

An Indian-Australian research partnership

Project Title:	Can unsafe be smart?: Smart city governance and women's safety in Urban India	
Project Number	HSS0762	
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Research Clusters:

Research Themes:

Highlight which of the Academy's CLUSTERS this project will address? <i>(Please nominate JUST one. For more information, see www.iitbmonash.org)</i>		Highlight which of the Academy's Theme(s) this project will address? <i>(Feel free to nominate more than one. For more information, see www.iitbmonash.org)</i>	
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4	CSE, IT, Optimisation, Data, Sensors, Systems, Signal Processing, Control	4	Water
5	Earth Sciences and Civil Engineering (Geo, Water, Climate)	5	Nanotechnology
6	Bio, Stem Cells, Bio Chem, Pharma, Food	6	Biotechnology and Stem Cell Research
7	Semi-Conductors, Optics, Photonics, Networks, Telecomm, Power Eng	7	Humanities and social sciences
8	HSS, Design, Management	8	Design

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The research problem

A common but pertinent critique of the 'smart city' concept is that it attempts to reimagine cities and urban areas as spaces and systems that are apolitical. Cities are broken up into sectors and areas which are to be managed; and complex problems are reduced to issues of efficiency or a lack of infrastructure. Solutions are techno-managerial: neat and quick, usually including the use of professional expertise and digital technologies. In other words, smart cities are technology- and infrastructure-centric – which is not necessarily problematic – but tend to overlook crucial social dimensions of city life and how these might impact the vulnerable and marginalized particularly women. This can have consequences on the way women perceive the smart city and vice versa.

One such dimension is safety. In any given Indian city, women find themselves far more unsafe as compared to men. If we add intersections of caste, class, area (of the city), occupation, and social capital, some women find themselves even more vulnerable. The question of safety, which is included under the smart city rhetoric but usually “solved” using only technology, offers us a way to study gender-blindness in urban policy. This is ironical, given that the urban does have all the wherewithal to make and keep a city safe.

Despite having few real-world examples to go by, the smart city is an attractive concept. As the world, and the developing world in particular, becomes more urban, policy and governance will need to plan and govern growing cities so as to ensure equitable, sustainable and democratic development. Already Indian cities are witnessing considerable inequality and marginalization. Cities that grow in an unplanned and haphazard manner tend to retain and deepen these trends, creating oases of wealth and prosperity in urban spaces that are mostly poor and deprived. The growing emphasis on urban planning and development is a step in the right direction. The question we must now ask as researchers and policy-makers is, what should this planning and development look like? And more importantly, who is it for?

Proponents of the smart city concept contend that urban problems, even the most complex ones, can be solved through the adoption and implementation of the appropriate technologies. These technologies will benefit all city residents irrespective of class, geography, caste, gender, etc. The perceived apolitical-ness of technology – already debatable – is assumed to permeate into policies that adopt and implement these technologies. Furthermore, it is argued that urban

planning and governance need not be exclusively a state activity. The private sector, consulting firms and ICT firms in particular, can play a pivotal role in creating and managing a smart city.

First and foremost, this project, 'Can unsafe be smart?' problematizes the concept of the 'smart city' as well as India's Smart City Mission (SCM). In particular, it aims to study urban governance and governance structures under the SCM – what does 'smart governance' look like and how does it function? How is urban governance impacted by the introduction of ICT? What are the other intended or unintended consequences of smart solutions on the structures of city governance? And finally, how are citizens impacted by these new iterations of governance?

While the questions raised above relate to governance more at a theoretical level, this project would also like to study the outcomes of these changing forms of governance on urban life. Studying the issue of safety under the SCM offers the chance to study the interesting intersection of urban governance, smartness, use of ICT through surveillance and generally an authoritarian approach exemplified by concepts like "Integrated Command and Control Structure". Studying safety also offers an opportunity to study the outcomes of depoliticizing the city space.

Since the SCM fails to ask who has the right to the smart city, it also fails to ask who in the city is unsafe and who *makes* the city unsafe. But is the issue of safety apolitical? Can it be solved with the introduction of surveillance technologies? Do these technologies make a city more open and accessible? Do these technologies make a city safer? For whom? If a smart city must necessarily be a safe city, what is the role of urban governance in bringing about and ensuring this safety? Do we need to reimagine smart governance if we aim to make cities safer for all residents?

While academia has drawn links between smart and the urban, and between the urban and safe, it has thus far not studied the links between smart and safe. This project aims to study what gender sensitive urban policy will look like; in particular, which features and processes could be incorporated in order to make cities safe for women. These policy changes could be scalable for other urban areas as well. Furthermore, this study would offer insight into the policy changes required in order to address the safety of other vulnerable groups in urban India.

Smart cities have the potential to lead by example by making urban spaces safe spaces. More importantly, smart city policy could potentially bring about a paradigm shift towards more inclusive, equitable, and just urban governance.

Project aims

This project has the following aims:

- a) To study the concept of a 'smart city' and the Smart City Mission (SCM) in India. The SCM will be studied within a historical context for a more robust understanding, thus shedding light on urban policy in independent India, especially since the late 1980s when India began to liberalize its economy. The Jawaharlal Nehru National Urban Renewal Mission (JNNURM) will be studied in some detail as a precursor to the SCM.
- b) One of the major focuses of this project will be governance under the Smart City Mission. On one hand it will study urban governance under the SCM in India, focusing especially on governance in Tier II cities. On the other hand, it will also study

governance on a more general level, inquiring into the impacts of technology and private sector participation on governance structures, democracy, citizenship participation, and access to basic services.

- c) In order to instrumentalize the study of smart city governance, the project will delve into urban safety. While the straightforward argument is that a smart city must also be a safe one, the project will raise questions pertaining to who the city should be safe for, who it is, often inevitably, kept safe from, and implicitly who has *the right to the city*. Within the context of the smart city, the project will lay special emphasis on surveillance and its pros and cons.
- d) Tying these aspects up, the project aims to draw the important linkages between governance, smartness, safety, and surveillance in the urban Indian context.
- e) It aims to question the concept of the 'smart city' and whether urban governance can or should be apolitical.

Expected outcomes

The expected outcomes of this project can be outlined under:

- a) Deepening the understanding of 'smart cities' in the Indian context. This will include an analysis of the Smart City Mission as well as the study of some Tier II Indian cities which have been selected as smart cities. Importantly, the project aims to place the Mission itself within the context of other urban policies in independent India rather than treat it as a stand-alone policy.
- b) Understanding the impacts of ICT application and private sector participation on urban governance structures.
- c) Understanding safety infrastructure in certain Tier II Indian cities and how what 'smart solutions' for enhanced safety entail. In particular, this project aims to throw light on surveillance techniques (or potential surveillance techniques) in Indian smart cities. Studying safety in cities offers the opportunity to demystify techno-managerial solutions and reintroduce sociology, culture, and politics into discriminatory or over-simplified 'smart solutions'.
- d) The project finally aims to offer policy solutions to improve systems of governance and safety infrastructure for the city has a whole. Finally, it aims to reimagine 'smartness' as a concept that is also equitable, just, and democratic.

How will the project address the Goals of the above Themes?

The project falls under the broad theme of Humanities and Social Sciences. More specifically, it addresses issues under political science, women's studies, and urban governance.

By studying current policy issues in India, the project aims to expand the knowledge base of the smart city rhetoric, urban governance in contemporary India and how urban policy serves the needs and rights of vulnerable/ marginalized groups, in this case women. Furthermore, the project's aim to make applicable policy recommendations makes it more relevant to issues of urban governance.

Capabilities and Degrees Required

The students will have completed a Master's degree in Public Policy, Political Science, Sociology, Urban Studies, Gender Studies or in any relevant social science discipline from a top university/institute with a strong/excellent academic record. Demonstrated ability to apply relevant theoretical perspectives and employ methodological approaches will be essential. Prior research experience in the social sciences will be desirable.

Potential Collaborators

National Centre for South Asian Studies, Monash
Centre for Women's Studies and Gender Research, Monash
Centre for Urban Science and Engineering (C-USE), IITB

Select up to **(4)** keywords from the Academy's approved keyword list (**available at <http://www.iitbmonash.org/becoming-a-research-supervisor/>**) relating to this project to make it easier for the students to apply.

Urban policy, gender studies, smart cities, women's safety