

Book: *Digital Governance:// Networked Societies. – Creating Authority, Community and Identity in a Globalized World*

Editors: Hans Krause Hansen and Jens Hoff

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Digital Governance:// Networked Societies is a timely effort to examine the role of new media, the Internet in particular, in the creation and reconfiguration of political authority, community and identity in a world marked by globalization, and the challenges these developments pose to politics and democracy worldwide. The editors have rightly highlighted digital governance as one of the important areas for advanced study and research in the process of democratization of contemporary globalized society.

The book is in two parts: Part one consists of four well written chapters that focus on the digital shaping of global authorities and addresses the complex intersection in global politics of new, boundary-crossing organizational forms and authorities, with the rise of the new media. Part two presents various efforts to address the digital shaping of communities and identities: chapters that explore how the new media facilitate the construction of communities and identities, including how they shape the dynamics of local politics and publics.

Digital Governance:// Networked Societies is organized as a selection of case studies that explore how the potential for social change is facilitated by the possibilities of the new media. This potential is manifest in the formation of new organizational forms and authorities of a transnational and local character, as well as in the creation of public spheres, communities and identities, that challenge the existing notions of territoriality and functionality.

In the introductory chapter, Jens Hoff, Hans Krause Hansen and Flemming Bjerke unravel the facilitation of social and political outcomes brought about by the new media and explain how they shape the transformation of political authority and power, the diversification of the public sphere and the rise of new communities and identities. The next four chapters in the first section examine new organizational forms operating on different scales and challenging the traditional conceptions of power often associated with notions of who gets what, when, and how, in national political systems.

Anne Loft and Christopher Humphrey in Chapter 2, explain the world of auditing with the help of a website ifac.org and analyze the rise of the International Federation of Accountants (IFAC) as a global authority governing auditing; a development closely connected to attempts at managing the world economy in an era of rapid economic globalization and escalating needs for information about the economic state of international business. This chapter illustrates the role of new media for construction of a global authority in auditing and its implications for democracy. The authors conclude that “IFAC.ORG will remain an important site for the foreseeable future for those wishing to view or participate in the development of particular auditing, ethical, educational and public sector accounting standards” (p. 71).

Mikkel Flyverbom and Hans Krause Hansen, in Chapter 3, explore global networks in the service of development through technological imageries and governance arrangements. This chapter investigates how specific conceptions about the potential of new media contribute to ICT4D as a governance space and discusses activities that impinge on practices of governance through two successful case studies of global network – the World Bank initiated Global Knowledge Partnership and the UN ICT Task Force.

In chapter 4, Bolette M. Christensen looks at networking in the field of alter-globalization movements and provides an example of how associations and networks are created within and across spatial or scalar containers. Christensen says that the Internet:

. . . offers an efficient means of transmitting information and developing knowledge. However, the internet does not appear to greatly facilitate the mediation of emotion and affection, the feeling of solidarity or the process of identification. It does not offer genuine opportunities to get to know each other ‘as persons’ or for gaining common experiences. It does not really offer the foundation of trust between participants. (p. 135)

The argument here is that to organize collective action it is necessary to leave the virtual space of the web and meet face-to-face in order to carry out communicative tasks.

Dorte Salskove-Iversen, in Chapter 5, studies global interconnectedness by using the case of Danish local government in the network society. The chapter is concerned with the mechanisms and modes enabling local actors to connect to the global, particularly the role of networks and networking in connecting the two. Salskove-Iversen develops the argument based on an empirical survey of the global orientation of 79 large Danish authorities and detailed studies of selected local authorities and transnational networks.

In part two of the volume, Flemming Bjerke (Chapter 6) considers computers and computer network as social systems and suggests that a new technology of power develops with the development of new media. In chapter 7, Charlotte Kira Kimby examines how women with breast cancer use the internet throughout their experiences that ultimately lead to diagnosis. Kimby's argument is based on an analysis of personal websites constructed by women with breast cancer and interviews with these women to explore 1) how the internet is used in coping with the disease and 2) in identity formation founded on everyday life experiences.

Chapters 8, 9 and 10 explore how the internet might compliment, undermine or reconfigure existing public spheres and traditional mass media – thereby impacting the contours of political communication in local settings. In chapter 8, Kresten Storgaard presents the results of an interesting project of developing and using new media – specifically visualization tools such as photo safaris and 3D modeling – to strengthen public participation in the urban renewal of Norrebro, a residential area in Copenhagen. In chapter 9, Jens Hoff analyzes the extent to which democratic norms have played a functional role in the construction and use of web-based means of political communication in a Danish municipality. In chapter 10, Olsen, Reiper and Torpe discuss the reconfiguration of local democracy by new media in Denmark through a study of the contrasting cases of two Danish municipalities. The study confirms that the internet supplements existing forms of political communication at the local level.

In the concluding chapter, the editors of the volume, Jens Hoff and Hans Krause Hansen, summarize some perspectives on politics and democracy based on context specific case studies to advance on the general understanding of literature in the area of digital governance and networked societies.

Digital Governance:// Networked Societies will be of particular value to developing countries where e-governance is still in its infancy. The perspectives presented are also useful for policy makers and researchers involved in the formulation and implementation of e-governance initiatives. The volume is well-documented and thus an excellent resource for students and researchers interested in e-governance and democracy studies in networked societies.

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