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Bridging citizen & professional perspectives on smart cities

Objective: Smart city initiatives are often driven by a limited subset of values like cost-effectiveness, convenience and safety. Our objective was to trigger frame reflection among smart city professionals to stimulate the development of more socially responsible smart cities.

Materials and methods: We first elicited smart city visions from about 140 citizens with our street theater and board game in and around three community centers in Amsterdam. In parallel, we elicited smart city visions from 20 smart city professionals through in-depth interviews. We then used these lay and professional visions to create a theater dialogue for our participants so that they could exchange and potentially broaden their visions on smart cities.

Results: Citizens and professionals displayed diverse visions on the smart city, showing differences between as well as within those actor groups. Although smart city professionals used a limited range of visions in their work practice (in line with the interests of their organizations), they did relate to alternative, public visions through inner dialogue. This research allowed them to open up about that inner dialogue and in effect gain a better understanding of their own and other perspectives.

Discussion: By functioning as a proxy of the public debate on smart cities, the theatrical dialogue triggered frame reflection among professionals. In order for smart cities to add social value, citizen and professional perspectives need to be bridged in a playful manner, thereby opening up smart city practices.