

Book Reviews

Matti Mälkiä, Ari-Veikko Anttiroiko and Reijo Savolainen, eds., *eTransformation in Governance: New Directions in Government and Politics*, Hershey, PA, USA: Idea Group Publishing, 2003. ISBN: 1 59140 130 5

The relationship between ICT-applications and governance, often addressed as ‘eGovernment’ or ‘eGovernance’, is on its way to becoming an internationally acknowledged stream of work within public administration and political science disciplines. International conferences, scientific and professional journals as well as a substantial number of dedicated publications are contributing to the establishment of eGovernance as a demarcated field of research. However, like most new areas of scientific interest, the emerging research field of eGovernance has to deal with growing pains: it seems to be difficult to establish a shared body of knowledge and to create the shoulders of the giants on which we can stand to look even further, as Isaac Newton put it eloquently more than three centuries ago. So far in its development we may observe the field of eGovernance to be fragmented, with many varying and competing theoretical insights applied and only a small empirical base thus far. Reviewing numerous papers presented at eGovernment conferences around the globe it becomes clear that the scientific world is still struggling between philosophising about the emerging brave new world or big brother on the one hand and describing anecdotal attempts to use ICT in government in the real world on the other hand.¹ The lack of a broadly applicable eGovernment theory, that might combine loose strings, challenges many scientists, however.

Mälkiä, Anttiroiko and Savolainen attempt to fill this scientific gap in the field of eGovernance with their edited volume. Like many scientists in this field they can be qualified as ‘believers’ in the benefits of new technological applications for the role of governance. They conclude however that societal transformation from the application of new ICTs unfortunately does not lead to positive outcomes only. Approaching the subject of eGovernance from the dilemmas, problems and failures of ICT-mediated societal transformation, they perceive extreme professionalization and horizontal decentralization, fragmentation of politics, political and institutional alienation, the increase in extremist political activism and global activism, and local apathy as major emerging threats to society. A variety of scientists from eight different countries contributed their views on solutions for these dilemmas and problems related to what the editors have called ‘eTransformation’. Author contributions have been clustered around four themes: (1) involving citizens, (2) restructuring public administration, (3) building urban and regional communities and (4) providing citizens’ access to information in the information age.

The reader is tempted to open this book as a scientific commentary on how little the ‘e’ in the concept of ‘eTransformation’ seems to contribute to changes in governing societies. He or she hopes to find answers to questions like to what extent does new technology transform governance? Or, is a particular change for the better or for worse? Some might hope to find new directions in government and politics

¹A. Grönlund: State of the Art in e-Gov Research – A Survey, in Traunmüller R., *Electronic Government*, Third International Conference, EGOV 2004, Zaragoza, Spain, August/September 2004 Proceedings, Springer LNCS 3183.

as announced in the title of the book. Others might look for rules of thumb to learn the 'do's and don'ts' in applying ICTs to solve societal problems and/or to improve government.

With regard to the first two questions on whether ICT matters, opinions differ among contributors. Becker for instance, in his contribution 'Teledemocratic Innovations that Public Officials Ignore', does not believe that successful ICT-mediated innovations can replace outmoded ways of doing things in modern representative government. Similarly, Ridell, in his contribution on 'ICTs and the Communicative Conditions for Democracy', concludes from a case study in Tampere, Finland, that 'obviously given the rigidity of local public communication practices, ICTs will change nothing'. Under the book's second theme 'Restructuring public administration', Slaton and Arthur conclude however that much is possible with ICTs as soon as governments approach citizens as 'owners' instead of 'customers' or 'subjects'. Bugdahn states in his contribution 'What's New? Perspectives on Freedom of Information and the Internet' that arguing that new ICTs fail to make a "real" qualitative difference 'fails to do justice to the impact of the new technologies'. Malina and Macintosh have to conclude in their contribution 'Bridging the Digital Divide' that, although they consider the Digital Communities Project in Scotland as important, unfortunately empirical results on the success or otherwise of this project are not yet available. Smith and Smythe examined the impact of the Internet on the failed attempts to negotiate two important international trade agreements, the Multilateral Agreement on Investing (1995–1998) and the WTO ministerial meetings in Seattle 1999. They conclude, too, that the Internet is not a panacea for all that ails citizenship. In their opinion however it does have the potential to enhance and enrich it.

The reader might conclude from the various contributions in this book that the balance seems not in favour of those who expect ICTs to actually transform governance. ICTs appear to be merely tools among other tools that might enhance relations between citizens and their governments: although even that seems difficult to prove from a scientific point of view.

If it comes to discovering new directions in government and politics or applicable knowledge like rules of thumb for practitioners, the book does indeed present a few ideas to involve citizens and bridge the digital divide. Becker, in particular, suggests two successful methods of involving citizens: scientific deliberative polling and electronic town meetings. Moreover, Slaton and Arthur present their experiences, which might be successful for other practitioners also. The message one reads between the lines however is 'we are trying hard to understand the role and successful use of ICTs in governance, but we are not there yet'.

The book uses a broad definition on eTransformation in governance, which is reflected in the various contributions. The contribution of Hunold and Peters on 'Bureaucratic Discretion and Deliberative Democracy' for instance addresses a more general problem for public administration, which does not appear to be specifically related to government transformation or eGovernance. This is a pity because the subject of bureaucratic discretion has direct relevancy to the research field of eGovernance. Other authors already discussed ICT-enforced developments like the decrease of bureaucratic discretion by street level bureaucrats to the benefit of system level bureaucrats.² Also, Richman's contribution on Telecommunications Policy seems to have little relationship with the central themes of the book.

In summary, the edited volume 'eTransformation in Governance' may be considered to reflect the current state of eGovernment as an area of scientific research. It is a collection of theories, case studies and research questions that shows little consistency and coherence. Some of the contributions however provide interesting food for thought and pose challenging questions, e.g. Edwards on the role of the moderator in online public debates. Some give clarifying overviews of specific areas of eGovernance,

²e.g. Bovens, M. A. P. (2003). *De digitale republiek*. Amsterdam, Amsterdam University Press.

e.g. Anttiroiko on the concept of democratic e-Governance. Some describe case studies which are valuable for other eGovernment practitioners, e.g. Slaton and Arthur on Televote and Uniontown. Over all, eTransformation in Governance seems like a lucky dip for its readers: if you don't know what you are looking for you might run into a shiny pearl. If you are looking for a consistent and coherent piece of scientific research or theory building to understand better the impact of ICTs on governance, the book might help you to realise that eGovernment as an independent area of scientific activity still has a long way to go.

Mr. Drs. Marcel Hoogwout
Tilburg Institute for Law, Technology, and Society
Tilburg University
The Netherlands Partner at Zenc, (consultancy firm on innovative ICT
developments in the field of public administration)
E-mail: marcel.hoogwout@zenc.nl

Wim van de Donk, Brian D. Loader, Paul G. Nixon and Dieter Rucht, eds, *Cyberprotest: New Media, Citizens and Social Movements*, London: Routledge, 2004, ISBN 0 415 297850, pp. 336, US \$ 32.95.

This volume brings together a number of expert contributions from two areas, namely, the literature on transnational social movements, and the literature on how developments in information and communications technology (ICT) are shaping contemporary social and political relations. As such, it provides a timely investigation into the relationship between the two, and establishes a number of interesting starting-points for future research. Particularly welcome and refreshing is the fact that many of the contributions resist the tendency towards over-generalisation and speculation that has characterised some studies of civil society, globalisation, and the media in the past.

The editors present the collection as an exploratory study: the recent nature of many developments in ICT and the deliberately broad, multi-disciplinary scope of the research framework deter them from drawing concrete conclusions from the findings. They are especially cautious about making strong claims about the impact of ICTs on social movements, arguing that the 'older' strategies – print media, direct action, face-to-face contact – retain much of their former relevance in a networked age. Rather, the aim of the volume is to provide a preliminary assessment of how ICTs have had an impact on social movements in three particular respects: firstly, how they have affected the level and domains of political action; secondly, how ICTs have affected social movements' strategies and choices of action; and thirdly, how ICTs have had an impact upon questions of citizenship and identity within the social movements themselves. The collection begins with a useful introduction to the literature on social movements and ICTs, setting out a general framework of analysis and identifying a number of central hypotheses. The rest of the book is then devoted to the three themes outlined above, with contributions from both academics and practitioners.

Several chapters are of particular interest. Dieter Rucht's study of the media strategies of protest groups provides a fascinating historical perspective on how citizens' movements and non-governmental organisations have used both new and old media to further their goals since the 1960s. Rucht bases his analysis on an important asymmetry: the fact that on the whole, protest groups have needed the media more than the media has needed them. Building upon this insight, Rucht argues that protest groups have

tended to choose from four contrasting media-management strategies, which he terms the 'quadruple A': abstention, attack, adaptation, and the search for alternatives. In contrast with those scholars who argue that the Internet age provides a radically new environment in which to operate, Rucht identifies continuities as well as new developments in protest groups' relations with the media.

Another notable contribution is the chapter by Peter van Aelst and Stefaan Walgrave of the University of Antwerp on the role of the Internet in shaping the 'anti-globalisation' movement. Van Aelst and Walgrave examine the content of anti-globalisation groups' web sites with respect to three functions: the extent to which the sites forge a sense of collective identity among protestors; their impact on actual mobilisation; and their networking function. Seventeen web sites are carefully selected and coded on the basis of these three functions. The authors take a number of factors into account when looking at levels of mobilisation, for instance: whether site visitors have the opportunity to become a member of the movement or donate; the existence of an action calendar; opportunities to undertake online actions, such as signing a petition; and online information on training, either directly on the web site in the form of manuals, or indirectly as links to other sites. Van Aelst and Walgrave thereby make a valuable contribution to the development of methodological tools for web site analysis. Other chapters deal with issues such as the role of ICTs in the anti-capitalist movement, the strengths and vulnerabilities of networked politics, the role of the media in democratising knowledge and mobilising mass protest, and lastly, case studies on the organisational structure and identity of women's, disabled and feminist movements.

While the broad scope of the collection undeniably adds to the freshness of the material, such a wide canvas can have its disadvantages as well. Terms such as 'social movements', 'new media', and 'citizens' movements' are notoriously hard to define and apply, meaning that sometimes – particularly in the third part of the book – one wishes for a clearer definitional framework, or at least a conclusion, that is able to pull the various strands of research together more tightly. The loose framework also results in some repetition, namely a focus on left wing, anti-capitalist movements in the first two-thirds of the book (a feature which is understandable, given the nature of many protest movements in recent years, but it would have been interesting to have some counter case-studies from conservative movements as well). There are indeed a number of issues that it would have been interesting to examine in more detail, such as the impact of North-South relations on new media strategies; the relationship between social movements' use of new media and that of more established political institutions; and more on the reception and consumption, as opposed to the production, of new media by the public.

Such comments should not diminish the fact, however, that this volume makes an original contribution to a fast-moving field, and in doing so, provides plenty of food for thought as well as, one should add, an excellent bibliography. As such, it should be of interest to scholars and graduate students working on globalisation, new media and public policy.

Dr Vivien Collingwood
Tilburg Institute for Law, Technology, and Society
Tilburg University
The Netherlands
E-mail: V.C.Collingwood@uvt.nl