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Dynamic Map Features Rome in Motion

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Sept. 10, 2007 — Residents of Italy's capital entered a new era on Saturday night as they turned their cell phones on.

In a technological leap, a futuristic urban map made its debut, featuring the dynamics of the city in real time. The map project, known as "Wiki City Rome," is [continuously fed data](#) through wireless technology such as cell phones and global positioning systems on city buses and taxis.

Developed by the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, the project was launched during Rome's [Notte Bianca \(White Night\)](#), an all-night festival of 400 events, which drew about 2.5 million people in Rome's streets.

Matching the pulsing flow of activities, a big screen display in one of Rome's main squares showed a continuously changing picture of the city.

Red, yellow and green lights overlaid over a [map of the city](#) reflected the movements of hundreds of thousands of people, the real-time position of city buses and taxis, and crowds at the most popular events.

Anyone with an Internet connection was able to follow the unique map of the city and experience "a new awareness of how Romans move within their city in response to exceptional pulse of activities," said Kristian Kloeckl, a researcher at MIT's [SENSEable City Laboratory](#) in Cambridge, Mass.



A science museum embraces the interactive experience.
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The system, according to Carlo Ratti, director of the SENSEable City Lab, can help people to make more informed decisions about their surroundings, such as "avoiding traffic congestions, or knowing where people are congregating on a Saturday afternoon."

In [worst-case scenarios](#), this real time urban mapping could also make it easier to evacuate cities — assuming that cell phones are working.

Using algorithms developed by Telecom Italia, the main sponsor of the project, the technology can distinguish whether a mobile phone signal comes from a user who is, say, stuck in traffic or perhaps taking a slow walk in a park.

Foreign mobile phone numbers, meanwhile, reveal the movements of tourists who are carrying phones from other countries.

The concept may remind some of Big Brother, but the researchers assure all data are kept anonymous to preserve individual privacy. The information is aggregated from communications and GPS networks and stripped of any personal identifiers.

During the Rome's Notte Bianca experiment, the ever changing map ran smoothly — even as 2.5 million people roamed across the city,

"I was really impressed when I realized that there were hundreds of thousand of people in line to visit the city's museums," Rome's mayor Walter Veltroni said.

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