Digital inclusion + international development

Aimee Hourigan, PhD Candidate, DMRC
aimee.hourigan@hdr.qut.edu.au
Critiquing digital inclusion + international development

- Technology is not neutral
- Global standards, practices, paradigms rationalised by Western ‘knowledge’ of the ‘future’
- Such visions of ‘modernity’ underpinned/justified by ongoing colonial rhetoric and practices
- Decolonial thinking + practice needed to question on-going Western power structures in the construction of ‘modern’ subjectivities and the enactment of ‘modern’ life.
Case study: Samoa

As ‘culture lived’, fa’asamoa (the Samoan way) remains a prominent embodied knowledge framework that helps organise society, establish identity and determine individual agency.

Creating design artefacts and engaging in talanoa to better understand ‘digital inclusion’ as an agenda of ‘international development’
Culture: Fa’asamoan + the ‘digital’ as relational

“the space between, the betweenness, not empty space, not space that separates but space that relates, that holds separate entities and things together in the Unity-that-is-All, the space that is context, that gives meaning to things” (Wendt, 1996).

The vā

It makes me think about digitally, how much space am I supposed to take? - Mary

the self as ‘dividual’ (Besnier, 2011).
Culture: the digital va

The ‘digital’, as objects, devices, spaces, infrastructure and so on, emerges as an important non-human, material, co-agentic partner that can alter the conditions and contexts of connection through ‘autonomous actions’ like poor connectivity or visual glitches. Consideration of how the relational and sociospatial values that govern interaction and communication in various sociocultural contexts manifest in, with, and through the ‘digital space’ (Enari & Matapo, 2020; Faleolo, 2021).
"We teach our children the cultural side of faʻasamo. But we are then sent to a Western school to learn the Western values and then we’re given the opportunity to make up our own minds by marrying the two and become that hybrid knowledge that we have. And to survive. That’s why our culture becomes progressive, not only because of the way we’re learning our culture and maintaining our values but at the same time we’re learning how to survive and be sustainable."

- Agapetos
We must continue to ask ourselves whose future we seek to enact, and to recognise how alternatives to modernity/colonality are being enacted and embodied by those for whom digital technology serves to create “a future imaginary attentive to the past as it critiques the present, and ventures forward into the beyond” (Recollet, 2016, p. 91).
Fa’afetai tele lava
Further reading

DMRC’s Digital Inclusion and Participation

Key Word Series: No 4

29 March 2022

Digital Inclusion and Development in Rural/Regional Contexts

Presenter: Prof Hurriyet Babacan
‘Development’

- Complex term – relational and distributional aspects- lots of critiques of the term
- In my work – rural/regional dvt, economic dvt, social dvt, community dvt

Key components for me are:
- Lens/perspectives of the key social/economic issues
- Approaches to individuals and community e.g. consumer, participant, client
- Views on power and empowerment e.g. centralised, devolved, degree of power
- How is change achieved – top down, policy, participatory bottom up, deliberative
- Subsidiarity – devolution of decision making
- Role of civil society actors e.g. government, community, nations, organisations, experts
**Exclusion** is multi-dimensional:

- Exclusion from *basic of life* e.g. services; *economic exclusion* e.g. income, labour market; exclusion through relationships e.g. by isolation, decision making; exclusion by *demographic attributes* e.g. gender; *spatial exclusion*; *institutional exclusion* and *cultural exclusion*

**Inclusion**

- Involves entry points for vulnerable communities into communities to be not ‘shut out’
- Establishment of relationships (including trust, confidence)
- Overcoming structural/systemic barriers and extending rights to most vulnerable- strengthening processes and outcomes which lead to equality
- Recognise that inclusion is addressing all types of exclusion and not creating a *hierarchy of disadvantage*
- Manifests itself a struggle for space in public arena e.g. in policy making.
Background

• Presentation based on participation in projects:
  • Cape York and Torres digital connectivity
  • Digital connectivity with pastoral industry in FNQ
  • Digital connectivity in Northern Australia project
  • RECoE Policy Paper on digital connectivity policy
  • Culturally diverse communities and e-health
  • Projects on e-government
  • Impacts of COVID-19
  • Workforce policy paper
  • Population policy paper
  • Consultations undertaken
  • Practitioner as a CEO of council – smart city
Advances in computing, broadband, cloud connectivity, mobility, AI, ICTs, blockchain, IoT, and data storage capacity offer opportunities for higher productivity, growth and improved in living standards.

They also pose risks of higher inequality and exclusion e.g. dislocation from the workforce.

Inequities that exist are replicated and may be exacerbated through digital technologies.
Fast changing world

- **Mega trends**: hungrier world, disparities in wealth, empowered customers, environmental crisis, technological change (Hajkowicz and Eady 2015):
- **Civic Participation**: decreasing civil sphere, corporatisation of our ‘life world’ (Babacan 2021, 2019).
- **Globalisation-Scapes**: fast movement of people, ideas, finance, media and technologies (Appadurai, 1996)
- **Globally and locally**, we are facing challenges that are unprecedented and require complex solutions
Disruptions

• We are in the midst of a 4\textsuperscript{th} revolution - disruption is happening across all aspects of our lives - some fast, others incrementally

• The disruptive potential of digital technologies is generally recognised.

• 65% of children will be employed in jobs that don’t exist today (EDA & RDA, 2018)

• Granular view: some sectors will be impacted fast (e.g. finance, ICT, media) while others will have time to adjust (e.g. education, health)

• Rural/regional economies in transition/structural shifts

• Access to ICT technologies is essential to living, working and participating in today’s society and addressing global challenges.
Some areas of potential change

- Widening of tasks that can be automated.
- Out sourcing of aspects of business (using digital technologies)
- Digital platforms replacing local businesses
- Workforce impacts, new jobs, loss of existing ones (skills and re-entry considerations)
- Market power of data
- Consumer power and choice
- Mobility of labour and capital- structural change in the economy
- New industries/jobs e.g. gig economy
- Supply chain efficiencies
Digital change in the regional areas

• Regions adapting at various speeds and magnitude to technological and digital change

• Challenges of digital connectivity infrastructure in regions - FNQROC study of mobile coverage - 5,100kms. Both 3G and 4G areas where there is no signal strength for 3,550kms (70%) of the total distance covered. In capital cities this would be less than 1%. (FNQROC 2019)

• ADII lower across Qld regions (access, ability, affordability)

• The profound impacts (+ve & -ve) are emerging, incremental change with increasing adoption

• Fear of not skilling/training quick enough, of being “left behind”
From Research: Key issues emerging

- **Infrastructure and connectivity** - unreliable internet connections, slow speeds, latency, blackouts, lack of technical on-ground crews for repair, reliance on satellite/weather/disaster impacts, scalability challenges across large spaces, impacts of power and energy outages.

- **Affordability** - data capping, comparative cost of plans, and lack of choice of plans-mismatch telecommunications services/plans to meet rural and remote consumer need, ‘thin markets’.

- Last and middle mile connectivity challenges.

- Layering up - lack of redundancy, households, where they can afford it are doubling up options e.g. multiple devices, several plans if able to afford them.
From Research: Key issues (continued)

• Digital skills across generations, digital awareness, troubleshooting, cyber security
• Social issues e.g.- inter-generational impacts; shared passwords due to collective norms
• Gendered and cultural patterns of use- women have used it for social networking; older men less engaged, seen at times as women’s domestic work
• Challenges of online access to government services and programs- e-government reducing civic participation and distancing of government from people
• Safety considerations – digital theft, disaster and weather events, accidents
• Greater exclusion impacts on Indigenous communities
• *We are marvelling at the outside world while we are getting left behind* (Aurukun participant)
“We need a high level strategic coordinated long term approach. Yeah, we're talking about intergenerational disadvantage. This cannot be a policy decision that will flip at the next election, you need years of concerted ongoing consistent strategy.”

Cape York Resident
Digital barriers to running businesses
- Tourism - online bookings, promotions, payment options
- Retail - Eftpos not working, reliance on cash (e.g. across Torres Strait)
- Agriculture - animal registration, bio security, risk of non-compliance
- Workforce recruitment and retention challenges
- Employers - payment of wages outsourced, inability pay wages
- Workforce development – access to online education and professional development training
- Supply chains - resultant inefficiencies
- Opportunities - difficulty in diversifying and growth opportunities

➢ Differences between larger corporations and SMEs. 80% SMES in regions
➢ Multiple-speed economies in one-place
➢ Future planning - challenge to see ROI in digital investment
➢ Overall impacts on regional and place based economic development
From Research: Policy frameworks

• Policy fragmentation and lack of coordination across jurisdictions
• Digital inclusion ecosystem is patchy and siloed
• Public good approach vs market approach for the most vulnerable areas
  • This is a human rights issue, and we need to see a public policy approach (Lockhart River participant)
• Scalability investment challenges
  • The economics of communications provision in remote areas militate against extensive provision of terrestrial backbone links, whether by microwave radio or optical fibre, and mobile phone coverage. While satellite internet can deliver acceptable service, it is recognised that the quality and reliability of services deteriorates under a range of conditions (Infrastructure Australia, 2015).
Digital Inclusion

• *Digital inclusion is not just about computers, the internet or even technology. It is about using technology as a channel to improve skills, to enhance quality of life, to drive education and to promote economic well-being across all elements of society.* (Australian Digital Inclusion Index, 2019).
Development and digital inclusion are linked

Important to not leave the ‘last marginal person behind’

“distribution of social and material benefits across social groups and categories but also the structural factors that cause and sustain exclusion and marginalization of vulnerable groups in society” (Van Gent, S. 2017:9)

“To go beyond a narrow understanding of development as primarily an economic process to one with an integral focus on the achievement of equity and the rights and status of citizenship” (Hickey, 2015).
NZ Government Blue Print for Digital Inclusion identifies 4 key strategies

• **Motivation**: Understanding how digital technology can help us connect, learn, or access opportunities

• **Access**: Connectivity, affordability and accessibility

• **Skills**: digital literacy, know how, attitude and confidence

• **Trust**: trusting online engagement and understanding safety
Conclusion

- Relationship between digital exclusion and other forms of social inequality
- New forms of digital inequality can create new forms of societal stratification
- Our research demonstrates that digital inclusion is vital for rural/regional communities to remain viable and vibrant, given challenges of geography; access to services; economic development; isolation; social capital and health-wellbeing outcomes
- + Impacts on rural economies: participation in the economy, access to markets, sustainable jobs, innovation, entrepreneurship, capitalising on opportunities, consumer-producer connectivity, productivity and growth
- We need to develop alternative frameworks for how we think about society and technology to achieve sustainable development outcomes
- Overcome fragmented discourses
- Shared vision for digital future
- Multiple strategies are needed
- Multi-stakeholder partnerships are required
References of our research


Thank You
Who am I?

- Mum
- Social worker
- Community Development specialist
- Systems advocate
- Human Rights led
Key Areas of Practice

• International Social Work (Internal Migration/Adoption; Bangalore, India)
• Case Manager, Program Manager, Advocacy and Practice Lead, Executive Manager (Multicultural Australia *MDA)
• Senior Community Development Manager, BHC (Brisbane Housing Company)
• Currently undertaking a PhD in Later Life Care for those from the Horn of Africa using cultural humility as a key theoretical lens.
BHC
Digital Access, Inclusion, Empowerment
Our Mission

BHC’s vision is delivered by building and maintaining quality affordable homes for people in need and engaging with and supporting people to sustain their tenancies.
Who we house?

• We house people from all walks of life including those living with a disability, whether it be physical or mental health barriers, single parents, ageing demographics, people from LGBTQIA+ backgrounds, those struggling with addictions, young people and dependents.

• We believe in supporting people from all walks of life and we have a variety of homes that suit individual and community needs including:
  – Boarding homes (transitional housing)
  – Studio apartments
  – One bedroom, two bedroom and some 3-bedroom homes
Our Model

• Mixed model
  – social/community housing alongside;
  – affordable (just below market rent e.g.,
    for single parents, young workers);
  – and market-rent.
• This model has proven to be an effective model for our community's ensuring diversity and strength in community
• Many of our buildings are large apartment complexes high density areas
What we (BHC) see

- When working with such diversity, particularly in a high density setting we see various vulnerabilities.

  One of which is barriers to digital access, literacy and empowerment.

2019 (pre-COVID) tenant survey saw:

- **22% of tenants surveyed have not accessed the internet recently** and a further 5% haven’t accessed it for over 3 months, meaning one-fifth of our sample have no regular access to the internet.

- **73% of respondents have their own smart phone and over 50% have their own computer, laptop, or tablet.** **15% of the tenants sampled use public equipment**, for example at a library.

- Of those that don’t use the internet- **32% do not want internet** and **28% of those that do say cost of equipment or cost of data are the prohibiting factors**.

- **33% of respondents who don’t have access to the internet don’t know how to use it** and **3.5% need special equipment due to a disability**.

- **42% of respondents find the internet expensive or unaffordable.**

- **18% of respondents rate their level of confidence in using the internet as low or very low.**
Our “Pivot”

• Connect Grants
• Multi-mode communication
• Social media campaign
• Service advocacy and support
•Digitally led project delivery (e.g. place-based digital literacy/access support utilising service partners)
• Systemic advocacy
Our stories

*Alex: With my ongoing Parkinson’s Disease this tablet helps me communicate with my peers, support workers and family members. I will use the tablet to communicate with my parkinsons community, my teleheath appointment and my salvation community. Being able to reconnect with my community will help me greatly overcome my current situation.

*Janet: My goals for 2022 include commencing study at tafe or online. I’m looking into a diploma of drugs and alcohol or a diploma in youth work/social work. this grant for a laptop would mean i can access online classes at home and would make my goals for 2022 achievable. the impact of achieving these goals are very positive. i will have an opportunity to give back to a community that gave me so much at a crucial time for support in my life with addiction and homelessness. to have employment and more stability in my life in the process will be amazing.

*Candy hopes to read more to overcome their language barriers [disorder] and to connect with family and friends more this year. The grant will enable me to purchase an iPad so they can read in the apple Books app. This is more affordable than buying hard copy books. It will also help them stay connected with family and friends during the pandemic. enable them to have better career options at the end of their Senior studies. They are entering year 11 this year. It would also improve the quality of their family and friend relationships, and they would hopefully feel less isolated.
COVID and the Exposing the Digital Divide

- 2020
- Covid
- In home learning
- Disadvantaged multiple individuals and families
- Clear vulnerabilities for children aged 7-12

Example:
Somali family of 9 using 1 x iPad for all learning, participation and education needs and school was not willing to let them learn onsite due to not meeting “vulnerable” criteria established by Qld State and Education Qld.
Community and Systemic Advocacy

- Community Forums
- Intentional one-one-one support and advocacy with the school/parent/child
- Petitioning Education Qld
Barriers

- Cyclical nature of disadvantage
- Economic disadvantage
- Digital Disadvantage
- Intergenerational Trauma
- Ageism
- Equity
Looking Forward

- Program design and delivery
- Social engagement and building relationship with vulnerable demographics and community
- Community and place-based responses
- Feminist lens and equity for genders in technology
- Addressing barriers to ageing demographics
- Systemic advocacy (policy, media, corporates)
thank you