

Editorial

This first issue of the 11th volume of *Information Polity* provides an eclectic mix of articles that range across the governmental and democratic interests of the journal. In so-doing it brings the journal back from its recent concentration on Special Issues and towards its more general remit of reporting research findings and publishing commentary on government and democracy in the information age. Moreover, this issue takes the journal into dimensions of the information polity that are highly topical in public policy terms, ones where it is vital for contemporary scholars to demonstrate their contributions to public debate in this field. This is precisely what this journal aims to achieve – the publication of high quality scholarly writing that works with issues that are current and examines them in ways that provide clarity, new thinking and new evidence. Thus we include articles that cover National ID cards, open source software, democratic enhancement and the delivery of high quality telecommunications infrastructure.

The first article in this edition brings analytical clarity to a matter of current concern to policymakers throughout Europe and not least in the UK. Paul Beynon-Davies provides analytical insight into the introduction of ID cards, using the case of the UK National Identity Card to illustrate his approach to unpacking and understanding the questions that such cards raise for public policymakers and public commentators alike. “Such an identity token offers numerous potential benefits for individuals and organisations but raises major challenges to data protection, data privacy and public trust in the information governance of the UK”, he concludes.

Berry and Moss are also raising questions about how much trust we can place in government, specifically in the context of their willingness to adopt free and open source software with its huge potential to extend democratisation processes in the modern State. They consider the implications for democracy and public participation of the use of free and open-source software in government and democratic settings. In particular these authors focus upon the ways in which such alternative software is represented discursively as well as how such software is constituted as it is introduced into new systems in government. Clearly these authors offer a view of circumstances emerging wherein the adoption of this kind of software helps to democratise government via enhanced forms of transparency and accountability as well as by offering opportunities for the engagement of citizens and groups into the shaping of the software itself. Berry & Moss conclude however, from an empirical perspective that such a desirable outcome seems unlikely. Much more likely, as these authors say, is more ‘politics as usual’ rather than democratisation.

Our third contributor in this issue, Ji-Young Kim, takes us back to the Internet, contending, as she does so, that students of the impact of the Internet on political engagement must understand that the political effects of the medium depend upon the way it is used. By examining different patterns of Internet use in South Korea she observes differentiated political consequences. Kim’s conclusion is that “the proliferation of virtual communities over the net, in and of itself, is not an indicator of political revitalization, but deliberative practices of citizens could be an integral element to regenerate civic political life”.

Jeffrey Cohen also takes up the Internet’s democratising potential by looking at the Internet as a medium for public contact with government. Although there is evidence that Internet users find it of

benefit to them in easing access there are also significant problems that ultimately may “imperil the internet as a way of connecting citizens and government”. Cohen concludes his article by examining ways in which matters may be improved in this respect.

Zahid Parvez takes us into the world of UK local government, as he puts it “to make sense of the role e-democracy plays in local democracy”. The author identifies ‘institutional mediation structures’ and ‘ICT mediation structures’ that together enable and constrain the shaping of electronic democracy by actors involved. Through this author’s use of the ‘structuration thesis’, he identifies insights that show the moderating role of these institutions on local e-democracy. How then should those involved in e-democracy projects proceed if they are to enhance democratic engagement through e-democracy projects? The author concludes by offering a number of such insights.

Finally, in this edition, the article by Dong Hee Shin examines the development of a broadband public information infrastructure in the Northeast of the US Using the Social Construction of Technology [SCOT] perspective as the evaluative framework the author offers insights into the ‘political economy’ of this infrastructure development including a forward look that learns from the insights deriving from his empirical work.