Connecting with citizen science apps

September 22 2015, by Caren Cooper

Smartphones. Credit: Esther Vargas

Years ago, when my daughter got an iPod, her iTunes account became un-affectionately known to the rest of the family as the "iTunes you out" app. Many parents have joined scholars in expressing concerns about how mobile computing and internet technologies might interfere with the human ability to connect to the real world. Yet, the real world

includes the virtual world. Technology can help us connect as much as disconnect: it depends on how it is used.

By some [estimates](#), 1 billion smartphones will be sold in 2015. By 2016, there will likely be more mobile phones (10 billion) on the planet than people (7.3 billion). In the United States, 91% of adults own a cell phone and most (61%) own smartphones. The average mobile phone user spends over 30 hours per month on about 25 apps. In 2014, developers of iOS apps alone earned [over $10 billion, which is more than Hollywood box office revenue](#). Huge growth is expected: by 2017, there could be an estimated 268 billion downloads, creating a $777 billion dollar industry.

The [fastest growing areas](#) in app development happen to be highly relevant to citizen science: social networking, location-based services, and object recognition through increased sensor capabilities. What sort of apps can help people turn their mobile phones into tools for data collecting and sharing? When citizen scientists use apps, will they become more connected with their environment? with each other?

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