**Sustaining Smart City Initiatives – A Configurational Comparative Analysis of Alignment Mechanisms in Four Smart Cities**

**Abstract**

*The development of digital strategies has become the responsibility of a new institutional structure within municipalities – the Smart City Functions (SCF). These functions develop agendas to develop and manage the implementation of portfolios of IT-dependent strategic initiatives in cities to produce public values. Like in traditional organisations, creating and sustaining public value in smart cities is contingent on the alignment of the SCF and the municipality as a whole. Such alignment is manifested through the development of smart city initiatives that meet the expectations of stakeholders or city residents or more generally support the overall city development goals. However, there is limited empirical research to guide the practitioner-researcher on the (combination of) concrete mechanisms needed to achieve such alignment. Through a multi-case study of relatively successful smart city initiatives of four Irish cities, we investigate the different alignment mechanisms that plausibly account for the reported outcomes in the different city contexts based on the realist evaluation approach. Based on the data collected from the interviews of SCF focal points, ethnographic observations, and a workshop, we develop configurations of contextual factors, alignment mechanisms, and the associated outcomes characterising the four smart city initiatives. Furthermore, we determined the alignment mechanisms that are common or appear necessary for value creation and sustained smart city initiatives. We conclude with the implications of our study for practitioners.*