

Editorial

This edition of *Information Polity* ranges widely, both across and within themes and issues in democratic discourse and public administration. Its points of departure are both broad and narrow, both theoretical and empirical. Together these articles make up a stimulating edition of this journal.

The broadest point of departure within this edition from a governmental perspective can be found in Deirdre Curtin's and Albert Meijer's analysis of European Union policy documents on the web, and the impact that presence has for that crucial aspect of modern governance, *transparency*. Is the EU in some ways more transparent as a consequence of that web presence? In seeking an answer to that question these authors are drawn to conclude that "transparency is a key element of democratic institutions but naïve assumptions about the relation between transparency and legitimacy can and should be avoided. We warn against a simplified trust in the . . . internet . . . enhancing legitimacy . . . [it] is much more complicated than creating fancy websites with policy documents".

From that 'supra-national' focus on the EU this edition moves to the localist focus of Paul van der Graft and Jorgen Svensson. These scholars take on the challenge of a big theme – how can we explain the development of forms of *e-democracy*? – through empirical work in a local context, that of Dutch municipal government. These authors propose 3 explanatory models that, once tested, lead to the conclusion that technology is the primary driving force behind eDemocracy. Counter-intuitively they conclude that "There is no evidence . . . that differential political traditions play any significant role in the development of local eDemocracy in the Netherlands". Rather, van der Graft and Svensson conclude that e-democratic development is an example of large-scale and technologically driven 'function creep', for its development is to be found most evidently where there is strong investment in electronic service delivery. The development of e-government applications, particularly those involved with delivering services, is a necessary precursor to the development of eDemocracy, they argue. Moreover, this 'creep' occurs "even at a time when it is still unclear whether this new development is really desired". Thus, we have strong evidence that social and political development of electronic democracy is technologically determined.

Arthur Edwards takes us back to another grand theme within the panoply of the information polity, that of *[dis]intermediation* in politics. In so-doing Edwards reminds us of early visions of newborn forms of direct democracy as intermediating agents in forms of representative democracy became increasingly sidelined through the affordances of information and communications technologies [ICT]. Edwards clarifies intermediation by contextualizing it more richly than has been undertaken to this point in time. He does so by allowing for the possibility that "an intermediary can be dis-intermediated in relation to one type of citizens, while maintaining its position in relation to another type, dependent on the ICT strategies that this intermediary pursues". He further seeks to clarify the nature of intermediation by reference to six different forms of democracy within which such practice is located.

In sum, Edwards argues that "counter to the proposition that ICT contributes to disintermediation, . . . the disintermediation discussion has to be related to specific models of democracy and styles of citizenship". New institutional arrangements are emerging that "provide a variety of niches for new intermediaries". For 'preference intermediaries', of which the best example is political parties, competition, far from leading to forms of disintermediation, leads instead to the reinvigoration of the intermediary

role through the use of selected ICTs. For political representatives similarly: the role of the representative in the network society is simultaneously threatened and reinvented, in part at least through the use of ICT.

From these first three papers of the current edition, with their focus upon democratic themes and issues, Peter Groenewegen and Pieter Wagenaar take us into the heart of public administration, in particular into the debate about *systems initiation, sub-optimisation and failure*. Their core academic concern is with perspective. For systems development and design two main perspectives predominate, neither of which appears entirely satisfactory. On the one hand, there is a perspective on the origination of new systems which the authors refer to as “the infighting” perspective. The second perspective they refer to as one of “continuous adaptation”. The first of these perspectives points to the need for stakeholder inclusion in systems origination; yet, if the continuous adaptation model is the norm, then this stakeholder inclusion may best be included throughout the lifetime of the system.

Their general conclusion is that continuous adaptation is a much more useful perspective than that of infighting. In the case they study here, they show the need for constant managerial attention during the entire life of the system, and contend that “Indeed, it could be argued that it is exactly the application of that [infighting] perspective, which has brought about the current situation”. They further argue that their observations “lend support to a more thorough analysis of who the relevant actors are in the case of large-scale system development. For policy and management purposes . . . evaluation of the changing interactions beyond the direct technology users and management should be part of IS management”.

Finally in this edition, Maija Setälä and Kimmo Grönlund take us back to a major theme in our concern to understand contemporary democratic practices. They examine the potential of parliamentary web-sites to enhance *openness in decision-making* and they do so with great originality as they juxtapose the Benthamite and Kantian arguments in favour of openness in parliamentary systems. Thus “Jeremy Bentham argued that publicity is needed to enable citizens to control the acts of the representatives . . . [The] Kantian tradition sees openness “as a test for the validity of the reasons given for public decisions”.

In their paper, Setälä and Grönlund present their research findings from a study of 18 democratic countries. Their conclusions are profoundly important: “We argue that parliamentary websites can be instrumental to citizens’ capacity to control the representatives in the Benthamite sense, although information provided on parliamentary websites does not necessarily provide a sufficient account of all aspects of parliamentary decision-making, most notably in party groups. From the deliberative [Kantian] perspective, however, publicity on parliamentary websites cannot replace the role of such mediating actors as journalists, political activists and parties who “filter” and reflect upon the representatives’ arguments and actions.