



Between Social Infrastructure and Social Innovation: Bidding for Urban Investment in the Smart City



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Guiding Question:

How does bidding or competing for urban investment produce more inclusive and equitable future cities?

About the Project:

In 2017, the Government of Canada launched the Smart Cities Challenge Canada competition. The federal government challenged communities and cities to develop ‘bold’ and ‘ambitious’ proposals to improve the lives of residents using data, connected technology, and collaborative social and political infrastructures.



Research Aim:

This research project examines the neoliberal discursive production of social innovation within broader global conversations on smart cities. With a particular empirical focus on the City of Toronto’s proposal submission for Canada’s Smart City Challenge in 2017, the main aim of this research is to problematize urban challenges around trending global discourses; such as innovation and smart cities. We argue the competing and bidding for urban investment further deepens the uneven provision of physical and social infrastructure, and the marginalization of vulnerable communities in cities.

Research Goal:

This research project examines how the high profile, public competitive bidding process of the Smart City Challenge reflects a shift in federal major expenditure programs from needs-based resource allocation to competitive allocation, as seen in city challenges in the U.S. and the U.K. The nature of competitive city challenges can be seen as a branding exercise, the winners essentially convincing the jury that their city is or has the potential to be ‘smarter.’

