



Smart Learning Cities Forum - 26 Feb 2020

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Another school of thought says that we should be striving for Lo Tech cities that are more in tune with nature and with humanity. Smart cities are only smart when they are just and compassionate and built on a learning framework that engages with people and nature.

Life is not just technical and mechanical – it needs to have meaning framed by creativity, imagination and worth. How can nature help us be smarter in the way that we live and engage with one another? How can we learn together and grow? How can the rewilding of our spaces help humanise the urban fabric of our cities?

Cities and communities are smart where citizens are educated and know their rights and responsibilities and are able to exercise those appropriately. For artificial intelligence to be smart it must respect human values.

In these times, we need more than ever to focus on creating cities where democracy is strong and flourishes. To do that we need educated people and communities which is why ALA campaigns for a national lifelong learning strategy that outlines both economic and social goals; integrates efficiency and equity, and sets out roles and responsibilities for community, business and all levels of government.

Now we are not only living in a time of climate change but a time of crumbling capitalism without a replacement or clear map to the future.

The Pulitzer prize winning author, Richard Powers, says that in these times we need to replace a life of commodity with a life of community. That we need to become different people and create different cities and spaces where we can evolve a higher consciousness = cognitively, morally, ascetically and spiritually.

Local intelligence together with nature-based technologies – can help us, especially when it is coupled with the ancient knowledge of landscape from indigenous people. We need to build living democracy into our cities and communities so that all people get an opportunity to be a learner and a sharer.

And so, I ask, how can Smart Cities:



- Ensure that the 1 in 7 Australians (14%) who have very poor literacy skills and the 1 in 3 (30%) who have below-proficiency level literacy making them vulnerable to unemployment, are included?
- Ensure that the Australians who struggle with numeracy (around 53% of the population at below-proficiency levels), don't miss out? Literacy is perhaps our most critical skill. It can mean the difference between a life well lived and a life of hardship. Lack of literacy is a continuing problem today and it often correlates with poor health outcomes and poverty.
- Bridge the digital divide? The Australian Digital Inclusion Index indicates that 2.5 million Australians are not on line. They are mostly older people, people unemployed or people with low education status. Digital disadvantage and low digital literacy coincide with other forms of social and economic disadvantage, so the people that can potentially benefit most from being connected are at the greatest risk of being left behind.

Technology is meant to be a tool to enhance liveability, sustainability and productivity – we don't want it to be a tool to further exclusion and alienation. So how does that look in reality?

The Australian Energy Regulator (AER) estimated that more than 70,000 residential customers had power supply disconnected between 2017 and 2018 in NSW, South Australia, Queensland the ACT and Tasmania alone. In Victoria, the rollout of smart meters has seen an increase in disconnections¹.

- How is the safety and security of our data to be managed when contractors and big corporations are managing the information – especially when it comes to personal data and information through increasing surveillance of citizens? Can they or even governments be trusted with our data?
- How do smart learning cities make a difference to people coming from the criminal justice system, where 1 in 3 have education of year 9 or less, and where we know that the lack of educational experience, literacy and crime are closely related?



- How do smart cities propose to include the 1.4 million or 5.8%² of the Australian population that have severe or profound disability? Will smart cities enhance their connection or further alienate them?

Old systems and structures are no longer working for us and we need to replace them with the future that we all want; one that leaves no one behind.

We don't need smart learning cities, smart learning cities need us. They need us to work out how to hold on to the common good and build trust in the systems, using compassion and generosity, protecting the truth, maintaining morality and acting with more common ideals.

They need us to incorporate nature-based solutions that limit the impacts of climate change, enhance biodiversity and improve environmental quality while contributing to economic activities and social well-being. They need us to ensure just and inclusive approaches that open opportunities for everyone to have access to continuous learning.

It isn't just the responsibility of our cities and communities to ensure smart learning cities, it is a Nation's responsibility. ALA continues to call on the Federal government to provide leadership and resources for lifelong learning and literacy for all. After all, it is learning that keeps our species alive.

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