metropolis

NEWS

Digitalisation: an opportunity or an obstacle to building more accessible metropolises?

Wednesday 22/12/2021

The global health crisis has highlighted the role that local governments play in many aspects, as they have largely been in charge of managing the Covid-19 emergency. Furthermore, and due to the changes brought about by the pandemic, we are in the process of rethinking the city in terms of planning, mobility, public space and immediate access to services. One way to have easy access to services is through digital technology, or in other words, via **digitalisation**.

However, while this process has been underway in many cities for years, access to e-government in other areas is still a long way off. This was a topic for debate among the cities representatives invited to present their experiences and policies in the webinar “Metropolitan governance in Africa: case studies”, the third and penultimate session of the course co-organised with UCLG Africa about metropolitan governance in Africa.

The webinar was held under the framework of the African Forum of Managers and Territorial Development

Institutes (FAMI). The topic chosen for the 5th year of the forum was "**The Digital and Intelligent transformation of Local Africa: the time to act is now!**".

Kate Joseph, Deputy Director of Strategy and Research at the City of Johannesburg, focused her presentation on the context in which the city finds itself in terms of population, and how they are responding to current citizen needs through different initiatives and policies that focus on increasing quality of life by **making mobility and administrative procedures easier thanks to digitalisation**. However, Joseph also presented the obstacles they face in terms of governance, such as challenges related to funding, political changes or a legal system that is lagging behind.

In Fez, work is being carried out to turn the metropolis into a smart city in terms of administration, lighting, urban mobility and solar energy production. However, as Mohamed El Khettab, Vice-President of the Communal Council of Fez, explained, **a smart city is not only "smart" in the digital sense—it is also a city that offers better quality of life to its inhabitants**. That is why, in Fez, they are also working to allow citizens to enjoy public space by creating green spaces and leisure areas so that people can spend quality time outside private space.

Not far from Fez, in Rabat, the **CASAURBA project** in the Casablanca-Settat region has created a collaborative digital platform that guarantees 100% dematerialised management of urban planning authorisations in over 36 municipalities. Mostafa Kheirredine, Urban Science Researcher, explains that the CASAURBA project manages all the procedures related to filing and delivering urban planning permissions, and everything in between, when the activity is planned and managed by an innovative PPP model (Public Private Partnership).

Although the webinar aimed to present experiences and case studies on digitalisation and resilience in African local governments, representatives from the United Nations University, the city of Bilbao and the private sector also participated to provide further perspectives on how digital solutions are being implemented in other sectors.

Take a look at this infographic on the third session of this course:

More information about the learning program here.