PUBLIC SECTOR INFORMATION SYSTEMS (PSIS): HOW ICT CAN BRING INNOVATION INTO THE POLICYMAKING PROCESS

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Panel

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Abstract

Policies are traditionally developed by experts with limited forms of stakeholder involvement. New technologies can change policy making practice through new methods of citizens' engagement. As a result, the traditional boundaries between governments and the public are also changing. Policy-makers face the challenge of advancing their policy-making practices to take advantage of these new developments. Many new tools and instruments are available that can help to improve policy-making, yet little is known about their costs, benefits, or contribution. The objective of this panel is to advance our understanding of how research in various disciplines can contribute to new ways of policy-making, in particular the role of information systems. The panelists represent various academic backgrounds and cultures and the audience will be challenged to share their experiences and contribute to the debate.

Keywords: policy-making, information systems, governance, crowdsourcing, open data, theory and practice

1   Introduction

Social media has recently begun to play a critical role in policy-making as it influences decision-making concerning the childcare and health system in various countries, including the UK and the Netherlands. The web enables the information society in which everybody can be directly connected with each other (Castells 1996). This is further accelerated by the social web, in which information and transactions are mediated by the web, but in which also social relations that traditionally had a physical presence are mediated by the web. Social networking sites enable people to contact each other. Governments are looking for ways to take advantage of the social web and are especially looking for opportunities to advance the policy-making processes (Belanger and Carter 2012).

Policy-making is aimed at solving societal problems by outlining and implementing policies that can solve them. In the simplest terms, policy-making can be viewed as a conveyor belt in which issues are recognized as a problem, alternative courses of actions are formulated, policies are effected, implemented, executed and evaluated (Stewart Jr et al. 2008). However, in practice, policy-making is much more complex involving a large number of actors and many organizations following different processes and procedures and using all kind of instruments to gather and assess data and opinions. Although there are established instruments and tools for supporting policy-making and assessing the impact of policies, the current networked society enables new instruments. For example, the social web is becoming more important in the daily work of policy analysts and decision makers and are looking for ways to take advantage of this. Making use of these new opportunities requires advanced scientific knowledge which provides in insight into the effectiveness of new instruments and in factors of influence.

There are a number of developments that influence the traditional way of policy-making including blogs as governance instrument (Coleman and Moss 2008), open data (European Commission 2010, Janssen et al. 2012), freedom of information (Burt 2011) and the wisdom of the crowds (Surowiecki 2004). All these developments can be used for enhancing citizen engagements and to involve citizens better in the policy-making process. In this panel the need for interdisciplinary research in this area is discussed in which the need for theories, instruments and tools will be discussed to advance the policy-making process. The panel is aimed at providing an overview of the different aspects of policy-making and will offer ideas for investigating various directions.

2 Focus of Panel

Different versions of the policy-making cycle describe various stages (see, for example, Stewart Jr et al. 2008, Gerston 2010). In general policy-making can be described using the stages agenda setting, policy formulation, policy adoption, policy implementation and evaluation. Traditionally policy-making is dominated by politicians setting the objectives and intentions and negotiating with each other about the desired outcomes and facilitated by policy-makers who act as experts in their areas. Today traditional policy-making is influenced by a number of developments which results in a drastic change of the landscape.

1. Crowdsourcing: Problems are not formulated and solved by policy-makers and experts guided by the government. Instead societal and policy problems are crowdsourced to the public to foster a larger set of experts. This enables the possibility of involving a wide range of stakeholders with diverging perspectives. As such the traditional roles of experts are changing. This changes aspects like the trust in policy-making

2. Public engagement: citizens routinely use ICT for civic engagement and techniques such as crowdsourcing and social media are encouraging citizens to participate in policy making processes allowing the shaping of policies that are more geared towards tackling local or grass roots level societal issues Participants feel more open to express what their thoughts are on the topic of discussion and contribute to the creativity.

3. Open data: The opening of publicly funded data provides greater returns from public investment, and can generate wealth through the downstream use of outputs, provides policy-makers with data needed to address complex problems (Arzberger et al. 2004). The public can utilize these data to investigate policy options and to contribute to the debate.

In particular the emphasis is more on the role of the public and the ways in which policy-makers roles are fundamentally changing, especially through the use of PSIS/ICT such as social media.

2.1   Panel Structure and Timeline

The objective of this panel is to advance our understanding of how research into the uses of IS can contribute to new inputs into the policy-making process. In particular the focus will be on the potential contributions of various disciplines and various technologies. The panel aims to have a lively discussion between panelists and the audience. Audience members will be asked to express their views on the topic and reflect on how research can contribute to this area. The panel will consist of two rounds, chaired by Professor Janssen. The first round will address the changing policy-making landscape from a number of diverse perspectives and the second will explore the main research questions. Before and during the panel discussion views will be collected by and excerpts will be made available on social media, primarily via LinkedIn, but also through more direct interaction via Twitter. The audiences will be invited to continue the discussion online following the panel itself. The general timeline for the panel will be (approximate timings in brackets):

1.   Introduction: overview of panel objectives and main developments (10 mins).

2.   First round: all the panelist express their view on the problem and developments; for example Helle Zinner Henriksen can talk about the area of inclusive eGovernment, including guideline principles and practice, as well as the role of social media in healthcare, Dmitrii Trutnev could give an international/eastern European perspective where the concept of citizenship itself is being transformed; Marijn Janssen could talk about open data and how central European governments approach eGovernment in the age of austerity; Laurence Brooks and Anastasia Papazafeiropoulou could share the UK perspective with examples about social media, the use of petitioning websites, ICT funding issues, etc., plus online contributions (25 mins).

3.   Discussion with the audience, gathering views and further insights, plus online contributions. These questions will centre on identifying the range of possible technologies that might be involved, the key issues/challenges and the barriers for use of these technologies in this context. An assistant (to be arranged prior to the conference) will coordinate prior online contributions feed these into the discussion in collaboration with the panel chair or Laurence Brooks (as online coordinator), while the Twitter feed will be displayed simultaneously with the panel, so that questions and comments can be actively responded to. The prior online contributions can be collected and brought along to the session, while the Twitter feed can be conducted via a mobile device signal, if wireless broadband is not available during the panel session (20 mins).

4.   Second round: panelists express the main themes for future research in the area (15 mins).

5.   Discussion with the audience to identify the 'grand challenges'/scenarios for the use of technology within policy making, plus further online contributions (15 mins).

6.   Closing and wrap-up (5 mins).

3   Conclusion

The traditional policy-making landscape is changing which results is a need for interdisciplinary research. In this panel an overview of the different aspects of policy-making will be given and various research directions will be discussed. The audience will be asked to provide their viewpoints (before during and after the panel, via social media the event itself) and look at how their research can advance policy-making practices and contribute to better outcomes.

4   Biographies

Laurence Brooks is a Senior Lecturer in the Department of Computer Science at Brunel University, UK and leads the MSc in Information Systems Management. He is the past president of the UK Systems Society (UKSS), past president of the UK Academy for Information Systems (UKAIS) and president-elect for the AIS SIGPhilosophy. He is involved in many IS conferences and journals and has published in many top journals. His research interests include the role of social media in the public sector, use of social theory to help us better understand the role of technology within society such as the use of IS in healthcare and also how these ideas translate into developing countries contexts.

Helle Zinner Henriksen is associate professor in digital government at Department of IT Management at Copenhagen Business School. Her research focuses on IT in public sector with particular focus on adoption and diffusion of IT innovations, including the understanding of institutional instruments stimulating adoption and diffusion of IT. HZH has published in some of the leading eGovernment journals such as Government Information Quarterly, and in IS journals such as the European Journal of Information Systems, Journal of Strategic Information Systems, and has presented her work at leading eGovernment and IS conferences.

Marijn Janssen is a full professor in ICT and Governance, is director of the interdisciplinary Systems Engineering, Policy Analyses and Management (SEPAM) and of the Compliance Management Master programmes of the Technology, Policy and Management Faculty of Delft University of Technology. He is involved in various information systems conferences and journals and has published over 240 refereed publications. He is interested in the effects of new technologies on public governance and involved in various policy-making projects.

Anastasia Papazafeiropoulou is a Senior Lecturer and Postgraduate Director in the Department of Computer Science at Brunel University, UK. She has worked as a technical trainee in the European Union (EU) in Brussels and as a research associate with expertise in electronic commerce at the Athens University of Economics and Business and Brunel University. She holds a first degree in Informatics (1994, Athens University of Economics and Business, Greece) and a MSc. in Information Systems (1997, Athens University of Economics and Business, Greece). Her research interests include adoption of Internet and electronic commerce by Small and Medium Size Enterprises (SMEs), national and international polices for technology diffusion, business integration, socio-technical aspects of information systems implementation in the domain areas of: electronic commerce, broadband Internet, Enterprise Resource Planning Systems (ERPs) and healthcare.

Dmitrii Trutnev is the deputy director of eGovernment Centre and Certified Information Systems Auditor (CISA), St. Petersburg National Research University of Information Technology, Mechanics and Optics. Dmitrii has 20 years' experience in consulting and teaching in the areas of "E-Governance" and "Information System Management". Since 2002 he has been actively involved in international projects. He has participated in 6 EU-funded projects on eGovernment topics with responsibilities related to the Public Service reform in Russia and Turkmenistan support in forms of the society requirements and readiness analysis, G2G, G2C and G2B services planning, development and delivery monitoring, civil servants education needs assessment, teaching materials preparation, training and study tours delivery in the area of e-Government to all levels of civil servants.

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