

## Editorial

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# Sustainable futures

In recent years, sustainability has been high on societal, political and policy agendas. It is a topic that is very emotive and which generates impassioned views. The information polity, academia more generally and the publishing business are all embroiled in these futures and have a role to play in ensuring resilient social outcomes, both in relation to environmental sustainability and also organisational and societal sustainability. As Editors-in-Chief, we would like to indicate how *Information Polity* can contribute to a sustainable future by publishing academic articles that strengthen our insights in the mechanisms that underpin sustainability and by presenting publications that improve the knowledge that is needed for building a sustainable future.

It is often argued, that the introduction of innovative new ICTs in the form of eGovernment services will result in a more efficient use of scarce resources – and in doing so contribute to sustainability. This is because administrative processes can be automated, because services can be targeted and personalised, and because decision-making can make better use of informational resources available in the polity. Such arguments are, for example, central to debates about how ‘smart city’ initiatives can contribute to sustainable futures (see for example: Webster & Leleux, 2019). Whilst this ‘line of argument’ is commonplace concrete robust evidence supporting this view is less forthcoming. There is a myriad of explanations for this, ranging from the complexity of measuring the outcomes of new ICT’s and the degree to which they are inherently embedded in existing institutional structures and norms. Moreover, the use of new technology not only contributes to solutions but also consumes significant levels of energy resources, and hence the call for Green IT.

The significance of the role of informationally intensive digital services has been in sharp focus during the COVID-19 pandemic. The ‘stay at home’ message has resulted in large numbers of people working from home and accessing services electronically. There has been a surge in online entertainment and the business of government has moved online (Meijer & Webster, 2020). This has been accompanied with a rapid decline in travel, both locally and internationally. Environmentalists have noted a significant decline in levels of pollution, but are at the same time worried about increases in pollution as lockdowns end and economic activity resumes. The point here, is that doing things digitally, can be directly linked to sustainable environmental outcomes, given certain circumstances. The information polity is central to these futures as it plays a key role in generating and using data, as well as delivering policy and services – and it is the mission of scholars in our field to understand and explain how this happens and how the information polity can contribute to a sustainable future.

As a journal linked to the IOS Press publishing house is worth noting that in December 2020 IOS Press became a member of the United Nation’s SDG Publishers Compact<sup>1</sup> and in doing so committed to develop sustainable practices and to act as champions of Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), in publishing books and journals that will help inform, develop, and inspire action that will contribute to

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<sup>1</sup>United Nation’s SDG Publishers Compact, URL: <https://www.un.org/sustainabledevelopment/sdg-publishers-compact/>.

global sustainability. As Editors-in-Chief of *Information Polity* we welcome this development and look forward to seeing how the journal will contribute to this mission. IOS Press have a dedicated webpage to setting out its commitment to this initiative, which you will find on their website<sup>2</sup>. Relevant to *Information Polity* is the commitment to *SDG 16 Peace, Justice and Strong Institutions* which is well aligned to the *Information Polity* aim of publishing ‘academic work that contributes to understanding and strengthening a democratic information polity’. Additionally, individual publications will address many of the other SGDs, such as *SDG 11 Sustainable Cities and Communities* through aforementioned research on smart cities and *SDG 9 Industry, Innovation and Infrastructure* through a focus on information infrastructures (for example discussed in the overview paper on strategies for dealing with COVID-19: Meijer & Webster, 2020).

Our ambition to contribute to a sustainable future is an important stance for an academic journal to take, as we are not just committing our scholarly endeavors to creating and disseminating new knowledge and understanding, but also to using this for the greater good – in this case a stronger sustainable democratic information polity. In our opinion, it is important to demonstrate the significance of our field and its intellectual contribution to the future evolution of critical institutions and infrastructures in society and especially the polity.

This issue of *Information Polity* focuses on a specific sustainable development goal which has received scant attention in the literature on eGovernment: gender equality (*Sustainable Development Goal 5*). This special issue is dedicated to ‘digital government and gender’, it fills an important gap in the literature and investigates a topic that is of great importance for a sustainable future. We would like to extend our personal thanks to the special issue editors for bringing this excellent issue to fruition, and we hope that you, our readers, enjoy these contributions to this vitally important topic.

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## References

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- Webster, C.W.R., & Leleux, C. (2019) Searching for the real sustainable smart city? *Information Polity*, 24(3), 229-244.

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<sup>2</sup>IOS Press, URL: <https://www.iospress.nl/service/sustainable-development-goals/>.