



## **American Journalist: Criticize Your Government And Facebook Might Censor You Too**

If, as and when Facebook-like tech giants decide to collude with government to impose their worldview on their constituents, it will be game over for all other forms of government, worldwide. In the case of Mark Zuckerberg, remember that he has highly praised China's Technocratic model of government, which is highly censored, repressive and manipulative. How could he not impose his beliefs on Facebook America? □ TN Editor

Facebook said my post's image of a violent FBI raid 'incorrectly triggered our automation tools.' But it wasn't the first time an iconic image vanished.

Responding to Russian-funded political advertisements, Facebook chairman Mark Zuckerberg declared last month that "we will do our part to defend against nation states [attempting to spread misinformation.](#)" But Facebook is effectively sowing disinformation by kowtowing to

foreign regimes and censoring atrocities such as [ethnic cleansing in Myanmar](#). In the name of repressing fake news and hate speech, Facebook is probably suppressing far more information than Americans realize.

Facebook blocked a post of mine last month for the first time since I joined it nine years ago. I was seeking to repost a blog article I had written on Janet Reno, the controversial former attorney general who died last year. I initially thought that Facebook was having [technical glitches](#) (no novelty). But I checked the page and saw the official verdict: “Could not scrape URL because it has been blocked.”

“Pshaw!” I said, or some other one-syllable epithet. I copied the full text of the article into a new blog post. Instead of using “Janet Reno, Tyrant or Saint?” as the core headline, I titled it: “[Janet Reno, American Saint](#).” Instead of a 1993 photo of the [burning Branch Davidian compound](#) in Waco, Texas, I substituted an irreproachable official portrait of Reno. Bingo — Facebook instantly accepted that crosspost. I then added a preface detailing the previous blockage and explaining why I sainted Reno. The ironic headline [attracted far more attention](#) and spurred a torrent of [reposts by think tanks](#) and [other websites](#).

I contacted Facebook’s press office to learn why the initial post was blocked. Facebook spokeswoman Ruchika Budhreja checked into the matter and notified me that I would be permitted to post that link. “But why was it blocked?” I replied. She responded: “There was an image in the post that incorrectly triggered our automation tools. That issue has been corrected.”

So when did showing the home of more than [70 people engulfed in flames](#) after a FBI assault become beyond the pale? Facebook presumably blocked everyone who sought to share that image from the most vivid law enforcement debacle of the 1990s.

This was not the first time Facebook erased an iconic image that the U.S. government would be happy to see vanish. Facebook likely deleted thousands of postings of the [1972 photo of a young Vietnamese girl](#) running naked after a U.S. plane dropped napalm on her village.

After coming under severe criticism last year, Facebook announced that it would [no longer suppress that image](#). Unfortunately, Facebook is unlikely to disclose a list of the images it bans. Because [most Americans are clueless](#) about current events and recent history, they will have little idea of what vanishes into the [Memory Hole](#).

Zuckerberg also promised last month to continue working “to ensure our community is a [platform for all ideas](#) and force for good in democracy.” But the Facebook vision of democracy does not include freedom of information. Facebook instructs its employees that “we will not censor content unless a nation has demonstrated the [political will to enforce](#) its censorship laws.” But in such cases, Facebook happily teams up with heavy-handed politicians to crush dissent and suppress heretical notions.

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# Propaganda: UN Urges Media To Drive Narratives On Its New Urban Agenda

The UN's New Urban Agenda has little direct appeal to the masses, so the logical Technocrat solution is to manipulate the media into selling it for them. Looking beyond the Utopian promises, the UN's policies will establish a global Technocracy and Scientific Dictatorship. □ TN Editor

Following Habitat III, the United Nations [Conference](#) on Housing and Sustainable Urban Development, which took place in Quito Ecuador 2016, and the emerging need to further build the capacity of the media in reporting Housing and sustainable urban development, the UN Information Centre (UNIC) Lagos and the UN-Habitat Nigeria have organised a Media Workshop on Post-Habitat III Conference/ New Urban Agenda.

Speaking on the role of the media in the New Urban Agenda, the National Information Officer of UNIC, Oluseyi Soremekun, called on the media to drive the new narratives about urban development in Nigeria by getting acquainted with the New Urban Agenda (NUA) as well as relevant policies and plans of the government on [housing and urban development](#).

'If you are not conversant with the necessary NUA frameworks; the National Housing Policy as well as other National Plans, you cannot hold the government accountable to its commitment to a new urban agenda that will redress the way cities and human settlements are planned, financed, developed, governed and managed. He noted.

'Media should give prominence to the issues of sustainable housing, urban development and slum upgrading. Soremekun said, 'Media should rise above sensationalising and politicising issues of urban development. Rather, they should interrogate the existing housing and urban development policy and plan and juxtapose these with government actions.

The workshop held on Thursday 26 October 2017 in Abuja, and attended by twenty-five participants from the media, Federal Ministry of Power, Works and Housing (FMPWH) and the UN system, was aimed at strengthening awareness among journalists and [media professionals](#) of the challenges of urbanisation and the global efforts to address them, notably the outcomes of the Habitat III conference in Quito; developing the capacity of journalists to engage constructively with policy makers, professionals and government functionaries to actively follow-up on implementation of the New Urban Agenda; and facilitating citizens' participation in the New Urban Agenda.

In his presentation, the [Program Manager](#) of UN-Habitat Nigeria, Mr Kabir Yari explained that the New Urban Agenda is an action-oriented document which sets global standards of achievement in sustainable urban development, rethinking the way we build, manage, and live in cities through cooperation with all levels of government, relevant stakeholders, and other urban actors such as the private sector.

He noted that the agenda also 'provides the underpinning for actions to address climate change and reaffirms our global commitment to sustainable urban development as a critical step for realizing sustainable development in an integrated and coordinated manner.'

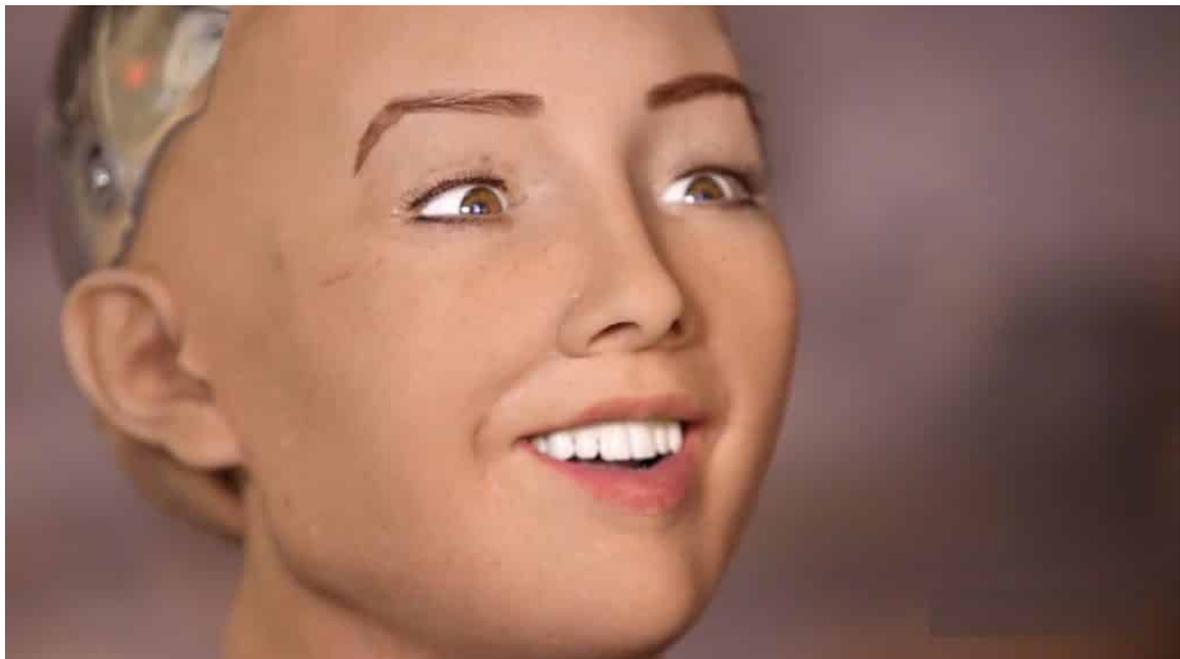
Mr Yari added that the shared vision and commitments include: 'Cities and human settlements must be for every one; referred as the 'right to the city. It entails equal rights including the right to adequate housing; gender equality, basic urban services etc.; Urban equity and inclusiveness leaving no one behind and addressing issues of poverty, deprivation in cities, socio-economic and cultural diversity.

Discussing the 'Challenges and Response to Urbanisation in Nigeria, the Director of Urban & Regional Development (URD) Department, Federal Ministry of Power, Works and Housing (FMPWH), Mr L. C. Anikamadu, explained that 'Nigeria boasts of more than ten regional centres which have established status of 'millionaire cities'. In addition, she has several other fast growing population centres which have assumed very strong urban identity due to administrative, commercial, ethnic, transport connectivity and other intrinsic peculiarities.

Mr Anikamadu noted that as urbanization creates hordes of cities and townships, several intimidating challenges of different shades follow in its wake. 'Perhaps most significantly, urbanization has created a huge class of 'urban poor' who live in unimaginable conditions, abject misery and lack of [basic necessities](#) of life. He added.

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## **Fortune: We're All Getting Played By Sophia The Robot**

It is true that Sophia the robot is the magician's foil to lead people to erroneous observations and conclusions about Artificial Intelligence. In his book, *Connectography*, Dr. Parag Khanna hints at a better picture of the underlying and enabling role of AI: "*We are building this global society without a global leader. Global order is no longer something that can be dictated or controlled from the top down. Globalization is itself the order.*" □ TN Editor

While folks are fixated on the [journey](#) of Sophia the robot, I'd like to point out that artificial intelligence is a technology, a platform, and a

concept shared by government, industry, and academia. AI is not an individual, object, or [sentient](#) being. And AI definitely doesn't have a gender.

The connections and distinctions between AI and robots are more nuanced as well. Indeed, some robots run on AI technology that allows them to operate independently, learn from surroundings, and interact with people. However, there are a lot of AI platforms, technologies, and innovations that have nothing to do with robots—and never will.

The fundamental—and [commonly sensationalized](#)—question of whether robots can be human also misses a crucial point. It's not about whether AI can help robots become human. Robots should not pretend to be human at all. AI can help people solve human problems without assuming a sentient role in society. People building AI can help fellow humans by focusing on problem solving and enhancing productivity.

AI, for its part, is not nearly advanced enough—yet—to be able to claim human-level intelligence, empathy, or possession of several fundamental qualities that make people human. Giving AI a human platform—and over-humanizing the technology, in general—creates more problems than it solves. It also presents the global community with a false sense of what AI actually is, what the technology can do, and why people like me dedicate their lives to building AI platforms.

I believe it's significantly more important for technologists to communicate the benefits of the AI technology itself, rather than focus on examples of robots that do not solve real issues, perpetuate gender perceptions, and reveal data-driven biases. The technology community and global society need to work on developing useful and purposeful AI that solves human problems like complex health care and transportation issues, and business problems like boosting productivity and filling gaps in technical expertise across disciplines. We need AI that neutralizes biases by taking gender out of the equation completely and using objective data sources to build, grow, and learn from interactions with human counterparts.

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# **EPA Cancels Scientist Discussion Of Climate Change**

The EPA's new bias against Global Warming and Obama's Clean Energy plan has angered Technocrats who are pushing for control over all energy. In this report, a New York Times reporter is interviewed by NPR to jointly bash industry and the new direction of the EPA. □ TN Editor  
*New York Times* reporter Lisa Friedman talks with Melissa Block about EPA administrator Scott Pruitt's latest moves to curb his agency's regulations and shift the focus away from climate change.

## **Transcript**

MELISSA BLOCK, HOST:

This week, without explanation, the Environmental Protection Agency canceled the speaking appearances of three EPA scientists who were scheduled to talk at a conference about climate change. In another development, the agency is backing away from a congressionally

mandated review of asbestos and other toxins. These are the latest developments in EPA Administrator Scott Pruitt's drive to shift his agency's focus, which critics say amounts to gutting the mission of environmental protection. Lisa Friedman covers energy and environment policy for The New York Times. Thanks for coming in.

LISA FRIEDMAN: Thank you for having me.

BLOCK: And let's start with the cancellation this past week of the EPA scientists' speeches on climate change. One of them was to have been the keynote address. Is this emblematic of a policy shift on climate change within the EPA?

FRIEDMAN: It's certainly emblematic of a rhetorical shift. Over the past several months, we've seen the EPA overhaul their website and replace climate pages without the word climate change. The EPA recently came out with a strategic plan for the next four years - doesn't mention the word climate change at all. So the phrase and thinking about how to approach climate change is verboten at EPA.

BLOCK: President Trump has also abandoned President Obama's clean power plan that was intended to regulate coal-fired power plants.

FRIEDMAN: That's right.

BLOCK: Has the administration proposed anything new that would replace it?

FRIEDMAN: No, though they say that's coming. You know, I think it's important to be clear that the clean power plan has not yet ended. There's a whole process for rolling it back. And that process really just started. The administration has said that they are going to solicit information about what a proposed new rule could look like. And, interestingly, industry has said that they want to see a replacement. Obviously, what they have in mind is a much more narrow and modest way of reining in emissions. But they have told the EPA they would like to see something.

BLOCK: There are a number of top EPA officials now who came to the

agency directly from working with the oil or chemical industries. How is their influence being felt? Because critics say this shows that the EPA is now in the pocket of industry.

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## **Dubai Vs. Smart City - The Future Of Happiness?**

Technocrats claim that convenience makes you happy, and in Dubai, its Smart City technology makes everything convenient. However, Dubai is an Islamic dictatorship, where creating a Smart City bypasses all direct input from citizens who must live under it. Scientific Dictatorship promises the moon, but the realization of it will be a dark moon rising, indeed. □ TN Editor

Every day Dubai is one step closer to becoming a fully-fledged smart city, as an increasing number of devices become connected, and as governments continue to implement projects with services that strip

away the old ways of getting things done. Our lives are becoming more intertwined with smart solutions that save us time and effort on administrative tasks, allowing us to focus on things that make us happy. It's no surprise then that the smarter a city is, the happier its residents are.

Over the last decade we have experienced the proliferation of digital connectivity and the Internet of Things (IoT), both of which have given smart cities a whole new meaning, creating endless possibilities for citizens to lead more convenient lives. According to research firm IHS Technology, smartphones and tablets make up more than 80% of connected devices in the Middle East and Africa and their adoption is set to grow from 133 million devices in 2014 to 598 million in 2018, a huge increase in only four years!

Gulf nations have gained increased visibility in the development of smart cities globally, with Dubai emerging as the leading smart city in the region. The Emirate has made great strides in the short period of roughly a decade since the launch of its eGovernment in 1999.

The smart city is a new playing field where authorities are able to link individuals to public organisations through electronic and mobile governments. Smart cities enable the transformation of public services and in turn enhance the convenience for citizens. One of the most important outcomes of cities going smart is that digitisation of governments, which enables the provision of services to a wide geographical coverage of the population in a citizen-friendly manner. eGovernment and mGovernment services make services more seamless and accessible to the public - especially citizens who are isolated or have reduced mobility. Although citizens have always been players in the system, with digital technology they are now the focal point and have the means to be involved and take control. Consequently, smart governments make life easier and citizen-centric, and residents will be appreciative that authorities do not ask for data which they already have in their possession; that personal data are under the control of citizens to ensure transparency and privacy; and that they can access public services 24/7.

Shaped by the vision of His Highness Sheikh Mohammed bin Rashid al Maktoum, Vice-President and Prime Minister of the UAE and ruler of Dubai, the Smart Dubai initiative is based on the notion that cities should be designed in a way to maximize the happiness of its residents and visitors by embracing technology innovation. This initiative is transforming the Emirate into a smart city, and over the past three years Dubai has launched an impressive 121 smart initiatives and 1,129 smart services.

For example, app-based solutions such as DubaiNow's one-tap bill payment makes payments easier, while infrastructure enhancements such as the Smart Grid by the Dubai Water and Electricity Authority leads to energy and cost savings. Smart parking services from Roads and Transport Authority save commuter's time and additionally the RTA's Nol Card allows users to pay for taxi, bus and metro fares with ease. Furthermore, Dubai residents can simply scan their Emirates ID cards at airport eGates for easy passage when travelling instead of having to queue up at immigration.

More recently in April, His Highness Sheikh Hamdan bin Mohammed bin Rashid Al Maktoum, Crown Prince of Dubai and Chairman of the Dubai Executive Council launched the next phase in Dubai's smart transformation which aims to make Dubai's Government entirely paperless by 2021. Building on the Emirate's many achievements to-date, the Dubai Government plans to continue deploying and integrating technology into its services to make residents and visitors happy.

As Dubai's population is projected to double over the next 14 years, reaching five million by 2030, an efficient and frictionless city is essential for a thriving future and explains why being a smart city is high on the national agenda. Seeing that enhanced services make life more streamlined and in turn easier, safer and more impactful for everyone, smart technology is the ultimate tool to maximise happiness — where we can spend time doing things we love, ultimately resulting in increased happiness.

That said, the convenience of smart cities brings risks, as data security and privacy become a concern. Trust and security are key factors that

must be woven into the fabric of smart cities for residents and visitors to be able to reap the full benefits. Smart government and public solutions, such as the ones already employed in Dubai only work when we trust those who design the technologies and services we rely on to keep our data and identities safe.

Security therefore must be kept in the forefront of everyone's minds if smart cities are truly to bring long-term happiness. There are three pillars that both the private sector and government partners must keep in mind if they wish to work towards achieving the full potential of Dubai Smart City initiative:

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## **The New Religions Obsessed with AI**

Over the millennia, mankind has worshipped the sun, molten and carved idols, other men, animals and rocks; now, AI enters as the latest contender for man's worshipful attention, and it's growing in stature. □  
TN Editor

What has improved American lives most in the last 50 years? According to a [Pew Research study](#) reported this month, it's not civil rights (10 percent) or politics (2 percent): it's technology (42 percent).

And yet, according to [other studies](#), most Americans are wary of technology, especially in areas of automation (72 percent), or robotic caregivers (59 percent), or riding in driverless vehicles (56 percent), and even in using brain chip implants to augment the capabilities of healthy people ([69 percent](#)).

Science fiction, however, is quickly becoming science fact—the future is the machine. This is leading many to argue that we need to anticipate the ethical questions now, rather than when it is too late. And increasingly, those taking up these challenges are religious and spiritual.

How far should we integrate human physiology with technology? What do we do with self-aware androids—like Blade Runner's replicants—and self-aware supercomputers? Or the merging of our brains with them? If Ray Kurzweil's famous singularity—a future in which the exponential growth of technology turns into a runaway train—becomes a reality, does religion have something to offer in response?

On the one hand, new religions can emerge from technology.

In Sweden, for example, [Kopimism](#) is a recognized faith founded over a decade ago with branches internationally. It began on a “pirate Agency Forum” and is derived from the words “copy me.” They have no views on the supernatural or gods. Rather, Kopimism celebrates the biological drive (e.g. DNA) to copy and be copied. Like digital monks, they believe that “copying of information” and “dissemination of information is ethically right.”

“Copying is fundamental to life,” says their [U.S. branch](#), “and runs constantly all around us. Shared information provides new perspectives and generate new life. We feel a spiritual connection to the created file.”

Other emerging tech-connected faiths, however, embrace the more grandiose.

A recent revelation from [WIRED](#) shows that Anthony Levandowski, an engineer who helped pioneer the self-driving car at Waymo (a subsidiary of Google's parent company, Alphabet) founded his own AI-based religion called "Way of the Future." (Levandowski is accused of stealing trade secrets and is the focus of a lawsuit between Waymo and Uber, which revealed the nonprofit registration of Way of the Future.)

Little is known about Way of the Future and Levandowski has not returned a request for comment. But according to WIRED, the mission of the new religion is to "develop and promote the realization of a Godhead based on Artificial Intelligence," and "through understanding and worship of the Godhead, [to] contribute to the betterment of society."

It is not a stretch to say that a powerful AI—whose expanse of knowledge and control may feel nearly omniscient and all-powerful—could feel divine to some. It recalls Arthur C. Clarke's third law: "Any sufficiently advanced technology is indistinguishable from magic." People have followed new religions for far less and, even if AI doesn't pray to electric deities, some humans likely will.

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## **China's Technocrats Blast Off: Two More Space Engineers In New Central Committee**

Chinese leadership has been dominated by Technocrats for at least 20 years, which has led observers to declare the China is a Technocracy rather than a Communist dictatorship. The United Nations extolls China's leadership as the best in the world to achieve Sustainable Development, aka Technocracy. □ TN Editor

The technocratic credentials of the Communist Party's Central Committee were boosted at the recently concluded party congress in Beijing, with two former engineers with a background in the defence industries, including the aerospace sector, joining the 204-member body.

Zhejiang governor Yuan Jiajun and Jin Zhuanglong, the former chairman of Commercial Aircraft Corporation of China (Comac) who is now first deputy to President Xi Jinping on an important military-civilian integration committee, join at least seven existing members with a similar background.

Six of the former engineers, including Yuan and Jin, used to work for China Aerospace Space Science and Technology Corporation (CASTC) and the others worked for Chinese defence conglomerates.

Due to its reliance on advanced technology, the aerospace sector was an indicator of a country's comprehensive national power and symbol of "modernisation" - a goal set by party chief Xi at the congress - Xu Shijie, a missile scientist at Beihang University, said.

China has invested heavily in the sector this century because of its importance in international strategic competition and the development of military technology.

CASTC management has delivered on the top leadership's expectations, having been rated in the top rank of central-government-owned enterprises for 13 years in a row. Last year it was ranked No 1.

Xu said the elevation of Yuan, Jin and the other former CASTC engineers was understandable because they had performed well and had shown they had the ability to manage difficult, large and complicated projects.

"With years of being grass-roots scientific researchers, they think differently from those who always work in administrative jobs," said Xu, who briefly worked with some of them before they left the industry.

Yuan joins four other provincial leaders who used to be CASTC engineers in the Central Committee: Heilongjiang party secretary Zhang Qingwei, Guangdong governor Ma Xingrui, Liaoning governor Chen Qiufa and Hunan governor Xu Dazhe. Zhang, Ma and Yuan are still in their 50s, as in Jin.

Two other Central Committee members with a similar background are Wang Yong, who became a state councillor four years ago, and Hao Peng, who has been director of the State-owned Assets Supervision and Administration Commission since last year.

The emergence of such technocrats in politics comes in the wake of some landmark aerospace achievements under their leadership.

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# Propaganda: Industry Study Shows Most Americans Ready For Smart Cities

A leading provider of Internet of Things technology for Smart Cities, Silver Sprint Networks tells us that Americans are in love with the idea of Smart Cities. The study only sampled 505 consumers, which is apparently sufficient for these Technocrats to conclude that the whole country feels the same way. □ TN Editor

A super majority of respondents nationwide think smart city technologies will have a positive impact on their lives, while half of those are expecting it to happen in the next three years or sooner, according to a new study by Silver Spring Networks Inc. and advocacy group Power Over Energy.

The combined sampling and online study also found that out of the 505 U.S. consumers who participated, the positive impression of smart cities came with information provided via the study. Nearly 80 percent said they had little or no knowledge about the technologies beforehand.

Sixty-four percent of those who clearly understood what it means responded that it will be important to live in or near a smart city. Smart city technologies include connected street lighting, advanced meter infrastructure, Wi-Fi, open data sharing, charging stations and connected appliances, among other devices and apps.

“In speaking with city leaders across the globe, we have found that understanding the needs and wants of their citizens around smart city technology is of utmost importance,” Dan Evans, senior director for smart cities and street lighting at Silver Spring Networks. “Our findings will help bolster the efforts that cities and utilities are championing, such as smart street lights—the most well-known smart city application—and reducing pollution and public safety, identified as the top two benefits of smart city technology in the study.”

Only 3 percent of respondents replied that smart city technology would have a negative impact. Of 15 percent who said they had no interest in living so connected, half of them lived in rural areas.

A majority in all age groups expressed enthusiasm for living in smart cities, with 83 percent of millennials being the highest. Sixty percent of those 65 and older also expressed a desire to live in those places.

“What we found most interesting about the study is the younger generation’s desire to live in smart cities,” Marina Donovan, vice president of marketing, Silver Spring Networks, said in a statement. “Adoption rates of smart city technologies are quickly on the rise and the next big wave is upon us. There is clearly a need, and opportunity, to educate consumers of all age groups about the benefits and positive impacts of smart city technology.”

Overall, reducing pollution and energy consumption were seen as the top benefits of smart cities (39 percent of respondents). Public safety was seen as the second most important benefit-with 23 percent saying so. Video monitoring, adaptive street lighting and faster emergency response were seen as attributes of smart cities’ public safety benefits.

Among the negatives, the biggest concern was wasting tax dollars, brought up by 40 percent of respondents. One-third also were concerned

about loss of privacy as their top worry versus smart city technologies.

The Smart Cities Consumer Research Study was conducted with the Energy Department's Office of Electricity Delivery and Energy Reliability Advanced Grid Research.

Silver Spring Networks, recently acquired by Itron Inc, is known for its Internet of Things network and data platform and has delivered more than 26.7 million devices globally. Power Over Energy is a social media literacy initiative focused on energy efficiency and backed by a coalition of business, nonprofit and governmental groups.

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**Sweden's Model Urban Policy  
Still Can't Control**

# ‘Unsustainable Consumption’

Sweden is headed toward direct Technocracy and leads Europe in New Urban Agenda policies, but it has not curtailed unsustainable consumption. Who decides what is sustainable consumption or not? The same Technocrats who shoved Technocracy down their throat in the first place. □ TN Editor

Following the long Swedish summer holidays, Stockholm has been slowly coming back to life with a series of cultural and sustainability festivals. The end of August saw the city host [the Stockholm Act](#), including talks, cultural events and seminars on how Sweden can deliver on international sustainability goals. On the heels of that was [World Water Week](#), a globally renowned forum attracting researchers and policymakers from top international institutions dealing with water and sustainability.

Stockholm also has been joined by cities such as Gothenburg and Umeå, in the country’s north, in driving sustainability. All three have been national winners of WWF’s [One Planet City Challenge](#), a global initiative designed to highlight cities that are implementing sustainable, low-carbon solutions and strategies to accelerate the global transition to renewable energy. In addition, Gothenburg has built a reputation around pioneering green bonds and its state-of-the-art public transport system, while Umeå has focused on integrated planning, measuring quality of life linked with sustainability.

Swedish cities thus appear to be global models of sustainability. Indeed, the urban districts of Hammarby Sjöstad in Stockholm and Western Harbour in Malmö regularly attract throngs of urban planners from the world over, eager to learn or mimic the innovative and high-tech sustainability efforts underway in these cities.

Those efforts are finding parallel at the national level, too. Sweden’s burgeoning reputation for urban sustainability has often been reinforced by the repeated claim at the national level that the country has successfully managed to [decouple economic growth from its emissions performance](#).

But what about the country’s “ecological footprint”? This measure takes into account consumption-based emissions from the goods and services consumed by Swedes but that may be produced abroad. In fact, it tells a far different story.

As set out in WWF’s latest [Living Planet Report](#), Sweden ranks among the worst such performers, along with Australia, the United States and the UAE. Today, the average Swede uses the equivalent of four times the planet’s per-person capacity — and most of this footprint stems from activities taking place in the country’s cities.

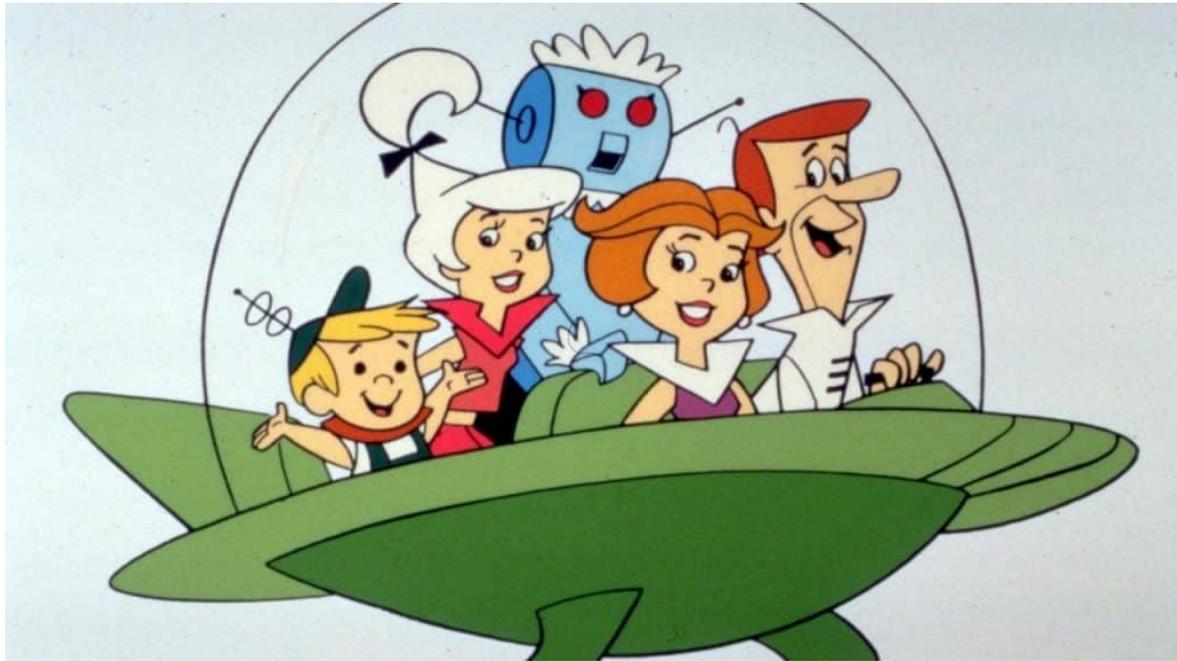
## **Containing ‘spillover’**

But a new process is currently unfolding that could offer a key opportunity to rethink how Sweden’s cities function — even, potentially, pushing back on this trend of unsustainable consumption.

The government is formulating the country’s first-ever [national urban policy](#). In part, this is seen as a means to cement the country’s implementation of the [New Urban Agenda](#), the global agreement on sustainable cities adopted last year to support the U.N.’s broader [Sustainable Development Goals](#) (SDGs).

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## The Infinite Suburb Is An Academic Joke

Sustainable Development, aka Technocracy, is an unworkable economic model that will self-destruct as its proponents foolishly worship at the alter of Utopia. I cannot find a single legitimate economist who has done a deep analysis on Technocracy and concluded that Utopia has finally arrived. It has not, will not, cannot. □ TN Editor

The elite graduate schools of urban planning have yet another new vision of the future. Lately, they see a new-and-improved suburbia—based on self-driving electric cars, deliveries by “drones deliveries at your doorstep,” and “teardrop-shaped one-way roads” (otherwise known as cul-de-sacs)—as the coming sure thing. It sounds suspiciously like yesterday’s tomorrow, the George Jetson utopia that has been the stock-in-trade of half-baked futurism for decades. It may be obvious that for some time now we have lived in a reality-optional culture, and it’s vividly on display in the cavalcade of techno-narcissism that passes for thinking these days in academia.

Exhibit A is an essay that appeared last month in *The New York Times Magazine* titled “[The Suburb of the Future is Almost Here](#),” by Alan M. Berger of the MIT urban design faculty and author of the book *Infinite*

*Suburbia*—on the face of it a perfectly inane notion. The subtitle of his *Times Magazine* piece argued that “Millennials want a different kind of suburban development that is smart, efficient, and sustainable.”

Note the trio of clichés at the end, borrowed from the lexicon of the advertising industry. “Smart” is a meaningless anodyne that replaces the worn out tropes “deluxe,” “super,” “limited edition,” and so on. It’s simply meant to tweak the reader’s status consciousness. Who wants to be dumb?

“Efficient” and “sustainable” are actually at odds. The combo ought to ring an alarm bell for anyone tasked with designing human habitats. Do you know what “efficient” gets you in terms of ecology? Monocultures, such as GMO corn grown on sterile soil mediums jacked with petroleum-based fertilizers, herbicides, and fast-depleting fossil aquifer water. It’s a method that is very efficient for producing corn flakes and Cheez Doodles, but has poor prospects for continuing further into this century—as does conventional suburban sprawl, as we’ve known it. Efficiency in ecological terms beats a path straight to entropy and death.

Real successful ecologies, on the other hand, are the opposite of efficient. They are deeply redundant. They are rich in diverse species and functions, many of which overlap and duplicate, so that a problem with one failed part or one function doesn’t defeat the whole system. This redundancy is what makes them resilient and sustainable. Swamps, prairies, and hardwood forests are rich and sustainable ecologies. Monocultures, such as agri-biz style corn crops and “big box” retail monopolies are not sustainable and they’re certainly not even ecologies, just temporary artifacts of finance and engineering. What would America do if Walmart went out of business? (And don’t underestimate the possibility as geopolitical tension and conflict undermine global supply lines.)

Suburbia of the American type is composed of monocultures: residential, commercial, industrial, connected by the circulatory system of cars. Suburbia is not a sustainable human ecology. Among other weaknesses, it is fatally prone to Liebig’s “law of the minimum,” which states that the overall health of a system depends on the amount of the scarcest of the

essential resources that is available to it. This ought to be self-evident to an urbanist, who must *ipso facto* be a kind of ecologist.

Yet techno-narcissists such as MIT's Berger take it as axiomatic that innovation of-and-by itself can overcome all natural limits on a planet with finite resources. They assume the new-and-improved suburbs will continue to run on cars, only now they will be driverless and electric, and everything in their paradigm follows from that.

I don't think so. Like it or not, the human race has not yet found a replacement for fossil fuels, especially oil, which has been the foundation of techno-industrial economies for a hundred years, and it is getting a little late in the game to imagine an orderly segue to some as-yet-undiscovered energy regime.

By the way, electricity is not an energy source. It is just a carrier of energy generated in power plants. We have produced large quantities of it at the grand scale using fossil fuels, hydropower, and nuclear fission (which is dependent on fossil fuels to operate). And, by the way, all of our nuclear power plants are nearing the end of their design life, with no plans or prospects for them to be replaced by new ones. We have maxed out on potential hydroelectric sites and the existing big ones are silting up, which will take them out of service inside of this century.

Electricity can also be produced by solar cells and wind turbines, but at nowhere near the scale necessary, on their own, for running contemporary American life. The conceit that we can power suburbia, the interstate highway system, truck-based distribution networks, commercial aviation, the U.S. military, and Walt Disney World on anything besides fossil fuels is going to leave a lot of people very disappointed.

The truth is that we have been running all this stuff on an extravagant ramp-up of debt for at least a decade to compensate for the troubles that exist in the oil industry, oil being the primary and indispensable resource for our way of life. These troubles are often lumped under the rubric *peak oil*, but the core of the trouble must be seen a little differently: namely, a steep decline in the Energy Return on Investment

(EROI) across the oil industry. The phrase might seem abstruse on the face of it. It means simply that it is becoming uneconomical to extract oil from the ground, even with the so-called miracle of “fracking” shale oil deposits. It doesn’t pay for itself, and the EROI is still headed further down.

In the 1930s, the oil industry could get 100 barrels of oil for every barrel of oil in energy they put into production. Drilling on the Texas prairie was like slipping a straw in a milkshake and the oil gushed out of the ground under its own pressure. Today, those old wells are far into depletion and we’re left with unconventional oil. Horizontal drilling and fracking into shale is enormously more expensive to carry out, and offshore deepwater drilling that requires a \$100 million floating oil platform is nothing like slipping a straw into a milkshake. They have to go down a mile or more beneath the surface and then another mile into the undersea rock. It’s very expensive and dangerous. (Remember the BP Deepwater Horizon blowout of 2010?)

The aggregate ratio of *oil-out-for-energy-in* these days is 17 to 1, and for shale oil it’s more like 5 to 1. You cannot run industrial civilizations at those EROI ratios. Thirty to one is probably the minimum. And you can’t run renewable alternative energy systems without an underlying support platform of fossil fuels. The implacable reality of this dynamic has yet to sink in at the graduate-school fantasy factories.

The world’s major oil companies are cannibalizing themselves to stay in business, with balance sheets cratering, and next-to-zero new oil fields being discovered. The shale oil producers haven’t made a net dime since the project got ramped up around 2005. Their activities have been financed on junk lending made possible by arbitrages on the near-zero Fed fund rate, itself an historical abnormality. The shale-oil drillers are producing all out to service their loans, and have thus driven down oil prices, negating their profit. Low oil prices are not the sign of a healthy industry but of a failing industrial economy, the latter currently expressing itself in a sinking middle class and the election of Donald Trump.

All the techno-grandiose wishful thinking in the world does not alter this

reality. The intelligent conclusion from all this ought to be obvious: Restructuring the American living arrangement to something other than “infinite” suburban sprawl based on limitless car dependency.

As it happens, the New Urbanist movement recognized this dynamic beginning in the early 1990s and proposed a return to traditional walkable neighborhoods, towns, and cities as the remedy. It has been a fairly successful reform effort, with hundreds of municipal land-use codes rewritten to avert the inevitable suburban sprawl mandates of the old codes. The movement also produced hundreds of new town projects all over the country to demonstrate that good urbanism was possible in new construction, as well as downtown makeovers in places earlier left for dead like Providence, Rhode Island, and Newburgh, New York.

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