Editorial: From Smart Systems to Smart Governance

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The present issue of Smart Cities and Regional Development demonstrates, with unusual clarity, that the contemporary debate on smartness has moved beyond the narrow fascination with devices, platforms, and technical novelty. The articles brought together in Vol. 10 No. 2 (2026) suggest a more mature proposition: a city, an institution, or a public system is not smart merely because it is digital. It becomes smart only when digital transformation is translated into better governance, stronger resilience, broader participation, institutional learning, and public value [1]. Across a remarkably diverse set of contributions – from fragile-state policing to citizen participation, from Digital Twins to travel regulation, from artificial intelligence to education and city branding – the issue consistently returns to one core question: how can innovation be governed so that it strengthens, rather than weakens, the social and institutional fabric?

One of the strengths of this issue is its willingness to stretch the smart governance conversation beyond conventional urban technology themes. The opening article on the collapse of the Afghan National Police may initially seem distant from the usual terrain of smart city scholarship [2]. Yet it addresses a fundamental prerequisite of all governance innovation: the existence of institutions that are legitimate, resilient, and locally rooted. Its analysis of fragmentation, donor dependency, corruption, and leadership failure reminds us that no governance model – smart or otherwise – can endure where institutional capacity is hollow. The lesson is sobering and important: public reform imposed from above, without local ownership and social legitimacy, remains fragile even when heavily resourced.

The issue then turns toward a central concern of contemporary urban studies: citizen participation. The study of Patna's experience under India's Smart Cities Mission offers a necessary corrective to technology-centred urbanism [3]. Its findings point to weak civic awareness, limited familiarity with local government institutions, and modest use of digital tools for actual grievance redressal. The implication is unmistakable. Digital channels do not automatically create civic engagement. Participation depends on awareness, accessibility, trust, and institutional design. In other words, the smart city cannot be reduced to an app-based interface; it must also be a political and civic project in which citizens understand where power sits and how they can act upon it.

A more infrastructural and systems-oriented perspective is offered by the article on the integration of Digital Twins with Management Information Systems [4]. This contribution advances one of the issue's most ambitious ideas: that predictive simulation should not remain isolated in engineering environments, but must be integrated into decision-making architectures if cities are to move from reactive management to anticipatory governance. By placing MIS at the centre of Digital Twin intelligence, the article recasts smart urbanism as a problem of coordination, interoperability, and strategic foresight. It is a notable reminder that the real promise of digital urban systems lies not in data abundance itself, but in the administrative ability to convert data into coherent public action.

Questions of economic development are taken up in the study of state support for digital small and medium-sized businesses in Georgia. Here too, the issue resists easy technological optimism. State programs matter; they can foster entrepreneurship, digital services, and employment. Yet the article also shows that digital transformation remains uneven where access to finance, regional inclusion, skills, and long-term monitoring are

weak [5]. This is an important contribution to regional development debates. It reminds us that innovation policy must be judged not by its rhetoric, but by its capacity to broaden opportunity and strengthen productive capability across territories.

The issue also addresses the increasingly delicate intersection between digitalisation and rights. The article on EU Digital Travel explores a theme of growing importance in European public administration: whether digitised travel credentials and automated border processes genuinely facilitate mobility, or whether they risk intensifying surveillance, exclusion, and privacy concerns [6]. A related tension appears in the contribution on agentic AI, which shows that adoption advances most rapidly where stakes are low and regulation is lighter, while high-risk domains remain rightly cautious because accountability, explainability, and human oversight cannot be treated as optional [7]. Together, these articles show that the future of digital governance will be shaped not only by what technology can do, but by what constitutional, ethical, and institutional boundaries it must respect.

The contribution on smart education in the Ukrainian university context adds another essential dimension: resilience as a civic capacity [8]. By focusing on formal and informal education, media literacy, citizenship skills, and the third mission of the university, the article expands the meaning of smartness beyond administration and infrastructure. In times marked by war, disinformation, and hybrid threats, resilience is not merely technical preparedness; it is also social learning, democratic awareness, and institutional responsibility. This perspective is especially valuable because it connects smart development to education in its deepest sense: the formation of capable citizens and capable public servants.

Finally, the article on city marketing in New York City, Boston, and Dallas–Fort Worth reminds readers that smart city narratives are also symbolic constructions [9]. Branding, however, is not treated here as superficial promotion, but as a governance capability that depends on credibility, partnerships, stakeholder coordination, and resident-facing value. This is an apt closing note for the issue. Smart cities are not made persuasive by slogans alone. They are convincing when communication aligns with delivery, when innovation aligns with lived experience, and when the promise of modernity is matched by institutional substance.

Taken together, the articles in this volume point toward a more demanding research agenda for the field. They suggest that the next stage of smart cities and regional development will not be defined by technology in isolation, but by the quality of the institutions that deploy it, the citizens who engage with it, and the values that discipline its use. That is the larger intellectual contribution of this issue: it shifts the conversation from smart systems to smart governance.

References

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