, and novel ideas. So far, it has successfully engaged thousands of individuals, both in-person and digitally, with over a thousand participants attending its events in 2022 alone.

Through a range of activities, including events such as the territorial roadshow and the main event called "Smart City General Assembly" (in Italian: Stati Generali delle Città Intelligenti), as well as communication efforts, research initiatives, and ongoing exchange of experiences, City Vision has established itself as an exemplary MCoP in the smart city landscape.

In this article, we delve into the trajectory of City Vision, highlighting its evolution and consolidation as a prominent MCoP in the field of smart cities. By examining City Vision's practices and achievements, we aim to shed

light on the potential of MCoPs to drive sustainable and inclusive urban development. City Vision's success serves as an inspiring example of how active community engagement and collaboration can shape the future of smart cities.

The article is organized as follows. We commence by presenting the theoretical foundation, followed by an introduction to the methodology and the case study analysis. Finally, we conclude with some key remarks.

2. Theoretical background

2.1. The concept of community of practice

In today's interconnected and rapidly evolving world, the importance of collaboration, knowledge sharing, and continuous learning has become increasingly recognized. One concept that has garnered significant attention in diverse fields is the Community of Practice (CoP). A Community of Practice is a social structure that brings together individuals with shared interests, goals, and expertise, creating a dynamic environment for collective learning, problem-solving, and professional development (Wenger, 1998).

The concept of a Community of Practice (CoP) traces its origins back to the groundbreaking work of Jean Lave and Etienne Wenger in the early 1990s (Lave and Wenger, 1996). In their influential book, "Situated Learning: Legitimate Peripheral Participation," Lave and Wenger (1996) proposed a socio-cultural theory of learning that emphasized the importance of communities in knowledge acquisition and skill development. The authors argued that learning is a social process that occurs through engagement in authentic activities within a community. They posited that individuals become members of a CoP by participating in joint activities and gradually transitioning from the periphery of the community to its core through legitimate peripheral participation. This transition involves acquiring knowledge, skills, and identities within the specific domain of practice. The socio-cultural theory of learning provides a foundational framework for understanding CoP as a socio-cultural phenomenon. It highlights the interconnectedness of learning and social interactions, challenging the notion that learning is solely an individual process. According to this perspective, learning is inseparable from the context in which it occurs, and communities serve as essential environments for knowledge construction and transfer.

Building upon this theoretical foundation, other scholars have contributed to the understanding of CoP from various perspectives. Social constructivism, as espoused by scholars such as Lev Vygotsky, emphasizes the role of

social interaction and collaborative meaning-making in learning (Vygotsky, 1978). CoP aligns with this perspective by recognizing that learning is not merely the absorption of information but a social process that involves active engagement, negotiation of meaning, and the construction of shared knowledge.

Organizational learning theories have also informed the conceptualization of CoP within the context of workplaces and professional communities. Scholars such as Peter Senge and Chris Argyris have explored how organizations can foster continuous learning, knowledge sharing, and innovation through the development of CoP (Argyris, 1977; Senge, 2006). This perspective emphasizes the role of CoP in generating new knowledge, disseminating best practices, and enhancing organizational adaptability.

Additionally, Wenger (1998) expanded his initial framework in his work "Communities of Practice: Learning, Meaning, and Identity." He emphasized the social aspect of identity formation within CoP, arguing that participation in a community contributes to the development of a shared identity and a sense of belonging. Wenger's work highlights the importance of social connections, trust, and a shared purpose in nurturing vibrant and effective CoP (Wenger, 2000).

Overall, the theoretical frameworks surrounding CoP emphasize the social, situated, and collaborative nature of learning. They emphasize that learning and professional development occur through active participation, engagement in authentic activities, and the establishment of social relationships within a community (Bettiol and Sedita, 2011). These frameworks provide a theoretical lens for understanding the dynamics of CoP, informing research, and guiding practical applications in various domains.

A CoP is characterized by its members' active participation, mutual engagement, and shared sense of purpose. It is a space where individuals come together to explore, discuss, and co-create knowledge, drawing on their collective experiences, skills, and perspectives. CoP provides a fertile ground for learning from one another, exchanging best practices, and generating innovative solutions to complex challenges.

The benefits of participating in a CoP are manifold. Individuals within a CoP can expand their knowledge base, enhance their professional competencies, and gain new insights by engaging with diverse perspectives. CoP also fosters a sense of belonging and camaraderie, providing a support system where members can seek guidance, feedback, and collaboration. Furthermore, CoP facilitates the transfer of tacit knowledge—knowledge that is difficult to articulate or codify—through observation, mentorship, and apprenticeship.

However, the establishment and sustainability of CoP are not without challenges. Limited resources, time constraints, and competing priorities can hinder the formation and continuity of CoP initiatives. Additionally, creating an inclusive and participatory environment requires effective leadership, shared values, and a supportive organizational culture.

The rapid advancement of technology has also influenced the dynamics of CoP. Digital platforms, social media, and online collaboration tools have expanded the possibilities for virtual communities, enabling geographically dispersed individuals to connect, communicate, and collaborate. This digital transformation presents new opportunities for accessibility, flexibility, and scalability, but it also brings challenges such as information overload and the need to maintain a sense of community in virtual spaces.

As the understanding of CoP continues to evolve, researchers are exploring the intersection of CoP with other theoretical perspectives, such as social networks, complexity theory, and socio-technical systems. These interdisciplinary approaches offer new insights into the complexities of CoP dynamics, the impact of network structures, and the role of technology in facilitating knowledge sharing and collaboration within and between communities.

2.2. The concept of smart city

The rise of smart cities has sparked a burgeoning body of literature that delves into the multifaceted nature of these urban environments (Caragliu et al., 2011; Cardullo and Kitchin, 2019). As cities worldwide grapple with pressing challenges, from rapid urbanization to resource scarcity, the concept of smart cities offers a promising vision for a sustainable, efficient, and inclusive future. Exploring the vast expanse of literature on smart cities, we can put together some insights from renowned authors who have shaped the discourse in this transformative field of study. To embark on our exploration, we turn to influential works that trace the evolution of smart cities. Albino et al. (2015) elucidate the various dimensions and conceptual frameworks surrounding smart cities. They emphasize the integration of information and communication technologies (ICTs), data analytics, and citizen engagement as vital components in the transformation of urban environments, suggesting that a deep understanding of the technological underpinnings is essential in comprehending smart cities. Shepard (2011) delves into the possibilities of ubiquitous computing, wherein embedded technologies seamlessly interact with urban environments. He highlights the potential of pervasive sensing, intelligent infrastructure, and data-driven decision-making in shaping the urban landscape of the future. Going beyond the pure technological dimension of the smart city, Deakin (2014) claims that effective urban

planning and governance models form the bedrock of successful smart city initiatives. In his book, "Smart Cities: Governing, Modelling, and Analysing the Transition" he explores the governance challenges and policy implications of transitioning to smart cities. He delves into the complex interactions among various stakeholders, emphasizing the importance of collaborative governance, adaptive regulations, and participatory planning processes. In addition, given the imperative of sustainable development, smart cities aspire also to be sustainable, promoting resource efficiency, and environmental stewardship. Picon (2015) examines the environmental implications of smart city technologies. He elucidates how data-driven energy management, eco-friendly transportation systems, and intelligent infrastructure can significantly reduce carbon emissions, enhance resilience, and foster ecological balance within urban environments. But sustainability counts not only the environmental but also the social dimension. Smart city initiatives must address social implications and empower citizens to actively participate in the transformation process (Blasi et al., 2022). Goldsmith and Crawford (2014) explore the transformative potential of data-driven governance and citizen engagement. The authors examine successful case studies, showcasing how open data initiatives, civic hacking, and digital platforms can enhance transparency, equity, and public service delivery. The third dimension of sustainability is the economic one. Smart cities are often viewed as catalysts for economic growth and innovation. In "The New Urban Crisis: How Our Cities Are Increasing Inequality, Deepening Segregation, and Failing the Middle Class—and What We Can Do About It," Richard Florida critically analyzes the role of smart city development in addressing economic disparities (Florida, 2017). He emphasizes the need to prioritize inclusive growth strategies, nurturing entrepreneurship, and fostering equitable access to digital infrastructure and opportunities. Basically he gives support to the triple bottom line approach (Elkington, 1997), which allows reaching sustainable development planning innovative, digital, clean and inclusive societies (Crespi Gomes et al., 2023).

2.3. The emergence of a metacommunity of practice for smart city development

In this section we outline our proposal of considering the role of a metacommunity of practice in leading territorial sustainable development. In particular, we acknowledge some limitations of the concept of Cops (Roberts, 2006) that can be overcome by the creation of meta-structures such as a Mcop. The possibility to activate a network of collaborations between CoPs offers the advantage of creating open spaces of ideas generation and avoid

the typical lock-in phenomena that can be associated with frequent and exclusive connections among people sharing the same practices. We believe that it is the intersection between practices that can produce virtuous circles of learning. Therefore, we put forward the concept of MCop to better suit the needs of a complex society living in networked territories. Following the inspiration given by Biggs et al. (2023), we define a MCop as a community within which are nested several smaller and more focused CoPs in the form of working groups, which become acquainted and leverage the cognitive proximity (Boschma, 2005) required to generate novel ideas and solutions.

The idea of leading CoPs is now consolidated in the literature, even if in the first attempt theorizing them the focus was put on their emergent nature. The need to nurture CoPs and ensure their persistence and effectiveness over time is now well established (Wenger et al., 2002). The question of how to nurture CoPs is still open. A gentle hand able to support the works of CoPs without hindering their creativity and spontaneity is desirable and can be explained also considering the literature on tribes and tribe leadership sustained by Godin (2008). Tribes are similar entities to CoPs. Godin introduces the concept of tribes, which are groups of people bound together by shared interests, values, or a common purpose. Tribes can manifest in various forms, such as communities, organizations, or online networks. In his work "Tribes: We Need You to Lead Us," Seth Godin explores the power of leadership and the impact that tribes can have in today's interconnected world. The book challenges traditional notions of leadership and urges individuals to embrace their role as leaders within their respective tribes. One of the key messages in the book is the need for leadership within tribes. Godin argues that anyone can be a leader, regardless of their position or formal authority. Leadership is not about titles or hierarchies; it is about stepping up, taking initiative, and inspiring others to follow.

Godin challenges the notion that leaders must have all the answers or be infallible. Instead, he suggests that leaders should focus on fostering a culture of collaboration, empowerment, and continuous learning within their tribes. They should embrace vulnerability and be willing to admit their mistakes, as this fosters trust and authenticity within the group. The book highlights the importance of having a clear vision and effectively communicating it to the tribe. Leaders must articulate their tribe's purpose and values, inspiring others to align themselves with the collective mission. Godin emphasizes that leaders should be passionate about their vision, as genuine enthusiasm is contagious and motivates others to take action. Godin also addresses the significance of tribes in effecting change and driving innovation. He argues that tribes are the catalysts for societal progress, challenging the status quo and pushing boundaries. Through numerous examples and case studies, Go-

din showcases how tribes have led movements, disrupted industries, and sparked positive transformations.

In a similar vein, we foresee the power of Cops leadership as crucial in supporting sustainable development of smart cities. As literature teaches us, smart cities are cities that use technology and innovation to improve citizens' quality of life, increase resource efficiency, and address urban challenges (Vanolo, 2014). On the other hand, communities of practice are groups of people who share common interests, goals, and knowledge in a specific field. In the context of smart cities, communities of practice can play a significant role in promoting collaboration, innovation, and knowledge sharing among groups of experts. But how to create artifacts able to manage networks of Cops? A dialogue between CoPs is necessary to guarantee sustainable development, made possible by the integration of the needs of multiple stakeholders, and by the joint efforts of a variety of professionals operating in different fields (or CoPs). We propose the MCop as an artifact able to connect diversified CoPs facing common challenges. MCop establishes a shared language which increase the absorptive capacity of members of different CoPs (Tsai, 2001; Cadiz et al., 2009). Thanks to the events and meetings organized by a MCop it is possible to integrate a variety of knowledge bases that otherwise would have been left separated (Allee 2000; Grillitsch et al., 2019). As a result, a network of people is formed, and the exchange of knowledge, experiences, and ideas is fueled. For example, the Mcop may bring together urban planning professionals, transportation experts, government representatives, and community members to discuss and address issues related to energy efficiency, sustainable mobility, or smart resource utilization. Through interaction and collaboration among community members, innovative solutions to urban problems can be generated, such as using emerging technologies like artificial intelligence, the Internet of Things, and shared mobility. Mcops can be configured as enablers of knowledge sharing and collective learning, which goes beyond the single CoP (Amin and Roberts, 2008). They can be places where smart city professionals acquire new skills, learn from others, and exchange best practices and lessons learned. This fosters the dissemination of knowledge and contributes to the growth and professional development of community members. The potential and benefits of MCops are illustrated in Table 1.

Table 1. Benefits of Mcops in developing smart city projects

Benefit	**Description**
Collaboration and Engagement	Foster collaboration and engagement among stakeholders in smart cities (citizens, businesses, government, academia) to stimulate innovation and co-creation of solutions.
Sharing Best Practices	Provide a space for sharing and disseminating best practices, enabling members to learn from each other and apply successful solutions in similar contexts.
Adaptability	Offer a flexible environment to quickly adapt to changing challenges and share innovative solutions to address them.
Sustainability	Promote sustainable practices through knowledge sharing, focusing on energy efficiency, sustainable mobility, and smart resource utilization.
Social Impact	Encourage citizen participation and local community involvement in smart city initiatives, enhancing quality of life and social inclusion.
Learning and Professional Development	Support continuous learning, skill exchange, and staying updated on smart city trends, fostering personal and organizational growth.
Problem Solving and Decision Making	Serve as platforms for collective problem-solving, sharing experiences, and finding innovative solutions to complex urban challenges.
Networking and Collaboration	Facilitate the creation of professional networks, trust-building, and collaboration, leading to synergies and innovative solutions in smart cities.
Adoption of Enabling Technologies	Play a key role in the effective adoption of technologies like IoT, AI, and data analytics through knowledge sharing and best practices.
Evaluation and Impact Measurement	Contribute to evaluating and measuring the impact of smart city initiatives, improving planning and management through shared evaluation methods and approaches.

3. Methodology

Drawing from the theory of CoPs and smart cities, our research endeavors to address two original research inquiries: Does a MCop work as a platform for CoPs networking in the realm of smart city development? What are the mechanisms that allows a MCop to be successful in generating novel ideas for sustainable territorial development?

Given the relatively novel nature of our investigation area, our study is inherently exploratory, necessitating an inductive approach. We are committed to collect data through a meticulous case study methodology (Yin, 2003). Rather than subjecting hypotheses to statistical testing, our aim is to propose valuable insights, which we will subsequently discuss within the framework of existing theory and that can potentially be subjected to future deductive analysis (Eisenhardt, 1989).

Our research adopts a single case study design, allowing for an exhaustive examination of a real-world scenario (Yin, 1981, 2014; Eisenhardt, 1989). As advocated by Siggelkow (2007, p. 22), "research grounded in case data often enables a closer exploration of theoretical constructs and presents a more compelling argument regarding causal influences than broader empirical investigations." This approach offers the advantage of combining a profound understanding of the context with a granular level of detail, facilitating a more profound comprehension of the dynamics leading to smart city development.

It is important to acknowledge that focusing on a single case study inherently constrains the generalizability of our findings. Nonetheless, it generates insights that can contribute constructively to the discourse surrounding the interplay between CoPs and smart city development. This case study centers on City Vision, a community that connects public administrators, businesses, innovators, researchers, and professionals operating in the field of intelligent territorial transformation. The observational data utilized in this case study analysis originate from the authors themselves, who have actively participated in the City Vision project in the roles of director and scientific advisor. To date, City Vision has engaged several thousand individuals, both in-person and digitally, with over a thousand participants attending in-person events in 2022 alone. Among City Vision's activities, events play a crucial role, including a roadshow across different territories and a main event called the "Smart City General Assembly", as well as communication efforts, research activities, and continuous knowledge exchange. The following pages trace the trajectory of the project leading up to its current consolidation, which suggests how City Vision can be considered a MCop able to connect multiple CoPs for smart city development.

4. The case of City Vision

4.1. The Beginnings

In 2020, the Municipality of Padua was accepted into the inaugural edition (2020-2022) of the Intelligent Cities Challenge (ICC). The ICC is an initiative by the European Commission aimed at supporting European cities in their journey towards a greener and more digitally advanced local economy through the implementation of Local Green Deals. By participating in the ICC, cities can leverage state-of-the-art technologies to enhance their economic competitiveness, bolster social resilience, and improve the overall quality of life for their residents. The program offers advisory services, access to an extensive network of experts, opportunities for collaboration with high-performing cities and global leaders, and the ability to develop Local Green Deals in collaboration with local businesses and citizens, thereby facilitating progress in the transition towards a more sustainable future.

Upon the initiative of the Municipality of Padua, Padova Hall - the public company that manages the local fair - and Blum - a communication company specialized in innovation - designed an event to accompany the City's participation in the Challenge. The event was intended to take the form of a conference, featuring an exhibition component, and was expected to have a dual target audience. On one hand, it was planned to engage policymakers, local institutions, industry associations, and social forces. On the other hand, it was intended to reach the general public and citizens at large.

Therefore, City Vision was established with a clear local perspective, but also with the intention of involving the broader territorial system in the city's intelligent transformation processes and establishing connections with external entities. This objective was achieved through the active participation of administrators from other Italian and international cities, innovators, companies, experts, and researchers.

However, the events related to the Covid-19 pandemic hindered the initial plan of hosting an in-person event. Nevertheless, Padova Hall and Blum decided to proceed with the City Vision project by launching an online event. This decision was made based on the experiences gained during the initial months of pandemic restrictions. Padova Hall and Blum had already organized a series of similar events to keep traditional trade fair appointments active, such as Flormart, which is dedicated to the floriculture industry, and Green Logistics, focused on sustainable logistics.

Fig. 1 - A moment from the 1st edition of City Vision in Padova Hall's virtual studio

Therefore, the first edition of City Vision was held on December 2, 2020, in a virtual studio at the Padova Fair. The event was streamed online, reaching audiences through the website of the local newspaper, Il Mattino di Padova, as well as the social media channels of the Padova Fair. Despite the challenges posed by the pandemic, Padova Hall and Blum decided to proceed with the project, ensuring that City Vision could still take place in a virtual format.

Even in this early edition, there was widespread participation in the event, with hundreds of people connecting from all over Italy. Among them, numerous administrators and officials from the public administration stood out. It was at this point that the realization emerged that City Vision could transcend its strictly local dimension and assume a national scope. Another realization also emerged: City Vision filled a representation gap and could become a platform for those working on the intelligent transformation of territories, including administrators, companies, experts, and innovators.

4.2. Content is King: Uniting Visionaries to Empower City Vision

After the first edition, City Vision enters its first full year in 2021. The initial definition of the "City Vision model" includes two key elements: a series of online events dedicated to specific verticals and an annual in-person gathering, starting from 2021, called the "Smart City General Assembly".

The cycle of online events, called "City Vision Forums," takes place throughout the year and involves public administrators, companies, and researchers focusing on three central themes in the smart cities debate:

Smart Mobility Forum: This forum explores the topic of intelligent, autonomous, and connected mobility. It features keynote speeches, expert talks, and startup pitches.

Smart Government Forum: Centered around the themes of simplification, innovation, and connectivity, this forum highlights the development of digital public administration. From metropolises to small municipalities, new solutions are being explored with the contributions of companies and startups to make life easier for citizens and businesses.

Smart Energy & Building Forum: This forum delves into the future of clean, sustainable, and connected energy. It showcases innovative startup ideas, projects from major companies, and international best practices.

Fig. 2 - A view from the control room desk of the Smart Mobility Forum 2021

The first edition of the "Smart City General Assembly", held in Padua on November 30 and December 1, 2021, was the first occasion for the nascent City Vision community to come together in person. Despite being constrained by the pandemic restrictions and a limited number of in-person participants, the event already foreshadowed many elements that would be further strengthened in 2022.

In the midst of it all, a powerful atmosphere of active participation and dynamic dialogue permeated the gathering of public administrators from both large and small cities. With unwavering enthusiasm, they openly shared

their wealth of experiences, actively collaborated to craft pioneering solutions, and fearlessly articulated their profound and pressing transformational needs.

The event further showcased an impressive array of companies unveiling their visionary projects, startups captivating the audience with their groundbreaking products and services, and esteemed universities and research institutions shedding light on the pivotal dynamics that govern the intelligent transformation of territories.

Despite the restricted number of attendees physically present, this pivotal gathering laid a solid foundation for the resolute fortification of City Vision in 2022. It fostered an empowering atmosphere of unwavering participation and invigorating dialogue among a diverse range of stakeholders, all steadfastly dedicated to the profound mission of intelligently transforming cities.

4.3. From Events System to Community-Centric Governance

2022 marks the year of full maturity for City Vision. A new governance model, consisting of a director and a lean team, enables a more impactful focus on defining City Vision as a community before it is considered as an events system.

The introduction of a director and a lean team represents an innovation in City Vision's management. The director takes responsibility for shaping and defining the community's identity and vision, guiding the process of setting priorities, goals, and strategies. This pivotal role is essential in ensuring the coherence and direction of City Vision as a community. The lean team, comprised of a small number of highly skilled members, works in an agile and collaborative manner to translate the director's vision into concrete actions. The team's agility allows for greater flexibility and responsiveness, enabling quick adaptation to changes and emerging needs.

The primary objective of this new governance is to emphasize the importance of the community within City Vision. While events were previously the main focus, there is now a drive to develop a strong and cohesive network of members who share a common vision and work together to achieve shared goals. Defining City Vision as a community acknowledges the value of relationships and connections among its members. This entails a greater emphasis on interaction and active participation, encouraging the sharing of knowledge, experiences, and resources.

The community becomes the driving force behind City Vision, generating a lasting and sustainable impact on urban development. This new perspective also reflects a paradigm shift in the approach to City Vision. It is not merely about organizing events but creating a dynamic ecosystem where the

community feels engaged and responsible for building a better urban future. This community-centric approach aims to promote the active participation of all members, offering them an active role in the decision-making process and project implementation.

Fig. 3 - A moment from the "Smart City General Assembly" 2022

In this context, City Vision strategically built a network of partnerships with renowned organizations at the forefront of the intelligent city movement, including Anci, Rete dei Comuni Sostenibili, Pa Social, EuropIA, and more. These partnerships bring together the most influential aggregations dedicated to cities and innovation, bolstering City Vision's position as a leading platform for urban transformation.

Collaborating with Anci, the National Association of Italian Municipalities, allows City Vision to establish direct connections with local government authorities. This partnership facilitates the exchange of knowledge and expertise in urban governance, enabling City Vision to incorporate best practices and insights into its initiatives. Rete dei Comuni Sostenibili, a prominent organization focusing on sustainability, contributes invaluable perspectives and practices for fostering environmentally friendly and livable cities. Pa Social, renowned for its expertise in digital transformation and innovative public services, plays a vital role in shaping digitally empowered and citizen-centric cities. Furthermore, partnering with EuropIA, a European network for a humanistic vision on artificial intelligence, expands City Vision's reach on innovation at international level, enriching its ability to address complex urban challenges.

The establishment of this robust network of partnerships enables City Vision to leverage the collective strength of these organizations. It fosters collaboration, innovation, and the sharing of best practices in the realm of

smart cities. City Vision becomes a hub for the exchange of ideas, experiences, and innovative solutions among diverse stakeholders, driving progress and evolution in intelligent city development. Through these strategic partnerships, City Vision solidifies its position as a transformative force in the intelligent city landscape. It nurtures its collaborative ecosystem that fuels the advancement of smart cities, inspiring a collective intelligence that paves the way for a better future for urban communities.

In 2022 and 2023, City Vision embarks on an extensive calendar of events across various cities in Italy, including Milan, Rome, Venice, Naples, Ivrea, and Genoa. This initiative brings forth two significant outcomes. Firstly, it leads to the further expansion of the City Vision community as the territorial events forge new connections with administrators, innovators, businesses, and academics from different regions. These local events provide a platform for networking, knowledge sharing, and collaboration, fostering a sense of inclusivity and collective ownership among participants. Secondly, the territorial events facilitate the dissemination of City Vision's content throughout the country, tailored to the specificities of each territory. This dissemination of knowledge, insights, and best practices enables a wider audience to access and engage with City Vision's ideas, initiatives, and vision for intelligent cities.

These events serve as catalysts for dialogue, collaboration, and innovation, inspiring attendees to implement transformative ideas within their respective territories. By extending the reach of City Vision's activities beyond a single location, the organization creates a ripple effect of positive change throughout the country. The territorial events act as platforms for cross-pollination of ideas and experiences, encouraging participants to explore innovative approaches and adapt successful practices from other regions. This exchange of knowledge contributes to a collective learning process, strengthening the intelligent city movement in Italy and driving progress towards sustainable and inclusive urban development.

Moreover, the territorial events provide an opportunity for City Vision to understand and address the unique needs and aspirations of each locality. By tailoring the content and discussions to the specificities of the host city, City Vision demonstrates its commitment to localized problem-solving and co-creation. This approach fosters a sense of ownership and empowerment among participants, as they become active contributors to shaping the future of their own cities.

These events not only strengthen the network of stakeholders and foster collaboration but also contribute to the enrichment of local contexts through the exchange of knowledge, experiences, and innovative solutions. By en-

gaging with diverse territories, City Vision cultivates a collective intelligence that propels the intelligent city movement forward.

4.4. Media Presence: Strengthening City Vision's Positioning

In order to consolidate the community, City Vision recognizes the importance of strong media visibility. In this regard, City Vision establishes a media partnership with the Gedi publishing group, which entails the publication of a dedicated "City Vision Special" online across all Gedi's media outlets, including La Repubblica, La Stampa, Huffington Post, and numerous local newspapers. This special feature, comprising approximately 20 articles per year, focuses on City Vision's events, partners, and thematic discussions, significantly contributing to the project's recognition and fostering a sense of identity within the community.

The "City Vision Special" serves as a comprehensive platform to showcase the project's initiatives, events, and key partners. Through approximately 20 articles published annually, the special feature delves into various aspects of City Vision, providing in-depth insights and analysis on the latest trends, innovative solutions, and emerging challenges in the realm of smart and intelligent cities. By leveraging the extensive reach and credibility of Gedi's media network, City Vision gains increased exposure and recognition among a diverse range of stakeholders, including policymakers, industry leaders, professionals, and the general public. The articles highlight the achievements, success stories, and transformative impact of City Vision, fostering a deeper understanding and appreciation for the project's goals and values. Moreover, the collaboration with Gedi allows City Vision to tap into the expertise and journalistic excellence of their editorial team. Through rigorous research, interviews, and analysis, the articles in the "City Vision Special" present a comprehensive and compelling narrative that captures the essence of the project and its multifaceted endeavors.

The consistent publication of the Special throughout the year reinforces the project's presence in the media landscape, providing a continuous flow of informative and engaging content that keeps the community and stakeholders informed about the latest developments, upcoming events, and relevant discussions. This regular communication further strengthens the bond among City Vision members, fostering a sense of belonging and shared purpose. Overall, the media partnership with the Gedi publishing group significantly contributes to the recognition, visibility, and growth of City Vision, elevating its profile both nationally and locally. By showcasing the project's activities and engaging storytelling, the "City Vision Special" empowers the community, inspires collaboration, and amplifies the impact of City Vision's

mission to drive the intelligent transformation of cities for a sustainable and prosperous future.

4.5. Taking the Global Stage

City Vision gains also an international prominence by accessing a global level through its collaboration with the Smart City Expo World Congress (SCEWC) in Barcelona, widely regarded as the foremost event dedicated to smart cities worldwide. The director of SCEWC, Ugo Valenti, delivers the opening address at the "Smart City General Assembly" in 2022, highlighting the significance of this partnership. City Vision leverages this collaboration to enhance its international presence and amplify its impact. In the same year, City Vision organizes a live online event from SCEWC, showcasing a series of successful Italian best practices that are being exhibited in Barcelona during the congress. This initiative not only promotes the innovative initiatives developed within Italy but also provides a valuable platform for sharing these experiences with a global audience.

Collaborating with SCEWC and participating in their renowned event demonstrates City Vision's commitment to fostering international cooperation and knowledge exchange in the field of smart cities. It serves as a testament to City Vision's credibility and relevance in the global arena, further legitimizing the platform as a hub for intelligent urban development. By establishing connections with international partners, City Vision gains access to a diverse range of perspectives, experiences, and best practices from around the world. This global outlook enriches the knowledge base of City Vision and enables the organization to incorporate international benchmarks and innovative solutions into its activities. It also offers an opportunity for City Vision to showcase its own accomplishments and contribute to the global discourse on smart cities.

The international dimension of City Vision not only strengthens its reputation but also opens doors for potential collaborations, partnerships, and exchanges with other countries and organizations. Through these international engagements, City Vision can learn from global trends, access new technologies and methodologies, and forge alliances with like-minded entities, fostering a continuous process of learning, growth, and impact. In summary, City Vision's international outlook, particularly through collaboration with the Smart City Expo World Congress in Barcelona, brings added legitimacy and recognition to the platform. By engaging with the global smart city community, City Vision expands its network, gains valuable insights, and promotes the achievements of Italian initiatives on an international stage. This international perspective enhances City Vision's capacity to drive

intelligent urban transformation and reinforces its position as a key player in the global smart cities ecosystem.

From an events perspective, City Vision currently fosters discussion, engagement, and the growth of its community through three types of events:

1. Territorial roadshow appointments, which consist of a series of working tables reserved for local communities dealing with innovation in an urban context. These involve public administrators, businesses, startups, researchers, and representatives from institutions.
2. The annual "Smart City General Assembly", the flagship event in City Vision's yearly calendar, which in 2023 alone brought together over 800 people. The assembly includes events dedicated to professionals (workshops, panel discussions, working tables), as well as initiatives aimed at dissemination, particularly for younger generations (exhibition area and in-depth meetings on key smart city topics).
3. Participation in events organized by third parties, during which City Vision intervenes through its own spokespeople to represent the perspective of its community in various contexts, such as territorial events, association assemblies, and events organized by municipalities and companies, among others.

5. Research Initiatives Empowering the City Vision Community of Practice

City Vision's commitment to its community extends to the realm of research, encompassing two key aspects. The first aspect involves research on experiences of intelligent transformation undertaken by public administrators. To fulfill this purpose, City Vision has established the City Vision Observatory in collaboration with the University of Padua. This observatory conducts a series of quantitative and qualitative studies on Italian public administrators in cities and towns, investigating their practices and approaches to intelligent transformation. The second line of research is carried out through the co-innovation forum, initiated in collaboration with the think tank Data Valley. The forum serves as a platform for gathering best practices in intelligent transformation and developing guidelines for policymakers. It brings together public administrators, startups, companies, and professionals actively engaged in data analysis, enabling technologies, and innovative solutions.

The City Vision Observatory and the co-innovation forum provide invaluable spaces for knowledge sharing, collaboration, and the exchange of ideas. By delving into the experiences and insights of public administrators, the

observatory generates valuable data and qualitative information that can inform future strategies and policies. Similarly, the co-innovation forum serves as a dynamic hub for identifying and disseminating innovative solutions, fostering collaboration between different stakeholders and driving the adoption of cutting-edge technologies and approaches. Through its research initiatives, City Vision strengthens its MCoP role as a thought leader and knowledge hub in the realm of intelligent urban transformation. By partnering with esteemed institutions and engaging diverse stakeholders, City Vision fosters a culture of continuous learning and improvement.

The research outcomes and guidelines produced by these initiatives not only benefit the City Vision community but also contribute to the broader discourse on intelligent cities, serving as a valuable resource for policymakers, industry professionals, and researchers alike. By actively pursuing research and innovation, City Vision remains at the forefront of the intelligent cities movement, driving forward-thinking approaches and shaping the future of urban development. The collaborative nature of these research endeavors ensures that City Vision remains connected to the evolving needs and aspirations of its community, empowering them with knowledge, insights, and practical solutions for intelligent and sustainable urban transformation.

Within the network of CoPs raising around the City Vision project, an array of key actors assumes a pivotal role in facilitating urban growth and development. These actors collectively constitute the composition of the City Vision community, as depicted in Figure 4.

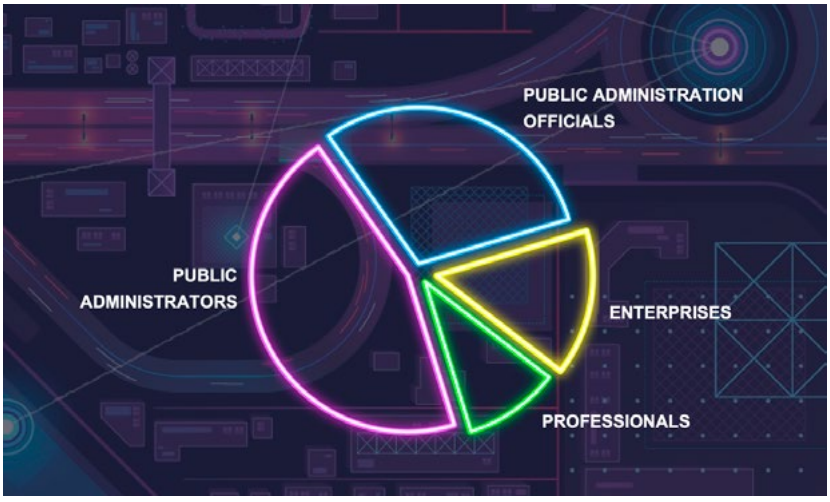

Fig. 4 - Composition of the City Vision community

These components can be categorized as follows:

- **Public Administrators.** Public administrators, representing governmental bodies and local institutions, bear the responsibility of policy formulation, urban planning, and effective management of public resources. Their crucial role lies in creating an environment conducive to innovation, sustainability, and the overall quality of urban life. Among the many public administrators involved, mayors and councilors from major cities like Milan, Rome, and Naples, as well as from medium-sized cities like Pesaro, Bari, and Bergamo, and from small and very small municipalities like Ferla (Syracuse), Villanova Mondovì (Cuneo), Arborea (Oristano), Cappella Maggiore (Treviso), and many others, are part of the community.
- **Businesses.** Businesses of diverse sectors and sizes constitute a significant pillar of the City Vision community. By providing services, products, and employment opportunities, businesses contribute to the urban economy and the prosperity of cities. Many businesses actively engage in socially responsible and sustainable initiatives aimed at fostering equitable and sustainable urban development.The types of companies involved mainly belong to the energy sector (such as EnelX, Acea, Nest), mobility (such as Dott, Eav, Parkingmycar), credit (such as UniCredit and Volksbank), telecommunications (such as Tim, Wind, and BBBell), consulting and innovation (such as Almaviva, Engineering, PWC).
- **Startups.** Startups, driven by their entrepreneurial spirit and willingness to take risks, assume a vital role within the City Vision community. These emerging enterprises bring forth fresh ideas and innovative solutions to address various urban challenges, such as mobility, energy, environment, and connectivity. Often, startups receive support from incubators and accelerators within the community to nurture and materialize their innovative concepts. Among the involved startups, the main areas of activity include data management and digital services (such as Blimp, Kineton, Willeasy), construction and management of urban spaces (like Wasp, Eneri, OpenStage), and sustainability (such as Wiseair, R3gis, Cleanwatts).
- **Experts and Academia.** Experts and academic institutions serve as invaluable resources within the City Vision community. These professionals specialize in diverse fields such as urban planning, architecture, engineering, and social sciences, offering profound knowledge and technical expertise to guide the planning and implementation of urban projects. Collaborative endeavors between academic institutions and the community foster enhanced research and innovation to tackle urban challenges effectively. Over the years, City Vision has established a strong collaboration with the Department of Economics and Management of the University of Padova and with other universities and research centers such as the Polytechnic University of Bari, the University of Naples Vanvitelli, and the Bruno Kessler Foundation.

- **Other Communities** City Vision seamlessly integrates with other communities that share common interests or similar objectives. These may encompass professional associations, non-governmental organizations, active citizen groups, and local communities. Collaborative partnerships among these diverse communities facilitate the exchange of knowledge, experiences, and resources, thereby broadening the available repertoire to effectively address challenges and seize opportunities presented by cities. Among communities of this kind, particular mention goes to the "Rete dei Comuni sostenibili", an association of public administrations committed to sustainability, the "PA Social" association, which brings together professional communicators from public administrations, and the national Smart Communities Tech Cluster.
- **Public Opinion.** Lastly, public opinion assumes a substantial role within the City Vision community. The viewpoints and expectations of citizens are instrumental in guiding the decisions made by public administrators, businesses, and other actors. Through citizen engagement and active participation, the City Vision community endeavors to foster a participatory urban democracy, where the voices and opinions of citizens are heard and exert influence on choices related to the development and evolution of cities.

Collectively, these components of the City Vision community synergistically work together to promote a shared vision of sustainable, innovative, and inclusive cities. Through collaborative efforts, they identify urban challenges, develop creative solutions, and implement projects aimed at enhancing the quality of life in urban environments.

By fostering knowledge sharing, exchanging experiences, and pooling resources, the City Vision community strives to stimulate innovation, encourage cross-sector collaboration, and foster the adoption of integrated approaches to address complex urban challenges. Ultimately, the City Vision community represents a dynamic and diverse ecosystem of actors united in their commitment to promoting a sustainable and prosperous urban future. Leveraging the expertise and resources of public administrators, businesses, startups, academic experts, other communities, and public opinion, the City Vision community catalyzes positive change and contributes to the realization of better cities for all their inhabitants.

6. Discussion and conclusions

City Vision, with its governance model and community-centric approach, embodies the characteristics of a MCop within the context of smart cities. By prioritizing the definition of City Vision as a community before an events system, the organization emphasizes the importance of building a strong and cohesive network of individuals who share a common vision and col-

laborate to achieve shared goals. The introduction of a director and a lean team signifies a paradigm shift towards a more impactful focus on shaping and defining the community's identity and vision. This shift in governance enables the coherence and direction of City Vision as a community, fostering interaction, active participation, and the sharing of knowledge, experiences, and resources among its members.

As a MCop, City Vision cultivates an environment where collective learning, knowledge sharing, and collaboration thrive. The community becomes the driving force behind City Vision, generating a lasting and sustainable impact on urban development. Through the strategic partnerships established with renowned organizations in the intelligent city movement, City Vision solidifies its position as a tribe leader within the smart city landscape. Collaborating with organizations such as Anci, Rete dei Comuni Sostenibili, Pa Social, and EuropIA allows City Vision to leverage the collective strength of these entities and facilitate collaboration, innovation, and the sharing of best practices.

City Vision's role as a tribe leader is further exemplified by its engagement with the Smart City Expo World Congress (SCEWC) in Barcelona, the foremost event dedicated to smart cities worldwide. The collaboration with SCEWC and the organization of a live online event from the congress provide City Vision with international prominence and a platform to showcase successful Italian best practices to a global audience. By participating in international events and establishing connections with global partners, City Vision demonstrates its commitment to fostering international cooperation, knowledge exchange, and the integration of international benchmarks and innovative solutions into its activities.

In a smart city context, City Vision exemplifies the potential and benefits of communities of practice. Firstly, the community-centric governance model prioritizes relationships and connections among members, promoting interaction and collaboration, which leads to collective learning and the development of innovative solutions for complex urban challenges. Secondly, the strategic partnerships established by City Vision allow for the exchange of knowledge, expertise, and best practices, enriching the organization's ability to address urban issues and contribute to the advancement of smart cities. Lastly, City Vision's territorial events across various cities in Italy serve as platforms for networking, knowledge sharing, and collaboration among diverse stakeholders. These events encourage localized problem-solving and co-creation, contributing to a collective learning process and fostering sustainable and inclusive urban development.

In conclusion, City Vision's community-centric approach, strategic partnerships, and territorial events position it as both a MCop and a tribe leader

within the intelligent city landscape. The organization's emphasis on collaboration, innovation, and the exchange of knowledge and best practices empowers its community and stakeholders to actively shape the future of intelligent cities. By driving sustainable and inclusive urban development on a local and global scale, City Vision showcases the potential of communities of practice in realizing the vision of smart and intelligent cities.

Our research is positioned at the intersection of CoP and smart city literature, providing a new perspective on the development of smart city projects. The major novelty of this work is in the identification of the role of MCorp for urban innovation and regeneration. By transcending the limited and narrow vision of a single CoP, MCop works as network orchestrators and innovation intermediaries for territorial development.

Our results allow for the identification of some managerial implications. Managers and leaders within smart city organizations can take a proactive role in nurturing MCops. They should identify the potential for MCops within their teams or networks and promote their formation. Moreover, MCops managers can facilitate collaboration in open and inclusive environment by organizing events, meetings, and projects that encourage members from different CoPs to work together, exchange ideas, and pool their expertise. Online and offline tools might be implemented for reaching this objective, as well as the implementation of a common vocabulary and knowledge framework, ensuring that members from different CoPs can effectively communicate and collaborate. MCop leaders can also organize skill-building workshops, training sessions, and mentorship programs to enhance the capabilities of their members. This can help in the dissemination of knowledge and expertise. Finally, MCop leaders should regularly assess the impact and outcomes of their activities to ensure that they are contributing to the objectives of sustainable smart city development.

In addition, some policy implications can be derived. First, policy makers can emphasize the importance of collaboration among different CoPs for sustainable smart city development. This can be achieved through funding initiatives, joint projects, and collaborative events. Second, local governments and organizations can establish platforms for knowledge exchange, including digital platforms, conferences, and workshops, to facilitate the sharing of ideas and best practices among professionals in smart city development. Third, policy makers can launch competitions (i.e. crowdsourcing initiatives) to stimulate professionals with different knowledge and expertise to jointly work together in elaborating specific solutions to smart city problems.

While the research design has its strengths, it also comes with several limitations that should be acknowledged. First, the research employs a single case study design, focused on City Vision as a MCop for smart city develop-

ment, which inherently restricts the generalizability of findings. On the one side there is a selection bias, since City Vision might not represent the full diversity of smart city initiatives, potentially skewing the findings and limiting their broader applicability; on the other side, conclusions drawn from a single case may not be applicable to broader contexts or different smart city initiatives. Future research may develop a comparative analysis with other similar initiatives or platforms, which could offer valuable insights and context. Second, the research relies on qualitative data that provide valuable insights, but the overreliance on qualitative methods can limit the rigor and replicability of the study. More quantitative research can be used by researchers willing to deepen our understanding on the role of Mcops for smart cities, making stronger, more quantifiable claims and generalizable findings.

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