

Taking the initiative

Gilles Betis tells the Parliament Magazine how IEEE is collaborating with cities to help create modern, sustainable urban environments

Does your city have the right stuff? That is the question that IEEE has been asking across the globe as part of its smart cities initiative. But what is a smart city? For Gilles Betis, IEEE's lead on its smart cities initiative working group, it is something that is "challenging to define". "Most of the time people think that smart cities are about technology, but this is not really the case. If you put this question to the people in charge of city governance, they don't really have a technology problem. They have some challenges about housing, traffic, pollution, water, energy, health, wellbeing, security and they have to face all these questions in their city. What they want is to develop a city which is smart, but that term means nothing by itself. They want a city that is attractive to people, to business, a city that is sustainable economically and environmentally, a city that is adaptive, inclusive and resilient, where they can design governance and business processes that are robust and stable."

IEEE's smart cities initiative foresees a world of ever-increasing urbanisation, with an urban population expected to grow from 3.6 billion to 6.3 billion by 2050. By this time, there will be huge pressure on the world's cities to provide sustainable solutions for populations facing problems of resource scarcity and increasing demand. Helping urban areas prepare for this future is at the core of IEEE's vision for smart cities.

The initiative, which closed for applications on May 16, will be formed of "10 cities, equally distributed across the continents", said Betis. The Mexican

municipality of Guadalajara is the pilot project and will be one of IEEE's 10 participants. "The cities must have a minimum size and a rich ecosystem, but not be too big," said Betis, who stressed that the initiative intends to "create a set of standards", and also will be a "repository of good practices". He was also keen to emphasise that the initiative would not involve large-scale funding, but would instead make use

of IEEE's "international networks and knowledge that can mobilised". Guadalajara has been working with a team of IEEE experts since October 2013 that have been collaborating with the municipality in the coordination and management of essential services and infrastructures. By collaborating with private, public and volunteer sectors, these experts can better understand the issues and solutions required to deal with the huge expected increases in population.

Guadalajara was chosen as the pilot because it was already "driving the transition" to being a smart city with the Ciudad Creativa Digital project, said Betis, who added that this was one of the key criteria for the initiative. "IEEE will not create the dynamic for smartification from scratch," he stressed, saying that any city considered for the initiative must have "started to draw up plans and have concrete funding".

Betis also underlined the changing "relationship between cities and governance", saying, "Democracy today is quite different thanks to ICT technologies. Previously, governance was mainly managed in a top-down way, but citizens have different expectations about their level of participation. Human links at the basis of the rural society have declined in the cities, but these are being redeveloped through communication technologies," said Betis. He highlighted the importance of tapping into this "new energy" from citizens, saying that IEEE wanted to help "provide the way for people to succeed in this transversal and bottom-up approach".

With the final list of participating municipalities expected to be announced by the end of summer, IEEE will be working to help make 10 cities smarter and therefore better able to face a challenging future. For Betis, while the concept can be considered complex, the aim was simple, "This is about creating a clean, economic and environmentally sustainable place for citizens to live, work and play," he concluded.

Gilles Betis is chair of the IEEE smart cities initiative steering committee

