

The concept of the smart city as an ideological construct: an analysis of SCRD journal publications

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Abstract

This article examines the concept of smart cities as an ideological construct, i.e., not only as a set of technological solutions, but also as a normative system of ideas, values, and power dynamics. The aim of the study is to reveal the principles underlying the vision of a smart city, who creates and implements it, and what critical tensions emerge in the scientific literature. The study was conducted using qualitative analysis of scientific literature based on publications in the Smart Cities and Regional Development (SCRD) journal. The articles analysed are systematised according to four directions: (1) the origin and notion of a smart city, (2) ideas and values, (3) creators and actors, and (4) criticism. The research shows that the smart city has evolved by combining the paradigms of digitization, sustainability, good governance, and citizen engagement. The SCRD journal literature highlights the core values of smart cities: transparency, openness, social inclusion, human rights, equality, environmental protection, improvement of quality of life, and urban efficiency. It has also been found that the smart city as an ideological construct is collectively created and supported by three main groups of actors: residents, local government, and the private sector. However, critically-minded literature reveals significant risks: cybersecurity vulnerabilities, the expansion of surveillance and control, the impact of disinformation, and the deepening of social and regional divisions. The article concludes that the smart city should be analyzed not only as a model of technological progress but also as an ideological construct with political, social, and democratic consequences.

Keywords: smart cities, ideology, literature review, city management, criticism.

1. Introduction

In Greek, ideology (ἰδεολογία) means the science of ideas or a system of ideas. However, this term is not so easy to define. It is said that the term ideology is among the most ambiguous in science. Ideology can perform various social functions, such as forming a sense of community within a group (society), establishing certain symbols and values, and introducing a specific order into the life of society through legal, political, religious, artistic, and philosophical forms [1]. In addition, ideology can be described in more complex terms as a set of consciously or unconsciously expressed ideas, beliefs, and attitudes that reflect or shape an understanding of, or misunderstanding of, the social and political world [2]. It is often used to recommend, justify, or support actions aimed at preserving or changing political practices and institutions.

Ideologies can vary. They are most often used to describe political theories such as liberalism, conservatism, or socialism. However, ideology also covers a broader range of topics – for example, there is frequent debate about whether religion can be classified as ideology, and the relationship between ideology and culture or ideology and economics is discussed. Meanwhile, this paper analyzes the concept of a smart city from an ideological perspective, which has become a real aspiration for various cities around the world in the 21st century. It is often claimed that being a smart city means being innovative, technologically advanced, environmentally friendly, and even fashionable. This article assumes that the concept of a smart city can be considered an ideology because it is based

on certain ideas and values, indicating how a city should be planned, organized, and managed, and how this can be implemented in practice.

The smart city as an ideological construct is analyzed through a review of the scientific literature. For this purpose, the scientific journal "Smart Cities and Regional Development (SCRD)" published by researchers from The Faculty of Public Administration, National University of Political Studies and Public Administration is used. The main objectives of the journal are to promote a better understanding of the concept of smart cities and to develop and strengthen the capacity of stakeholders to actively participate in national, regional, and international processes of smart city development [3]. This journal was chosen because it does not focus solely on technological solutions, but draws attention to the key dimensions of a smart city, such as smart governance, smart people, or smart government, and so-called "soft" aspects, such as culture, education, or social relations. In addition, since the journal has been published since 2017, it already has a sufficient number of articles to provide a comprehensive analysis of the topic of this paper.

This paper first analyses the origins and notion of the smart city as an ideological construct, then moves on to its values and ideas (worldview). Next, it seeks to identify the creators and actors of the smart city ideologue – i.e., it performs a power analysis – who create, shape, and benefit most from this ideologue. Finally, attention is drawn to the prevailing criticism of the smart city, which is very important in order to assess the limitations and contradictions of the ideological construct and its real impact on democratic and social processes.

2. Analysis: the smart city as an ideological construct

2.1. Origin and notion

One of the characteristics of ideology is that it does not arise on its own – it is shaped by certain historical circumstances, the development of ideas, and/or social problems. The smart city emerged as a reaction to important technological, social, and, in a sense, political changes. In his article "The Conception and Discourse of Smart City," Deepak Kumar argues that the origins of the smart city are linked to initiatives that began in the late 1990s to introduce technology into urban spaces in order to provide public services more efficiently and support local democracy [4]. However, it is important to emphasize that the smart city did not appear suddenly, but developed consistently, evolving alongside earlier urban development paradigms. Stefano Carboni discusses the evolution of the smart city in his study "The New Advanced Cities: From the Green and Digital to the Smart Cities." He argues that the smart city is the result of technological progress and the search for environmental sustainability: first there were green cities, which sought to preserve and develop parks, forests, meadows, and other green spaces in the city; then emerged digital cities, which sought to integrate information technologies into city management and analytics and offered residents certain remote services; however, there were no longer any cities that wanted to be purely digital – in order to remain competitive, they combined environmental sustainability strategies with the latest information and communication technologies – these were smart cities [5]. One of the most important characteristics of such

a city is its ability to respond quickly and purposefully to the latest technological discoveries and integrate them into the city's development.

However, a smart city is more than just a city that uses technology. In the article "Cities rethinking innovation by technology," Mauro Romanelli emphasizes that technology is a necessary but insufficient condition for a city to be called smart [6]. According to the author, technology enables cities to become smart urban communities that combine technological, human, organizational, knowledge, and social aspects – this is what makes a city smart. This idea is supported by Stefano Carboni, who in his study "Smart Cities in comparison: An analysis of the best Smart Cities," argues that in a smart city, technology is used to improve the quality of life of residents and optimize city operations and services, so this concept encompasses not only the integration of technology, but also sustainable practices and the promotion of resident participation in city life [7]. This is why articles often analyze specific practical solutions. For example, Dragos Gabriel Ion, in paper "Solving the traffic issue", proposes using technology to synchronize traffic light signals in order to increase traffic flow efficiency, reduce emissions, and lower the risk of accidents [8], while Maria Pavlovskaya and Olga Kononova, in their article "The Smart City Vision: The Internet-of-Postal-Things (iOPT) Approach," examine how Internet of Things technologies can optimize postal services, reduce costs, and increase sustainability [9].

Over time, the concept of a smart city has expanded to include other urban planning models. It can be seen in the article "Yogyakarta Spatial Planning: Review from the Special Regulation of Yogyakarta" by Nadia Fitri Wijayaningsih, Dinda Miftahurrohmah, and Muhammad Iqbal. It examines the rules of spatial planning that contribute to the implementation of smart city principles by maximizing the development of local culture, social interests, and public welfare [10], while Patrycja Krauze-Maślankowska and Jacek Maślankowski's study "Social, economic, and environmental benefits of 15-minute cities: A case study analysis" discusses the idea of a 15-minute city, which, according to the authors, facilitates the development of a smart city by seeking to create a more sustainable, resident-friendly, and crisis-resistant city [11]. In addition, the smart city concept has expanded beyond traditional city boundaries and has begun to encompass smaller and larger geographical units. For example, Barsi Boglárka, in her article "Adaptation of smart city model(s) in rural environment," addresses the adaptation of the smart city model in rural areas, but here it takes on a slightly different form: local communities, social justice, and inclusion become more important aspects than high technology [12], while Esra Banu Sipahi and Zabihullah Saayi, in their piece "The world's first 'Smart Nation' vision: the case of Singapore," analyze the case of Singapore, which applies smart principles on a national scale in order to become the world's first smart city-state [13].

Therefore, like any ideology, the smart city has its origins, prevailing notions, diversity of interpretations, and further development. The smart city emerged as a result of evolution, when old definitions were no longer able to explain the development of cities, which were increasingly integrating technologies and seeking to streamline management. Over time, rural areas and states adopted and adapted the principles of the smart city. It shows that the smart city is not only an urban concept but also a contemporary ideology that shapes the visions and development directions of cities, regions, and even countries.

2.2. Ideas and values

Every ideology offers a certain normative vision – for example, what a good life, fair governance, or an advanced society should look like. A smart city also embodies specific ideas and value assumptions. As mentioned earlier, the emergence of the smart city is linked to the development of democracy and support for it, so it should come as no surprise that one of the most prominent ideas and values of the smart city in the literature is transparency and openness, which, as the main object of analysis, is examined in numerous scientific studies. Robertina Zdjelar, Anamarija Musa, and Nikolina Žajdela Hrustek, in their article "Open data availability in Croatian local government: Improving the quality of life," argue that the availability of government data that is open and freely accessible to citizens and businesses is the basis of the concept of a digital society and a smart city – open data contributes to improving the quality of life, as the public can access and use public sector information, thus increasing opportunities to participate in city life [14]. Albina Borisenko, in her study "E-democracy: Slacktivism vs. civic activism," also expresses a similar idea, stating that open government expands opportunities for public participation in the life of the country/city, provides tools and mechanisms for interaction between interested parties, and ensures effective public governance [15]. This idea is reinforced by Branko Dimeski's publication "Twenty Years of Transparency Development in the Public Sector: What Has Been Achieved?", which once again emphasizes that transparency and open government are among the key principles ensuring effective administrative reforms and are among the most important features of a modern democratic society and a smart city [16].

Naturally, ideology is often not limited to a single idea or value. It is also true in a smart city, where another important pillar of values is social inclusion, human rights, and equality. This is evident in Bissera Zankova's article "Smart societies, gender, and the 2030 spotlight - are we prepared?", which states that a smart city must defend and support human rights standards in order to serve people as best as possible, and that areas such as human rights, gender equality, and access to services are essential for the smooth functioning of a city [17]. Thus, the idea expressed here is that a smart city is more than just advanced technology; it can only thrive on the basis of policies that focus on people and equality. The idea of social justice is highlighted in Shiyi Tao's work "Smart tourism and poverty reduction." It is based on one of the dimensions of a smart city – smart tourism, which, according to the author, is one of the most effective ways to reduce poverty in a targeted manner. Tourism can be smart because it gives residents access to digital platforms that allow them to advertise services, sell local products, and manage accommodation services, thereby increasing their income and entrepreneurial opportunities in a smart city [18]. Sanjay Chopra's study "Measuring feminisation of urban poverty among domestic workers in Delhi, India" once again confirms the importance of social inclusion and equality in a smart city. The researcher analyzes the case of an Indian city, which showed that women come to cities to escape the unemployment and poverty prevalent in rural areas, but live insecurely, cannot find adequate housing, experience social deprivation, and lack adequate healthcare [19]. It is clear that in a smart city, such problems should be solved effectively and not allowed to become entrenched.

In a smart city, not only are justice and people's well-being important, but also the environment. Therefore, another notable value of a smart city is sustainable development, i.e., sustainability and environmental conservation. Tina Maria Mitre and Renee Obregon's article "Green spaces in Bucharest - present situation, current developmental programs and future aspirations" emphasizes that ensuring a healthy environment for residents should be a priority on the agenda of smart city administrations in the short and long term, as green solutions are linked to environmental responsibility, healthy lifestyles, and urban resilience to climate change [20]. The importance of sustainability is also highlighted in Mauro Romanelli's study "Cities and urban consumption in transition towards sustainability," which states that cities play a key role in achieving sustainable consumption and encouraging citizens to be responsible consumers and initiators of social change – the implementation of a vision of sustainable and responsible consumption helps to shape a smart city as an urban community that can promote efficient, effective, inclusive, and green growth by reducing sources of pollution and environmental degradation and creating conditions for the efficient management of energy and resources [21]. Meanwhile, Akhmad Yusuf Zuhdy, Totok Soehartanto, and Ifarrel Rachmanda Hariyanto's article "Implementation of green communication in the city of Surabaya to build a clean and sustainable environment" discusses green communication that can be applied by organizations, companies, governments, and individuals, with the main goal of raising awareness of environmental issues and encouraging positive changes in behavior and actions that contribute to a healthier and more sustainable environment [22]. Thus, one of the ideas and values of the smart city as an ideological construct – sustainability and environmental conservation – can be achieved not only through technology, but also through communication strategies.

Finally, another idea of a smart city that prevails in the scientific literature can be identified as improving the quality of life and making the city function more efficiently. There is a noticeable desire for the city to operate as efficiently as possible, be well adapted to the needs of residents, and be technologically optimized. In the article "Smart city: A system for measuring noise pollution," Ivan Jezdović et al. examine the importance of reducing noise in cities for the quality of human life and propose certain solutions: for example, restricting night-time traffic, changing air corridors, installing double glazing, or insulating walls [23]. It should reduce stress and cardiovascular problems and increase the satisfaction of city dwellers. In another study, "Smart city initiatives: Street lights," John M. Polimeni and Raluca Ioana Iorgulescu analyze the benefits of LED street lighting, noting that this solution offers greater energy efficiency and environmental sustainability, and reduces associated costs [24]. Meanwhile, the paper by Boban Davidovic et al., "Designing adaptable smart home environment based on resident's activity" shows that a smart city also encompasses private space, i.e., smart homes. The authors propose a smart city system that can predict residents' behavior at any time of the day and adapt to specific residents [25]. It means that smart city solutions can not only be effective and improve the quality of life in public spaces, but also be able to adapt to individual human needs in private spaces.

Thus, the ideas and values of a smart city form a certain ideological structure. Articles in the scientific literature have shown that a smart city is an ideological construct that specifies not only how to manage a city, but also how it should look, what ideas and values it should

promote. The main ideas and values of the smart city are transparency and openness, social inclusion, human rights and equality, sustainability and environmental protection, quality of life, and efficiency.

2.3. Creators and actors

Like any ideology, the smart city is created, supported, and implemented by certain actors. In the case of the smart city, the range of important actors is particularly broad. In the article "Informal collaboration: building a smart city through self-organized stakeholders," Hanane Rochdane and Oussama Assaber argue that interested parties (citizens, universities, private or public companies, non-governmental organizations) can successfully implement innovative smart city projects through informal collaboration [26]. Meanwhile, Carmen Săvulescu and Corina Georgiana Antonovici's analysis, "Fostering the digital change in a smart city," identifies even more actors. The authors argue that smart cities must bring together key stakeholders – mayors, local council chairpersons, city administrators, citizens, scientists, academics, social partners, investors, small and medium-sized enterprise managers, entrepreneurs, and representatives of non-governmental organizations – only then can the main challenges, best practices, and opportunities for cities be identified and reforms be implemented effectively [27]. These actors, who comprise the smart city ecosystem, are crucial in shaping the future of the city.

However, scientific literature highlights certain specific creators and actors whose influence on smart city development is particularly significant. One of them is the residents (city dwellers). Most authors emphasize that a smart city cannot exist without active residents, who become not only consumers but also co-creators and, at times, initiators of political decisions. In the article "People make a city smart", Amitava Basu argues that people living and working in cities must be an integral part of the smart city implementation process – the success of a smart city depends on smart people – without their participation, technological solutions lose all meaning [28]. It is also important that involving residents in city processes increases their satisfaction – it means that they are considered part of the city – and, at the same time, motivates them to cooperate more and help make the city a better place to live. This idea is further developed by Léo J. Portal and Brian Fabrègue, who in their article "Establishing Participative Smart Cities: Theory and Practice" assert that the participation of city residents in smart city decision-making processes is very important because it helps to create a robust and transparent democratic process; it is also beneficial for cities as it helps to discover innovative solutions, strengthens local activities, and provides support for newly proposed ideas [29]. Finally, Bissera Zankova's study "Smart citizens for Smart cities: the role of social media for expanding local democracy" emphasizes that human capital is an essential condition for the creation of smart societies and smart cities – their environment is nurtured by open and active citizens [30].

Although the role of residents in a smart city is obvious, the scientific literature also notes the need for a higher authority to ensure centralized city management and policy implementation. This authority is the government (local authorities). In his article "Smart leadership for smart cities," Takele Bekele Bayu argues that smart cities play an important role in shaping a flexible, inclusive, productive, sustainable, and resilient future for

humanity, in which local government is the main initiator, leader, financier, and coordinator of projects [31]. A very similar view is expressed in Jinghuan Chen and Wei Lu's study "What are the driving factors of innovation in Smart City?", which states that local authorities promote change in various areas of smart cities: technology, society, health, and safety. The authors also claim that as the transformation of smart cities progresses, government institutions play a key leadership role [32]. Of course, as one of the main players, local government institutions also shape smart city policy. It is noteworthy in Monika Namysłowska and Aleksandra Olbryk's work "Smart governance in Poland: The case study of the city of Łódź." In it, the authors show how municipal administrations are developing smart city strategies, implementing artificial intelligence solutions, and optimizing administrative processes – the case of Łódź illustrates the city's commitment to using smart city solutions to reduce administrative inefficiency and meet the changing needs of its residents [33].

It is also important to note that many smart city solutions are inseparable from the private sector, which, in many cases, not only provides certain innovative solutions but also adapts them to its own needs. Therefore, the third group of creators/actors of smart cities can be identified as private companies (i.e., technology and other private entities). In his article "Science parks and the regional socio-economic conditions for their development in Russia," Evgeny Torgashin examined the importance of science and technology parks for the development of smart cities. The researcher revealed that science and technology parks (private or public) are innovation hubs where the interests of government institutions, science, and business converge [34]; therefore, these parks become not only drivers of economic growth, but also disseminators of ideology – they reinforce the belief that innovation and technology are the main drivers of smart city progress. In her analysis "Urban marketing for smart cities," Stefany Cevallos explores a somewhat less common but inevitably important element of a smart city: marketing. The author reveals that business shapes the identity of a smart city, creates a city brand, attracts investment, and maintains international relations – close ties between local authorities and businesses are an important factor in achieving recognition and a good reputation for a city [35]. Finally, Ama Kissiwah Boateng's article "Green hotel development: Towards the building of resilient cities in Ghana" provides an insight into the development of eco-friendly hotels – most of them, in order to meet service classification requirements, adhere to the principles of environmental sustainability in their activities and seek to reduce the negative impact of their activities on nature, thus contributing to the development of a smart city sustainability vision among both customers and industry representatives [36].

Therefore, there is no single creator or actor of a smart city. The smart city as an ideological construct is shaped by a system of interrelated actors, including residents (city dwellers), public authorities (local government), and private entities. Each of them not only participates but also creates: residents empower the democratic element of the smart city and ensure that decisions are useful and relevant, local authorities shape smart city policy and create official strategic documents, while private actors help spread the word about the smart city and guarantee its further development and practical implementation. In this way, the smart city becomes a collectively created ideological construct.

2.4. Criticism: problems, shortcomings, and threats

The smart city is not viewed unequivocally. Although, as shown in previous chapters, this concept (which can also be considered as an ideological construct) is often presented in scientific literature as a positive, technologically advanced model that solves social problems, there are also studies that take a less favorable view of smart cities, revealing the problems, shortcomings, and threats posed by this ideological construct. Some authors present the full spectrum of problems associated with smart cities. For example, Garine Keshishian Siraki and Parvin Neginraz, in their study "Challenges of the Iranian government in smartening cities by emphasizing the model of good governance: Case study of Tehran," argue that the creation of smart cities faces various complex problems: there is often a lack of financial resources to implement smart city projects, as well as a need to adapt to political agendas, and existing cities already have many problems and compete with other cities for resources, which makes it impossible to implement all aspects of a smart city [37]. Khoren Mkhitarian et al. article "The smart city paradigm in the 21st century: Pathways and pitfalls" highlights even more problems of smart cities – administrative and legal challenges (policy fragmentation, regulatory gaps), social and behavioral challenges (public mistrust, low public engagement), and technological challenges (uneven infrastructure and cybersecurity vulnerabilities [38]. Although there are many such problems, the main topics highlighted in the scientific literature are security risks and the living conditions of residents in smart cities.

Modern surveillance cameras in a smart city can help maintain public order, for example, by making it easier to catch criminals or prevent planned crimes. However, at the same time, the growing dependence of smart cities on digital infrastructure is becoming a serious vulnerability. Vilma Tomco and Klorenta Janushi Pashaj in their paper "Enhancing investment through cyber security policies – Case of Albania" argue that globalization and the growth of smart cities have brought enormous benefits to society, but have also opened up new opportunities for governments, criminals, terrorists, private companies, and individuals, making it necessary to increase investment in resources dedicated to information system security [39]. Payment systems are an example of such potential threats. In the article "Towards robust security in smart payment systems: challenges and solutions," Pooya Teimoory discussed security challenges in smart payment systems, such as data and identity theft, fraud attacks, and account hijacking, and argued that addressing issues related to data and privacy breaches and fraudulent activities is becoming particularly important to ensure effective financial operations [40]. Meanwhile, Oleksandr Tsaruk and Maria Korniiets, in their study "Hybrid nature of modern threats for cybersecurity and information security," pointed out that cyberattacks have become way more dangerous – what used to be simple espionage and distributed denial-of-service (DDoS) attacks now cause significant physical damage to infrastructure, influence public opinion on important domestic issues, and interfere with elections [41]. It means that maintaining superiority in the information and technological sphere may be more difficult than with traditional weapons, as cyber "weapons" are much easier to reproduce and use.

However, modern technologies can also become tools for surveillance and control. In the article "A technological and legal investigation into how smart states deploy collective intelligence for security and surveillance purposes," Diana M. Popa argues that surveillance

technologies can become a threat if they are relied upon too heavily or if they are not adequately protected from malicious interference. The author states that surveillance systems installed during major events to ensure security are sometimes left in place for longer periods of time – even though the temporary threat no longer exists, surveillance continues, and should ensure the protection of permanent residents, but this also leads to constant surveillance, which can violate privacy and collect confidential information about individuals [42]. A similar security risk is expressed in Juliana Novaes' paper "Private information in public spaces: Facial recognition in the times of smart urban governance," which points out that a smart city inevitably creates a "smart person" and forces them to accept certain technologies in order to participate in social programs or urban public life – this means that people are not given the opportunity to choose whether they want to be included in various surveillance databases [43]. It poses the risk that residents will lose some of their freedoms, as they will be constantly monitored and controlled. One practical example of this was observed in China during the coronavirus pandemic. Ina Virtosu and Chen Li analyze this case in their study "Algorithms weighing lives and freedoms: The case of China's health code." The authors argue that the national health QR code system, implemented as a pandemic control measure, has been misused by both businesses and local authorities for commercial purposes, as well as to collect excessive information about residents, their contacts, and their movements [44]. Thus, although smart health measures appear to protect residents from threats, they can also be used for other purposes. It is particularly relevant in authoritarian states, which also invest heavily in smart city practices.

A smart person in a smart city will inevitably have to deal with a greater amount of information, as well as the easier dissemination of misinformation. In her article "Smart society – 'Fake analytica' style?", Bissera Zankova raised this problem of the smart city, arguing that one of the greatest challenges of our time is the rapid spread of fake news, propaganda, and hybrid warfare, which intensifies during periods of political change and social unrest. It can affect the mental state of members of society, undermine people's trust in democratic principles and values, and reinforce negative preconceptions, prejudices, and stereotypes [45]. Moreover, it is logical that there are certain reasons why these threats may become even more pronounced. Robertina Zdjelar and Robert Kelemen, in their work "The smart cities are implemented – Are citizens also 'smart'?" point out that older people's digital literacy is relatively low, which can affect not only their ability to distinguish real information from propaganda, but also their ability to use smart city e-services, increase their exclusion from the labor market, and undermine their self-confidence [46]. As a result, there are increasing calls for the development of appropriate, attractive learning tools that would enable all city residents to keep up with innovative developments and learn about new threats.

The issue of social exclusion is another important part of the criticism of smart cities in the scientific literature. In the study "The Making of Smart Citizenry: Decoding 'Smart Citizen'," Deepak Kumar argues that city residents are not adequately involved in smart city Initiatives – although they are presented as active participants, their role is essentially reduced to approving government projects, and often only the opinions of technologically savvy, educated people are taken into account, which can lead to the exclusion of residents

and the marginalization of certain groups [47]. Amitava Basu, in her paper "Engage citizens to smarten city governance," emphasizes once again that smart city governance structures often remain bureaucratically closed and politicized, public participation becomes symbolic, and real decision-making remains in the hands of the political elite ("top-down") [48]. Finally, the divide is noticeable not only between people but also between different settlements. Mariana Rosca and Rodica Ciobanu, in their article "Smart Cities and the Rural-Urban Divide in Moldova: Balancing Innovation and Tradition," claim that smart city initiatives are rarely implemented in rural areas, which makes the rural-urban divide even more pronounced, hinders the pursuit of equitable and sustainable development across the country, and forces more and more people to move to cities in search of a better life [49]. It highlights the need for greater efforts to ensure equal access to modern infrastructure and digital services.

Therefore, the smart city is often analyzed as a progressive and positive evolution of urban development. However, at the same time, it also poses many new challenges and problems that must be taken into account by both local government representatives and residents. Therefore, articles criticizing the smart city can also be found in scientific literature. Their main themes are related to new security threats, the information space, mechanisms for controlling residents, and increasing social and regional exclusion. It encourages an alternative view of the smart city, where progress does not necessarily mean only an improvement in the quality of life – it requires critical assessment, political and social responsibility.

3. Conclusions

This paper sought to examine a phenomenon rarely discussed in academic circles – the smart city as an ideological construction. It was done in four main directions: 1) origin and notion, 2) values and ideas, 3) creators and actors, and 4) analysis of criticism. The journal *The Smart Cities and Regional Development*, published by researchers of the National University of Political Studies and Public Administration, was chosen for the study because it examines the smart city not only as technological progress but also as a political phenomenon. Between 2017 and 2025, 177 articles were published in this journal, 46 of which were used as a basis for this paper.

The study showed that the smart city has evolved consistently, taking into account other urban development paradigms. The main goal is to use the latest technologies to provide public services more efficiently, increase the transparency of city governance, and support local democracy. However, a smart city is not just about technology – it is also a community, sustainable practices, and improving the quality of life. The concept discusses how each of these aspects contributes to the existence of a smart city. It allows us to say that a smart city can be considered a modern ideological construct that shapes urban visions, priorities, and development directions.

As the analysis revealed, a smart city encompasses many different ideas and values. Scientific literature most often emphasizes democratic transparency and openness, social inclusion, human rights, equality, sustainability, environmental conservation, and the

importance of quality of life and more efficient city functioning. It allows us to perceive a smart city not only as a set of technical solutions but also as an ideological model that offers a certain vision of a morally just city.

Obviously, both the smart city and its ideas need to be created and implemented by someone. Although all smart city stakeholders can be considered participants, the most important ones are residents, government authorities, and the private sector. The scientific literature expects them to work together and be both creators and actors who implement and use smart city solutions and services. It is the interaction between these actors that determines whether the ideological aspects of a smart city will be successfully realized in practice.

If only articles that evaluate smart cities positively were analyzed, this ideological construction could be considered almost perfect and applicable to any city in the world. However, there is a considerable amount of critical research in the scientific literature that reveals the problems and challenges that smart cities can pose. Developing technologies create new security threats, make it easier to spread misinformation, and enable the control, monitoring, and tracking of the behavior of residents. Furthermore, growing social and regional disparities cannot be ignored, which is why, as has been demonstrated, the principles of smart cities are increasingly being applied not only in cities but also in rural areas and even at the national level.

In summary, the smart city can and should be analyzed not only as technological and urban progress but also as an ideological construct that directly influences political decisions, citizens' rights, freedoms, and the direction of social development. Therefore, future research could continue the topic explored in this paper and continue to re-examine the changing view of the smart city as an ideological construction. In addition, it may be interesting and useful to compare the views of different journals on the aspects of smart city as an ideological construct discussed in this paper, especially given that their interpretation may vary depending on the region, for example, journals published in the East may emphasize different aspects than those in the West.

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