Region UK
Young BCCG London –
Inaugural event 2019

Smart City London

On 7 February, the British Chamber of Commerce in Germany's London Young BCCG held its inaugural event with 50 guests from various industries. The new networking group will focus on discussing future-oriented topics and promoting relationships between young professionals from different sectors.

The first event themed 'Smart City London' was suitably hosted in the centre of London at law firm Brown Rudnick's 18th century Mayfair town-house office. A panel of industry representatives explored the meaning of London as a smart city. The discussion included an analysis of a smart city's drivers and challenges, and a glimpse into the future of London as a smart city. The panel consisted of Jules Chappell OBE, Managing Director of London & Partners, Patrick Kraft, Energy Design & Sustainability at Drees & Sommer, Dee Corsi, Chief Operating Officer of The New West End Company, Sepi Arani, Head of Growth at HiyaCar, and Benjamin Kott, Chief Executive Officer of Fabriq.

Drivers & Challenges

In terms of smart city drivers, the panel agreed that the increased importance of data, in particular data analytics, was the key to making a city smarter. Dee Corsi revealed that the New West End Company is launching a data project using mobile technology, international flight data and sales data to understand

customer behaviours and trends. Jules Chappell explained that making London a smart city is also a top priority of London & Partners, the Mayor of London's promotional agency. Its London Data Store initiative serves as an example. There, data is anonymised so that it can be used to spark innovation. Start-ups such as Citymapper were established based on this data being available.

The data gathered through the development of London as a smart city is also being used to address the city's environmental challenges, such as analysing London's air pollution, detecting overfilled bins or optimising street cleaning operations. In line with this, Patrick Kraft explained that a key concept in the property industry is ‚cradle to cradle': sustainability through the use of recyclable construction materials and products. This approach enables buildings to be constructed in a more efficient, economical and environmentally friendly manner.

In Ben Kott's view, however, this is not enough. Fabriq gathers data from various sources within a building and analyses its energy use in order to achieve greater efficiency. In his view, the technologies to make London smart already exist, but the various programmes and approaches are not linked to allow for an integrated and ‚smart' operation of the city. The challenge for a smart city remains to 'connect the dots'.

The panel agreed that the ultimate challenge is to balance a traditional city like London with innovative technologies. As Sepi Arani explained, London's topography, its multitude of councils and its division by the Thames make it one of the most challenging examples of making a city smart in

terms of mobility. This, however, makes London more favourable for peer-to-peer sharing business models like HiyaCar (as opposed to owner-operator models, which need high upfront investments). Ultimately, this fundamental change in mindset from ownership to a sharing economy will benefit London as money stays within the community and people are able to earn a little extra cash with their property or car.

The Future

The panel's discussion on the sharing economy was naturally followed by the next question; what will be the next disruptor in the smart city space?

Sepi Arani described the growth of the sharing economy, especially in the area of mobility. He went further to reveal that, in the near future, there won't be an app for each service but one app that covers all services (i.e. bus, train, taxi, etc.) and one fee that allows you to use all these services.

Artificial Intelligence will also have an important role in smart cities, the panel agreed. In their view, whilst AI can be a threat to white and blue collar workers, skilled machines will also propel people to emphasise their human side and imagination. London, the panel concurred, is a place where people are free to be who they want to be and AI can contribute to this freedom even more by giving people the chance to focus on humanity. In Jules Chappell's view, this should be seen as an opportunity rather than a threat. Cities that are able to adapt to this change will prosper, she said.

The panel's insights were concluded with a warm round of applause from the audience, who continued the evening with drinks and follow-up discussions. The success and positive feedback of this inaugural event provided plenty of food for thought about the London Young BCCG's next event. |

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