Editorial

Information Polity: an international journal for the information age

Recent data made available to me confirms the gathering strength of *Information Polity* amongst academics and professionals worldwide. Of particular significance for a journal that sets out to be international in its outreach and content is the interest to be found in the journal in the USA, India, Canada, China as well as in the UK and many other European countries. Such reach will add weight to our application to Thomson/Reuters early next year for indexation into the ISI – the international science index. Following indexation we will then be in a position to announce the official 'impact factor' being achieved by IP which, as many readers will be aware, is becoming an adjunct to academic publication deemed to be of the highest importance.

The papers in this edition provide further testament to the international standing of *Information Polity*. This edition contains five papers, authored by academics from five different countries: China, Costa Rica, Slovenia, Norway, and Turkey. In the first of these Weibing Xiao argues that the expansion of 'information pathways' in China, brought about by the widespread and growing adoption of new media, has brought the Chinese government into more receptive mode in terms of the adoption and acceptance of 'freedom of information'. The necessity of releasing information during physical disasters and social and political crises has broadened to a more general acceptance that much more information can and should be made available to Chinese citizens. Citing a number of Confucian aphorisms such as 'the common people may be made to follow, but may not be made to know', Weibing Xiao explains the long history of State secrecy in China as a consequence of the influence of the greatest of Chinese philosophers. The movement towards Freedom of Information sat in stark opposition to a philosophical conviction that the common people are best protected from learning about issues of governance including crises. Now in the era of new media uptake, as Weibing Xiao explains, the release of information hitherto kept secret works as a necessary social corrective to what emerges as forms of 'rumour'. Rumour, it is now argued, is potentially far more damaging to governance of the nation State than more open flows of information. Additionally, and in a more general sense, flows of information are more developed in China now both amongst citizens and between them and government. Thus there is an environment in China that is moving strongly towards the release of information rather than its secretive capture and management.

In the second paper presented here Fuat Alican, based in Costa Rica, writes about the possible contribution of information and communications technologies to peace. He does so by taking a case study approach to the region of South East Turkey. As with the first paper, here we have modern media development being attached to high level analysis of a major theme, in this case peace. Fuat Alican explains that whilst Turkey is gradually making progress towards joining the European Union, nonetheless the southeastern region of the country remains underdeveloped when compared to other regions of Turkey. Furthermore, he reveals, this area is characterised by widespread social unrest, a condition believed to be in large measure a consequence of the relative deprivation of this largely Kurdish region.

Reinforcing the issues faced by this region of the country and perhaps reflecting some of their causes is an 'Information Society' programme introduced in 2006, one which has little to say about the uneven development of the regions of the country and one which in any event has been slow to be implemented. Alican pleads in his paper for the incorporation into this strategy of a regionalised approach to software and hardware production in Turkey. If this could be achieved then the human capital growth in deprived regions would begin to shift current economic deprivation in potentially dramatic ways. And, as such development occurs, so too the sense of protest and unrest may diminish. Here then is an ambitious argument, hardly to be found in the pages of this journal before, that we need to think strategically in our countries about the growth and development of the industries so fundamental to the information age and to do so in ways that explicitly seek to overcome deprivation and unrest in some of the worst hit regions of the world. These industries may gravitate naturally to those regions that are already better off, regions where the labour force is already better equipped, but the strategic planning challenge lies in finding ways to draw these industries, including their high added-value components into deprived regions.

In the paper that follows, Vintar and Nograsek return to the continuing debate about how best to measure e-government development with its consequential benchmarking. These authors draw specific attention to Slovenia, their home country, which appears to be faring well in its e-government development, according to the Cap-Gemini measures adopted by the EU, but less well when we make comparisons to other measurement approaches. Table 1 is a good reference point for readers as its shows the divergence amongst 4 prominent and regular studies in terms of the broad variables being measured. The authors conclude that these wide variations between these studies point both to the immaturity of e-government as a field for study and to the necessity that such studies are used at most to inform policy but not to shape it. Indeed they draw attention to the 'political problem' of evaluations of e-government whereby politicians and senior officials use them to 'demonstrate' successes as well as to allocate resources. Once we see the variability that different studies bring to our understanding of this field we can see how misguided such political reaction may prove to be.

The fourth paper in this edition addresses questions of new media influence in political campaigning and elections. Here Rune Karlsen asks if we can see new media influencing political campaigns in some deterministic manner in the same way that it is frequently argued that the technologies influence society in general. Karlsen's argument is that campaigning must be located within its historical and institutional [including national] context and that new technology cannot and should not be treated as an independent variable therefore when seeking to understand its 'impact' upon these political processes. Karlsen's analysis and evidence show how easily the observer can be seduced into seeing electoral politics being played out increasingly at the behest of the world wide web. Howard Dean's campaigning in 2004 and Barack Obama's in 2007/8 seem to point to that conclusion. Karlsen is convincing however that this new medium offers enhancement of what has gone before and probably its enlargement too, but underlying objectives, expectations and the actors involved remain largely the same.

Finally, Zahid Sobaci provides a paper that looks directly at the parliamentary web-site in Turkey, asking the question of high relevance to all polities of its effectiveness in encouraging forms of public participation in governance processes. His conclusions, like so many that appear in this journal, contrast the heady optimism of the assumptive world that often surrounds web-sites of this kind with a stark reality of low and slow development of the site and an unwillingness to engage from either side of the political spectrum in Turkey.

JA Taylor,
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