

Editorial: Putting Our Work in Context

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In February of this year I had the opportunity of participating in the Canadian West Coast Community Networking Summit, “Strategic Use of Information and Communication Technology for Communities,” in Vancouver, Canada. (<http://www.2005summit.ca/>)

The event was a striking success in that it attracted some 500 participants almost all from the two western provinces of Canada, a very large proportion of Canadian aboriginals (First Nations), and community technology activists and researchers with little hesitation as to the kinds of changes and opportunities that community ICTs were providing to their communities.

I attended as a member of the Canadian Research Alliance for Community Innovation and Networking (CRACIN) and also of the Community Informatics Research Network (CIRN), both of which sponsored or co-sponsored events as part of the overall “Summit”.

A number of things were notable during the 4 days of presentations, meetings, workshops, plenaries, informal chats in corridors and bars, and formal dinners:

- The impact that community-based ICTs are having in providing opportunities for economic and social development in marginalized and remote communities throughout a vast and diverse region.
- The powerful vision of local empowerment and further advances in such areas as remote health care and local e-governance.
- The sense that the technology is an enabler for all and not simply those with existing advantages of education or technical proficiency but that there is a continuing need for creating technical capacity at the local level.
- The need for research and understanding of the processes and activities as a means for continuing self-understanding and improvement.
- The role that many Canadian First Nations are seeing for ICTs as leveling the playing field for their participation in Canadian society (a striking example of this is found in the report from K-Net in this issue)

While on the one side there was optimism and enthusiasm for the future, on the other side was a deep concern that the basis for much of this development – a commitment by the Canadian Government to ensure a degree of “access” (connectivity) for all – was in the process of being declared “achieved” with the result that Government support and attention was shifting to other areas. Many practitioners attending the event were particularly welcoming of we researchers as they were looking to us as a means for identifying and documenting the positive benefits that had been achieved to date in a manner and format which would be convincing evidence for politicians and government policy makers. Overall, there was a concern for “sustainable” financing models for Community Based Technology initiatives given the long-term instability of current Government funding approaches.

There was a considerable interest on the part of the community technology practitioners in the work of the researchers since they were looking for ways of documenting impacts and outcomes and for a self-understanding and a basis for self-assessment of appropriate and useful operating models and practices. In this way a set of on-going working relationships on a broader basis than the specifics of an individual

university-based research project was tentatively beginning to be developed and the anchoring of this in quite specific and directed policy processes was also emerging though in the background.

This is the third issue of the Journal, and I'm delighted to say that we have been very well received by colleagues worldwide and by a range of researchers, practitioners and policy staff. The most "popular" article from the first issue, Scott Robinson of the *Universidad Metropolitana, Mexico* article "Towards a Neo-Apartheid System of Governance in Latin America –Implications for the Community Informatics Guild", has been down-loaded 2200 times and from the second issue. Stephen James Musgrave of *The Fylde College* in the UK's piece "Community Portals: A False Dawn over the Field of Dreams?" has been downloaded 1200 times. We now have over 250 registered "subscribers" and some 100 contributors and the equivalent number of signed-up reviewers. It is probably a bit early to start checking citation indexes, but I am beginning to see references to CI articles appearing in some conference papers and student project papers and we have a bit of a back-log in contributions for up-coming issues and offers to edit special issues on special topic areas.

So, by the various obvious measures we have begun to fill need. The other, and probably more significant measures, that is whether we are making a contribution whether to the discipline, to the field, to researchers, to practitioners or to policy development, of course remains to be seen but my hope (and expectation) and I think that of all those involved with this effort are that we will have impacts and outcomes in those areas as well.

This issue reflects the diversity of research (and practice) in the area of CI, including:

- Randy Stoecker's valuable and provocative essay on whether "Community Informatics Is Good For Communities?"
- Larry Stillman and Randy Stoecker's paper on a case study of a Community Informatics program in Australia looking for its way forward "Structuration, ICTs, And Community Work."
- Garth Graham's challenging Point Of View, "Community Networking As Radical Practice."
- Susana Finquelievich and Graciela Kisilevsky study on an emerging model for community ICT governance from Argentina "Community Democratization Of Telecommunications Community Cooperatives In Argentina: The Case Of Telpin",
- Chris Hagar and Caroline Haythornthwaite's fascinating account of the use of community networking as a response to the local foot and mouth crisis in the UK "Crisis, Farming & Community."
- Anna Malina and Ian Ball's review of the community technology policy processes in Scotland in "ICTs And Community And Suggestions For Further Research In Scotland",
- Anikar Haselhoff's very interesting preliminary look at a field project examining Cybercafes in India from a Community Informatics perspective "Cybercafés And Their Potential As Community Development Tools In India",
- Reports from K-Net on the development of their ICT enabled local High School and on its future in E-Health and Telemedicine.
- An extremely interesting video report on a Workshop on ICT research with Aboriginal Communities from the RICTA network (Research on ICTs with Aboriginal Communities).