
Digital-Cultural Ecology and the Medium-Sized City

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Abstract Submission Form

1. Paper / Proposal Title: Networked Infrastructure and Citizen Participation in the City of Geelong's Nascent Digital Strategy

2. Format: Written paper/verbal presentation

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6. Abstract (300 words):

This paper examines the City of Greater Geelong, Australia as a case study of a medium-sized city seeking to transform from a manufacturing-reliant economy into a 'knowledge city' by preparing its citizens for the digital era. Geelong has a population of approximately 185,000 (ABS, 2014) and is located on the periphery of Melbourne, less than an hour's drive from the CBD of one of Australia's largest 'second-tier' global cities. Over the past decade or so, Geelong's economy has undergone an abrupt transition following the closure of several large business headquarters – particularly in manufacturing and retail – and growing investment in services and creative industries (Keneley et al, 2014; Milman, 2013; Potter, 2014). As it undergoes this transition, local government organisations have invested in digital technologies, networked infrastructure and high-tech industries as a means to embrace 'digital disruption', encourage innovation and make Geelong a '21st century smart city'. Its plan for the future emphasises digital inclusion, crowdsourcing, transparency and e-government and shifting to 'digital only' services and platforms where possible (City of Greater Geelong, 2015). In addition, large-scale high-tech projects like the development of a university medical campus and a cutting-edge Library and Heritage Centre are vying to reshape the city's landscape and economic opportunities.

This paper examines the early phases of Geelong's digital strategy, situating its economic history and plan for the future within the context of broader transformations unfolding in cities around the world as they grapple with the opportunities and challenges afforded by digital technologies. Drawing on an extensive review of the literature and interviews with key professional figures in the City of Greater Geelong, we identify how the city is coping with this transition, concentrating specifically on the role assigned its citizens within this new 'smart city' vision. Given the substantial movement of labourers from one economic sector to the other, the citizens of Geelong are going to play a vital role in this transition – and will need the infrastructure, support and education provided by the city to do so. Based on our findings, however, on-the-ground services and infrastructure are only just beginning to reflect the future envisioned by government and planners. Although our interviews and research highlight a strong desire for Geelong to become a knowledge-driven smart city, they also identified two broad factors limiting this potential. First, the promise and rhetoric is seldom matched by funding and investment, especially from outside Geelong. Second, bureaucratic metrics for assessing and evaluating the city's infrastructure have not adjusted to reflect recent changes in the economy and citizens' behaviour. As such, we argue that for a medium-sized city such as Geelong to successfully restructure its economy for the digital future, assuming that citizens will follow the city's digital strategy is not enough – it must be backed up by institutional and bureaucratic change as well.

7. Author(s) Biography (200 words each):

Dale Leorke recently completed his PhD in the School of Culture and Communication at the University of Melbourne, Australia. His thesis examines location-based gaming and play in public space, critiquing the discourse around games and artistic projects that use mobile and locative media to bring digital play into physical spaces. His work has been published in the *International Communication Gazette*, *Space and Culture*, *First Monday*, *Digital Culture & Education* and on the *Theory, Culture and Society* and *Society and Space* open blogs. For more information, please visit his research page: <http://unimelb.academia.edu/DaleLeorke>.

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