European Commission

High-level Conference

The Digital Cities Challenge: a Strategy for EU Cities in the 21st century

5th of June 2019

Charlemagne building
Brussels

The High-level Conference

Cities host 72% of the EU population and are Europe's economic engine, contributing to large part of its GDP. As centres of economic activity, employment and innovation, cities have a vital role to play when it comes to promoting smart, sustainable and inclusive growth in Europe and tackling economic, environmental and social challenges.

Many European cities are experimenting innovative approaches and, through advanced digital technologies, are reinventing the way they generate economic growth, productivity and well-being for their citizens. Technologies, such as open data, Artificial Intelligence, Internet of Things or sensor technologies, offer cities unprecedented opportunities for enabling innovative business models, creating market potential and addressing societal challenges. Through innovation and digital technologies, cities have also the potential to contribute to building a greener society and addressing climate change, by favouring the transition towards greater energy efficiency, or sustainable transport modes and economic models.

The Digital Cities Challenge is a European Commission initiative that is helping over 40 European cities to reap the benefits of advanced digital technologies, develop comprehensive strategies and thriving ecosystems, and achieve smart and sustainable growth. Launched in October 2017, the initiative provides the cities with access to tailored advice, mentoring and coaching opportunities, and it has become a network of collaboration, knowledge sharing and peer learning.

The high-level conference wants to celebrate the work of the cities that have been part of this process, and share experiences and insights on the transformative power of advanced technologies. It will gather 400 participants from all over Europe and will feature high-level experts from different industries, smart city practitioners, and EU, national and local policy makers (including national Ministers, Commissioners and high-level representatives of the EU institutions). The conference aims to showcase the trends that are shaping urban areas in Europe and the opportunities offered by advanced technologies to transform cities into catalysts of smart and sustainable growth and pave the way for the future "Intelligent Cities Challenge".

The high-level conference will discuss a range of themes:

- Creating sustainable and thriving city-ecosystems, which catalyse the coordinated action to digitally transform their territories

- Shaping the cities of the future, by investing in digital infrastructure, promoting access to technology and data and acting as testbeds for emerging technologies

- Upskilling the cities through disruptive education and training, as an essential condition for the industrial modernisation and digital transformation of a territory.

Agenda

8:30-9:00 Registration and welcome coffee

9:00-10:00 Setting the scene: Sustainable urban growth and development in the EU Agenda

Speakers from European Commission, the European Committee of the Regions and the EU Presidency will share their insight into the EU policy developments and strategies.

10:00-10:15 Keynote: Cities leading the global economy

Vision on the cities of the future, the trends that are shaping urban areas and the opportunities offered by advanced digital technologies.

10:15-10:45 Coffee break

10:45-12:00 Sustainable city-ecosystems: Governance and reputation

A successful digital transformation strategy builds on a thriving ecosystem, which shares an ambitious vision and catalyses coordinated action of the different players: local authorities, businesses, citizens, academia, and social partners. Key questions that will addressed are following:

- How to create vibrant ecosystems and build a successful city brand?

- How to create synergies and engage stakeholders (government, industry, finance, academia, NGOs, social partners) in the creation of a shared and forward-looking vision?

- What are the challenges and lessons learned from the Digital Cities Challenge initiative?

12:00- 13:15 The future of cities: infrastructure, technology and data

Cities have the opportunity to become testbeds for emerging technologies, from AI to self-driving vehicles, and to trigger innovation and economic growth by fostering access to technology and opening up their public datasets. This session will revolve around the following key questions:

- How can advanced technologies redesign growth in European cities and make them more liveable, inclusive and environmentally sustainable while boosting business growth and business creation?

- How can European cities facilitate access to technology and open data (through fab labs, innovation labs, clusters) to boost economic growth and well-being?

13:15-14:15 Networking lunch

The lobby will host an exhibition of cities participating in the Digital Cities Challenge initiative

14:15-15:30 Upskilling the cities: disruptive education and training

Industrial modernisation and digital transformation of a territory can only happen if local businesses have access to relevant skills. Mismatches between the skills available and those needed to harness advanced digital technologies remain and are projected to increase. Cities need to invest on people, attract and retain the right talents and ensure that their workforce has the relevant skillset to reap the benefits of advanced technologies. The following questions will be addressed:

- What initiatives are disrupting education and contributing to build and retain the talents and skills needed to leverage advanced technologies?

- What are the instruments to activate the local ecosystem, enhance cooperation between University and industry and boost the acquisition of skills that fit the needs of companies?

15:30-16:00 Coffee break

16:00-17:15 Cities as market creators

Cities play a crucial role when it comes to boosting the digital transformation of industry and creating the conditions for innovative business models to thrive. This session will discuss how cities can enhance growth and innovation at local level, by investing in digital infrastructure, promoting access to data and innovative solutions (e.g. through public procurement).

17:15-17:45 Conclusion and steps ahead

17:45 Networking Cocktail

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