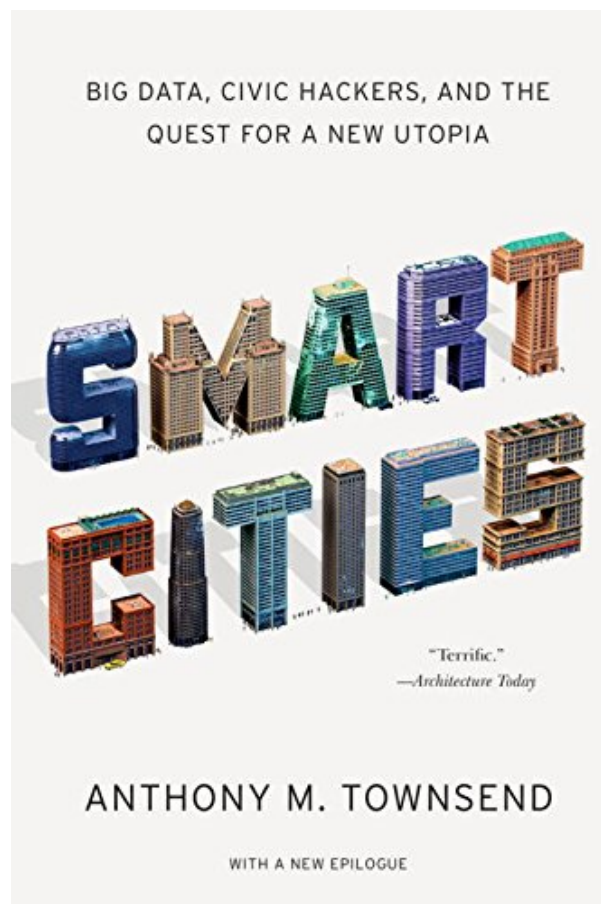


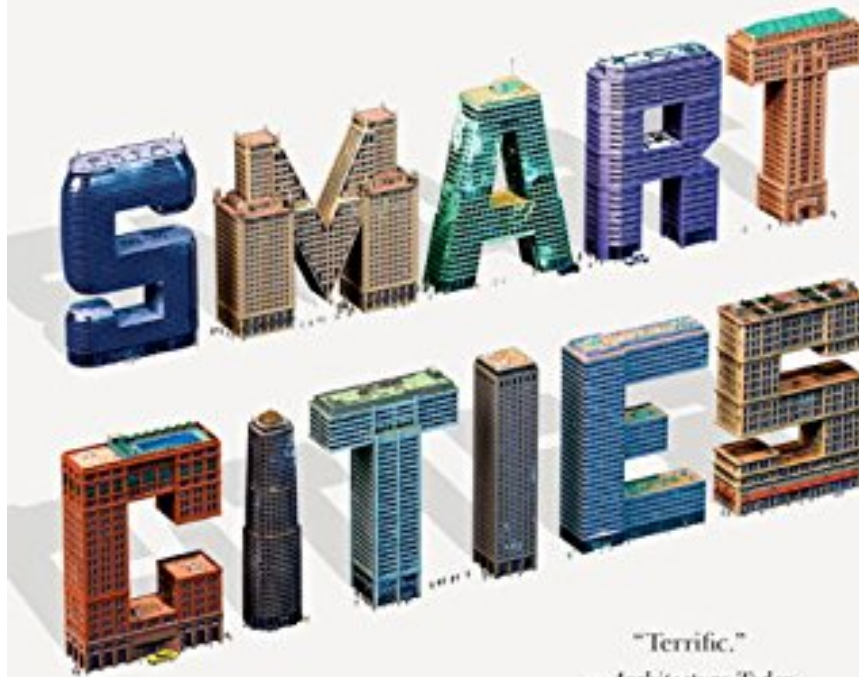
# SMART CITIES: BIG DATA, CIVIC HACKERS, AND THE QUEST FOR A NEW UTOPIA BY ANTHONY M. TOWNSEND



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## **PDF**

An unflinching look at the aspiring city-builders of our smart, mobile, connected future.

We live in a world defined by urbanization and digital ubiquity, where mobile broadband connections outnumber fixed ones, machines dominate a new "internet of things," and more people live in cities than in the countryside.

In *Smart Cities*, urbanist and technology expert Anthony Townsend takes a broad historical look at the forces that have shaped the planning and design of cities and information technologies from the rise of the great industrial cities of the nineteenth century to the present. A century ago, the telegraph and the mechanical tabulator were used to tame cities of millions. Today, cellular networks and cloud computing tie together the complex choreography of mega-regions of tens of millions of people.

In response, cities worldwide are deploying technology to address both the timeless challenges of government and the mounting problems posed by human settlements of previously unimaginable size and complexity. In Chicago, GPS sensors on snow plows feed a real-time "plow tracker" map that everyone can access. In Zaragoza, Spain, a "citizen card" can get you on the free city-wide Wi-Fi network, unlock a bike share, check a book out of the library, and pay for your bus ride home. In New York, a guerrilla group of citizen-scientists installed sensors in local sewers to alert you when stormwater runoff overwhelms the system, dumping waste into local waterways.

As technology barons, entrepreneurs, mayors, and an emerging vanguard of civic hackers are trying to shape this new frontier, *Smart Cities* considers the motivations, aspirations, and shortcomings of them all while offering a new civics to guide our efforts as we build the future together, one click at a time.

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## Most helpful customer reviews

18 of 20 people found the following review helpful.

Smart Read

By Joel Natividad

Required reading not only for urbanists, but for futurists as well. Anthony Townsend has written the book, now literally and figuratively, on the "21st century's first new industry - the multi-trillion dollar Smart City industry."

At the dawn of this new century, three things have come together accelerating us into our urbanized future - for the first time in 2008, more people now live in cities; mobile computers (AKA smartphones) are now pervasive; and the Internet of Things is on its way to being ubiquitous. And instead of us living in remote islands telecommuting in this flat world, it has actually made Cities even more attractive as it provides the connective fiber to support a vibrant, social, digital nervous system.

And everyone who has anything to do with running cities has taken notice - from City Hall, to civic hackers, to urban planners, to academia, entrepreneurs, and of course - giant system integrators.

Going from the Crystal Palace in Victorian London, to the shiny skyscrapers of South Korea's "smart city from scratch" Songdo, and even touching on Gelernter's "Mirror Worlds", Asimov's psychohistory and Heisenberg's Uncertainty principle, Townsend explores how technology will impact our future cities, extracting lessons from history - past, recent and future (I particularly enjoyed how he explored the failed attempts at building SimCity-like simulations in the 70s and how he compared it to Asimov's Hari Seldon).

And he just doesn't explore the contours of this important topic. Derived from these lessons - he finishes the book with his take on how to achieve our urbanized, utopian future.

My takeaway from these guidelines can be described by the epigraph at the beginning of the book - a quote from Shakespeare's "Tragedy of Coriolanus" - "What is the City but the people?" (As it happens, the exact same quote we used when we coined "peopleware" for our reinvent payphones submission - NYCdatawell)

Smart Cities are not made smart by various soon to be obsolete technologies built into its infrastructure, its how its citizens uses these ever-changing technologies to be "human-centered, inclusive and resilient." Or as we put it in BetaNYC, the hub of NYC's civic hacking community - to "Connect, Learn, Innovate and Collaborate" - to CLICK together. To me, these digital connections are the axons connecting the City as super organism.

As evidenced by my interpretation, perhaps I read the book through rose-colored glasses as a self-confessed civic hacker and the co-founder of an urban informatics startup, but I can't recommend this book highly enough.

After reading this book, I'm now reading "Mirror Worlds" (till I read this book, I didn't know that the Unabomber Ted Kaczynski targeted Gelernter precisely for his predictions) and a biography of Patrick Geddes - a polymath biologist turned social planner.

I'm now also re-reading Barabasi's "Linked", Gleick's "Chaos" and "The Information: A History, A Theory, A Flood" for how these books describe network theory, complexity, chaos and emergence, and how Data, Information lies at the heart of systems. Not that Townsend mentioned these books, but I couldn't help but make the connection when he prescribed that when designing Smart Cities, we should "Build a Web, not an

Operating System."

6 of 6 people found the following review helpful.

watch how people use technology

By Eric Goldwyn

Smart Cities excels when it connects abstract ideas about smart technology with cities. Instead of cheering blithely for technical fixes like congestion pricing, he shows how technology, cities, and people thrive when fine-grained details and context are considered. Dr. Townsend clearly sees many of the benefits of ascendant technological advances aimed at urban management and governance, but his critical approach is meant to slow us down before adopting cookie-cutter solutions imported from other cities and countries. For those interested in cities and policy, the lessons distilled here are applicable to other areas of the city.

3 of 3 people found the following review helpful.

Careful assessment offering more considerations than solutions

By Andrew D. Oram

Townsend produces here neither a simple history nor a rah-rah presentation of a glorious future, but a nuanced view of the impacts technology is already having and will likely have on our lives. He combines his own substantial experience in government and technology with interviews and research to create an impressively broad overview of data collection and the involvement of the public in using it for improving public services. The book will be valuable to people interested either in technology or in social policy, because the trends Townsend documents are sure to become increasingly significant. Knowing the history of many of the trends he discusses, I was impressed by his thorough research and ability to go beyond commonplace assumptions to find the real story. The stories and case studies are varied, but Townsend tends to break them down into corporate-driven, capital-intensive, proprietary services and open, community-driven, crowdsourced innovations. I'll let you guess which ones he champions. While warning against leaving our infrastructure and public data in the hands of companies that create solutions for governments, he recognizes that both the top-down and the bottom-up approaches are needed. If you don't have time for the whole book, I suggest you consider the final chapter required reading. I also appreciate his concern for climate change and environmental degradation, a key reason for creating smart cities.

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