

Editorial

Editorial issue 3 2023: The Value of Classic Works in our Field

As Editors-in-Chief of the journal *Information Polity*, we have been active in this field of study since the 1990s. We are both over 50 years old (just) and may not always understand all the details of current technological developments as well as younger scholars. At the same time, we sometimes feel that we are confronted with the same naïve, optimistic expectations about technology that we have heard many times before. We enjoy learning from publications about new technological developments, but in this editorial we would like to make a plea for strengthening the connections between current research and older classic studies. We believe that connecting latest insights to foundational theories is the key to strong academic work (see Meijer & Löfgren (2015) for a quick overview).

Digital participation is a topic addressed in a number of papers in this issue of *Information Polity*. Attention to the promise of digital technologies for strengthening democracy remains a key focus in our field of study. This has been the case since the early days of studies into ‘informatization’ in the public sector. By the mid-nineties, Van de Donk, Snellen and Tops (1995) published a fascinating volume with the title ‘*Orwell in Athens*’. They highlighted the tension between the promise of technology for democratic governance (‘Athens’) and contrasted this with the dystopian perspective of the surveillance state (‘Orwell’). We encourage all scholars of digital democracy to take the time to check out this edited volume – you will be amazed at how many insights are still relevant.

Some of the key classic work that continues to influence our thinking are the following:

- Winner, L. (1986). *The whale and the reactor: A Search for limits in an age of high technology*, Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press.
- Zuboff, S. (1988). *In the age of the smart machine: The future of work and power*. New York: Basic Books.
- Taylor, J.A., & Williams, H. (1991). Public administration and the information polity. *Public Administration*, 69(2), 171-190.
- Snellen, I.T.M., & Van de Donk, W.B. (Eds.). (1998). *Public administration in an information age: A handbook*. Amsterdam: IOS press.
- Fountain, J.E. (2001). *Building the virtual state: Information technology and institutional change*. Washington: Brookings.

Our message to the current generation of academics is to explore the roots of our field of study and connect to them. We feel that it is of crucial importance to not only build upon recent studies but also connect to the classic literature in the field. This process of ‘zooming out’ (Meijer & Homburg, 2008) will also ensure that we are not entrapped in the latest government fad, but have a more critical perspective on all emerging trends. Some editors emphasize that new manuscripts must refer to recent relevant publications, but we feel that is only partly true – strong publications make both a connection to current

literature and also to classic publications, and in that way, they are anchored in established and traditional academic debates, whilst at the same time offering a commentary on contemporary thinking.

Editors-in-Chief

Professor Albert Meijer, Utrecht University
Professor William Webster, University of Stirling

References

- Meijer, A.J., & Homburg, V.M. (2008). Introduction: Zooming in and zooming out on electronic government. *Intl. Journal of Public Administration*, 31(7), 707-710.
- Meijer, A., & Löfgren, K. (2015). The neglect of technology in theories of policy change. *International Journal of Public Administration in the Digital Age (IJPADA)*, 2(1), 75-88.
- Van de Donk, W.B., Snellen, I.T.M., & Tops, P.W. (Eds.). (1995). *Orwell in Athens: A perspective on informatization and democracy*. Amsterdam: IOS Press.