Editorial

Information Polity is an inclusive journal in its field, interested equally in publishing studies on all aspects of the polity. In so-doing it works across the political spectrum from studies on 'government and administration', on the one hand, to those on the 'democratic sphere', on the other. Its sub-title '*the international journal of government and democracy in the information age*' embraces this wide perspective of an information polity. Just as 'information economy' is a concept that deploys an informational perspective to capture and understand the myriad of economic activities, so the concept of information polity seeks to bring an informational perspective into an understanding of the whole political system.

In this issue we include five substantive articles, two focused on government and administration and three on democratic expression and procedure. In the first of these which address governmental questions, Claude Rochet and colleagues examine a perspective on information systems in government as agents of "subversion". In the second Stephan Grimmelikhuijsen re-examines the pertinent issue of the relationship between the openness of government and public trust in government.

Set in the French context of relationships between central government and the Universities, the paper by Rochet and colleagues looks at the new regime of performance management in French government as it comes to define a new paradigm within these centre-periphery relationships. The successful implementation of policy objectives set at the centre of government is a longstanding topic in studies of public administration. Here, the authors examine the re-engineering of the information systems' relationship between central government and the Universities as peripheral organisations, and in so-doing trace a new strategic dialogue between the actors involved. As the central State seeks new monitoring capabilities based on new flows of information from research institutions, so new information systems implied raise questions that the authors refer to as 'subversive'. Here new systems are subversive because they sit within what appears as a loose organisational network whilst actually permitting the prospect of greater central control over that network. Thus extreme tensions are introduced into the organisational system that, as these authors point out, requires new modes of governance within the system. The authors conclude that stronger central government should be built from stronger peripheral organisations. By building on innovations at the periphery, and encouraging them, the centre of government can support a federated approach to organisational networking that will fulfil its own desire for improved performance management whilst simultaneously enabling local organisation to behave relatively autonomously. Thus subversive IS can work to the mutual advantage of the actors concerned.

The paper by Grimmelikhuijsen brings much needed empirical evidence to the debate about government transparency and public trust. It does so in the context of 'internet transparency', asking whether greater informational availability on government web-sites presents a greater or lesser sense of government competence, benevolence and honesty – the stuff of public judgments of trust. The author acknowledges that the findings from the study set out here are only a starting point and that further work needs to be undertaken. He does so after finding from his study that perceptions of governmental competence seem unaffected by internet openness whilst perceptions of benevolence and honesty are affected positively.

A government web-site containing many government papers and supportive information leads to a sense of benevolence and honesty, it seems. To test the impact of internet transparency on competence, the author acknowledges that a different study is needed, one that engages an experimental group with a government web-site containing much more 'outcome' information than the one used in this study. The test of competence concerns both process openness and outcome openness. The web-site used in the research set out here displayed only the first of these, rather than the second. More research is needed but the author is able to point up a general message for governments concerned with developing the trust relationship that exists between them and their citizenry. Governments should present high levels of policy information of their web-sites, for to do so will have important perceptual benefits and in the most general sense develop positively the trust relationship with citizens so much desired by them.

The next three papers in this edition offer research findings on the 'democratic sphere' of the polity. First amongst these is a study of on-line deliberative democracy by Kimmo Gronlund and colleagues. Second and third are studies undertaken in Ireland by Matthew Wall and colleagues and by Kerrill Dunne. Wall and colleagues offer research findings on Ireland's 'Picking your party online' initiative which was established in the first instance to support the general election in 2007. Dunne, like Gronlund et al, looks at deliberative democracy as encouraged by on-line forums and finds that the existing literature has overlooked to this point an important dimension of such forums, that of 'cross cutting discussion'.

The Finnish study is important for the way it offers a direct comparison between face to face and on-line deliberation. What judgments can we reach about the efficacy of what might be called 'traditional' deliberation as citizens talk together in a shared space, on the one hand, and similarly how efficacious is the virtual meeting space on-line? Perhaps the most surprising from this study is that learning occurred similarly in both face to face and virtual modes of interaction. The authors state that enhancing knowledge as a result of on-line deliberation has not been strongly researched before but having done so a reasonable claim is that "an increase in cognitive competence can also be achieved through online endeavors". The authors point up technical problems with virtual discussion such as server capacity [at the University], lack of computer skills amongst some participants and slow connections over 'broadband'. The authors finish by pointing out the importance of well designed deliberation so that it is not overwhelmed by "cacophony", a point of huge significance for those who promote such activity.

Wall and colleagues examine an online voting advice application, ostensibly enabling voters to compare their own policy preferences with those of the political parties competing in the 2007 election and advising the voter on their vote. One of the values of this paper lies in it bringing forward evidence and argument about the role such sites are playing in shaping voting patterns in those countries, particularly multi-party countries, where party differences are less immediately evident than they are in countries where a comparatively small number of parties compete for votes. Here is an important aspect of 'internet politics' which as the authors point out is as yet relatively unexplored. Their conclusions point up important issues for designers of such sites too, particularly for the way such sites may 'favour' smaller, more evidently differentiated, parties over the larger 'broad church' variety.

Finally, Kerill Dunne's paper takes us to a further aspect of internet politics, that of on-line deliberation, asking whether on-line deliberation support all of its forms. Drawing from the existing literature Dunne adduces a typology of deliberation consisting of '*Mixed Discourses and Modes of Communication*' [rational argument plus more emotional and personal accounts], '*Rational Deliberation Redefined*' [rational argument only] and *Non-Rational, Non-Consensual Deliberation.* In a research-rich paper Dunne examines his research question using both deductive and inductive methods and in so-doing offering readers of *Information Polity* an insightful account on what can be found on on-line sites developed to further forms of political deliberation. His conclusion that sites supporting a fourth type of

deliberation *'cross cutting discussion'* are more likely to have higher levels of participation than those other types is one that scholars working in this field and those designing such sites will want to note.

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