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Comments on Smart Environments and Democratizing Cities

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Reflection note

Comments on Smart Environments and Democratizing Cities

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As a Ph.D. student, I am relatively new to the field of information systems (IS) and this year's, IRIS40, was the second conference I've attended, in my relatively short career as a researcher. My first being ICIS17. While very similar in many aspects, IRIS40 naturally represents the Nordic and Scandinavian research tradition, which is of particular relevance in an age where bigger and larger IT conglomerates increasingly dictate everything from the everyday life of individual citizens to the political agendas. In that light, it was for me refreshing to experience the presentations and papers by Hanne Cecilie Geirbo and Per-Anders Hillgren as they represent an important counter weight in the form of a more including and critical voice compared to the more business-oriented research discourse which I often encountered at ICIS17 or during my readings of IS literature.

What I found particularly inspirational and relevant from Hanne Cecilie Geirbo's lecture and paper, was the choice of setting in a third world country. Drawing from my knowledge, the norm in IS is skewed towards business settings in the western world. For me, it was therefore refreshing to read and hear stories and research from unfamiliar settings that's often not found in IS literature and for myself, it personally illustrated that such research is possible. While situated in a western country, Malmö, Per-Anders Hillgren research setting was equally inspiring. In particular, by investigating and giving voice to minorities, among others Afghan refugees in Malmö, he also illustrated that IS research can be conducted outside the all familiar corporate setting and can have an impact other than a monetary one. I found that particularly interesting and relevant in a society where IS becomes ever more ubiquitous—again, not only in organizations but for society as a whole.

Another aspect from Hanne and Per-Anders research and presentation that I would like to highlight is their emphasis on being politically relevant. Specifically, by deconstructing the

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metaphors and uncovering biases in metaphors (Hanne) or by empowering marginalized people (Per-Anders) through design processes, both strive at bringing to light inequalities. I therefore see Hanne and Per-Anders research as great examples of the Nordic and Scandinavian research tradition. And, personally I hope that such studies will become more frequent, not just inside the Nordic and Scandinavian research communities, but also outside in (i.e., the basket of eight). In this way, I hope field of IS research can develop to be a more democratic and diversified research field that include other aspects than that of the efficiency or productivity of big organizations.

In short, I found Hanne and Per-Anders's research and presentation very inspiring due to their courage to go outside mainstream IS research and by doing so help to give voice to underrepresented countries and groups of society. In turn, I hope that the research field of IS can diversify its scope and become more politically engaging and hopefully help to act as a counter weight to increasingly powerful IT corporations.

Thank you both for inspiring me, and I am sure, many other young as well as more experienced IS researchers.