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IMPACT OF THE EMERGING INFORMATION SOCIETY ON THE POLICY DEVELOPMENT PROCESS AND DEMOCRATIC QUALITY

This report was commissioned by the OECD Public Management Service to explore how the new information and communications technologies (ICTs) and the emerging "information society" (IS) are changing the way governments handle information in the policy making process, and to discuss some of the issues these changes raise for the conduct of democratic government. The report was prepared by Roberto Gualtieri, former senior official in the Government of Canada, based on interviews with government officials and others in eight OECD countries -- Canada, Denmark, Italy, Norway, Spain, Switzerland, the United Kingdom, and the United States. The report is being published under the responsibility of the Secretary-General. The views expressed are those of the author and do not necessarily reflect the views of the OECD or the governments of the above countries.

It is provided to the Committee for information and reference. It is also available free of charge on the PUMA Web site at http://www.oecd.org/puma

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FOREWORD

1. This report was commissioned by the OECD (PUMA) to provide background information for the Public Management Service (PUMA) to explore how the new information and communications technologies (ICTs) and the emerging "information society" (IS) are changing the way OECD governments handle information in the policy-making process, and to discuss some of the issues these changes raise for the conduct of democratic government.

2. The report was prepared by Roberto Gualtieri, former senior official in the Government of Canada. His most recent assignments include Assistant Deputy Minister, Science and Technology, Department of Industry, Science and Technology; Assistant Secretary to the Cabinet, Social, Cultural and Native Affairs; and Visiting Professor of Public Administration, Carleton University. The author wishes to thank the many people who volunteered to be interviewed in Canada, Denmark, Italy, Norway, Spain, Switzerland, the United Kingdom, and the United States, with particular thanks to those who helped organise special meetings. The comments and guidance of Daniel Blume and Christian Vergez of the OECD are gratefully acknowledged as is the research assistance of Basma Abdelgafar of Carleton University.

3. Responsibility for the contents of the paper remains, however, with the author, and do not commit or necessarily reflect the views of governments of OECD Member countries. The report is published on the responsibility of the Secretary-General of the OECD.

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

1. The objective of this paper is to describe how the new information and communications technologies (ICTs) and the emerging "information society" (IS) are changing the way OECD governments handle information in the policy-making process and to discuss some of the issues these changes raise for the conduct of democratic government.

2. The paper is divided into five sections. Section I introduces the framework of analysis, sets out the key definitions, and identifies some of the important factors in the general environment or context which are likely to determine the impact of the ICTs on the policy and democratic processes. Section II discusses how the ICTs are affecting the major players in the policy process and how governments and policy-makers are reacting to the spread of the ICTs. Section III attempts to evaluate how the new technologies and the IS are affecting democratic governance by looking at some of the key touchstones of democracy. Section IV reflects on why the ICTs are not having a more positive impact on policy development and the democratic process and identifies some of the obstacles that will have to be overcome. The general conclusions of the analysis and scope for further study are summed up in Section V.

3. The study is based on interviews carried out in 1996 and 1997 with information specialists, policy-makers, ministerial assistants, journalists, interest groups, lobbyists, and legislators in eight OECD countries: Canada, Denmark, Italy, Norway, Spain, Switzerland, the United Kingdom, and the United States. An extensive literature search revealed little for most of the writing in this area deals with the impact of the ICTs on the delivery of programmes and services, and not on policy development.

4. One of the more important conclusions of the study is that the forces in play are very complex. The impact of the new technologies and the IS is incremental, often contradictory, and varies from country to country. Technology is evolving rapidly; the Information Society less so. Institutions and processes are still rooted in traditional modes of thought. The balance of the evidence suggests that the impacts on the policy environment are largely negative and have not increased transparency or public participation in policy-making in any significant way. Even the *potential* impact of the increasing use of these technologies should not be exaggerated.

5. Another major conclusion is that the paper's general findings and analysis appear to hold true for all the countries visited in spite of important country differences such as the degree of penetration of the new technologies and the differing political and decision-making systems. This suggests that deeper forces of a subtle and powerful nature are affecting decision-makers and the operation of democracy. These are discussed in Section IV.

6. A summary of the other major findings and conclusions follows.

The new information and communications technologies (ICTs) have many strengths:

- speed (compression of time and distance);

- informality;
- relative ease of access;
- targetability;
- relative low cost.

7. As a result, more information is available more readily.

They are affecting the major players in the policy process in many different ways:

- The media are better informed, more questioning, and better able to play a role in government accountability in the emerging Information Society (IS).

- Interest groups are also better informed, better linked through networks, and, in most of the countries visited, better able to bring pressure to bear, especially on the middle level of bureaucracy; access to the top is still, however, limited.

- Lobbyists who do not use the new technologies to rally support around their clients' interests could lose some power as their principals get direct access to information they used to pay lobbyists to obtain; lobbyists will, however, continue to sell their prime asset: access to decision-makers.

- Political parties have become more electoral than policy machines as they have adapted to the emerging IS and adopted many of the new technologies to raise money, organise workers, get out their messages, and neutralise the opposition.

- Legislatures are increasingly squeezed between the general public and the executive; the new technologies make plebiscitary democracy more feasible and this possibility is putting pressures on representative democracy.

- Relations with the general public have not, and are unlikely to, change much; they will be able to communicate faster, but not necessarily to greater effect with policy-makers.

- The bureaucracy appears to be increasing its influence as it has the resources to enhance its synthesising and advising role.

8. In spite of the fact that several major players in the policy and democratic process (e.g. the media, interest groups, and bureaucrats) are adopting these new technologies and have become *force multipliers* in the policy arena, the ICTs have not improved the links to decision-makers or the democratic quality of policy and governance.

9. Looked at from the point of view of the decision-makers as opposed to the other players in the policy process, it appears that most OECD countries are in a period of transition where the IS and the new technologies on which it is based are feeling their way into the paper-based and oral worlds of policy and governance. In effect governments are running parallel paper and electronic systems simultaneously. In this period of uncertain co-existence, the new is being made to conform to the old. This is evident in the two main uses of information for policy purposes:

- Traditional instruments are still mainly used to *gather* information for policy purposes: letters, written submissions, telephone conversations, informal meetings, more or less public

consultative processes, formal hearings, monitoring of media, opposition parties, and so on. The ICTs are not much used to gather policy information.

- The new technologies are more in evidence in the *dissemination* or transmit mode, once governments have taken their policy decisions, but even here the old instruments are still very much in evidence.

- The IS and the new technologies have done little to enhance democratic values such as the frequency and quality of *participation* in or the *transparence* of policy-making and governance. Nor have they improved government *credibility*. The growth of a confrontational media has done little to advance these values. On the other hand, in a positive vein, the purposeful use of the ICTs has the *potential* to advance some of the other important touchstones of democracy -- *accountability, political equality, freedom of speech and association, and the treatment and role of minorities* -- especially if they become simpler to use and more widely distributed.

10. While the extent of direct public participation in policy decision-making and democratic governance have changed little as a result of the advent of the ICTs and the IS, this is not to say that there have been no impacts on the policy process. In fact the IS and the ICTs have altered the environment for policy-making, *often in negative ways*, and driven a number of important developments which are affecting the ability of governments to govern and their willingness to embrace the new technologies:

- The policy-making process has become more complex.

- It is increasingly difficult for governments to set and maintain their agenda; once decisions are taken it is more and more difficult to make them stick; it is more difficult for governments to get their way on issues.

- This has resulted in an enormous stress on "marketing" policy decisions, facilitated by the new technologies with their ease in segmenting markets and speeding delivery of tailored messages. Increasingly vast amounts of time and resources are spent on communications planning and implementing communications strategies.

- There is a tendency for governments to move into the *infotainment* business. This is accentuated by the need of governments to be seen to be doing something; the media often drive governments to develop “symbolic” or short-term solutions to symptoms rather than root causes with the result that major issues are left untouched.

11. There is a temptation to believe that the information revolution is by its nature profoundly democratic. This belief also accompanied a number of other social and technological revolutions in the past -- the introduction of printing, universal publicly funded education, radio, television, and even the introduction of air travel. While these changes undoubtedly contributed to the evolution of democracy over the centuries, none, in and of itself, was a driving or determining force for positive change.

12. The democratising potential of the ICTs and the IS which it has spawned will only be realised if accompanied by other important changes, some of which are readily achievable, while others will require profound changes in the way we govern ourselves. Among the changes are:

- the advent of a new technically literate generation to positions of power (since the spread of new technology requires leadership from committed users at the top);

- improved technologies for interactivity, synthesis and feedback;

- higher priority and greater political will on the part of decision-makers to better link the public to the decision-making process in a substantive way; decision-makers must contain their propensity towards secretiveness and their instinct to "ration democracy"; and last but not least;

- greater desire on the part of the public to participate actively in the policy process.

13. In short, significant progress depends less on technology and more on social and cultural development, government priorities, political will and the structure of institutions.

IMPACT OF THE EMERGING INFORMATION SOCIETY ON THE POLICY DEVELOPMENT PROCESS AND DEMOCRATIC QUALITY

I. INTRODUCTION

1. The objective of this paper is to describe how selected OECD governments are changing their information management policies in the light of the emergence of "an information society", to identify the impact of these changes on the policy-making process, and to discuss some of the issues these changes raise for the conduct of democratic government.

2. Governments collect information for many purposes but mainly to administer programmes and deliver services. This paper is not concerned with information management policies related to programme administration and service delivery -- this is well-trodden ground and there is broad agreement that the ICTs are having considerable and mostly positive impact on government delivery of programmes and services; nor does it deal with the policies and regulations governments set in telecommunications and broadcasting -- it is assumed that the existing policy framework (broadly one of introducing greater competition) will continue; rather this paper deals with how governments are changing their handling of information in the policy development process and in their conduct of democratic politics as the IS unfolds.

3. Information has always been seen as something to be managed -- records to compile, classify, file, store, release, and eventually destroy. What is new as we slowly move from a paper-based world into the electronically based multi-media "information society" is that information is increasingly seen as a *resource* which has value beyond its current use, e.g. the integration and manipulation of diverse data bases to obtain demographic information for private marketing purposes or procurement information to enhance the prospects for future contracts. The strategic management of information becomes more important as the use of regulation and enforcement decreases.

4. Government information management has traditionally had three dimensions -- what to collect, what to reveal, and what to conceal (for reasons of state security, privacy of individuals, commercial confidentiality, negotiations, Cabinet confidentiality, or political embarrassment). This paper deals with the first two, i.e. how the new technologies are affecting the gathering and dissemination of information in the policy process. It also explores some of the broader issues raised by the IS in relation to the quality of democracy and the relationship of citizens to their state.

5. The distinction drawn between the policy-making process and the conduct of democratic government is of course somewhat artificial. Democratic government in a fundamental sense *means* public input into the policy process. The legitimacy of the policy process in a democracy depends in large measure on the extent of public input. For purposes of analysis, however, the distinction allows the

pursuit of interesting avenues which would be obscured if these two facets of democracy were treated as one. Thus Section II of the paper looks at the impact of the ICTs and the IS on democracy as a *process* for the public involvement in policy-making whereas Section III looks at its impact on some of the *values* underpinning democracy. In dealing with these questions, the paper reviews only the practices of national governments though it is recognised that the IS and the new technologies are having as much if not more impact on state, provincial, and local governments.[1]

6. The gathering and publication of information in a policy context can have many objectives:

- to obtain or provide material for policy analysis and the pursuit of some view or aspect of the public interest;
- to involve élites, opinion leaders, and the general public in the policy process;
- to try to get better decisions through democratic debate and input;
- to ensure that decisions respond to public needs and wants;
- to explain government decisions with a view to increasing consensus, compliance, co-operation, support, and hence legitimacy;
- to provide the public with reassurance (e.g. environmental assessment) or to show concern (e.g. ministerial statements on natural disasters);
- to consolidate power -- “manage the agenda”;
- to make democracy work better.[2]

7. The relative importance of these objectives is a major determinant of information management policy. Thus it is important to look on information policy and information management not as a single policy but rather as a family of policies which differ depending on the purpose for which the information was collected and for which it is actually used: information management policy can change from use to use.

8. The findings in this paper are based in the first instance on a search of the literature; but very little exists on the use of ICTs for policy purposes. Most of the documentation relates to the use of these technologies to increase the efficiency of delivery of government programmes and services. Interviews with politicians, ministerial aides, civil servants, agency personnel, and journalists provided the bulk of the material for this paper. Interviews were conducted in Canada, Denmark, Italy, Norway, Spain, Switzerland, the United Kingdom, and the United States. In addition, the author has been a member of a Canadian Government Task Force examining these and related issues over the last several years.

9. Appendix I contains a list of people interviewed. Appendix II contains a bibliography.

Definitions

The New Technologies

10. The "new (computer-based) technologies" considered in this paper are:

- the "old" new technologies:
  - faxes;
  - mobile phones;
  - interactive voice response (voice messaging);
  - tele centres or "800 numbers".

- the "newer" technologies:
  - touch-tone data entry;
  - video conferencing;
  - CD ROMs;
  - the Internet (including e-mail, web pages, policy user groups), "Intranets" (internal or local area networks), and "Extranets" (private Internets);
  - Web TV.

11. The Internet is the "hot" technology; touch-tone data entry, video conferencing, CD-ROMs, and Extranets were rarely, if ever, mentioned. The use of Intranets varied from country to country, ministry to ministry, and from use to use (e.g. policy co-ordination, programme delivery). Web TV, which promises to reduce costs of access to the Internet (Net), is still in the market trial phase (in the United States); the recent investment of $1 billion in this technology by Microsoft could significantly accelerate accessibility to the Internet. This list of newer technologies will probably change yearly as the power of digitisation propels the convergence of technologies and the development of new uses. The one stable constant in this digital environment is the computer and the screen (whether a computer or TV monitor) which remains the main type of "interface".

Information Society

12. The term "Information Society" is used as a shorthand for the mushrooming use of the new ICTs, together with the social, political, cultural, and economic impacts these are having on society, governments, and the economy. Throughout this paper the abbreviation IS is used to denote the Information Society. From time to time, the phrase "new technologies" or the abbreviation ICT is used when the focus is on the technologies themselves rather than their societal impact.

13. The major differences between society today and the emerging Information Society is that the IS is, and will increasingly become:

- more interconnected;
- more interactive;
- more instantaneous (fast-paced);
- more information rich;
- more informal;
- more affordable;
- and more uncertain.

14. It is these characteristics which suggest that the IS could have significant impact on the policy process and the quality of democracy in a number of countries.

Policy

15. The policy process consists of three main activities: the *gathering* of information as the basis for policy development; the *analysis* of this information for and by decision-makers; and lastly, the *diffusion* of the results of policy deliberations to interested parties and the public.

INPUT (GATHERING) --> PROCESS (ANALYSIS) --> OUTPUT (DIFFUSION)

16. This paper is concerned with the management and use of information by government for policy purposes in the context of the *democratic process*. Thus it is concerned with information as an input (gathering) and as an output (dissemination).

17. While not within the scope of this paper, it is worthwhile noting that computers and the ICTs have had a significant and in most cases positive impact on policy analysis. The new technologies make certain policy initiatives that were previously only talked about technically feasible e.g. a negative income tax covering all social payments. At the same time they permit sophisticated impact analyses of winners and losers which feed back into policy formation and communications strategies. Indeed, as we shall see, it is probably the case that computers and the ICTs have had more impact on policy analysis than on the gathering of information, and probably about as much as on the diffusion of policy information.

Democracy

18. Essential ingredients of democracy are freedom of speech and association. By giving individuals and groups a relatively inexpensive and fast way of communicating, the new ICTs, the Internet in particular, can add new voices and strengthen points of view in democratic debate. Some say that this development, in itself, strengthens democracy. Others contend that government by the people means more than that — as a minimum it means that people are consulted and have avenues to participate, preferably through dialogue and deliberative debate, in setting strategic directions, priorities, and major policies. Key to this view are the concepts of participation, transparency, and accountability through free elections and other mechanisms. Participation, transparency, and accountability serve not only to contain the power of the executive and help ensure that government *by* the people is government *for* the people, but also enhance the legitimacy of governmental actions. It is this latter, more robust, view of democracy that is used in this paper. To borrow from Truman Capote, other voices are not sufficient for democracy if the decisions are taken in other rooms.

19. These points are developed more fully in Section III.

20. Appendix III contains a glossary of other terms.

Current context

Globalisation

21. All facets of modern life are being affected by the dual forces of the ICTs and globalisation -- forces that reciprocally feed each other. While globalisation is not a new phenomenon, the pace of its advance and the number of areas affected is new: R&D, production, trade, financial markets, tourism, and culture are increasingly being organised on a global basis. Of particular importance for this paper, the globalisation of news and information now places "issues" before politicians, and questions in the minds of journalists and the public, seconds after an event has taken place. Politicians are often required to give answers before they have been briefed. It is less possible for politicians to hide -- equipped as they are with a cell phone or other PCD (Personal Communications Device) -- without appearing to be either ill-informed, or weak and vacillating. The speed of delivery of information requires instantaneous reaction. The "sound bite" has become all important. Decision-makers are more pressured and required to react to others' agendas. We shall see that the impacts on the policy-making process and democratic governance are not all positive.

22. Another aspect of globalisation which is having a profound effect on policy is the increasingly horizontal and cross-jurisdictional nature of many problems, e.g. resource exploitation and environmental protection. In transcending accepted boundaries, many new issues pose complex new problems for governments and their citizens -- problems which existing values and institutions are often ill-equipped to handle.

23. At the same time that a host of new problems are being put on the public agenda, governments for reasons of ideology and fiscal restraint are being asked to cut back on the programmes and services they provide, leaving more and more formerly public space to the market for determination.

Country differences

24. There are two important differences in the countries visited that *prima facie* could affect the impact of the ICTs on the policy process and the quality of democracy.

Extent of ICT diffusion

25. The first is quite simply the degree of penetration of the ICTs in the general population. World-wide, over the past few years, the number of host computers connected to the Internet has doubled each year. The Internet now connects more than 50 000 public and private networks, providing access to between 50-60 million people (Beale, 1997, p. 48). The spread of these new technologies is very rapid though the rates of change appear to be moderating (Riley, forthcoming, p. 9). Unfortunately, reliable internationally comparative statistics for the countries visited are not available and the data that are available are often misleadingly out of date in this extremely rapidly changing field. These technologies are in their infancy with some observers calling them the "Model-Ts" of the information age.

26. In Canada in 1997, Statistics Canada estimates that 30 per cent of households had computers and 13 per cent or 1.5 million households had access to the Internet; this is double the number in 1996. Norwegian officials estimate that about 15 per cent of the population have access to the Internet either at home or through their office. In Denmark, 47 per cent of homes are computerised, 12 per cent have modems, and about 4 per cent use the Internet. Spanish officials estimate the number of PCs per

100 inhabitants at about 7 with 1.3 million or 3 per cent of the population using the Internet. Italian officials estimate that there are approximately 1.3 M Internet accounts with about 500 000-600 000 users (1 per cent of the population).[3] Various studies put US Internet users at about 10 per cent of the population. Reliable figures for other countries visited were not found.

27. While there are no standard or agreed measures of "wiredness", a number of interesting points have come to light (Riley, *op. cit.*, pp. 2-9):

i. The rate of growth of new users on the Internet slowed in 1996 (+36 per cent) in comparison with 1995 (+65 per cent), though it is expected the pace of growth will once again accelerate.

ii. Internet users are becoming slightly more representative of the general population (e.g. more women) but they still tend to come from the middle class, are more highly educated, and generally more affluent.

iii. An IntelliQuest survey found that 73 per cent of Net users do so to pursue their hobbies, 63 per cent to get news, and 50 per cent to plan trips. *Business Week* had research at 50 per cent, education at 37 per cent, and news at 31 per cent (May 1997).[4]

iv. According to IntelliQuest, only 43 per cent of users described their satisfaction with the Net as very good or excellent, far lower than people's satisfaction with TV, radio or personal computers which have satisfaction rates of 70 per cent or higher.

28. In general, looking at the diffusion of the ICTs, the countries visited can be grouped on a spectrum with the United States, Denmark, and Canada at one end, Italy and Spain at the other, and the United Kingdom, Norway, and Switzerland in the middle (OECD, 1997*b*, p. 88). If the number of Internet hosts per 1 000 inhabitants is used as the indicator, the United States and Norway are at one end of the spectrum, Spain and Italy at the other, and Canada, Denmark, Switzerland and the United Kingdom are in the middle (OECD, 1997*d*, p. 7). In the relatively highly "wired" countries of Canada, Denmark, Norway, and United States, the percentage of households with computers is in the 25-30 per cent range. These households tend to be high-income, highly educated, urban, and white collar, raising questions about the political representativeness of the Internet as a tool for public consultation, at least at this stage of its development.

29. This pattern of distribution and the rate at which the Internet is spreading within OECD countries is affected by the costs of hook-up to the Internet. In most European countries, the cost of using telephone lines is charged by the number of minutes on line whereas in Canada and the United States lines are usually leased by the month with unlimited use. With deregulation and technological change (e.g. the spread of mobile communications), there is consideration in North America to charge per minute and vice versa in Europe. Spain has introduced an interesting experiment -- the establishment of a single national telephone number to connect subscribers to the Internet at a single national standardized rate whether one lives in a metropolitan or rural area. Where this vortex of regulatory and technological change will eventually lead is uncertain. At this time, the pay-per-minute approach is a disincentive for many Europeans to hook up and use the Internet, as is the dominance of the English language.

Political Culture

30. The new ICTs are of course being introduced into an existing socio-political and technological milieu which affects them and they in turn affect.

31. At the socio-political level, the impact of the new technologies on policy formulation and democratic quality depends in part on the political culture of the country. If gathering points of view, consulting interested parties, and achieving *consensus* prior to announcement of decisions are strong traditions (Scandinavia, Italy, Spain, Switzerland), then dissemination as a political activity is correspondingly less important. If, on the other hand, the political decision-making culture is more along the lines of

CONSULTATION --> INTERNAL DELIBERATION --> ANNOUNCEMENT,

then communications planning and the development of sophisticated diffusion strategies becomes crucially important.

32. We shall see, however, that even in the co-operative and consensus-based countries, the ultimate stages of the decision-making process are secretive. And there is no indication that even the most democratic governments are about to change this.

33. Interestingly, we shall see that neither the extent of penetration of the ICTs nor the culture of decision-making appear to have much impact on how governments either gather or diffuse information for policy purposes.

34. Weaving these general contextual factors together with the emerging IS confronts governments and their publics with a range of problems and challenges which with only slight exaggeration can be said to be unprecedented.

II. THE INFORMATION SOCIETY (IS) AND THE POLICY PROCESS

The Players

35. Governance involves more than governments. Involved in the policy and governance process are a number of players including the media, interest groups, lobbyists, political parties, legislators, the general public, advisory councils, and public servants. It is useful to look at government management of information in these processes through the optic of the changes in behaviour induced by the new technologies in the various players. First we look at the role each currently plays, the technologies now used, and how these two dimensions are being affected by the IS. Then we look at how the government (the political executive) manages information in the policy process, how this is affected by the IS, with particular focus on how the IS is affecting information management and relations with the various players. This approach sheds light not only on how governments manage information in relation to each player but also on how the players are adapting their strategies and tactics with the advent of the IS and the new technologies.

36. Throughout we focus on the two broad dimensions of information policy mentioned above -- the ***gathering*** and ***dissemination*** of information. It should be noted that the players discussed below are both a source and a target of government information.

The Media

37. There are significant national cultural differences in the relationship of journalists to politicians; in some countries, journalists are "insiders"; in others they are "in your face" critics.

38. An "insider" media can be a useful educational instrument, helping to explain government policy and initiating reasoned dialogue on an issue; but lacking true independence, it is rarely an effective instrument of transparence and accountability — other important democratic values. The more comfortable the relationship between politicians and journalists, the more it was found that the traditional system of communications continues -- personal meetings, telephone conversations and "leaks" were the main methods used to transfer information.

39. The new generation of members of the media are often "outsiders". By and large, they are young, well educated, and know how to use the new technologies. They practice computer-assisted journalism, spending increasing amounts of time on the Net where large amounts of data are easily and quickly available.[5] They thus have world-wide reach and access to information which in the past was available only to journalists who worked for wealthy organisations like the *New York Times, Washington Post*, *Economist*, or major TV and radio networks. Access to many more sources enhances their knowledge base, puts them in a position to ask more questions, and be more critical. Hence the media are becoming more adversarial in many countries, including the eight countries visited. Most of the persons

with whom I discussed this issue were of the view that the media have played a significant role in diminishing public trust in government in western democracies.[6]

40. All the main (and several of the regional) newspapers, radio stations and TV stations in the OECD countries visited have mounted home pages on the WWW. These provide a new channel for fast and "popular" reaction to events which in turn helps mould the public agenda. Through the Net one can find some of the same information one finds in newspapers, but one can also participate in political (or other) ongoing debates through general discussion groups hosted by the newspaper or TV station. In this way the traditional media can contribute to the development of new public spheres where citizens can participate, discuss political issues and transform their political ideas into political demands directed at the government.

41. This potential should not be over-blown. Discussion groups can be a mixed blessing. They also contribute to information overload and the breakdown of civility, providing a venue for junk mail, kooks and cranks, illegal porn and hate literature. Sustaining interest is also a problem. During the October 1997 Italian Government crisis in which the government disbanded and re-formed, the newspaper *La Repubblica* sponsored a discussion forum which drew 800-900 responses over a 10 day period. Subsequently, an effort was made to form these respondents into a continuing discussion group. Ten (10) per cent responded positively but interest and participation of even this self-selected 10 per cent quickly fell off. One journalist at *La Repubblica* likened it to a heated political discussion at the local bar -- interest falls off at closing time. He identified the problem as the lack of a solid link to the political process coupled with the fact that politicians are too busy to take an interest in this sort of activity.

42. Whatever the relationship between the media and governments — insider or outsider — the media are major *agenda setters* and *framers of issues* (*cf.* Milward and Laird, 1996; and Iyengar, 1993). These roles are being strengthened by the marriage of the ICTs with the media, especially television, for the media are often the first to know about a crisis or issue and the first to pronounce on it.

43. Governments increasingly use group faxes and e-mail to get material to the press (Canada, Norway, the United States). This allows the transfer of more information faster. The Norwegian experience suggests that the new ways of communicating add to the traditional modes of personal contact, telephone, etc. The result is an increased volume of information and communication. The down-side is less personal contact, less opportunity to ask and answer clarifying questions, and the loss of information transferred through "body language". The government, however, still controls the selection of what to send and the ability to engineer the "spin".

44. Recently governments through their web sites have begun to dump vast amounts of material for public consumption on the Internet. The UK Central Office of Information, for example, posts all press releases. This has become an easy response to demand for greater access to information. At the same time, governments welcome this new conduit as a way to reduce the interference of mediating organisations like the press. This was true for each of the governments visited.

45. While the increasing access to information and a more questioning media offer some potential for better decision-making and a better quality of democracy, there is at least one seriously adverse impact of the IS. Governments must be seen to be doing something in reaction to the day's or even the hour's events. A confrontational media often drive governments to develop "symbolic" or short term solutions to symptoms rather than root causes with the result that major issues are often left untouched. This development, coupled with the instantaneous nature of the new technologies, poses a major challenge for

democracy which at its heart is a *deliberative* process, conciliating interests and building consensus, both of which take time. This point is developed in Section III below.

46. Two other points are worth mentioning. First, the growing horizontal and vertical concentration of the media -- driven by the need for economies of scale in a highly competitive environment -- raises the issue of pluralism at both the production and distribution levels (*cf.* EC, 1996, Theme X, pp. 72ff.). The media, whether driven by their owners, publishers, editors, or advertisers, often have their own agenda. This development threatens to mute certain voices -- most often the poor and the underprivileged -- in policy deliberations.

47. Second, the media, re-enforced by the new technologies, are biased in favour of personalities and events. This has contributed to a melding of information, entertainment, and education -- the world of "infotainment" -- with important implications for policy and politics. Increasingly, a politician seeking election or to defend a position is bolstered by good looks, and a good TV image and manner (*cf.* Neustadt, 1985, p. 561).[7] Issues are over-simplified so they can be reduced to a soundbite and the appetite for the novel induces the short-term perspective mentioned above.

48. These developments pose a challenge to democratic governance and the role of the media: can the media play an integrating role in society by contributing to the development of a common framework or will its constant hammering of government and social institutions contribute to the further fragmentation of large polities?

Interest groups

49. Better access to information, and the ability to communicate rapidly and relatively inexpensively, has led to the multiplication and empowerment of interest groups. Many have become very adept at using the new technologies, the Internet in particular, to gather information and build alliances. The Internet, for those who have access to it, is a paramount vehicle of communication and association. Some groups have developed networked systems of e-mail alerts to try to eliminate surprises. They are able to do this in part because, unlike government departments, they do not operate in the vertical silos of departmental structures.

50. Fomented by governments seeking their advice or trying to enlist them as partners, interest groups have increased their networking, their transparency (slightly), and their legitimacy.[8]

51. What impact have the new technologies and the IS had on the *effectiveness* of interest groups?

52. First and foremost, they facilitate the formation of single issue coalitions - cyber groups on the Internet. This was most evident in Washington, D.C. In Europe, where some countries have stronger traditions of policy development with well-established "social partners" in the form of trade unions and business associations, the role of single-interest pressure groups and non governmental organisations has been smaller, but in these cases too, interest group involvement is opening up the consultation process, but at the same time, making its management more difficult.

53. Secondly, the new technologies allow quick and easy input to the working level where policy advice often originates. At the same time it allows governments to monitor the activities of interest groups (usually without their knowing it).

54. But *access* to decision-makers is still minimal and the impact on policy marginal unless the issue is "hot" and there is political advantage to be seen to be open.

55. The rich and powerful interest groups have been affected marginally if at all; they continue to have access in traditional ways. Why bother with coalition-building on the Internet when a simple phone call will do?

56. In general, the increased empowerment of interest groups has contributed to the creation of a more volatile political environment.

Lobbies

57. Lobbyists sell information and access using for the most part the traditional technologies of meetings and phone calls now supplemented by fax and e-mail. Like interest groups they are learning to use the Internet as a source of information and a way of building coalitions in support of their clients. However, the growth of government web sites and the information they contain threatens the information providing role of lobbyists; if a client can gain relevant information on policy developments by plugging into a government web site, then he or she will be reluctant to pay a lobbyist for repackaged information. The ability of lobbyists to sell access -- their most important asset -- has not been and for the foreseeable future will not be affected.

Political parties

58. Political parties have traditionally functioned to mobilise interests and voters for electoral purposes and to recruit and train political leaders, using policies and ideology to distinguish themselves one from the other. In recent years, in most of the OECD countries visited, they have become more electoral than policy machines as they have adapted to the emerging IS and adopted many of the new technologies.[9] Indeed, in the United States and Canada, political parties have become sophisticated users of these technologies. Astute polling, and mining and merging of diverse data bases have enhanced their ability to make use of the targetability, speed, and relative low cost of the new technologies to segment the electorate for tailored messages. They are using the new technologies to raise money, organise workers, get out their messages, and neutralise the opposition. As key links in the power and electoral process, it is not surprising that political parties have been among the first and most imaginative players to try to make use of the possibilities of the new technologies.

59. Paradoxically these same features have allowed some legislators to get elected or re-elected through their own efforts, reducing their dependence on the party or the coat-tails of the leader.

60. Most political parties have their own home pages where they present their political proposals and programmes, and the Internet address of the party. This opens possibilities for citizens to submit their views to political parties electronically. Although not many parties host their own discussion groups on the Net, the experience with Norwegian parties shows that even though the main function of the Internet is broadcasting, there are initiatives to use the Net for dialogue. During the recent Canadian election, all the major political parties mounted their own “Home Page” where political platforms, biographies of the leaders, and reaction to late-breaking events were featured.

61. Attempts to use the new technologies for policy purposes, e.g. the Canadian Reform Party’s attempt at electronic fora, have not proven very successful.

62. A further phenomenon, also linked to the emerging IS, is the organisation of more niche, single issue or regional parties, further complicating the task of "managing" the legislature and the government's programme (see below).

The general public

63. Dealing with public input into the policy process is a complex issue much dependent on one's view of the degree of interest the public has in participating in governing. We tend to be mesmerised by images of Athenian democracy in action at the boule (usually imagining mass participation and forgetting that only about 6 000 Athenian men were entitled to vote).

64. Over and against this image of mass participation in democratic decision-making is the observation of Alexis de Tocqueville that in most societies very few wish to participate actively in government, preferring to stay at home and enjoy the satisfactions of private life. From their perspective, the role of government is to protect their ability to do so. De Tocqueville called this mild and paternalistic use of power "soft despotism". In modern times he might have described electoral democracy as a mild form of regulatory dictatorship punctuated by periodic popularity polls (elections). [10]

65. Whatever view one takes, it remains that the majority of interested citizens do not have sufficient time to participate in the policy-making process even if they wished to do so. Even the technological optimists note that there would have to be profound economic, social, and cultural changes to induce citizens to participate actively in political life. [11]

66. Discussions with officials in OECD countries revealed that citizens, to whatever extent they feed into the policy-making process, do so in very traditional ways - by telephone, mail, personal meetings in the constituency, and occasionally faxes to the responsible minister or local legislator, relying on him or her to carry views to the decision-maker. [12]

67. Public consensus or at least acquiescence and consent is still important, especially on major issues where government members or caucus might be divided.[13] The views of the public used to be carried to the policy process by ministers and legislators. In current circumstances, because of fragmentation, alienation, and the availability of new technologies, governments increasingly resort to seeking views directly from the public.

68. All countries visited (Canada, Denmark, Italy, Norway, Spain, Switzerland, United Kingdom, United States) frequently use polling to test public views. Focus groups are also used extensively in Canada[14] and the United States but are less common elsewhere (e.g. Norway). Internet home pages with modest e-mail capabilities are also being used experimentally to gauge public opinion (Canada, the United States) but they are still used mainly to disseminate rather than receive information. The growing use of referenda should also be noted (California, Canada, Switzerland).

69. Contributing to the development of a better informed public is the accessibility of the results of polls and focus groups under Freedom of Information legislation (FOI) though often with considerable delay.[15]

70. Most of the governments' efforts, however, are devoted to trying to shape public opinion through mailings, advertising, stories planted in the media, and leaks. More on this below when we consider dissemination of information.

71. On major policy issues, Canada in particular is increasing its use of "800 numbers" though mainly to disseminate rather than gather information. Switzerland set up an 800 number for the 1995 election; 3 250 queries were received.

72. While the use of e-mail and the internet is increasing as a vehicle for expressing political views, the impact of this trend on decisions remains a question. The e-mail addresses of some Ministers and officials are available in some countries but there is a general fear that such access will lead to a flood of comment which government will not be able to handle. To deal with this some politicians advocate the use of second mail boxes whose addresses are restricted on a "need to know" basis (*cf.* Waller, 1995, p. 10). By and large, e-mail is used as an internal communications device rather than as an instrument to reach out to the public.

73. At the moment, e-mail is generally treated like ordinary mail; it is printed and sent for preparation of reply.[16] This is not unreasonable since almost all serious submissions turn up on paper. Each e-mail is recorded as pro or con the particular issue; thus they are handled as an unscientific poll.

74. All of the governments in this study have experimented with "news groups" or "policy user groups" as a way of getting greater public involvement in the policy process. For example, the Norwegian government set up a site to get input into family policy. According to the Ministry of Children and Family Affairs, it was a "troublesome success". They were unprepared to deal with the comments received, some of a very personal nature which raised privacy issues and in some cases could have prejudiced the individual's personal security. The Ministry received 300 electronic comments out of a total of 6 000. All the comments received (both from the Internet and by post) were analysed but not answered.[17]

75. Of the more than 12 000 inputs on Switzerland's new constitution, only a few hundred were in electronic form, and this in one of Europe's most computerised countries.

76. In the United States, The Nuclear Regulatory Commission (NRC) is using the Internet to promote early public comment and interaction on rule-making issues as part of its rule-development process. The NCRs experimental RuleNet (http://nssc.llnl.gov/RuleNet) permits dialogue about a proposed rule among the interested regulated community, facilitated by expert staff independent of any of the parties. This encourages interested parties to work among themselves toward common ground. In 1995, the US Office of Management and Budget co-sponsored a public electronic open meeting on the topic "People and Their Governments in the Electronic Age". The meeting used the Web, newsgroups, e-mail listservs provided by commercial on-line providers, public access sites, and toll-free modem dial-up connections. Over 10 000 people participated in discussions of such questions as, "How should government use the Internet?"[18]

77. In the United Kingdom, the Central Computing and Telecommunications Agency (CCTA) has set up a number of Collaborative Open Discussion Groups (COGs) as fora to discuss issues ranging from "Open Government" to Ethics, Family, and Women.[19] In addition, the Central IT Unit issued the Government's Green Paper (discussion document) *The Electronic Delivery of Government Services* on the Internet,[20] on paper, and on a CD-ROM. This government initiative was supported by UK Citizens Online Democracy (UKCOD) who have hosted a number of other policy discussion groups. UKCOD promised that "all discussion and responses to the Green Paper will be forwarded to the Government as part of its public consultation exercise".[21] These were later published on the Internet.

78. At issue is how these electronic inputs will be treated in the decision-making process. As with e-mails from individuals mentioned above, all countries visited indicated that these inputs are analysed

and interpreted by officials who usually produce a report in printed form for senior officials and ministers. Thus this electronic input into decision-making does not differ from the treatment of inputs in other forms. And as indicated above, they may in fact be accorded less "weight" in deliberations because of their electronic origins -- the "wired" world is not broadly representative of the citizenry at large. In general, discussions with officials suggest that the impact of electronic inputs on policy has been negligible, either because of the quality and utility of the comments or, in some instances, because the politicians and bureaucrats were not adequately prepared to deal with this new type of input.[22]

79. Lastly, the potential for the emergence of a dichotomy between the "haves" and the "have-nots", even within technologically advanced nations, has important implications for governmental communication with the public. The speed, economy, and ease of the Internet make it an obvious channel of communication but governments will have to guard against the assumption that a posting on the Net achieves their public information purposes.

80. Electronic access to decision-making processes by the general public has at least superficial appeal as a way of strengthening public consultation, due to its convenience and ease of use, and seemingly transparent means of bringing together diverse actors to consider policy issues. However, lessons learned form these experiences suggest that governments who wish to expand use of electronic democracy will have to take into better account how to synthesise and use this information, how to ensure that it is given due consideration by decision-makers, and not least importantly, how to promote better access to these technologies.

Legislatures and their committees

81. Legislators, as representatives of their voters, are in theory pre-eminently the channel through which the public speaks to government. This is most obvious in Congressional systems where initiatives from the executive may be blocked or modified. While in some cases this can lead to policy stasis or "rotten compromises", it is also an institutional mechanism to work out differences and build consensus as part of a process of deliberative democracy.

82. In parliamentary systems, legislatures play a smaller role in the policy process, functioning mainly to support government policy initiatives. This is changing, however, as the IS creates pressures moving parliamentary systems closer to congressional systems.

83. Many factors affect the degree of influence exercised by legislatures over policy. For example, minority parliaments or slim majorities usually give legislators more policy influence. So can the type of issue. Issues which raise deep moral questions (e.g. abortion, capital punishment) or deep emotions among large blocks of voters (e.g. family policy, pensions, gun control) allow members to play a much more determining role in policy. Indeed, it is not uncommon to see "free" votes used in these circumstances, with parliamentarians then having a role more akin to that played by their counterparts in Congressional systems where the power to originate policy proposals is greater. Governments count on party loyalty to see them through these types of issues.

84. The main sources of information for legislators are the media, interest groups, lobbies, constituents, other party members, and ministers. But none of these players accords top priority to keeping legislators well informed, preferring to deal with individuals closer to the source of power -- ministers and senior public servants. In the case of ministers, the major focus of attention is the Prime Minister or President, other ministers, the press, interest groups, and to a lesser extent, the general public.

85. Legislators (as well as the media and ministers) are under increasing pressure from interest groups, lobbyists, constituents and others who are using the new technologies to strengthen their information base and form new single-issue alliances. Some argue that these groups are establishing media presence and political influence completely out of proportion to their membership or public support. Their influence may therefore distort the policy preferences of elected governments, and in effect undermine not only democratic legislatures but democracy itself. This is especially true if they decide to pursue their objectives, which are often highly political, through the courts. Ironically, election-minded politicians, instead of protesting this loss of power, often welcome this development as a convenient way to avoid controversial issues.[23]

86. In the circumstances, it is not surprising that legislatures are becoming more difficult to manage. Even managing the members of one's own party is becoming more difficult. Apart from the increasing influence of niche, single-issue or regional interests on legislators noted above, sophisticated polling, and the mining and merging of diverse data bases have enhanced the ability of legislators to get elected or re-elected through their own efforts, reducing their dependence on the party or the coat-tails of the leader.

87. Of the various players in the policy process, none faces greater challenge from the new technologies than legislatures. If they do not adapt to the new technologies, indeed seize the initiative, their representative role could be undermined by the public demanding or governments instituting forms of direct democracy facilitated by the new technologies.[24] There have been two interesting initiatives in Switzerland to meet this challenge.[25] A group of deputies proposed that voters be given electronic access to voting records accompanied by an explanation of the vote in question. It was argued that these two measures would enhance accountability and allow direct contact with the public without the intermediation of the media. The first part of the proposal was accepted and the second rejected on the grounds that its value was unproven. Another group proposed that electronic voting be allowed via the Internet as a way of trying to increase youth participation. This proposal was rejected on technical and privacy grounds.

88. All of the legislatures in the countries visited have established home pages. For the most part they are rather bland factual sites featuring descriptions of institutional structure, biographies of members, press releases, schedules of sessions, lists of publications, and in some cases speeches of members.

89. To develop more individual attention, some legislators have set up their own personal home page (usually pushed by one of their young energetic researchers!). Mainly used as diffusion instruments, they usually contain a photo of the member, his CV, some speeches, press releases, a list of government jobs available, and so on. Some have modest interactive capacity with an electronic mail form, or "news groups" on current local, national, or international issues.

90. The evolution of these personal home pages give an interesting insight into how legislators are learning and adapting to the Internet. Some legislators simply shut down their sites; they did not have the staff to update the site continually or handle the comments received, many from outside the legislator's constituency and thus of secondary interest. They feared they would be swamped by "bombing" campaigns from the general public which would simply distract them from serving their constituents. Some MPs in the United Kingdom expressed the fear that home pages or chat groups would replace mailing lists and gradually cause legislators to lose personal links with their constituents. In what could be a foretaste of the future, one Spanish legislator changed his home page completely, abandoning efforts at self-promotion (his curriculum vitae, copies of his speeches, honours received, etc.) and mounting a page of general interest including a list of best search engines, travel and holiday tips, and links to other pages dealing with topics of current interest.

91. Considerable time and money will have to be spent by legislators to make their personal home pages competitive with newspapers and radio, let alone TV. But there is little incentive for them to spend their scarce resources of time and money on a medium whose use by the public is still too limited to play a significant role in constituency politics. Until reliable filters can be developed to weed out non-constituency e-mail, legislators are unlikely to be much interested in the Internet as a discussion or deliberative forum.

92. Leaving the Internet aside, many MPs have taken to the "older" new technologies, using group faxing to link to local media. In the United States and the United Kingdom, telephone canvassing is replacing door-to-door canvassing which in some regions is better liked by the population and appears to generate better and more accurate information on voter intentions.[26] E-mail has been used by some US presidential candidates to solicit funds and recruit volunteers (Cochran, 1996, p. 42). There has also been some experimenting with video-conferencing with links to constituency offices and local TV stations but this has been abandoned because of cost and inconvenience.[27]

93. Thus far the new technologies have had little impact on the way legislators interact with their constituents or their role in the policy process. As mentioned above, they are used mainly for broadcasting not dialogue. Information gets out more quickly, but there has been no qualitative change in the policy process. The public still prefers the traditional ways of expressing their views, *viz.*, by letter, telephone, or better still, a meeting with their representative face to face.

94. Looking at role of legislatures in the policy process as a whole, at this point, the impact of the ICTs and the IS appears to be negative. More legislatures are moving towards the US Congressional system where almost every vote or decision must be negotiated. The result is often policy stasis -- issues, not necessarily fundamental ones, take years to resolve. Compromises are often based on short-term political gain, not the longer term national interest. There is little evidence that the new technologies are being used to broaden public debate and participation in the legislative and policy process.

95. This is unlikely to change until the new technologies are more accessible and easier to use, i.e. until the technologies disappear into the background (like the telephone system).[28]

96. More importantly, even improved ICTs, on their own, will not increase the policy role of legislatures. They may increase the effectiveness of individual legislators in relations with their constituents, other legislators and in some cases even ministers but an enhanced policy role for legislatures will require significant political will and institutional reform.

Public servants

97. Senior public servants, i.e. the members of the permanent bureaucracy, have always been strong players in the policy process. Their (normally) unique access to ministers gives them a privileged role in policy-making. Interviews in all countries visited indicate that their influence continues to be based on acquiring information in traditional ways, and not by using the new technologies.

98. The story is somewhat different with lower and middle-level bureaucrats. They too continue to rely mainly on traditional sources of information but they are turning increasingly to the Internet to provide quick access to a variety of sources. They use the new technologies to obtain and verify information, to make international comparisons, to obtain statistical data, and to open new avenues to interest groups, to the public, and to public opinion. "We generally use the Internet to get information for

our bosses....Very few officials above the sub-director level use the Internet", said one Spanish official, echoing comments received in all the countries visited.

99. The new technologies are also used by lower level bureaucrats to undertake sophisticated policy analysis As mentioned above, these technologies make certain policy initiatives, that were previously only talked about, technically feasible e.g. a negative income tax covering all social payments. At the same time they permit sophisticated impact analyses of winners and losers which feed back into policy formation and communications strategies.

100. These two uses of the Internet have the *potential* to improve the quality of advice, and hence both the policy and democratic processes. The word "potential" is important here for the new technologies facilitate and stimulate the expression of more points of view but at the moment they are not being used to increase participation in or the transparency of the policy process by promoting more dialogue and deliberation on policy issues.

101. In part this is due to the absence of good analytic/synthetic software to deal with large volumes of public input. In part it is due to the lack of a clear message from the political and senior bureaucratic level that the policy process is to be "opened up" and democratised (see Section III below). More subtly, it is also due to the important filtering role played by lower and middle-level bureaucrats who have access to and use the Internet.

102. Information clearly affects the outcome of decisions. Thus knowing the *source* of information used in decision-making is critical. For decision-makers, the source is rarely the Internet but the bureaucrat or other advisor who has culled the Internet (and other sources) for information to support the policy proposals under discussion. The bureaucrat does the selecting, ordering and presentation of the information. An undetermined amount of filtering takes place at this stage.[29] The bureaucrat becomes the primary source of information. The Internet is secondary.

103. The seemingly democratic Internet is thus squeezed along several points in its path: the skewed distribution of computers and modems, the unequal power of access among interested parties, and lastly any bureaucratic agenda managed by middle and senior level bureaucrats serving as filters between decision-makers and the sea of information available on the Internet and elsewhere. Thus, it cannot be assumed that the new technologies in the hands of public servants will in and of themselves lead to greater democratic decision making. On the contrary, the new technologies give middle-level bureaucrats added weight in advising their seniors and tend to shift influence if not power toward their hands. The recipients of this advice, especially politicians, will continue for the foreseeable future to rely on the traditional methods of gathering advice and information.

104. The reasons for this are not hard to discern. Most of the current crop of senior officials and politicians did not grow up with the ICTs. They lack the time to learn. Middle-level bureaucrats often have more money to spend on the new technologies than e.g. parliamentarians. Perhaps they also have more interest in experimenting with new "gadgets"! More importantly, politicians tend to be risk-averse. The new technologies represent risk, so they propagate up to a certain level in the bureaucratic chain but not to the highest levels. Senior officials and ministers rely more on their command over people than technology to get the advice they need.

105. This rather negative picture would change somewhat if governments or policy think-tanks managed open discussion fora which became a counter-weight to the bureaucratic agenda and an objective input into the broader decision-making process.

106. Most ministries in the countries visited have home pages. They vary greatly in quality and utility not only between countries but also within countries. Considerable power is in the hands of the middle-level editors and up-daters of these pages for at least in the immediate future they are unlikely to be subjected to much political control for the reasons given above.[30]

107. The new technologies include departmental Intranets. All countries visited either have or are in the process of installing these internal communications networks. It is often claimed that these will change the way work is organised by facilitating non-hierarchical communication and consultation both within and between departments, breaking down departmental silos and contributing to a culture of co-operation and trust. Work units will be smaller and people will work more co-operatively. While this may be true in many areas of work, it is unlikely to have much impact in the realm of policy. Policy units are already generally small and to be successful they must work co-operatively.[31]

108. Italy is setting up an Intranet linking ministers offices (*Rete dei Cabinetti* -- G-net) but in the opinion of officials it was unlikely to change the *modus operandi* quickly (if ever) with lunches, dinners, meetings, telephone, letters, faxes, etc. continuing as the major modes of communication. E-mail connection could simplify the process of setting up meetings. Eventually ministers might get and turn on their computers for some of their information (e.g. news agencies on line) but this would never supplant traditional sources.

109. Secondly, it is claimed that the new technologies will cause a move from centrally controlled hierarchies to decentralised networks. Some argue that decentralised policy-making, being closer to the people, is *ipso facto* more flexible and hence more democratic. Two points are worth noting here. First, decentralising policy is unlikely to occur at least in the area of strategic policy which is centralised by nature. Second, one could have a policy to decentralise policy-making but the act of decentralising in itself does not lead to greater public participation or greater democracy as the poor turn-out at municipal elections and experience with municipal politics demonstrates (*cf.* Severijnen *et al.*, 1996, *passim*).

Advisory councils

110. Another mechanism used frequently in the past in Canada and the U.K. to link the public or interest groups to the policy process -- to "open up" the decision-making process -- is advisory councils, boards or consultative committees. At their best, they provide direct interaction between the public and decision-makers, and act as a counterweight to the internal advice emanating from the bureaucracy. There are broadly two types: "internal" advisory bodies who tender advice in confidence, and rely on the intimacy and frankness of their relationship with Ministers and senior officials to have their views taken seriously; and "external" advisory bodies whose advice is made public. Sometimes this is done to stimulate public debate but often it is seen as a method to bring pressure to bear on the government to accept the advice or at least explain why it is not being followed.

111. The new technologies plays very little role in the operations of either internal or external bodies at this time. In the future, however, we can expect external bodies to experiment with Web sites and other technologies as they try to get their points of view accepted by the wider public and thence the government. Three things follow: first, internal bodies are often tempted, whether through leaks or other means, to make their advice known through the media; second, advisory bodies -- both internal and external, but especially external -- complicate issues management for governments; third, Ministerial attendance seems inevitably to fall off after the initial burst of enthusiasm and the photo opportunities have passed. Canadian experience suggests that advisory bodies are less and less used.

Impact on government policy-makers and the policy process

112. Before considering how governments and ministers are adapting their handling of information and interaction with the major players in the policy process, it would be useful to summarise our findings thus far.

- The activities of the players converge at the decision-maker or advisor — ministers and their senior officials.

- The media are better informed, more questioning, more adversarial, and potentially better able to play a role in government accountability in the IS world.

- Interest groups are also better informed, better linked through networks, and better able to bring pressure to bear, especially on the middle-level of bureaucracy; access to the top is still, however, limited.

- Lobbyists who do not use the new technologies to rally support around their clients' interests risk losing some power as their principals get direct access to information they used to pay lobbyists to obtain; lobbyists, however, continue to sell their prime asset: access to decision-makers.

- Political parties have become more electoral than policy machines; they are adapting to the emerging IS and adopting many of the new technologies to raise money, organise workers, get out their messages, and neutralise the opposition.

- Legislatures are increasingly squeezed between the general public and the executive, though some are trying to use the ICTs to re-assert their representative role. More legislatures are moving towards the US Congressional system where many votes or decisions must be negotiated.

- Relations with the general public *in the policy context* have not changed much; they are able to communicate faster, but not necessarily to greater effect.

- The bureaucracy is increasing its influence by using the ICTs to enhance its synthesising and advising role.

113. In summary, the new technologies are having a significant impact -- not all of it positive -- on ***some*** of the major players in the policy process, especially the media, interest groups, political parties, and public servants. They are having less impact on the other players including the general public and legislatures *which are the main democratic forces in the policy process*.

114. ***The question which must now be addressed is how the confluence of these players in the policy arena is affecting the behaviour of policy-makers -- ministers and their senior advisors -- in the policy-making process.***

115. To consider this question it must be recalled that the management of information for policy purposes has two main dimensions:

- the gathering of information as an input into policy formulation; and

- the dissemination of information to gain public support for policy decisions.

116. Each is considered in turn.

Gathering of information

117. Traditional instruments are still mainly used by governments to gather information: letters, written submissions, telephone conversations, informal meetings, opinion polling, more or less public consultative processes, formal hearings, monitoring of media, opposition parties, and so on.

118. The "older" of the new techniques are used mainly as extensions of traditional techniques, e.g. the fax is a mail substitute used to speed letters; the mobile phone extends the range of the traditional telephone. Whereas politicians, in their role as representatives, used to provide the "views of the public", there is now more use of polls and focus groups.

119. But the use of the new technologies is creeping in.

120. In Denmark, all public institutions and ministers have e-mail addresses. In the other countries visited, ministers, public servants, legislators, and other public officials were gradually establishing e-mail addresses (Canada, United Kingdom, United States) though in some countries there has been reluctance to publish them (e.g. United Kingdom).

121. E-mail at the moment is treated with caution at the receiving end: politicians realise that not many people are connected and they tend to regard those who write as “techies” (and hence as unrepresentative). Inputs are collected, classified as pro or con, and filed; as mentioned above, they are treated like an unscientific poll.

122. Video-conferencing is still in its infancy. It is expensive, complex to set up, and inconvenient as the parties have to travel to site. It can work with single-site locations but at this time is prohibitive in cost and complexity with multi-site connections. The gradual introduction of *commercial* video phones that will allow video conferences means that in the period of transition more and more people without this special equipment will find themselves at a disadvantage. If and when the Internet increases its capacity by becoming broad band, then new possibilities will emerge. Video-conferencing might replace ministerial travel at least in some circumstances and become a new vehicle for policy discussion.

123. Regularly scheduled tele-conferences are used by political aides in Canada and the Unisted States to co-ordinate the political agenda but this practice did not appear to be followed elsewhere.

124. Lastly, it should be noted that the new technologies allow last minute changes in scheduled publications, thus allowing greater political input and control, e.g. last minute changes to the budget.

125. The Internet is potentially the most potent and important of the new technologies to gather information for policy purposes. But at the moment, it is used mainly as a passive source of information - a vast library.[32] Its use to gather input from the public is largely experimental and prestige-driven. At best it functions as an unresponsive and unrepresentative recipient of views in the countries surveyed.

126. Most governments (including all of those visited) have posted "home" pages on the Internet.[33] However, they seldom invite comment; or if they do, comments are asked for on the quality of the site and other anodyne matters.[34] One useful feature is usually a link to the home pages of other government

institutions. For example, the White House Web site provides virtual tours of the White House and its art works, links to the home pages of each federal agency, access to White House press releases and other documents (currently received by approximately 250 000 people every day), and an electronic mail facility used by over 700 000 people to send messages to the president, vice president, and first lady.[35] If comments on policy are received, there is generally an acknowledgement, not a substantive reply. This is understandable, given limited resources and the wish of governments to exercise as much control as possible over the public agenda.

127. As mentioned above, there have been a few experiments with policy fora or user groups (Canada, Switzerland, the United Kingdom and the United States) but their policy impact has been negligible, either because of the quality and utility of the comments or, in some instances, because the politicians and bureaucrats were not adequately prepared to deal with this new type of input. The key problem identified in Italy is that political discussions on the Net are not linked to the political process.

128. On the gathering side, the Internet has had some impact on the people who influence the decision-makers (the media, interest groups, political parties, some bureaucrats), and through them, an indirect effect on policy-makers (MPs senior officials, ministers). Several points made earlier bear repeating. First, while the power of some of the players has increased, it is still difficult for them and the general public, even when using electronic means with all its supposed advantages of speed, informality low cost, etc., to penetrate the decision-making core.[36] Second, the modes of transmission to the decision-makers are the traditional ones and they generally still behave as they did before the advent of the new technologies. Third, these policy advisors or "intermediaries" act as filters who often have their own agenda.

129. While it is generally true that governments are more interested in getting their message out than getting views of outsiders which complicate and slow the decision-making process,[37] governments often do reach out to consult interest groups and others in policy development. This raises the question why Internet discussion groups are not used more frequently as an instrument to gather policy inputs. The reasons are fairly clear:

- The ICTs are relatively new; politicians tend to be conservative in the techniques they use to take decisions.
- There is concern about opening flood gates; as well as serious input, one can expect many "kibitzers"; as one interviewee put it, "Noise is not a Net problem but a human problem".
- If governments are seriously interested in consulting and getting outside views, all must be answered -- a very labour-intensive *and costly* process.[38]

130. Technical limitations must be overcome:

- the capacity to synthesise information effectively is lacking;
- current technologies are not sufficiently interactive -- dialogue is difficult; e-mail is more like a poll than an interactive policy input;
- the distribution of computers and modems is not very broad and very uneven, limiting their political utility;

- even if these problems were overcome, it is important to note that powerful groups (e.g. business) will not choose the new technologies to input into government policy.

131. Thus it appears that the use of the new technologies as direct democratic channels to gather information for policy formulation is marginal. The traditional methods of input -- mail, telephone, meetings -- still predominate. While some of the external policy players and some middle-level advisors are using the ICTs to increase their sources of information and argument, their input to senior officials and ministers is converted to paper and oral briefings for, at the decision-making centre, a paper and oral culture still persists.[39] Of equal importance, they have their own agenda, and generally limited, controlled, and filtered access to decision-makers. Thus far, decision-makers themselves have not sought to use the ICTs to increase public input into policy formulation in any appreciable way.

Dissemination of information

132. The impact of the new technologies on the dissemination of policy information depends in part on the political culture of the country. If gathering points of view, consulting interested parties, and achieving consensus prior to announcement are strong traditions (Scandinavia, Italy, Spain, Switzerland), then dissemination as a political activity is correspondingly less important.

133. Similarly, if the line between policy and politics on the one hand, and administration on the other, is relatively clearly drawn, then again dissemination activity tends to diminish as the vast machinery of the public service is not engaged to the same extent in selling the policy as is the case where the public service plays a quasi-political role (e.g. the United States, Canada).

134. Having said this, **the new technologies are more in evidence in the dissemination or transmit mode**.[40] Perhaps the most subtle effect of the increasing use of ICTs by governments in the process of information dissemination is the legitimisation of persuasive rather than deliberative communication (*cf.* Linsky, 1988, Ch. 9). This is not surprising as governments are generally more interested in getting their own views accepted than in soliciting the views of others. Moreover, it is easier for public servants to organise around the dissemination activity which they can control than around gathering information where the response is unpredictable.

135. The traditional instruments are, however, still the main ones used to disseminate the results of policy deliberations. Press releases, press conferences, letters, telephone calls, meetings, advertising, and official Gazettes are still very much in evidence.

136. But the parallel electronic world is making inroads here more rapidly than in the gathering activity. Most governments are starting to adopt the practice of “throwing everything up on the web”. While most are simply copying print material into electronic form, some technologically sophisticated departments (e.g. some departments of Finance) are integrating the two worlds with interesting gains in both effectiveness and costs.

137. The electronic world allows the government to get its message out more cheaply, quicker, and better targeted, especially to areas geographically distant from the capital. Home pages also allow governments to get out standardised messages (a sort of King James version of their activities). By leap-frogging the mediating institutions of the media, interest groups, and lobbies, governments get their messages direct to citizens (at least those with modems). The major obstacles at this time are the lack of widespread access to computers and the Internet in particular, and the uncertainty that this mode of transmission will catch on with the general public.

138. It should be noted, however, that many Home pages have been mounted less for reasons of information and education than for reasons of prestige -- to show that the government or department in question is "*WITH IT*" and not lagging others in the new digital world.[41] In these cases, Home pages tend to go stale and the lack of commitment manifests itself very quickly. In one of the countries visited the Home page had not been changed in over a year.

139. An interesting development is the trend for web pages to replace mailing lists. While significantly reducing costs, this practice carries the political risk of further separating politicians from their electors. More ominously, evidence is appearing to indicate that there is some hiding of information in the electronic labyrinth (Canada, the United States). Information is posted but in reality it is available to only the few who have modems and the patience to search for it.[42] The information burden is shifted from the government to the citizen. Mailing lists, where the government assumes the responsibility for seeing that the information reaches the citizen, are more user friendly, and given the current distribution of the Internet and e-mail, more democratic.

140. As in the case of gathering, how far governments go down the road of using the new technologies for dissemination is a matter of political will and decision.

141. It does appear, however, that governments are becoming more open as they become more exposed: we live in a CNN world. The fact that the public is increasingly able to find out about government mistakes (through the media and interest groups, often using Freedom of Information legislation) has become a factor in determining the amount of "openness" practised. Realising that their mistakes may be found out, governments are more frequently adopting the policy of acknowledging error and apologising (though in other cases they acknowledge the risk but proceed to try to "hide" things anyway).

142. It should also be acknowledged that postings on the " Net" can be the vehicle to spread false and unaccountable (anonymous) views. The medium is tailor-made to launch over-night dirty tricks and smear campaigns. Even official web pages (e.g. the US Government's CIA and US Presidential candidate Robert Dole's pages) have been altered by "hackers". While the open nature of the Internet permits challenge, significant damage can nonetheless be inflicted by unsubstantiated rumour at least in the short run (Cochran, *op.cit.*, p. 42).

Layered dissemination

143. Some governments are developing fairly sophisticated dissemination strategies based on multi-mode layering.

144. The traditional techniques still dominate -- televised press conferences supplemented by paper-based press releases and background documents aimed at the general public. But increasingly, 800 numbers and web pages are starting to form a second tier of the arsenal. Group faxes and group e-mails for targeted specialised audiences or regions -- e.g. journalists, accountants, lawyers, investment counsellors, banks, farmers, etc. -- constitute a third tier. Video conferencing is still in its infancy but has been used, e.g. in Canada, to reach specialised audiences.

145. It is interesting to note that the quantity of paper releases diminishes with the increasing use of Internet and Government WWW sites; e.g. over the last few years, the Canadian Government has reduced the number of printed budgets from 60 000 to 6 000. The impact of this on public understanding of the budget has not been verified.

146. Some governments (e.g. Denmark, Norway) have set up special Information Agencies to handle general government publications and telephone information lines. In some cases they are also responsible for maintaining Web sites or Web site standards. They do not perform general co-ordinating functions but often act as consultants for line departments. Information dissemination remains the responsibility of the respective line departments.

147. A few governments have established a general communications co-ordinating function usually in the PM's Office (e.g. Canada).

Conclusions: Impact of the ICTs and the IS on policy development

148. From an information gathering perspective, it is helpful to reflect that information used to flow to governments in ***DISCRETE RIVERS*** -- from legislators, the media, interest groups, advisory bodies, the party, and so forth. The main focus of government was on **collecting, balancing, and controlling access** to the stores of information accumulated from these distinct flows into the policy process. The control was exercised through various regulatory schemes such as security and classification systems, FOI, rules on access to Cabinet documents, and so on.

149. Now governments are enveloped in a ***SEA*** of information and the major challenge for governments is to **filter, verify quality, and make relevant and useful** the waves of information that bombard them from all sides. This task has been rendered more complicated by the growth of government and the number of government departments, the breakdown of central registries in many departments, and the storage of much information on the personal computers of individual public servants.

150. From an information diffusion or dissemination perspective, it is commonly said that information is power. This is probably true but whereas in the past power came from hoarding and restricting access to information, increasingly power *can* now emanate from the ability to filter[43] and diffuse information in a timely manner, the ability to act as an "information node" that continuously draws people to come back for more.

151. The new technologies have many strengths:

- speed (compression of time and distance)
- informality
- relative ease of access
- targetability
- relative low cost

152. The Internet in particular, as a world-wide web of interlinked computers, provides governments with a promising instrument to encourage a distributed system of dialogue and deliberation prior to taking policy decisions.[44]

153. In spite of this, ministers and their advisors have made little use of the ICTs to gather information for policy purposes. The traditional methods -- mail, telephone, meetings -- still predominate. This is also generally true for the dissemination activity, though in this case the new technologies are

more in evidence. Because of the speed with which they allow governments to get out their message, and their targetability, governments have found the ICTs useful as they seek to put their particular "spin" on policy announcements before the media and interest groups give their interpretations. In the dissemination mode, governments control the release of information -- selectivity is at play -- and this shifts power into their hands as senders of the message at the expense of the various receivers. This underlines the importance of placing in the hands of the general public and other recipients of government information instruments such as FOI "to keep governments honest". But we shall see (Section III on transparency) that these instruments are of limited use. In short, the new technologies have done little to increase public input into, or improve the quality of, the policy decision-making process, even though some players in the process are using the new technologies to improve their capacities to "play" in the policy process.

154. *Plus ça change*....[45]

155. The OECD countries visited are in a period of transition where the IS and the new technologies on which it is based are feeling their way into the paper-based and oral worlds of policy and governance. In effect governments are running parallel paper and electronic systems especially in the dissemination mode. *In this period of uncertain co-existence, the new is being made to conform to the old.*

156. Though they have been slow to adopt them, politicians by and large like the new technologies -- the Internet in particular -- because of their speed and the fact that they allow governments to get their message to the public without the intermediation of the press. They also facilitate the tailoring of messages for specific audiences. On the other hand, politicians are concerned about opening the floodgates on the gathering end but thus far they have not had much pressure to do so.

157. While the extent of direct public participation in and the democratic quality of policy decision-making have changed little as a result of the advent of the new ICTs and the IS, this is not to say that there have been no impacts. In fact the IS and the ICTs have significantly altered the *environment* for policy-making, often in negative ways, and driven a number of important developments which are affecting the ability of governments to govern and their willingness to embrace the new technologies.

158. The impact of the IS Sea varies from country to country, government to government, within governments from ministry to ministry, and between levels of government within a country. There was a clear consensus, however, in all countries visited that the process of policy development and governance has become *increasingly complex* as a result of the emerging IS:

- "Information overload" -- the increasing volume and speed of arrival of information -- is not simply a metaphor; it threatens sound decision-making. There is the ever present danger that decision-makers, forced to react to a news report, will go off in the wrong direction. Much time is wasted evaluating information to reduce that danger.

- There are more and better informed players. Influence, and to a lesser extent power, is more diffused throughout the system and society than it has ever been. Unfortunately, this does not translate automatically into better and more democratic decision-making. The media have improved their capacity to act as agenda setters and framers of issues. Interest groups are better informed, better linked, and more influential. Even bureaucrats have increased their ability to influence and direct the government's agenda. These developments have served to complicate political decision-making and increase the time and resources spent on communications planning and activities. More importantly, these unelected power centres

diminish democratic decision-making when, as is usually the case, they are pursuing their own (private) agenda.

- Competing issues and informed players are placing greater pressures on the scarce time and limited cognitive capacities of decision-makers.

- The rapid rise and fall of issue coalitions make it difficult to build a stable consensus. As a result, there has been a weakening in the mass parties, and the emergence of many diverse single interest or niche movements. Put another way, building stable "follower-ship" (e.g. national political parties or a broad popular consensus around a course of action) is increasingly difficult.[46] (This raises the question whether governments must become more adept at governing **without** consensus.)

159. Many more issues, which used to be handled by officials, are "politicised" and need ministerial time and review.

160. The decision-making context for the politician is increasingly circumscribed:

- The internationalisation of policy development has shrunk the power of governments to act alone and new politically unaccountable sources of power have emerged -- e.g. international capital and Multi-national Enterprises (MNEs).

- Public cynicism and loss of faith in government have restricted the scope of government action as government intervention is regarded as a *malum*; deference is being replaced by defiance.

161. More legislatures are moving towards the US Congressional system where many votes or decisions must be negotiated. Counting on quasi-automatic support from the governing caucus is no longer feasible.

162. This complexity forces governments into a defensive posture, requiring unprecedented flexibility and communications skills. The result is often policy stasis -- issues, not necessarily fundamental ones, take years to resolve.

163. Other important impacts on the policy environment emerging from the IS Sea and the increasing complexity of decision-making are:

- It is increasingly difficult for governments to set and maintain their agenda; once decisions are taken it is more and more difficult to make them stick; the increase in the number of players increases the number of potential winners, but it also increases the number of potential losers; thus it is more difficult for governments to get their way on issues. [47]

- This has resulted in an inordinate stress on "marketing" policy decisions, facilitated by the new technologies with their ease in segmenting markets and speed of delivery. A question is whether this stress on policy marketing is occurring at the expense of policy analysis.[48] Ministerial time is an increasingly scarce resource in very short supply. As a result policy proposals are increasingly put forward using point form "decks" of slides which emphasize *reporting* rather than detailed policy analyses of the options.

- Increasingly vast amounts of time and resources are spent on communications planning and implementing communications strategies.

- On this point it is important to remember that cultural factors are important. The consensus tradition in Scandinavia reduces the need for "marketing" policy decisions on announcement, for the consensus is developed during formulation.[49] This is also the case in those systems where the line between policy and administration is clearly drawn. The role of "strategic information planning" differs significantly in these cases.

- A disturbing development is the tendency for governments to move into the *infotainment* business (Question Period, Parliamentary and Congressional tactics, ministerial side-shows, e.g. the performance of some politicians in the Canada-EC fishing dispute). This is accentuated by the need of Governments to be seen to be doing something; the media often drive governments to develop "symbolic" or short-term solutions to symptoms rather than root causes with the result that major issues are left untouched.

164. It must be noted that these impacts on the policy environment are mainly negative; they have not increased public participation in or the transparency of policy decision-making except in an indirect and tenuous way. We shall see that even the *potentially positive* impact of the ICTs on policy decision-making (and the quality of democratic governance) should not be exaggerated.

III. THE IMPACT OF THE NEW TECHNOLOGIES ON THE QUALITY OF DEMOCRACY

165. The issues raised by this question are complex, abstract and much more a question of judgement -- judgements which are very difficult to make as situations vary from country to country.

166. Democracy, from the Greek *demos*, people, and *kratos*, power literally means government by the people. Government *by* the people is important because it is presumed to increase the likelihood that it will result in government *for* the people. Over the centuries, this seemingly simple and straight-forward concept has evolved along two separate but inter-related lines. First, with the growth of the nation state, direct or plebiscitary democracy has gradually yielded to indirect or representative democracy. Second, other concepts or conditions regarded as essential to the functioning of democracy have in effect become part of its definition. These include freedom of speech and association, separation of powers, free elections, and the rule of law.

167. During the author's visits to capitals, one thing emerged clearly -- governments are focusing first and foremost on the competitive/commercial benefits of the new technologies. Second, within their own areas of responsibility, the concentration is on the efficiency of delivery of governmental programmes and services. Any democratic benefits are a third and significantly lower priority.[50]

168. There are two broad views of the impact of the new technologies on the quality of democracy. First there are the technological optimists who see the new technologies not only as easier and faster, but as qualitatively better - holding out new ways of existing, working, communicating, and participating in political life. UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan told delegates to the Global Knowledge '97 Conference that "We at the United Nations are convinced that information has great democratising power waiting to be harnessed to our global struggle for peace and democracy."[51]

169. The other view is less optimistic, maintaining that changing institutions and behaviour patterns is a slow and problematic process. "It's so easy to imagine a scenario in which technology is used to get instant judgements from people. If it is used that way, we haven't seen anything yet when it comes to high-tech lynchings....Real democracy is slow and deliberative."[52] Newsgroups, unless carefully moderated (censored?) can get out of hand. Unmoderated groups often get quite abusive and wander off topic. Politicians and other community leaders with whom citizens wish to interact, become reluctant to engage, especially at the beginning of a dialogue, for they fear being "flamed" or losing their ability to lead from behind. Then there is the problem of dealing with the overload of undifferentiated and uncategorised information and data.

170. As the European Commission report "Building the European Information Society for Us All" put it, "`Direct democracy' runs counter to the time it takes to form a judgement....It should not be substituted for other, more traditional forms of representative democracy....There is a danger of confusing "data transmission" and "public debate" (EC, 1996, pp. 77-8). Lastly, there is the problem of accessibility, turning the "information have-nots" into "information haves", another theme highlighted by the European Commission report (*ibid*, Theme V, pp. 32ff.).

171. To try to come to a tentative judgement on this conflict of views, we will look at some of the major touchstones of democracy and try to determine how the IS is affecting them. These touchstones embody values needed to reconcile the diverse interests in today's society with the majority principle.

172. There are a number of such touchstones; we will look at ***participation*** in and the ***transparency*** of the policy process, ***accountability***, the ***credibility*** of the government, ***freedom of expression***, ***freedom of association***, political ***equality***, and the treatment and role of ***minorities***. Other touchstones such as free elections and individual liberty, are not directly relevant to our subject.

173. Throughout this discussion it is important to bear in mind that at present only a small percentage of the population have computers. Even fewer have modems, and fewer still are connected to the Internet. Thus many of the comments in the next few sections refer more to potentialities than current realities.

Participation

174. Public participation in policy-making and governance not only helps ensure a government that is responsive to public needs but also enhances its legitimacy. Yet the degree and quality of public participation have always been an Achilles heel of democratic development as indicated in earlier references to Athens and de Tocqueville.

175. It should be remembered that "representative" democracy has its origins in geography and technology -- distance from the capital and the then existing communications technologies necessitated that the MP be a "representative". Technological progress, particularly with the ICTs, has diminished these spatial and temporal obstacles. If and when the Internet or a similar technology becomes widely distributed, it could become an important instrument for broadening and deepening input and participation, increasing the scope for direct democracy and direct popular input through electronic voting and referenda.[53] In theory plebiscitary democracy could replace representative democracy on many issues.[54] Interestingly, these new technologies could also strengthen the role of the individual legislator (representative) who could use information tools to probe opinion and present constituency views to policy-makers. How these two opposing forces will play out remains to be seen but history suggests that electronic voting and plebiscitary democracy are unlikely to displace representative democracy except perhaps on a few major issues like constitutional change.

176. The experiences of Norway, Switzerland, Canada, and others with the Internet do not at this juncture fulfil the expectations of those who see it as a vehicle promoting broad public participation in political issues. Further improvements in technology will help; but more important will be the demonstration of political will by governments that they genuinely want "broader and deeper" policy input from the public, and by the public that it is willing to do the work required to participate constructively in the policy process.

177. Interestingly, the increasing use of polls, focus groups, and other sophisticated methods of gauging public opinion seem to be relieving the pressure on governments to develop new and more effective modes of public participation.[55]

Transparency

178. "Transparence" has both a substantive and a process dimension. First, transparence means clarity in the process used by politicians and senior bureaucrats to take decisions, including knowledge of

who had input into or influenced the decisions. Second, it means having knowledge of the definition of the problem and the options being considered, prior to the decision being taken, with a view to encouraging policy debate amongst interested parties and the citizenry.

179. There can be varying degrees of transparence. In descending cumulative order, towards greater transparence, there could be:

- widespread publication of the decision;
- a clear explanation of the decision;
- identification of who provided input into the decision;
- publication of inputs;
- prior to the decision being taken, publication of the problem definition and the options being considered;
- open voting.

180. The demand for greater transparency can be linked to the decline of deference and the distrust of politicians mentioned in Section II. It is an issue in both consensus and consultation-announcement modes of decision-making.

181. On occasion the demand for transparence includes demands for access to the actual advice given by participants in the decision-making process, but this demand is almost always (rightly) denied as a threat to the tendering of free and frank counsel.

182. From the findings on the gathering and dissemination of information, it is clear that governments have not done much to increase transparency. Politicians are reluctant to reveal precisely who was involved in the decision-making process at what particular time because of the perceived threat to the integrity of the process. In general, the political and bureaucratic culture is one of secretiveness, with openness closely tied to calculations of political advantage.[56]

183. Various players, if they are not "insiders", try to obtain information on the evolution or maturation of decisions, e.g. interest groups, lobbies, and particularly the media. As indicated above in Section II, the Internet strengthens their ability to obtain more information more quickly and thus the players can become a force for greater transparency, bearing in mind, however, what we have said about their having their own private agenda which they may use to interpret and present information.

184. **Freedom of Information or Access to Information legislation (FOI)** is designed as a further instrument for individuals to use in pursuing "open government". Such legislation generally has three purposes:

a) to improve policy-making and the democratic process;

b) to give citizens the right to turn a critical spotlight onto the secretive world of public administration to ensure that matters are being handled with integrity, probity, objectivity and fairness; and

c) to ensure a citizen has access to government information about him or herself.

185. Such legislation has been or is in the process of being enacted by all the countries visited. In some cases access rights are incorporated in legislation covering particular sectors (e.g. environment, personal data). Some have codes of practice that purport to perform much the same function as legislation.

186. It does not follow that those without legislation or codes are more closed or secretive than those with. Of equal importance is the political and bureaucratic culture of the country which can either tend towards secrecy or towards openness. Furthermore, it should be borne in mind that governments may have as much or more interest in disclosing information on a particular policy or subject than in concealing it.

187. Trends in the area of FOI are mixed. In Norway and Denmark, the increasing use of the Internet to post documents points to a greater openness. In Canada and Switzerland, reviews are under way with a view to "tightening up" the legislation.[57] The United Kingdom is proposing to introduce legislation but its nature and content were not evident at the time of writing. The status quo remains in the United States, Italy, and Spain.

188. In practice, there have been relatively few requests for access from individuals in the countries under study. FOI is used mainly by business to obtain commercial information in Canada and the United States. In Norway and Denmark, it is used mainly by the press. In Italy, there is a law but no bureaucracy is in place to administer it. The United Kingdom relies on a "Code of Practice". Information on the number of requests for information under various countries' legislation has been difficult to obtain. In the United States, they number about 400 000 per year. The number for Canada is 10 000. When Canada was planning the introduction of its information law in the late 1970s the expected number of requests was 75 000 annually.

189. Given the relatively small number of FOI requests, it appears that the strongest democratic impact of FOI legislation is indirect. Many politicians and bureaucrats have recognised that trying to conceal something with access rights hanging in the background is probably futile and likely to lead to more problems than a policy of openness and disclosure. But old habits die hard. Concern over generating more criticisms of government has in some instances re-enforced the secretive instincts of government and created a defensive mentality among politicians and bureaucrats. In one of the countries visited, it has led to the destruction or alteration of documents, and greater resort to oral communication.[58] This development could become an inhibitor to the flow of e-mail which sits on the computer and is retrievable.

190. The direct impact of FOI has been more important on the transparency and integrity of public administration than on democratic quality, i.e. promoting public participation in policy-making and governance. But even here the gains have been modest. The forces playing on decisions remain quite obscure even in countries like Switzerland where formal, open "processes of consultation" exist. Moreover, it has been difficult for the public to turn what knowledge it has gained about the rules of the game -- the procedures governing various administrative and decision-making processes -- into actual participation in decision-making and governance.

191. Increasing access to government information may strengthen transparency, but also raises a host of other issues. None is perhaps more important than the question of access to internal e-mail and voice mail, which would potentially increase the transparency of the decision-making process, but perhaps at the expense of the informality and frank exchange occurring within current internal deliberations.

192. Another issue of significance for some governments is whether the court of appeal which exists under most access regimes should have the power to order release of documents rather than simply make recommendations. Given the record of unimplemented recommendations, this change would strengthen access regimes considerably.

193. Budgetary constraints also play a role in how transparent governments are able to be. Putting information on a Web site is generally cheaper than mailing out documents, while timely responses to individual FOI requests require greater resources, raising questions of whether to charge for access to information.[59] In spite of current fiscal pressures, most governments are trying to hold the line on charges with the general practice being to provide free access or have a nominal charge to deter frivolous or vexatious requests. For requests involving large amounts of research or copying, charges are made often at marginal cost.

194. It remains to be seen whether the publication of governmental and legislative home pages will increase or diminish demands for information under existing access regimes. It should be borne in mind that governments manage the release of information on the Internet and that access rights are probably a beneficial discipline on their decisions on what to post and what not to post.

195. In general, FOI does not appear to have been a very potent instrument in the hands of the public to promote greater transparency and participation. Indirectly, however, the threat of its use appears to have caused some greater degree of disclosure, though it has also led to greater use of oral discussion and decision-making, and in some cases the actual alteration or destruction of documents.

Accountability

196. Accountability appears to have three dimensions: *(i)* authority - enabling someone to act; *(ii)* results - what that person is expected to deliver; and *(iii)* a process to hold that person to account. For accountability to work, there must be considerable transparence.

197. Determining the degree of accountability of an individual or institution is no easy matter. Has the government kept its electoral promises? Has a legislator who campaigned on a platform of fiscal prudence voted accordingly? Seemingly simple and straightforward questions, the answers become complex and sometimes convoluted as respondents seek to explain how the changed context alters cases.

198. If a person participates in the decision-making process, then he or she is accountable. However, several points are noteworthy in this context. First, as noted above, the new technologies have not enhanced participation significantly. Second, ministerial responsibility is increasingly being interpreted as personal as opposed to constitutional responsibility. Third, general elections every 4 years or so are not an adequate instrument for holding a government accountable for a particular policy it may have introduced in year 2. Lastly, the new forms of collaborative decision-making being tried in several OECD countries tends to obscure accountability. Thus the question must be asked: are we better able, because of the emerging IS, to hold those who take decisions on our behalf more accountable?

199. The answer appears to be positive, at least potentially. The Internet could act as a long-term memory of promises and voting records. The new technologies, with their increasingly powerful search engines, facilitate the search for records. In the case of a legislator, for example, it would be an easy matter to post voting records on a parliamentary web page. The same type of score card could also be kept for government promises, bearing in mind that the media have an interest in keeping the government's feet to the fire and are thus an important instrument of accountability.[60]

200. But, as noted earlier, it is also easy to hide things in the electronic sea, claiming correctly that it is posted but in effect inaccessible except by the diligent or the lucky.

Political equality

201. The tenet that all citizens are politically equal is the basic argument for democracy as a way of trying to both exercise and control power. It is better to give each citizen a firecracker (a vote) than to give a stick of dynamite to the leader. These individual firecrackers coalescing at election time can blast a leader out of office.

202. Generally speaking, political power is based on information, technology, and wealth.[61] The IS can go some way down the road of increasing equality by providing more information to the bulk of the population in a speedy and inexpensive fashion (assuming that access to the new technologies becomes universal for all practical purposes). When power at election time is manifest at the ballot box, information is a more potent instrument than wealth, *provided an adequate regime of controlling election expenses is in place*.

203. It is useful to recall Robert Putnam's conclusion that democracy works best where there is horizontal collaboration among equals.[62] The IS and the new technologies could contribute to the achievement of this state of affairs. The improved availability of information, coupled with the enhanced ability to organise coalitions using the Internet as an instrument of communication *and* association, should increase the firepower and political equality of the ordinary citizen.

204. But at the moment this scenario is more potentiality than reality. As stated earlier, the danger is that the IS will create two classes of citizens: the information "haves" and the information "have-nots". [63]

Credibility

205. By using the new technologies to get out unmediated messages, governments hope to enhance their credibility and public (democratic) support. But unmediated messages from the government must compete with those of interest groups and the media to make their voices heard.

206. On the issue of credibility, the medium is unlikely to be the message. A technological fix is unlikely to suffice. At the heart of credibility is trustworthiness -- a feeling of confidence that a promise made will be a promise kept. In these complex, fast-moving, and difficult times, it is often too easy to argue that circumstances alter cases and that promises made cannot be kept. [64]

207. One thing is clear: establishing credibility in the information age will be no easy matter.

Freedom of expression

208. Freedom of speech or expression is often confused with democracy. It is clearly a *sine qua non* of democracy but merely adding another voice to the marketplace of ideas is not sufficient. There must be institutions in place which link these voices and views to the decision-makers and sources of power, who in turn should be prepared to discuss and debate these points of view. Otherwise, words may be spoken,

but there is no assurance that voices are heard and considered, especially if the decision-making process is conducted in secret.

209. For those who have access to it, e-mail and Internet discussion groups provide another vehicle for the expression of views. With the arrival of the Internet, everyone is now a publisher --good, bad, or indifferent.[65] The utility of this empowerment of personal and group freedom of speech was demonstrated by the Democracy Movement in China at the time of Tien-an-min and more recently when President Slobodan Milosevic of Serbia closed down the only two independent radio stations at the time of the demonstrations against his decision to annul the results of local elections. The Internet - difficult to shut down without disrupting the whole telephone system - became an important link with the outside world.[66]

210. In both these and similar cases (e.g. Vietnam, Russia and Eastern Europe), it is important to sort out true causes and effects. Two points are relevant here. First, although the new technologies may, in certain cases, alert the media and political leaders to developments, the public environment which helps shape both the content and presentation of a policy decision is affected more by the old *mass* technologies such as TV and newspapers than by the new ICTs which pipe into individuals. Public sentiment towards Vietnam and Tien-an-min was mobilised by TV images, not by Internet e-mails. The ICTs fed the mass media. By speeding and facilitating the exchange of views and the formation of pressure groups, the new ICTs take their place as *another "force multiplier" but rank in power below the mass technologies which are the real agenda setters and framers of issues*. Moreover, insofar as we can surmise, the ICTs did not directly affect the Chinese and Serbian leaders who were influenced by street demonstrations, their advisors, and in certain cases, local media. Second, politicians often assert that various opinions, whether emanating from interest groups, TV, the newspapers, the Internet or any other player in the policy process, were " taken into account" in formulating a policy. However, as noted above in Section II, these *indirect* effects on decision-making, especially if the process is *in camera*, are not adequate indicators of "democratic decision-making" or "public participation in governance".[67] Democracy is a deliberative process involving opportunities for dialogue, mutual exchange of views, and arriving at an agreed outcome. Without this, as noted above, there is a tendency for decision-makers to place a very heavy weighting on communications considerations in determining the actual *content* of policy decisions. The process of public deliberation is particularly important if the Internet is used as a source of information, for the Net is subject to many more questions of reliability than the traditional sources which are embedded in known institutions whose reliability (or unreliability) is generally well known.

211. Given the great difficulty of regulating free speech on the Net -- since content can always be transferred to servers located outside of a regulator's jurisdiction -- it undoubtedly has strengthened freedom of expression. However, as noted above, this freedom can lead to abuse. In Europe, where the experience of propaganda in support of neo-nazism looms more strongly, there is a strong debate over the government role to discourage or suppress unfiltered "hate" messages advocating violence against particular groups or advancing revisionist views denying the existence of the Holocaust. But even if there is agreement on the need to restrict certain forms of speech (e.g. violation of individual privacy, knowingly printing false and slanderous information, child pornography), figuring out how to prevent such information from being disseminated is a greater challenge. For example, a biography of former French President François Mitterrand written by his personal physician was banned in France for violating French privacy laws, but then made available to all through Web sites based on foreign soil. Postings on the Net can also be used to spread false rumours, often from unaccountable sources. The medium is tailor-made to launch over-night dirty tricks and smear campaigns, as the experience of "hackers" being able to alter the Web pages of the CIA and US Presidential candidate Robert Dole demonstrate. While the open nature of the Internet permits unprecedented freedom of expression, significant damage can nonetheless be inflicted, at least in the short run. Countries are continuing to grapple with how best to

crack down on illegal behaviour facilitated by the internet, but at least in terms of policy debate, it is hoped that the open nature of democratic debate can overcome the abuses of disinformation.

Freedom of association

212. Freedom of expression, to be fully effective as a democratic tool, must be accompanied by freedom of association. Then there is the potential for really significant impact on those who exercise power.

213. The Commission on Global Governance reported that, "...the desire of people to be involved in the management of their affairs, the need to be active in areas where government is unable or unwilling to act, and the development of new communication technologies that convey information broadly and help people interact across national borders are encouraging what some have called a global associational revolution" (Commission on Global Governance, 1995, p. 253).

214. The IS and the new technologies -- fax, teleconferencing, and especially the Internet -- have increased the availability of information and the ability of individuals and groups to exchange views, associate, organize coalitions, and even demonstrate. The impact is particularly evident on the international level, where non-governmental organisations and other pressure groups are more easily able to mobilise and unite groups to apply pressure on treaty negotiations on a multi-national basis. For example, some 600 groups in 70 countries had signed statements in opposition to the proposed Multilateral Agreement on Investment (MAI), many of them through internet and e-mail campaigns, before the OECD halted negotiations in late 1998.[68] This prompted calls for greater transparency in future OECD work on investment, including broadened participation of non-member countries and further discussions with "representatives of civil society (business, labour, non-governmental organisations, consumer and other groups)".[69]

Treatment and role of minorities

215. One of the hallmarks of democracy is how they treat their minorities and the role of minorities in the democratic process (Sclove, 1995, pp. 40-41).

216. The new technologies have increased the ability of minorities to organise, express their views, and influence the policy process. Of equal importance, their interests are more and more embedded in state structures: departments, ministers and their offices, and personnel policies are often organised around minority interests. They receive recognition in constitutions and charters of rights.

217. There can be little doubt that their increasing power complicates the decision-making process, but the result can be (though it is not automatically) more democratic.

218. While the IS can also be used by the majority to crush minority views, on balance, the persons consulted for this study were of the view that the new technologies enhanced the status of minorities, as it has strengthened the influence of interest groups more generally due to the greater capacities of ICTs to facilitate communication, organisation and mobilisation within these groups.

Conclusions

219. Increasing the quality of democracy -- in particular the frequency and quality of *participation* in governance and the *transparency* of decision-making -- is much less a function of technology than of political will and the structure of institutions.[70] The IS and the new technologies will not accomplish much in this regard on their own. Nor does the IS with its hyper-critical media and interest groups facilitate the establishment of government *credibility*. "Computer journalism" (and FOI) are often used by the media and interest groups to embarrass governments.

220. The negative effects on the decision-making process mentioned in Section II above have led governments in the words of one senior official "to ration democracy", i.e. to adopt a defensive posture vis-à-vis the various players and the public, and to take steps to increase transparence and participation only under pressure.

221. On the other hand, in a positive vein, the new technologies and the emerging IS have the *potential* to advance some of the other important touchstones of democracy -- *accountability, political equality, freedom of association, and the treatment and role of minorities* -- especially if they become simpler to use and more widely distributed. Whether in the longer run this will lead to greater transparency and public participation in policy formation, and improve democratic governance is impossible to say. The analysis above and that in Section IV below suggests this is unlikely.[71]

222. The current situation underlines the inadequacy of existing mechanisms of public participation and the need to reform existing institutions or develop new ones that foster the time-consuming process of democratic deliberation. The challenge is to develop better methods of conflict resolution, mediation, and consensus building so all parties emerge feeling that they have had adequate participation in the process.

223. There have been many recent proposals to improve the health of democracy. Daniel Yankelovich has developed a seven stage "public judgement model" whose ultimate goal is both the moral and emotional acceptance of a solution that has been wrestled though the previous six stages (Yankelovich, 1991, *passim*). James F. Fishkin has proposed a process of "deliberative polling" where representative parties spend several days debating an issue and their views are "polled" at various stages of the process as they move towards an accommodation of positions (Fishkin, 1991, *passim*).

224. A number of processes have been tried in Canada and elsewhere with varying results (*cf.* Stein, forthcoming, pp. 9 ff.; and Rosell, forthcoming, Ch. 5). One which has had some success involves governments pushing decisions and consensus building back onto interested parties. With this and other similar processes, two problems are present: (i) how to maintain policy integrity and ensure that the results are not simply a self-interested elite accommodation; and (ii) how to maintain the accountability of Ministers. Proponents maintain that these problems are resolvable if at the outset a proper framework to protect the public interest is clearly set out. This is harder than at first sight appears (Rosell, *op.cit*.).

225. One point that emerges from the experiences of the Canada, Norway, Switzerland, the United States, and others is the tremendously time-consuming nature of these processes. Deliberative consultation and participation slows down decision-making considerably, often taking two or three years or more. In this fast changing world, this slowness adds another dimension of complexity to the policy formulation process. Another point is that these processes seem to be successful in dealing with relatively discrete, concrete issues but have not been able to deal with broad questions of the constitution, national values, or trade-offs involving strategic directions.

226. In the longer run there is a danger that the new technologies - the Internet in particular - will divide on two lines, with payment through subscriptions to quality services based on Intranets (closed groups) for those who can afford it, and the anarchic "popular" Internet providing poor information (the equivalent of junk food) for the bulk of the population.[72] This suggests an important role for governments in ensuring that relevant and accurate information is accessible to all. As governments seek new sources of revenue and to re-engineer their roles, there is a danger already evident in Canada, the United States, and other countries, that governments will sell information to value-added re-packagers who will charge for access to their sites. Such a development would not augur well for the improvement of the quality of democratic governance.[73]

IV. OBSTACLES TO THE USE OF THE NEW TECHNOLOGIES IN POLICY AND DEMOCRATIC GOVERNANCE

227. There is a temptation to believe that the information revolution is by its nature profoundly democratic. This belief also accompanied a number of other social and technological revolutions in the past - the introduction of printing, universal publicly funded education, radio and television, and even the introduction of the airplane. In the media hype that surrounded the first airplane flights in 1903, journalists prophesied an era "in which planes would conquer distance, abolish national boundaries, and make all men brothers ... guaranteeing equality, democracy, and perpetual peace."[74] While these changes undoubtedly contributed somewhat to the evolution of democracy over the centuries, none, in and of itself, was a driving or determining force for positive change. The reason why these hopes were not realised was not simply a matter of mis-reading or mis-managing technology. A number of powerful factors militate against significant changes in policy decision-making and the quality of democracy.

228. There are a number of reasons -- technological and human -- why new technologies, including the ICTs, have difficulty penetrating the policy world and improving the quality of democracy.

229. In the case of the ICTs, there are some relatively short-term obstacles (five to ten years) where a solution is in sight. These include lack of:

- penetration of the Internet and other digital transmission technologies;
- technological standardization;
- broadband capacity at reasonable prices.

230. Technological obstacles more directly related to policy include:

- concern over security;
- lack of good analysis/synthesis software to deal with large volumes of public input.

231. These are more intractable problems and the time frame for solutions is indeterminate. They are likely to prove more difficult to solve than is commonly believed; what we are presuming in the latter case is the ability to digitise the human capacity of judgement.

232. The main obstacles to the greater use of these technologies in policy, however, are human and political rather than technological. They include:

- generational factors;
- the nature of the decision-making process;
- the lack of political will to really open up the decision-making process;

- insufficient public interest in policy development.

233. The generational factor may be evanescent and disappear as the young generation of computer literate persons gradually assumes positions of power. For the moment, however, not only the lack of technical prowess but also the preference of decision-makers to surround themselves with people rather than technology is a deterrent to the greater use of the new technologies for policy purposes.

234. The ICTs can quickly add additional information "to be taken into account" by any decision-maker. An increasing army of analysts and advisors -- low or mid-level bureaucrats or ministerial assistants -- can try to ingest the growing volumes of information available. Two problems arise. First, governmental decision-making (especially at higher levels) is still very much a small group people-oriented activity, most often conducted in secret, based on the amount of information capable of being processed by one brain.[75] The limited capacity of the human brain to absorb and process information remains a brutal constraint on public participation in the decision-making process. Second, as noted in Section II, the decision-making process requires that the increasing volumes of information be synthesised, filtered and ordered, so that it can be digested and considered by one brain - whether it be a committee member preparing to vote, or a President making a decision. This synthesis usually takes the form of a memo, a briefing note, a set of slides, or a small group discussion where personal, institutional, or other agenda are in play. One interviewee put it this way:

> *The existence of hierarchies ("verticalisation") is in the nature of organisation, for time is limited. Decision-making is a process of selection by a restricted group with personal trust. Pyramids may flatten but they will not disappear. The Internet may provide more windows on the process of decision-making but this will simply complicate the process.*

235. It should also be noted that "new" information is only one, and not necessarily the most important factor, entering into the decision-making process. The policy process is a complex inter-play of ideas, institutions, the distribution of power and expertise among the players (particularly interest groups), the public environment (values and opinions), the choice of policy instruments, leadership, historical traditions (policies, programmes, culture) embodied in state and societal structures, and the decision-making process itself. Many of these factors operate at the unconscious level, yet each plays a specific role in the process. For example, the public environment sets the parameters for consensus and/or consent, and determines the "window of opportunity"; historical traditions acts as a drag on policy innovation; the choice of instruments defines who pays and who wins; institutions structure behaviour; leaders determine the weight that will be assigned to the various factors in play, and so on. The impact of the ICTs and the IS on this panoply of factors is complex and uncertain; what is highly probable, if not certain, is that any "new' information available through the ICTs and the IS will not be the determining factor in democratising the policy process and governance in general.

236. In spite of the increasing amounts of information now available, the increasingly wide distribution it receives, and especially the speed with which it is transferred, **there is no evidence that the quality of decision-making has improved or that decisions are more democratic**. The decision-making process has simply become more complex, and is likely to become even more so as the IS takes hold. This added complexity itself becomes an additional obstacle to the increased use of the new technologies by governments.

237. Closely related to this factor is the general lack of political will to really open the decision-making process to outside players. The reasons for this are not hard to discern. Open decision-making is slow, complex, and uncertain in its outcome. Even in the co-operative and consensus based countries such as Denmark, Norway, and Switzerland, the ultimate stages of the decision-making

process are secretive. And there is no indication that even the most democratic governments are about to change this.

238. Some commentators have argued that the IS with its "open" character has decreased the possibility of secrecy,[76] thus undermining government systems that rely to a certain degree on confidentiality. Some go further and assert that the increased openness resulting from the IS will enhance the legitimacy and credibility of governments and their decisions.

239. In the opinion of the author, this is a rather optimistic view of the outcome. Secrecy, which has long been embedded in the governmental decision-making processes, exists at least in part, if not largely, to maintain the legitimacy and credibility of the decision-makers by obscuring the factors -- frank talk or otherwise -- that influence the decision-making process.[77]

240. With the advent of the IS, governments are finding ways of maintaining secrecy and protecting both credibility and legitimacy. Such behaviours include the use of ICTs to report events to the public with a determined "spin"; intentionally hiding information in the information sea, i.e. making retrieval increasingly difficult; the mobilisation of media contacts to elicit support; and outright prohibition or censorship of any form of publication.[78]

241. It is worth noting that the IS has shortened the length of time it is possible to keep a decision secret. Thus policy announcements frequently follow hard on the heels of the decision.[79]

242. Lastly, the point made by de Tocqueville bears repeating. Very few people wish to participate actively in government, preferring by and large to stay at home and enjoy the satisfactions of private life. One interviewee put it thus: "One of the great freedoms is that you are free not to care about or participate in politics." The general lack of public awareness of the information available from a multitude of sources contributes to this state of affairs. The posting of volumes of information on the Internet by the governments visited does not appear to have done much to enhance the quality of democracy. As officials in several of the countries visited (Canada, Italy, Spain, Switzerland) put it: "How many people have access to the Internet? How many people want access in order to engage in political discussions? If they want access for this purpose, how many can find the appropriate site? If they find the site, how useful is it?" The IS does not appear to have altered the validity of de Tocqueville's observation.[80]

V. GENERAL SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS[81]

243. These are early days in the development and diffusion of the ICTs. As suggested earlier, we are in the "Model T" stage of expansion. The following developments seem particularly relevant to the policy process and the quality of democracy:

- the relatively low level of penetration of the ICTs is a transitional phenomenon, and over time these technologies, driven by the growth of the Internet, will connect a significant majority of the population in OECD countries. As the use of the new technologies increases, the ICTs will become more interactive. Video conferencing will become available on computer or TV. The speed of communication will increase. The tailoring of messages and the targeting of audiences will become easier.[82] The new ICTs will take their place as *another "force multiplier" in policy and governance but they will rank in power below the mass media which are the real agenda setters and framers of issues*.

- the forces in play are very complex. Technology is evolving rapidly; the Information Society less so. Institutions and processes are still rooted in traditional modes of thought and action.

- the ICTs have had very little impact to date on the way governments gather information for policy purposes; the traditional methods -- letters, written submissions, telephone conversations, informal meetings, more or less public consultative processes, formal hearings, monitoring of media, opposition parties, and so on -- are still the main ones used;

- the ICTs have had more impact on the way governments choose to distribute information for politicians and senior decision-makers like the speed and targetability of the new technologies. But even in the diffusion mode, the traditional methods continue to dominate — press releases, press conferences, letters, telephone calls, meetings, advertising, official Gazettes and so on;

244. The balance of the evidence suggests that the impacts on the policy environment have for the most part been negative. They have not increased the links or access to policy-makers, nor have they increased the transparence of or public participation in policy decision-making and governance in any significant way:

- some of the major players in the policy process are making greater and increasingly effective use of the new technologies, e.g. the media, interest groups, lobbies, and bureaucrats. These players, however, are usually pursuing their own agenda; their prime interest is rarely to make the policy-making process and governance more open, participative, and democratic. Those interests with broader governance objectives rank in priority below those who have a specific economic, personnel, or political problem to discuss and their access to decision-makers is more limited and controlled.

- the increase in the number of players, the speed with which politicians have to respond, and the dominant role of the mass media have made the policy process more complex, more instantaneous, more theatrical, and policy analysis less important. The policy process does not appear to have become more democratic.

245. Without taking a position on the relative merits of direct versus representative democracy, it is probably accurate to conclude that the growth of the Internet and the IS is a threat to representative democracy.

246. Interestingly, differences in the degree of penetration of the new technologies, or even differences in the style of decision-making (consensus vs consult and announce) do not appear to make much difference in the use or impact of the ICTs.

247. It is **possible** that as citizen access to and use of the Internet continues to grow, politicians could become more motivated to take into account its growing political force and adjust their approach to policy development to better exploit the internet's potential for sharing of information and consulting with the public. Interactive policy fora and e-mail could come into greater use for communication on policy issues. They could become a new type of speedy, inexpensive, relatively easy, low-barrier, informal input which could spur the public's interest and desire to shape policy - witness the way the public has taken to banking machines! But the early experiments have not been greatly encouraging. Even the *potential* impact of the increasing use of these technologies to further participation in the policy-making process should not be exaggerated.

248. The democratising potential of the ICTs and the IS which it has spawned will only be realised if accompanied by other important changes, some of which are relatively achievable, while others will require profound changes in the way we govern ourselves. These include:

- there must be significant improvements in ICTs -- technological standardization, greater broadband capacity at reasonable prices, improved security, and most importantly, the development of effective analysis/synthesis software to deal with large volumes of public input, and greatly enhanced interactivity;

- there must be much greater penetration of the Internet and other digital transmission technologies;

- governments must attach higher priority to opening up the policy process and welcoming genuine dialogue on important issues. They must overcome their secret mentality and propensity to "ration democracy"; and

- last, but far from least, citizens must manifest greater interest in participating in political life and the policy process in particular.

249. There is no imperative for all, or indeed any, of these developments to occur, and it is likely that different nations will embrace different combinations of these factors at different times, if at all.

Scope for further study

250. Governments need to be bolder in taking experimental initiatives to link the public and the decision-making process. However, given that the ICTs and the Internet in particular are not yet broadly diffuse technologies and the embryonic state of the IS, there are few concrete actions that can be suggested. Rather many aspects of the subject deserve more detailed study.

251. Possible concrete action initiatives could be to:

- encourage OECD countries to set up one or two small pilot "deliberative fora" on significant national issues using the new technologies and report their experience to the OECD. These would have to be moderated policy fora with active government participation including, if possible, significant involvement of the legislative branch of government, showing that they are seriously taking input into account;

- develop OECD-sponsored work on "best practice" uses of the Internet, video-conferencing, teleconferencing, and "800 numbers" as instruments to increase the transparency of and public participation in policy decision-making;

- develop better internationally comparative statistics on the growth of the ICTs and the Internet.

252. Other possible study initiatives aimed at opening up the policy process to greater public participation and encouraging citizens to manifest greater interest in participating in political life and the policy process could include:

- a detailed examination of the nature of the political decision-making process. Is it inherently small group, essentially oral, personal, and secretive?

- an examination of the factors — institutional, social, political, and personal — that link policy players and the public to decision-makers;

- a "best practices" review of how the new technologies could be used to get greater citizen participation in the policy process and governance;

- a detailed review of the experience of one or more countries (e.g. Canada, Norway, Switzerland, or the United States) on using the Internet as an instrument for public policy consultation and improving democratic quality;

- changes which would have to be made to existing legislatures to make them into more deliberative as well as representative fora drawing on the new technologies to get greater public participation into their decision-making;

- preparation of an inventory of junior government initiatives using the Internet;

- a "think piece" on the use of the ICTs as new methods of consultation, conflict resolution, and coming to "public judgement" in the area of policy;

- a study on use of the new technologies in the diffusion of information including a cross-country examination of the impact of the increasing emphasis on “marketing” policy on policy analysis;

- a think piece on the possibility of the media playing an integrating role in society;

- in the context of Freedom of Information, a detailed study of access to and the pricing of information;

- a technical study of the likelihood and timing of the emergence of new and more effective analytic/synthetic software.

NOTES

[1] In Italy, for example, the use of the ICTs and Internet is further developed at the local and regional level than at the national level. Good civic networks exist in Bologna, Torino, Milano, and Rome. The reasons for this appear to be younger people, smaller geography, politicians closer to the people, simpler issues, and traditions of activism at the local level. The use of Internet discussion groups is not uncommon at the local level.

The town of Villena in Spain started in late 1996 an experiment in digitising the local community ("Infoville"), jointly financed by the government and private sectors.

[2] Another taxonomy was suggested by Paul Horsle of the State Information Service in Norway:

- One-way biased information, often called "propaganda" (with the purpose of persuasion, control, dominance).
- Public information, still one-way, but with the purpose of disseminating information, and getting others involved in knowledge.
- Two-way asymmetrical communication of information (with the purpose of influencing and persuading). Contrary to the propaganda-model the two-way asymmetrical model prepares for feedback.
- Two-way symmetrical communication (with the purpose of mutual understanding as in a dialogue).

[3] The number of Internet accounts will always be greater than the number of users as some people will have 3 or 4 accounts. The importance of obtaining figures on actual use is also borne out by the fact that in Canada 34 per cent of home computers have modems but only 17 per cent used them to access on-line services or the Internet. (OECD, 1997*b*, p. 99)

[4] The OECD found that the most frequent use of home computers involves computer games, word-processing, educational activities, record-keeping, and work-related activities (OECD, *op. cit.*, p. 95).

[5] *Cf.* Cochran (1996) (*passim*). Not all journalists are enthusiastic surfers of the Net. "I case information for a living but I rarely use the Internet. I find it balky, unreliable, confusing to use, exasperatingly slow, and almost never worth the trip." Susan Riley, Senior Editor, *The Ottawa Citizen*, June 18, 1997, p. A-15.

People often refer to the Internet as an "Information Superhighway". A better metaphor is the downtown of a big city. Streets can take you anywhere. Some buildings are public and open to anyone. Others are exclusive with security guards controlling access. You can enter a mall or an arcade and discover a host of unexpected boutiques. You can stop and window shop at your leisure. You can find nice people to give you directions and others who will rip you off. The Internet has its own police force, post office, newspapers, art galleries, and libraries. Wander around long enough and you will find both piety and smut (Schwarz, 1995, p. 22).

It is important to remember that most Internet "news" or information is not filtered in any way. This gives it a certain raw freshness but raises questions about its authenticity.

[6] "Media types, civic leaders, volunteer organisers, all agreed the news media have played a role in the disintegration of public trust." (Shephard, 1996, p. 25).

[7] Stephen Harper, a young and promising MP who has left Canadian politics, said: "I came to Ottawa to be a legislator and found that what I was supposed to be is a performer." *The Globe and Mail*, December 14, 1996, p. D-1.

[8] Non governmental organisations (NGOs) are beginning to be involved in governmental and inter-governmental negotiations and decision-making. They are frequently better equipped with information. For example, at the UN/ECE negotiations several NGOs have a seat at the table.

[9] Gordon Gibson, a former advisor to Canadian Prime Minister P. E. Trudeau and leader of a provincial political party commented: "... parties are chiefly about *power*, with policies as mere vehicles. ('These are my policies, and if you don't like them -- I have others.')" *The Globe and Mail*, January 7, 1997, p. A-25.

The Deputy Prime Minister recently stated that "We're always getting ready for an election." The Indian Affairs Minister, a long-time friend of the Prime Minister, asserted: "You've got to understand the Prime Minister. The Prime Minister talks 'the next election' the day we arrive." (*The Globe and Mail*, March 1, 1997, p. A-3). The Prime Minister himself put it thus: "I've been conducting an election campaign since 1963." (The year he was first elected). (CBC Radio, March 7, 1997). This perspective goes some distance in explaining the use of the ICTs in the policy and governing processes.

[10] This has become a political issue in Canada. One of the political parties (the Reform Party) has suggested that voters hold their politicians accountable between elections with tools like recall, referendum and citizens' initiatives. The government of the Canadian province of British Columbia recently introduced recall.

[11] *Cf.*, Sclove (1995), p. 203-4: "Can there be a self-governing society if citizens have limited ability to structure their own time? Programmes of job sharing, flexible life-scheduling, benefits' provision to part-time employees, citizen sabbaticals, parental leaves, and affordable childcare and birth control need to be extended or created." See also Arterton (1987), in a groundbreaking work that explored the results from experiments in electronically mediated fora. He concluded that there is "little support for the notion that citizens have the interest necessary to sustain near universal participation... Most citizens, probably around two-thirds, will not participate."

Paradoxically, the popular uses of ICTs (hobbies, porn, travel), and time spent using them (searching the Net is very time-consuming), can have negative impacts on democratic participation for they consume time, often spent in isolation, which could otherwise be devoted to civic affairs. Commercialisation of ICTs is likely to accentuate this dilemma.

[12] A study commissioned by Pitney Bowes Mailing Systems found that Americans prefer snail mail to e-mail. The methods ranked were first-class mail, standard mail, overnight delivery, fax and e-mail. First-class mail received the highest score. Overall, consumers rated e-mail the least preferred method of communication. It was also considered the least secure method, even by consumers with an e-mail address, and was ranked one of the most intrusive for all messages received. NFO Research Inc. conducted the research. (*InfoBeat*, Internet Daily, 3/12/97).

[13] The distinction between consensus, consent, and acquiescence is important in the context of democratic government. The impact of the IS and the new technologies on these fundamental concepts could be the subject of a fascinating paper.

[14] A Canadian Minister is reported to have said: "In my next life I want to come back with real power; I want to be a member of a focus group"!

[15] Senator Lowell Murray, who was Chairman of the powerful Cabinet Committee on Communications under Prime Minister Brian Mulroney, has said that he often withheld polls, even after requests under Access to Information, on the grounds that they were advice to Cabinet. This practice was challenged and reversed by the Information Commissioner. *The Globe and Mail*, May 12,1994, A-1.

[16] Private conversations with legislators and officials in Denmark, Switzerland, the United Kingdom, and Canada. *Cf.* also Allen (1995), p. 15: "In the name of equity, we (the office of the MP for Cambridge) treat everything that arrives on the same day with the same priority -- E-mail messages are downloaded in Cambridge, printed out, bundled up with the day's post, and posted to me."

[17] The Norwegian ministry concerned regards the experiment as useful and intends to try it again. They stated, however, that they will spend more time planning and preparing to deal with the inputs. They report that the new Social Democratic Government plans to use policy fora as a main feature of their contact with the public. However these are planned as face-to-face meetings. The ICTs may be used to support these "live" meetings.

[18] *Cf.* forthcoming paper by McConnell, Bruce W., "Governance and the Internet Paradigm".

[19] Dr Phillip M. Hallam-Baker of MIT who describes himself as "one of the founders of the Web and the chief instigator of its political dimension", has penned a trenchant criticism of the COGs. "The COGs may have meet HMGs objectives but HMG has not even begun to meet mine... I remain entirely disappointed by the response of HMG. HMG has yet to provide a comprehensive government information system to compare with that of the US federal government. A principle [sic] reason for this has been the complete lack of political will such as that provided by Vice President Al Gore."

"HMG still does not understand the fundamental changes the Internet permits. The Internet for the first time allows active participation and interaction between the governors and the governed. Mass listening is a hard problem, the number of people wishing to comment on a particular government programme will inevitably outstrip the ability of decision-makers to analyse the response. That is why simply converting traditional models of communication (e.g. mail) into electronic form are inadequate."

[20] At http://www.open.gov.uk/citu/gdirect/ind1.htm

[21] http://www.democracy.org.uk/groups/gov-direct/

[22] Two interviewees made the point that for policy newsgroups to work, they must have a moderator. This is a difficult task for whose point of view should the moderator adopt: is the moderation done from the point of view of the minister? the public? the departmental client group? The answer to this question will influence significantly the interventions of the moderator.

[23] Professor Ted Morton of the University of Calgary at a recent conference on "Who Governs? The Role of Canadian Courts in Canadian Society", *Ottawa Citizen*, November 25, 1997, p. A-1.

[24] Private conversations with legislators in Switzerland, the United Kingdom, and Canada. *Cf.* also Allen (1995), p. 8.

[25] Postulat Stamm Luzi 95.3064 February 3, 1995, and Postulat de Dardel 96.3304 June 19, 1996.

[26] Discussions with British MPs and US Congressional staff.

[27] The author has formed the impression that the new technologies are used more by political parties than governments particularly in the context of elections. Studying the use of the new technologies by political parties in electoral campaigns would be a fascinating subject.

[28] "... we must recognise that communications, not only within the House but also between members and their constituents, will, to a considerable extent, continue to be dependent on traditional methods for years to come." (Waller, 1995, p.10). Confirmed in private conversations; *cf.* above notes 12 and 16.

Two Washington area firms with expertise in communicating with Congress (Issue Dynamics Inc. and Capitol Advantage) give the following advice: "Tips for Contacting a Congressional Office -- The letter is the most popular choice of communication with a congressional office." They add: "Many congressional offices have adequate staff resources to respond only to their constituents. Inclusion of your full name and mailing address will insure that your Member can identify your residence within his or her Congressional District. Many offices use an automatic response to all incoming messages, so you can expect to receive a form message back from most of the addresses to which you send a message." (Congress.org)

[29] Senator Lowell Murray (see above, note 15) has stated that "polling has been grossly overused. Polling became *a tool used by bureaucrats* as a crutch to prop up their proposals to Cabinet." (Author's italics). *The Globe and Mail*, May 12, 1994, p. A-1.

[30] Piet Severijnen's study of the use of ICTs in local government found that officials, and not politicians, played the dominant role in the introduction of ICTs (Severijnen *et al.*, 1996).

[31] For a candid assessment of the use of e-mail as an internal communications device, see the report on California's experience at http://www.lao.ca.gov/infotech.txt. California has spent over $US1 billion per year on internal networks since 1956.

[32] *U.S. Census Bureau Survey* quoted in Schwarz (1995), p. 23.

[33] *Cf.*, for example, the "Welcome to the White House" Web site (http://www.whitehouse.gov/).

[34] One journalist interviewed, a frequent web crawler and speaker on the Internet, exclaimed, "Government web sites are a farce -- incomprehensible!"

[35] *Cf.* McConnell, Bruce W., *op. cit.*

[36] As one official put it, "Participation is not opening up a newsgroup. There must be 'buy-in' by the decision-makers; otherwise, why waste time commenting?"

[37] "E-mail for MPPs is no-mail" was the headline of a letter to the *Ottawa Citizen* from an individual who tried to e-mail a protest to all members of the Ontario legislature but had his missives returned by a server that was apparently filtering or blocking in-coming e-mails. *Ottawa Citizen*, 27 Nov., 1997, p. A-16.

[38] The fact that policy analysis is a relatively costly process in part explains why deficit conscious governments attach higher priority to using the ICTs to improve the efficiency of delivery of government programmes and services, where the prospects are that costs will be reduced, as opposed to policy development where uncertain initiatives could turn into costly failures.

[39] *Cf.* UK Green Paper, "While computerisation has already enabled great strides to be made in efficiency, government departments still mostly communicate with the public using paper." (Central IT Unit, 1996).

[40] This same conclusion was reached by Piet Severijnen (*op. cit.*, p.25) in his international study of the use of ICTs by 88 local authorities on 3 different continents.

[41] A finding confirmed in Severijnen (*op. cit.*, p. 25). It is not only governments that are feeling these pressures to appear *au courant*. *The Herald Tribune* carried an article (October 16, 1997, by Celestine Bohlen) which quoted a claim by Sergio D'Antoni, head of Italy's second largest labour union, that faxes

and e-mails from the grass roots had played a crucial role in ending the recent government crisis. "We have never received so many faxes and our Internet site exploded with messages against the crisis."

Discussion with Union and public officials suggest that this claim is exaggerated. All communications media were in play -- meetings, telephone calls, faxes, e-mails. Key was the intervention of regional party officials. Faxes were more numerous and important than e-mail which numbered in the 100s. One official put the number of e-mails as high as 1 500.

42 *Cf.* Ursula Franklin, the distinguished physicist and professor emeritus at the university of Toronto, who said, "I call the Internet censorship by stuffing. It is a landfill for information...The result is that you are so swamped by quantity, you have no way to evaluate what's there, or what to spend time on. This immobilises citizens better than the thought police ever could." Quoted in *The Globe and Mail*, January 10, 1997, p. A-10.

43 Due to information overload, advisors and decision-makers have to resort to filtering, with a consequent temptation to pick and choose whatever information serves their argument. Almost any policy can be defended through "appropriate" filtering.

44 An interesting pilot project, likely to be made permanent, is underway in Norway. Called "Electronic Accessible Government Databases", its main purpose is to register electronically all documents relating to a case of public administration. Both the register (available electronically) and the documents are searchable by the media. This experiment in increased accessibility and transparency has increased the demand for documentation and information. As a result, it has been necessary to set up an appropriate organisational structure with the requisite technical skills to make it work.

45 Meeting of Officials from Centres of Government, paras. 21, 46.

This judgement was strongly endorsed by a British expert who was involved in knowledge-based systems, "intelligent systems", expert systems, etc., about 5 years ago. At that time it was thought that these systems were going to put all sorts of experts out of business. "They would be the right-hand man of policy-makers for doing what if queries and making sure the policy was coherent. Of course, we see virtually no overt impact of this." While this British expert believes that on-line technology is different, she notes "that policy is a difficult area for getting application of technology of any kind. While it will be used to disseminate information, I really do wonder how much they (senior officials and ministers) want on-line collection of views".

46 "People's attachment to political parties has been weakening in recent years and voters are increasingly tempted to scan the horizon for alternatives. These trends make for a lot of volatility but they are not unique to Canada." Blais *et al.* Witness the shift of Conservative voters to the New Labour in the recent British election and the results of the even more recent French election. *Cf.* also Marien (1985), p. 654.

47 Meeting of Officials from Centres of Government, paras. 31, 36.

48 One interviewee suggested that in the "Information Sea", the skills required are different; analytical ability becomes less important and diffusion skills become paramount.

49 Even in countries with this strong tradition (Norway, Denmark) officials report that there is increasing attention paid to "marketing" new political initiatives.

50 *Cf.* Piet Severijnen who reaches the same conclusion in his study of local government (*op. cit.*, pp. 19, 27, 36).

In Italy, the main priority appeared to be the use of the ICTs to improve the efficiency of public administration; the democratic benefits were still last.

The High Level Council for Informatics which sets information policy in Spain has set out seven strategic objectives related to the efficiency, effectiveness, and cost of public administration. In the

summer of 1997, a further one was added to deal with "Projects for the Information Society". This latter objective is intended to deal with governance and democratic issues but no funds have yet been allocated to this new thrust.

[51] *Ottawa Citizen*, June 23, 1997, p. D-5.

Cf. also President Clinton's 1997 State of the Union address and the following:

"The Information Age has created unprecedented challenges and opportunities for governments -- from the smallest rural towns to the largest nations....Government and the lives of citizens are being radically transformed by technology." Janet Caldow, Director, IBM's Institute for Electronic Government, http://www.clearlake.ibm.com/GOV/accesspoint/art11.htm

"There would also be benefits to open government. By making more accessible the information which is used in the development of Government policy, the information service would allow the citizen to be more fully involved in the democratic process." (McConaghy, 1996, para. 6.17); *cf.* also Blanton (1995), *passim*; and Hollander (1995), "What is proposed here is to merge the spirit of ancient Athens with the technologies of the twenty-first century -- Pericles with digital transmission. Direct democracy can and should have a rebirth."

[52] Andrew Blau, Director of the Communications Policy Project for the Benton Foundation In the U.S. quoted in Conte (1995), p. 34. *Cf.* also Barber (1996) for a balanced discussion of this topic.

[53] It should be remembered that electronic votes are searchable and in the wrong hands this information is a serious breach of personal privacy.

[54] While technology may allow us to move to a more direct or plebiscitary system, there are perhaps other strong reasons for holding to a representative system. In particular, representative democracy has emerged as one of the better ways to govern a complex society.

[55] The extensive use of polling by governments has been mentioned several times in this paper. Leaving aside the numerous questions about their reliability, the obvious should be noted *viz.*, that polls are inadequate vehicles or substitutes for public participation in decision-making which in a healthy democracy is a deliberative process. This is why the claim that the public is now effectively governing through polls is misleading. *Cf.* Hoy (1989).

[56] "There is scope for extending authorised disclosure of information within existing legislation, and greater openness may be achieved more effectively by administrative means." (United Kingdom Government, 1993, p. 56). This statement was interpreted by one of the author's interlocutors as a coded reference to the prevailing culture of secrecy which of course does not require legislation to change. The British Government announced recently that it intends to introduce Freedom of Information legislation.

[57] According to officials, Denmark intends to abolish paper archives as early as 1997 and then to post all accessible documents on the Internet, thereby making them available through search engines. In Canada, a review is underway which could lead to tighter controls over records in Ministers' offices such as opinion polls, appointments, and other forms of ministerial business.

[58] *Scripta manent sed verba volent!* At the Canadian Somalia Inquiry, it was established that Major-General Jean Boyle (later Chief of Defence, then resigned) asked fellow officers at a meeting not to take notes for "any written record is subject to being, you know, demanded by someone else" (Somalia Commission of Inquiry, 1997, pp. 15574, 15592, 16829 ff.). There was also testimony to the effect that changing the name of some documents and providing for their destruction after 72 hours was aimed at frustrating access-to-information requests (*ibid*, pp. 14750 ff.). The Information Commissioner noted that senior officers in the Department of Defence "deliberately undermined...lawful right of access (to documents)". *The Globe and Mail*, June 5, 1996, p. A-1.

[59] This question is under active consideration by most of the governments visited, e.g. Norway and Canada. The Government of the Canadian Province of Ontario introduced user fees of $5.00 per application and $7.50 for each 15 minutes of research time in 1996. The Canadian Government charges $5.00 per application but provides up to 5 hours of research time free. The government of Ontario also recently introduced changes to designed "to improve the administration of its Access legislation". Under these changes, "the head" of an institution may refuse requests he deems "frivolous or vexatious".

[60] A fascinating lawsuit has been launched against the Government of the Canadian province of British Columbia. A group of citizens has asked that the recent election be nullified for alleged lies during the election campaign. The B.C. Supreme Court has allowed this action to proceed.

[61] "Money talks: It speaks to the purposes of men and nations...", Heclo & Wildavsky (1981), p. 17.

[62] Putnam, Robert D., "What makes democracy work" in *National Civic Review*, Spring 1993, p. 104.

[63] Equality raises an important issue. As governments move more of their activities into electronic form, how much of a duty does a government have to ensure equal access to this medium and this information?

[64] The government's credibility was a major issue in the recent Canadian election. Opposition parties argued that the government had failed to honour many of the most important promises made in the previous election campaign. The Government replied that it had kept 78 per cent of its promises!

A survey taken by Professors André Blais, Elizabeth Gidengil, Richard Nadeau, and Neil Nevitte, as part of their third major Canadian Election Study, found that half of the people interviewed *strongly agreed* (author's italics) that "politicians are ready to lie to get elected". *The Globe and Mail*, June 7, 1997, p. D-2.

[65] "Whereas the broadcast media is highly regulated with gatekeepers, on the Internet, anyone can be a publisher or broadcaster." Janet Caldow, "Governance in the Information Age", A White Paper from the Institute for Electronic Government's 2nd Annual Leadership Electronic Workshop, The Institute for Electronic Government: http://204.146.146.253

[66] *NYT*, December 8, 1996, p. 1. In private conversation , Adam Clayton Powell Jr. described the Internet as "the most effective tool against censorship since the Xerox machine".

[67] One commentator on this paper suggested that many of the most important impacts of the new technologies on the political/public environment are inevitable and almost subliminal – that is, they arise from the changes that technology brings regardless of whether or not politicians or citizens understand them. "... in this new era, public input comes through such things as the instant spread of 'mass' ideas, the internationalisation of issues and consciousness, the almost automatic focus on a single leader and the definition of leadership in new, information age terms." Another commentator suggested that "to understand the effects of information technologies, we will be confronted with much contradiction and much subtlety. There may be the appearance of 'no effect' on familiar ways of doing business. But if we look underneath that, there are numerous, small effects that in aggregate suggest something significant is going on."

The evidence from the author's researches suggests that these opaque points ignore the important distinctions between cause and effect, and direct and indirect effects. The ICT's may speed up the transfer of information and multiply the number of voices in the market place but they have not resulted in any qualitative improvement in democratic decision-making. *Cf.* also Rosenau (1995), p. 6.

[68] See Peter Morton, "MAI gets tangled in Web", in the *Financial Post -- Canada's Business Voice*, 22 October, 1998.

[69] See "Chairman's Statement following the meeting of the OECD Executive Committee in Special Session", 23 October, 1998.

[70] Throughout this paper the author has repeatedly stressed the importance of political will. The point has been clearly and forcefully expressed by Barber (1996), p. 5-7, and *passim*: "Whatever entailments technology may have in the abstract, it still will reflect concretely the premises and objectives of the society deploying it....Politics governs technique, society and culture always trump technology....The wishful thinkers fantasize an Internet as free and democratic and horizontally organised as their own ingenuity and imagination....But it will take political will to allow such tendencies to emerge and modify traditional attitudes and institutions, which in the meantime are likely to be determinative."

This point is also made by Piet Severijnen (1996, p. 8).

[71] *Cf.* Piet Severijnen (*op. cit.*, pp. 15, 19). His study of local government found that "...(politicians) think that the (new information) systems will not bring the citizen closer to local government."

His paper (*ibid*, p. 11) contains an interesting schematic which views democracy as points on a continuum. This paper suggests that existing power structures yield to responsive or direct democracy to the extent necessary to consolidate power and retain legitimacy -- a conclusion supported by his study of the use of the new technologies by local governments.

Representative democracy --- Responsive democracy --- Direct democracy
<----------

[72] Shenk (1997) fears that the Internet will end up like other mass media which have reacted to flood of information now available by becoming more aggressive in their use of attention-grabbing techniques, e.g. shock-jock radio, sensational TV, screaming newspaper headlines. He goes on to note that in cyberspace, we mass-copy scraps of information to friends or group-mailing lists, strip and filter information of everything but the data that supports our point of view, and in so doing, we devalue truth and knowledge.

[73] "As the cost of congestion becomes more obvious and as technical improvements that allow for differentiation of service come on line, it seems likely that pricing schemes will vary, with users paying a flat fee for 'best-effort' service and higher rates for assured high-quality service." (OECD, 1997*b*, p. 12).

Another related danger is noted by Barber (1996), pp. 24ff. Precisely because they are interactive, these supposedly liberating technologies can become tools of repression as computers collect and store vast amounts of private information which in turn can be used to reshape attitudes and behaviour to promote particular commercial or political interests. This is also an important theme in "Building the European Information Society for Us All" (EC, 1996, p. 2) ("...people should be in control of information, rather than it being used to control them...") but the report was short on suggesting practical "hows". See also the interesting discussion of "data mining", in OECD (*op. cit.*), pp. 14ff.

[74] See Doug Saunders, "Wired should stay out of the future"; and Rick Salutin, "How about some straight talk on the Internet?", *The Globe and Mail*, December 22, 1997, p. A-14, and May 17, 1996, p. A-10.

[75] *Cf.* John Barlow quoted in Janet Caldow. "As information becomes more and more rich and opportunities to get it become more and more rich, you have a system that puts too much information at the centre for the system to process. There is so much information pouring in and so little ability to process it, you get what biologists call a 'connection crash", which is something that happens in biological systems when there is suddenly so much information coming in they can no longer process it -- usually because of population spike which occurs along a set of natural laws governed by chaos. Those things crash and the energy is redistributed. And that's what's going to happen here in my opinion." This point is made in the context of an argument for decentralised decision-making at the community level. The author is not convinced that decentralised decision-making is less complicated than decision-making at the state/provincial or national level.

Cf. also Marien (*op. cit.*), p. 656; and Klapp (1982), pp.56 ff.

Cf. also Peter Dobell, Director of the Canadian Parliamentary Centre at a private meeting (June 10, 1997): "...polling has, at least within government, led to small group decision-making. If one compares the

past with the present, until polling became a source of pretty reliable information, Parliament was the principal instrument which the leadership, the Ministers and the Prime Minister, used to get the sense of regional perspectives."

[76] One official interviewed related the following: "My experience from using our recently introduced Intranet is that more messages move around more quickly. And, most importantly, policy papers are more easily cleared amongst a wider network of interested officials. It is also easier to suck more senior officials into less important decisions. Somehow it is easier to send an E-mail to a top official than it is to send a paper minute (the copy lists are not so readily visible). I remember some interesting work that was done at Harvard showing that E-mail user groups persist even after members move to different jobs. The tradition of copying papers on a 'need to know basis' is likely to break down under E-mail."

[77] Several high ranking officials have expressed the view that too much public access to government information might tie the hands of public servants and discourage them from giving free and frank advice. Interestingly, Piet Severijnen, found that local authorities were also of the view that openness makes decisions on sensitive matters more difficult (*op. cit.*, p. 16).

The *boulé* of ancient Athens appears to be one of the last examples of open decision-making -- a process that occurred over several days.

[78] ". . . it is little wonder that South African, Israeli, and Chinese authorities have had occasion to prohibit international television coverage of riots in their countries. To do otherwise would have been to allow the brutality shown on the world's TV screens to weaken their legitimacy". (Rosenau, 1995, p. 7).

[79] Private conversation with a senior official in the Canadian Prime Minister's department.

[80] In this context it is useful to remember that participation in U.S. Presidential elections hovers at around 50% of eligible voters. Participation in Swiss referenda used to be about 50%; now, depending on the question, it is between 18% and 30%. Participation in the recent federal election in Canada fell to 64% from the historic average of 75%.

The largest cable television provider in Canada recently moved its public affairs channel which includes the House of Commons to the end of the dial which is not available to all consumers. *Globe and Mail*, 21 Nov., 1997, p. A-12.

[81] It is important to re-emphasize that these conclusions relate to policy formulation and democratic development and do not diminish the importance of the impact of the IS and the new technologies on the delivery of government programmes and services.

[82] The possibilities of an Orwellian scenario need to be considered. With government data banks containing information on an individual's education, income, employment, health, etc., it would be possible to tailor individualised policy messages and send them to people in their homes over the Internet. As one official put it, "We could move to *Just in Time Government*!"

APPENDIX I: PEOPLE INTERVIEWED

CANADA

Reg Alcock, M.P.
David Brown, Treasury Board, Ottawa
Ruth Cardinal, Privy Council Office, Ottawa
Geoffrey Carruthers, Sussex Circle, Ottawa
Arthur Cordell, Department of Industry, Ottawa
Peter Daniel, Assistant Deputy Minister, Department of Finance, Ottawa
Ron Duhamel, M.P.
Doug Hull, Department of Industry, Ottawa
Basma Ibrahim, Carleton University, Ottawa
Harvey Lazar, Director, Institute of Intergovernmental Relations, Queen's University, Canada
Alan Leadbeater, Deputy Information Commissioner, Ottawa
W.E.R. Little, Deputy Secretary and Deputy Comptroller General, Treasury Board of Canada
Jim Mitchell, Sussex Circle, Ottawa
Eric Myles, Somalia Inquiry, Ottawa
Maureen O'Neil, President, International Development Research Centre, Ottawa
Leslie Pal, Professor, Carleton University, Ottawa
Joe Politi, Treasury Board, Ottawa
Elizabeth Richard, Government Telecommunications and Informatics Services, Ottawa
Paul Rummell, Chief Information Officer, Treasury Board, Ottawa

DENMARK

Thorkil Kjems, Principal Private Secretary to the Minister of Research and Technology, Copenhagen
Lisbeth Knudsen, Editor-in-chief, Det Fri Aktuelt, Copenhagen
Thorkild Meedom, Chief Jurist, Ministry of Research and Technology, Copenhagen
Peter Lorentz Nielsen, Deputy Permanent Secretary, Ministry of Research and Technology, Copenhagen
Leon Østergaard, Director, Statens Information, Copenhagen

ITALY

Gilberto Andreoli, CISL (Labour Union), Rome
Mario Belati, Ministry of University Affairs & Research, Rome
Antonello Busetto, Ministry of Industry, Rome
Fabiana Cerquetelli, CISL, Rome

Mauro Fioroni, Senate, Informatics Service, Rome
Ermano Granelli, Chef de Cabinet, Minister For AIPA, Rome
Giovanna Melandri, Partito Democratico della Sinistra, Rome
Giulio de Petra, AIPA, Rome
Giorgio Radicati, Ambassador, Foreign Ministry, Rome
Giuseppe Rao, Ministry of Communications, Rome
Benedetta Rivetti, Office of the President of the Council of Ministers, Rome
Valerio Russo, Commune of Tuscany, Rome
Piero Sanduli, Commune of Rome, Rome
Lucia Urciuoli,Partito Democratico della Sinistra, Rome
Vittorio Zambardino, *La Repubblica*, Rome

NORWAY

Terje Dyrstad, Royal Ministry of Government Administration, Oslo
Pal Horsle, State Information Agency, Oslo
Ståle Rist, Royal Ministry of Government Administration, Oslo
Tanja Storsul, Royal Ministry of Government Administration, Oslo

SPAIN

Belen Bajo Prieto, Ministry of Public Administration, Madrid
Rogelio Baon Ramirez, Congress of Deputies, Madrid
Rafael Estrella, M.P. for Granada, Congress of Deputies, Madrid
Rafael Fernandez-Calvo, Editor, Novatica, Madrid
Fernando Garcia Ruiz, ASTIC (association of public servants involved in informatics, Madrid
David Gonzalez Rubio, SEDISI (private sector informatics association), Madrid
Victor M. Izquierdo Loyola, Ministry of Public Administration, Madrid
Francisco Lopez Crespo, Ministry of Public Administration, Madrid
Pedro Martin Jurado, Ministry of Infrastructure & Communications, Madrid

SWITZERLAND

Roland Bless, Chancellerie Fédérale, Berne
Werner Carobbio, Conseiller national, Canton de Tessin
Alesssandro Delprete, Parliamentary Services, Berne
Synes Ernst, Journalist, Neue Luzerner Zeitung
Paolo Janke, Parliamentary Services, Berne
Dominique Rub Lyssy, Department of the Interior, Berne
Hugo Schittenhelm, Department of Finance, Berne
Viktor Schlumpf, Department of Justice and Police, Berne

UNITED KINGDOM

Owen Barder, Treasury, London
Richard Baxter, Department of the Environment, London
Jeff Hoon, M.P., Labour spokesman on information and technology matters
Graham Jordan, Head, Central IT Unit, Cabinet Office, London
Ruth Kerry, CCTA, Norwich
Anthony Kesten, Central IT Unit, Cabinet Office, London
Mike Palmer, Machinery of Government and Standards, Cabinet Office, London
Brian Strowger, Central Computer and Telecommunications Agency (CCTA) Norwich
Jane Wainwright, House of Commons IT Unit, London
Gary Waller, M.P., Chairman of the House of Commons Information Committee
David Wilkinson, Head, Machinery of Government and Standards, Cabinet Office, London

UNITED STATES

Barry Anderson, Assistant Director for Budget, OMB, Washington, D.C.
Gary Bass, Executive Director, OMB Watch, Washington, D.C.
Jack Gribben, OMB, Washington, D.C.
Gail Gullickson, Public affairs Counsellor, US Embassy, Ottawa
Alexis Halley, D.P.A., Director, Stennis Centre for Public Service, Washington, D.C.
Richard Huff, Department of Justice, Washington, D.C.
Bruce McConnell, OMB/OIRA, Washington, D.C.
Patrice McDermott, Analyst, OMB Watch, Washington, D.C.
David Plocher, Counsel, Committee on Government Affairs, US Senate, Washington, D.C.
Adam Clayton Powell III, Vice President, The Freedom Forum, Washington, D.C.
Melanie Pustey, Department of Justice,
Steve Rosell, Meridian International Institute, San Francisco
Michael Douglas Smith, Commission on Protecting and Reducing Government Secrecy, Washington, D.C.
Roger Sperry, National Academy of Public Administration, Washington, D.C.
Christopher Wye, National Academy of Public Administration, Washington, D.C.

APPENDIX II: BIBLIOGRAPHY

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The Institute for Electronic Government: http://204.146.146.253

US Congressional Internet Caucus: http://www.democracy.net

The U.S. Internet Council: http://www.usic.org

The Council for Excellence in Government: http://www.excelgov.org

The Center for Democracy and Technology: http://www.cdt.org

California Legislative Analyst's Office: http://www.lao.ca.gov/infotech.txt

APPENDIX III: GLOSSARY

Information Society (IS): the mushrooming use of information and communication technologies, together with the impact these are having on society, governments, and the economy.

ATI or FOI: Access to Information or Freedom of Information laws designed to give the public better access to government information.

Information management policy: that set of policies governing the collection, processing, and distribution of information. It includes both access to (ATI, Privacy, Security) and use of (advertising, publication) government information as well as government regulation of access to and the content of the channels of distribution (copyright, licensing of radio, TV, cable, satellite communications). Note that increasingly the information in the hands of governments is in electronic rather than paper form and that the sources of information are increasing rapidly. A government may or may not have a single coherent overall information management policy.

Information-gathering instruments: the instruments governments have at their disposal to acquire information for policy development and other purposes; these include mail, telephone calls, meetings, faxes, e-mail, voice mail, the Internet, 1-800 and 1-900 numbers, tele-conferencing, video-conferencing, advocacy advertising, research including polling and the use of focus groups, government organisations such as advisory bodies, monitoring agencies, official enquiries, legislative committees, and other consultative processes.

The **organisations or entities** scanned include opinion leaders, party members, the "caucus" of elected representatives, local political organisations, nomination committees, opposition parties, the media (TV, radio, newspapers, magazines), think tanks, interest groups and lobbyists, the public service, the courts, and grassroots public opinion (the general public).

Consensus building instruments: the instruments governments have at their disposal to inform the public, engender support for the decision-making process, and to achieve understanding of and support for government decisions; these include most of the scanning instruments mentioned above together with more generic instruments such as education and exhortation, economic incentives (grants, contributions, tax incentives), and leaks. Organisation often takes the form of special communications bureaux, specialists in ministers' offices, special information agencies, or central agency co-ordination.

Most of the **organisations or entities** used to gather information are also used to build consensus. Others are political leadership, endorsements, coloured papers, press releases, speeches, interviews, addresses to the nation, advertising, and frameworks and best practice guidelines.