

Smart city campaign gets a D for failing to connect with residents

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A questionnaire sent to South Australian households has found that more than half don't understand what a "smart city" means, despite Adelaide being one of the most wired cities in Australia with very fast internet speeds and networked sensors.

A 10 Gigabit per second Adelaide fiber optic network—an Australian first—propelled the SA capital into the world's top seven technologically intelligent communities in 2020, but this does not appear to have registered with the state's citizens. More than 45% have "never heard" of the term "smart city" and 54% do not understand the concept, according to a recent University of South Australia study.

The UniSA study, published in the journal *Sustainable Cities and Society*, underlines the failure of local governments to explain the value of the smart city concept to residents, despite large amounts of money spent on promotional campaigns, researchers say.

More than 200 questionnaires were completed by SA residents, spread across different income levels and comprising 59% men and 41% women, most with a bachelor's degree and in the 35–44 age group.

Lead researcher Shadi Shayan says the survey also highlights the risks of developing [smart cities](#) that isolate certain people, including women and older adults, many of whom don't use or understand modern technology.

"A smart city is defined as an urban locality that uses digital connectivity to manage assets, resources and services in an efficient and sustainable way," Shayan says.

"This translates to smart transportation, smart energy, and smart waste management.

"Improving people's quality of life is the ultimate goal of a smart city but it is also disruptive and challenging and if not properly executed can threaten a society."

The social risks of a smart city include creating a [digital divide](#), disempowering and excluding people, and discriminating against people

who are not across fast-changing technology.

"It affects people in highly personal ways, depending on their age, education, gender and [income level](#)," Shayan says.

Older people are disempowered because they have lower levels of digital literacy and rely on others to use smart solutions. People with hearing and [visual impairments](#) and certain [health conditions](#) also find it challenging using technology, the researchers say.

"Lifelong learning is critical to re-socializing residents during a smart city transition period. Frustrated individuals who struggle to adapt and learn new norms tend to stop participating in the smart city development process.

"Judging by the survey feedback we received, the SA Government and local councils are not achieving cut-through in explaining the concept. Residents are at the core of any smart city and the fact that more than 50% of people are unfamiliar with the term, poses a serious issue for authorities."

The findings correlate with a 2021 U.K. study which found that more than half of Britons don't understand what a smart city entails.

More information: Shadi Shayan et al, Understanding correlations between social risks and sociodemographic factors in smart city development, *Sustainable Cities and Society* (2022). [DOI: 10.1016/j.scs.2022.104320](https://doi.org/10.1016/j.scs.2022.104320)

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