

Freedom and transparency in turbulent times: Some thoughts and issues

This is a general issue and is composed of a broad and vibrant collection of 20 articles and covers a range of issues and draws on researchers and practitioners work from across four continents, reflecting the depth of research in the public affairs area. It is almost a menu for a banquet of public affairs issues. The issue covers transparency, financial regulation, public administration management, migration, gun laws, health care, lobbying, and political positioning amongst its themes and reflects the growth and width of the industry and research globally.

The first article is by Peter Jones, Martin Wynne, and Daphne Comfort of the Business School at the University of Gloucester and David Hillier of the Centre for Police Sciences at the University of South Wales. It is a commentary piece on City Deals within the UK which are basically bespoke packages of funding and decision making negotiated between national government and local authorities and are increasingly used to promote economic development. The paper outlines the development and characteristics of the City Deals programme and offers reflections on a number of the key issues relating to the programme, particularly, accountability and evaluation, the relationship between the local and national states, the role of planning, and sustainable development.

The second article is by Kevin A Diehl of the Department of Accounting and Finance, Western Illinois University QC, Moline, Illinois, USA. In Professor Diehl's Commentary piece, "Can the U.S. government legally monitor private communications? If so, given the U.S.'s significant protection of privacy rights, what government cannot?" he topically and candidly reflects on the meaning of privacy and human rights and government access to citizen's communications. He focuses on the U.S. and recent attempts in the legal system to give access to government against recent terrorist group activity using the Internet. The focus of his analysis is on the Wikimedia Foundation case and the increasing erosion by government of internet and civil liberty freedoms. It brings to mind in a period of disruption and highly publicised and self-promoting violence what does the Land of the Free and Freedom mean in a cyber and social media dominated world. Think this will dominate much public affairs work and thinking for the next decade as clearly there are no answers but governments and policy makers will be looking for them.

The next contribution is an academic article entitled "Modelling the relationship between counter-knowledge and open-mindedness for policy development" by Pedro-José Martínez-Ortiz-1, Sandra Moffett-2, Fernando A. López Hernández-1, and Juan-Gabriel, Cegarra-Navarro-1 of 1-Facultad de Ciencias de la Empresa, Universidad Politécnica de Cartagena, Cartagena, Spain and 2-School of Computing and Intelligent Systems, Ulster University, Londonderry, UK.

The authors argue that counter-knowledge refers to flaws in citizens' mental models arising from utilisation of rumours, inappropriate knowledge structures, outdated routines or procedures and when counter-knowledge is applied to civil servants, it may result in problems of efficiency, equity, and motivation. This paper examines the relationship between counter-knowledge and open-mindedness to model a framework for improving city marketing and policy development. Relationships are examined through an empirical investigation of 203 Spanish City governments. The results show a potential positive indirect effect of counter-knowledge on open-mindedness through city marketing programmes.

The fourth article is an academic article from André M, Everett and Jane, Yuting, ZHUANG of the Department of Management, University of Otago, Dunedin, New Zealand. It is entitled “Surviving Local Government Policy Intervention: The Case of Embedded Markets within a Historical Cultural Cluster” it is a useful paper in that it allows one to draw historic comparators which can help frame analysis and policy making. It outlines that China's name derives from “china” (porcelain), and “China” (pronounced as “Changnan”) is the former name of Jingdezhen, the capital city of porcelain—through whose exports of “blue-and-white” china the country gained international renown. The 2200-year-old porcelain cluster in Jingdezhen has survived through multiple empires with distinct policies towards the development of the city's dominant industry. This case study examines interactions between local government and the business community to discover the effectiveness of policies and the perception of those policies by entrepreneurs through qualitative research employing Grounded Theory methodology.

The next article is by David G, Mueller, and Ronald Frandsen of the Regional Justice Information Service Commission (REJIS), Saint Louis, Missouri, United States, and is entitled “Trends in Firearm Background Check Applications and Denials.” It is very useful as we reflect on gun ownership policy internationally and can see over the last few months mass shootings in Chicago on an almost weekly basis which are often leading to more deaths than one sees in conflict areas such as Kabul or Bagdad. The authors argue that there is little research on firearm background check applications and regulation despite the potential for such research to significantly benefit policy and practice. It confirms that the U.S. firearm background check system is complex with federal, state, and local laws creating a patchwork system intended to increase public safety and reduce mortality.

Meller and Frandsen examine the relationship between application and denial rates and state characteristics such as poverty, race, gender, existing firearm ownership, and population density. They use multi-level longitudinal modelling which was used in an ecological study design with the state as the unit of analysis spanning a time period between 2005 and 2010. The results indicate that application and denial rates significantly increase over time and that population density and poverty levels were negatively related to application and denial rates.

It found that gun ownership, male population size, and the percentage of residents that were white was positively linked to application and denial rates. The percentage of African-American residents was negatively related to application rate. The importance of understanding the factors that predict firearm prevalence and the need for additional research in this critical area is explored to advise future legislators and policy deliverers in this area of growing interest.

The next article takes us to Africa and Ghana and is by Alex, Osei-Kojo of the Department of Public Administration and Health Services Management, University of Ghana, Accra, Ghana, and is entitled “E-government and public service quality in Ghana.” The author makes a contribution by assessing the contribution of e-government to improving the delivery and management of public service. It argues drawing on Ghanaian cases and data to posit that effective e-government application leads to improvements in improving public services delivery by increasing efficiency, reducing the cost of operations, expanding access to services, and achieving customer satisfaction. It never the less argues that there remains a range of challenges that impact upon much of the developing world such as weak ICT infrastructure especially in towns and villages, incessant power outages and illiteracy, which are drawbacks to fully harnessing the benefits of e-government in Ghana. It argues that these

constraints and how to address them need to be built into future policy making and government thinking for e-government to be effective.

The next article is by Mohammed Hersi Warsame and is entitled “Public finance management reforms in Somalia: A case study on Somalia's finance professionals.” It argues that there is a major need for reform of public financial management in Somalia.

It argues that there is no independent auditing authority to enable citizens to access information on the use of public resources. It proposes that the success of future reform depends on establishing strong public budgeting systems as well as developing strong public finance training programs and policy linkage on financial management policies and procedures.

The articles on Ghana and Somalia highlight the need for international policy makers to be aware of the limitations of infrastructure both in services and infrastructure to be able to deliver to citizen's effective services and stability for growth. This then might create sustainable employment and reduce mass migration from both states.

In the next article, “Intervention Unnecessary: Bar Associations as Public Participants in Regulatory Actions” by Mathew Reid Krell of the Department of Political Science, University of Alabama, Tuscaloosa, Alabama, USA. It argues that interest groups participate in the political process in a variety of ways. They can lobby legislatures, interact with elected and administrative executive officials, and participate in litigation either as a litigant or an amicus curiae. But the literature is scarce in exploring how interest groups behave when their stakeholders dissent. This study explores the actions by one interest group, the American Bar Association (ABA), in participating in “notice and comment” rulemaking by the Department of Labor where the ABA did not represent the legal profession. It finds that the ABA engaged in astroturfing, and that their efforts were ignored by the Department. The author confirms this comparing the ABA's influence on the Supreme Court in *Boumediene v. Bush*, when it did represent the consensus of the legal profession.

The next article is by Christian, Ayikwa, Lutete, and Johan W. de Jager of the Department of Marketing, Logistics and Sport Management, Tshwane University of Technology, Pretoria, South Africa and is entitled “Advocating Social Marketing as ultimate weapon to fighting HIV/AIDS propagation, and related discrimination and stigmatisation.”

It argues that the spread of HIV/AIDS in the African continent and related discrimination and stigmatisation towards people living with the virus have become a major issue to be addressed by communities, health organisations and governments in Africa. They argue that a successful way to overcome these plagues necessitates the application of social marketing techniques and campaigns. However, they point out that when it comes to funding and supporting social marketing activities, African leaders deny the important role that the government could play in achieving the “HIV/AIDS free generation goal as well as making African societies a non-discriminative and stigmatisation places for infected people. The study argues that the use of social media can play a major role in educating people to prevent this disease and discrimination and it needs to be adopted more positively by African political leaders.

The next article is by Kaisa, Falasca, and Christina Grandien of the Department of Media and Communication, Mid Sweden University, Sundsvall, Sweden, and is entitled “Where you

lead we will follow: A longitudinal study of strategic political communication in election campaigning.” Changes in the way election campaigns are run has changed significantly and dramatically over the last two decades as a result of new communication channels and communication platforms and strategic political development. It argues that the concept of strategic political communication refers to an organisation's purposeful management of information and communication to achieve key political goals. In this article, they focus on the role of the individual political party in developing election campaigning. The data used cover the 2002, 2006, and 2010 Swedish national election campaigns and illustrates how political parties lead and follow each other in the development of strategic political communication. By exploring party agency, this article contributes to the understanding of how ideas and practices of strategic political communication emerge and develop over time in election campaigning.

The authors of the next article are Tomáš, Malatinec of the Department of Regional Science and Management, Faculty of Economics, Technical University of Košice, Košice, Slovak Republic, Eleonóra Marišová of Department of Law, Faculty of European Studies and Regional Development, Slovak University of Agriculture in Nitra, Nitra, Slovak Republic and Viliam Kováč of the Department of Finance, Faculty of Economics, Technical University of Košice, Košice, Slovak Republic. It is entitled “Regional Tailor-Made Policy Making in Trade Licensing Administration—Case of Slovakia.” It argues that ‘good local public administration can contribute to a favourable business environment. Slovak Trade Licencing Administration (TLA) provides public services for traders. Centrally managed policymaking that does not take into account local and regional specifics is not fully conforming to the current local needs of territorial units. There are significant regional differences in the numbers of trades per employer and performed administrative actions. It creates conditions for individual approaches in policy making. Cluster analysis groups the territorial units of the TLA for suitable tailor-made policy making from the central tier. Based on their findings, there are seven clusters of territorial units with specific local and regional needs. They suggest that tailor-made policy making can take into account territorial specifics and strengthen the role of territorial units of the TLA in regional development.

The next article is a practitioner piece by Kenneth, Plowman of BYU, Communications, Provo, Utah, USA and is entitled “Big Strategy to Little Strategy: A Multiple Case Analysis of Public Affairs Planning.” He argues that a grand strategy or overall strategy is essential to successful strategic communication planning as are the tactics of any campaign to accomplish that longer-term strategy. The terms play off the phrase, the big idea, generally credited to David Ogilvy who some have called the father of advertising but also used by Edward Bernays, who has frequently been seen as the modern father of public relations, in his 1936 work, *Biography of an Idea: The Founding Principles of Public Relations*.

The purpose of the present study was to meld the big and little concepts of strategy in public relations through analysing strategic communication plans for Multi-National Forces-Iraq, a United Nations military force of 40 countries led by the United States. It encompassed multiple case studies that included interviews, documents participant observation, and direct observation in strategic communication planning. It also confirmed the usage of research and overarching goals as big strategy, and the operational and tactical parts of public relations planning as little strategy although big strategy can be elevated to the highest corporate levels as well. This should be a great aid to public affairs practitioners and campaigns.

The next article is an academic article by Christine Sarah Pitt of the Royal Institute of Technology, Division of Industrial Marketing (KTH), Stockholm, Sweden and Emily Treen of Beedie School of Business, Simon Fraser University, Vancouver, British Columbia, Canada. It is entitled “Understanding Communication in Disaster Response: A Marketing Strategy Formulation and Implementation Perspective.” It is an analysis of communication disaster response in four well-known natural disasters and explores at what stage a disaster communication plan can fail. Based on a marketing strategy formulation—implementation framework, four different outcomes are used to examine what makes a disaster communication plan succeed or fail. This leads to an identification of barriers to the implementation of disaster communication plans. Very often in disaster communication plan failures the strategy formulation is blamed. However, frequently, it is the implementation that is at fault. This makes it difficult to diagnose the reason for the communication plan failure. By taking heed of the barriers identified here, disaster response executives can hopefully overcome some of the causes of disaster communication plan failure. Potential future research issues and agendas are identified and suggested.

The next article is by Edward L. Figee, Jordy F. Gosselt, Paul C.J. Linders and Menno D. T de Jong of the Department of Communication Science, Faculty of Behavioural, Management and Social Sciences, University of Twente, Enschede, The Netherlands, and entitled “The Home Front: Internal Organization of Public Affairs in Dutch Subnational Governments.”

Dutch subnational governments such as municipalities and provinces are increasingly compelled to express their interests in the national and European political arenas. Effectiveness in these arenas requires an optimisation of Public Affairs (PA) activities in the subnational organisation. Based on in-depth interviews with key PA professionals and practitioners in the Netherlands, this article provides an overview of initiatives that subnational government organisations have to develop in their own organisation after their “discovery” of how useful PA may be, but before the moment they enter the arenas. Conclusions from the interviews suggest that human aspects and internal cooperation determine the sense making of PA in a subnational organisation, but a lack of arena knowledge frustrates this process.

The next article is by Direnc, Kanol of the Political Science Department, Near East University, Nicosia, Cyprus and Muesser, Nat of the Cyprus International University, Nicosia, Turkey, and is entitled “Interest Groups and Social Media: An Examination of Cause and Sectional groups' Social Media Strategies in the EU.” The paper examines social media use by cause and sectional interest groups in the European Union. The literature suggests that cause groups should focus on building a constituency more than sectional groups, because they do not offer exclusive benefits to their members. Cause groups face collective action problems more than sectional groups, so they have to take a proactive approach to community building. An in-depth analysis of a random sample of 1,000 tweets by cause and sectional groups reveals differences with respect to social media use. Cause groups use social media to pursue two-way communication with the public slightly—albeit not significantly—more than sectional groups. Cause groups mobilise the public to take action significantly and substantively more than specific interests.

The next article is a commentary piece by George Varghese, of the Institute for Financial Management and Research, Chennai, India entitled “Inflationary Effects of Oil Price Shocks in the Indian Economy.” It argues that stabilising inflation around a certain preconceived level remains the predominant objective of monetary authorities all over the world as its

variability has crucial ramifications on the real economy. However, the effective operation of monetary policy to this end largely hinges on the nature and dynamics of inflation both in the short- and long-run. In this context, the present study focuses on the theoretical investigation of how crude oil price fluctuations affect inflation in a real economy. Moreover, the study examines the nature of relationship between crude oil price fluctuations and inflation and its impact with reference to the Indian economy.

1 Commentary

The next article is a practitioner paper by Intae, Choi who is an independent policy adviser in South Korea and is called “The Optimum Size of Seoul's Districts in South Korea.”

The paper examines the optimal size of Seoul Autonomous Districts in South Korea. Because of the very dense population in the Seoul area, the government of South Korea is trying to solve this problem by implementing policies on developing non Seoul areas Seoul consists of 25 autonomous districts and this paper found one autonomous district. Gangnam-Gu is a highly inefficient district compared to other districts in Seoul. This finding it is suggested is a key cause for the dense population problem in Seoul.

The next paper is a practitioner paper by Matthew, Olatubosun Aihonsu of the National Open University of Nigeria/School of Arts and Social Sciences/Lagos Study Centre, Lagos, Nigeria, and is entitled “International Migration and the Conduit Pipe Syndrome.” It posits that migration is as old as mankind. So are the fears and hopes attached to it by the different parties directly or indirectly concerned. Wars, poverty and humanitarian crises have been one steady producer of—mostly involuntary—migration. The pursuit of economic advantage has been another major driver of migration, by those who left their home in the hope of a better life elsewhere. However, the reaction of those at the receiving end was at best mixed, and often outright hostile. Experts agree that the surprising thing about migration is not how often it occurs, but how rare it is. Up to now, human beings have shown a strong resistance to move away from their home ground. As long as conditions at home do not become absolutely unbearable, or the expected benefits of moving elsewhere are not extremely high, the human race seems to prefer to “stay put.” However, it must also be stressed that the movement pattern and distribution of millions of migrants are not evenly spread across the globe. European countries are amongst those with the highest share of foreign nationals. It is therefore perhaps better understandable that there is a major public debate about the pros and cons of migration in Europe.

Daniel Simonet of the School of Business and Administration, American University of Sharjah, Sharjah, United Arab Emirates, writes a practitioner paper entitled “Public Values and Administrative Reforms in French Health Care.” He argues that public value appears to be reborn out of the ashes of earlier failed new public management (NPM)-driven policies in health care. It advocates greater consultation of the civic society and autonomy of public managers in decision making. In France, the 2009 Hospital, Patient, Health, and Territory law recentralized the health system and strengthened the central government to restore consistency in policy implementation and address earlier NPM shortcomings. The 2014 Health Project heralds a phase of policy hybridization that not only preserves earlier NPM tools but also seeks to reaffirm the role of the public and the medical profession in the governance of the health system. It is hoped this will aid policy makers in the Emmanuel Macron Government.

The final article is a practitioner paper by Massoud, Khazabi of the University of Ottawa, Ottawa, Canada, Entitled “Postal Service Markets: An International Comparison Analysis.” The article contributes to the literature on post and postal services by using a quadratic framework under which national postal markets are analysed and compared from efficiency, profitability, and quality of service positions. Sample countries are grouped into four market models based on two attributes of market structure and ownership. The question of which governance-operation postal model performs best is then addressed. The policy insight offered by this paper expects to guide the advancement of national posts towards an optimal future design that best meets their specific needs and preferences and should be a good guide to policy makers.

Best wishes and look forward to your contributions.