

Editorial

The strong and eclectic contents of this, my final edition as Editor-in-Chief, please me enormously. At the end of 2015, editorial responsibilities will be passed on to a highly capable and distinguished successor, Professor Miriam Lips of Victoria University Wellington.

As with all acts of ‘stepping down’ there is some sadness in giving up a considerable aspect of my work; I have edited Information Polity since founding this journal 14 years ago. I shall write a little more about this change, including the editorial handover, after I have introduced readers to the really important part of this edition, its constituent papers.

First we have a paper on open data, a topic about which more and more is being written, yet this paper opens up a new aspect of that theme. Here we have a paper on the subject of *licensing* of open data written by Mashael Khayyat and Frank Bannister from Trinity College Dublin. After reviewing fundamental issues such whether there is a need for licensing open data at all, and after examining a number of current licensing frameworks such as Creative Commons, the authors conclude that well thought through licensing is crucial to the effective use of open data. Thus they reject a common view that little in the way of licensing is really necessary and that data might be simply made available in the public domain, in favour of the development of a standards driven approach that will ultimately lead to greater use and to greater effect in terms of public value creation. Government must continue to play a central role in the regulation of data that comes into the public domain, they argue. And to make that point emphatically they offer an arresting final paragraph. I will not spoil your enjoyment of the paper by revealing their last words here. Read them for yourselves.

Second we have a paper from Arthur Edwards and his colleague Dennis de Kool from Erasmus University, Rotterdam and Charlotte van Ooijen who is at CNRS-University Pantheon Assas in Paris, on what they refer to as the ‘information ecology’ of parliamentary monitoring websites. Their focus throughout the paper is on the contribution of such sites to strengthening democracy and their case studies of Germany, UK and France serve them well in offering three distinctive political systems or ecologies within which to explore how these monitoring activities are being conducted. The authors produce balanced conclusions from their work, offering up where these monitoring activities can produce significant democratic gains but also where they fall short. My own comment on reading this paper is how there is as yet too little published work in this specific area and how fruitful a research field this could and should become. More critical studies of this kind are needed and, in those, we must consider the extent to which these monitors are operating transparently and how they are themselves held to account.

Wayne Buente from the University of Hawaii at Manoa, Honolulu provides our third paper with a look back at the 2008 US Presidential election accompanied by a look forward at what his study offers for the present time. Buente’s work carries an optimistic note, that good high speed digital infrastructure in the home can break down some of the oft cited social divisions which are said to bias *informed* digital citizenship in favour of higher income groups. Encouraging too for many who argue in favour of enlarging the franchise to younger voters, Buente argues that access to high quality technical infrastructure in the home can lead to the development of political interest amongst younger citizens. Where his study is at its strongest is on following through the distinction between ‘digital citizenship’ and ‘informed digital citizenship’ both analytically and empirically. Much more research is needed in this field, as Buente himself concludes.

The fourth paper here is written by Giles Moss, Stylianos Moshonas and Chris Birchall from the University of Leeds, UK together with Helen Kennedy of Sheffield University, also UK. Their paper covers another hot topic for readers of this journal – that of the effective use of social media analytics by public authorities. In this case the authors adduce evidence of social media analysis from two local government case studies and bring forward highly instructive findings. Notably, they conclude that existing practices in the organisation will heavily influence social media analytics as will the search for cost reductions. They point also to a fundamental dilemma for local governments – that of a perceived need to develop stronger forms of public consultation through social media activity in times of financial constraint, yet the resources needed for this are diminishing. One other aspect of this paper to point readers towards is the section on the way their research was conducted. I learned a lot from the section on the tools that were used in this research, including the open source tool Gephi which enables analysis and visualisation. If readers are considering this kind of research themselves then much can be gleaned from this paper.

Our penultimate paper, written by Wouter Steijn from Tilburg University in The Netherlands and Anton Vedder from Leuven in Belgium revisits questions surrounding the salience of privacy in western democratic systems, particularly as perceived by the younger citizen groups, but also how those younger cohorts vary in their concerns about privacy from older groups. Their findings at this level of analysis seem straightforward enough with younger citizens being somewhat less concerned about privacy *per se* than older citizens. Where their research offers a newer insight is in their finding that, whichever age cohort is looked at, freedom and security are valued more highly than privacy.

The sixth and final paper included in this edition is from Aleksander Lust from the Appalachian State University, Boone, North Carolina. His topic is a much needed revisiting of the issues surrounding on-line voting accompanied by insights from his case study country of the world's most extensive use of on-line voting, that of the Baltic republic of Estonia. So often in the past this topic has been written about from the 'pens' of zealots, those who believe in on-line as the necessary future of voting practices and the failure to do so as being a modern form of Luddism. What Lust demonstrates however is that on-line voting carries many uncertainties and deficiencies along with it which are all too often over-looked. Here is another paper in this edition where I want to draw readers' attention to a final section. In this case it is the very final sentence. Lust states in no uncertain terms "*This is a bad thing for democracy and Estonia should discontinue online voting*". Well, we all await the Estonian response!

Finally let me return to my handover of editorial responsibilities for **Information Polity**. It has been enormously gratifying to lead a journal that has come from its very earliest beginnings of struggling to attract good papers to one that now has a plentiful supply of rich material. This journal has climbed the league tables of academic research during this period with its current status on **SCOPUS** as being top quartile in its major subject fields. And Information Polity attracts top scholars too who see this journal as a good outlet for their work. Long may this be the case, a sentiment that I am certain my successor and former colleague Miriam Lips will echo. But so too I hope this journal will continue to publish work from colleagues new to academic life whose scholarly work deserves wider audience. I have been proud to publish the work of younger, brilliant scholars in my period 'in charge'.

So over to Miriam, but not before other acknowledgements. Dr Alasdair Marshall has been my *aide de camp* for many years now, helping me enormously in getting review requests out, and reviews in, as well as keeping me on publishing schedule. Colin Smith, Miriam Lips and, currently, Karl Lofgren have been first rate commissioners of book reviews. Kim Willems at the publisher, IOS Press, has been amazing for her quiet but massively effective editorial and publishing support for the past 10 years or so. And then there is Einar Fredriksson the owner of IOS Press who has given this journal a lot of personal

attention despite the wide catalogue of journals for which his company is responsible. I am immensely grateful to you all.

John Taylor,
October, 2015.