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## tech

IN PRINT

### City life in real-time

Using cell phone signals and GPS systems, scientists are trying to map events in a city in real-time; research could help in traffic management and better navigation

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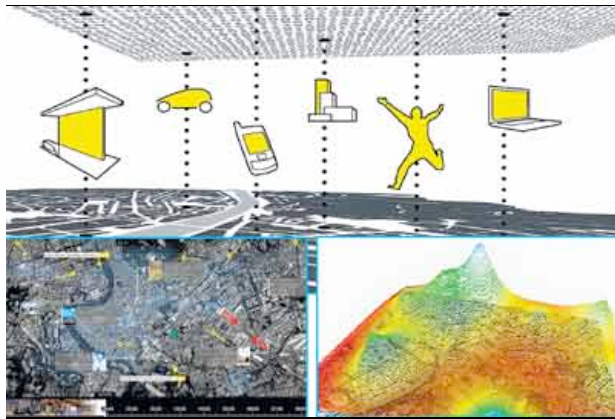
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**Mumbai Mirror Bureau**

Mumbaikars are more than familiar with the festive atmosphere in the city when Ganesh Chaturthi comes around; and they're also familiar with the resulting traffic chaos.

But this could all change soon, thanks to a new initiative by scientists to map cities in real-time by using readings from people's mobile phones, and GPS units on public transport services.

Residents of Italy's capital will glimpse the future of urban map-making next month. Romans will bear witness to the launch of 'Wiki City Rome', a project developed at the US-based Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT), which uses data from cell phones and other wireless technology to illustrate the city's pulse in real time.



In the 'Wiki City' project, scientists will obtain data anonymously from cell phones, GPS units in cars, laptops and other devices to map cities in real time. Left: An example of what the interface will look like. Right: A depiction of the peaks and lows of the distribution of people on a satellite image of Rome during the football World Cup finals last year, obtained by using cell phone information

The project will debut this Saturday during Rome's Notte Bianca (white night), an all-night festival of events across the city. During that night, anyone with an Internet connection will be able to see a unique map of the Italian capital that shows the movements of crowds, event locations, the whereabouts of well-known Roman personalities, and the real-time position of city buses and trains.

The map will also be broadcast on a big-screen display in the city centre, giving Romans real-time feedback on the human dynamics in their immediate surroundings.

**Mapping on-the-go**



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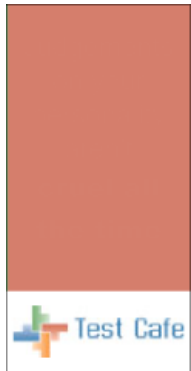
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Wiki City Rome stems from MIT's SENSEable City Laboratory, an initiative directed by Carlo Ratti, that studies the impact of new technologies on cities. The new project builds on the work of a similar experiment last year, called 'Real Time Rome'.

Ratti's team obtains its data anonymously from cell phones, GPS devices on buses and taxis, and other wireless mobile devices. Data are made anonymous and aggregated from the beginning, so there are no implications for individual privacy.

The organisers say Wiki City Rome raises the intriguing prospect of a map drawn on the basis of dynamic elements of which the map itself is an active part.

According to researcher Francesco Calabrese, a person could consult the map to find the most crowded place in Rome to have a drink or grab a bite – and then identify the least congested route by which to reach it.

"Rome's Notte Bianca is all about the city, the people and the events, and Wiki City Rome will give Romans a new awareness of how they move within their city in response to this exceptional pulse of activities," said researcher Kristian Kloeckl, who is also working on the project.


By looking at a city using a 'real-time control system' as a working analogy, the Wiki City project studies tools that enable people to become prime actors themselves in improving the efficiency of urban systems, thus also being a good sociological experiment.


"How access to real-time data in the context of possible action alters the process of decision-making in going about activities is just one of the questions we may be able to answer," Kloeckl said.


#### **An Internet of things**

In coming years, the Wiki City project will develop as an open platform where anybody can transmit data that is location and time sensitive.

"By deploying developments of the 'Web 2.0' and the 'Semantic Web', Wiki City can be a significant leap forward towards a pervasive 'Internet of things' to support human action and interaction," said Ratti.

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