

Localism and the information society

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Introduction: reigniting localism

Richard Berry

From the dawn of human existence, technological innovation has usually served to broaden our horizons. The wheel, the internal combustion engine, the aeroplane: each has allowed members of our species to get from where they are to somewhere else, faster. Even the mastery of fire contributed to this goal, providing a steady source of heat and allowing us to expand our range of movement.

The information and communication technologies associated with the internet have done very much the same thing, allowing people on one side of the world to talk, trade and share information with people on the other instantaneously. Okay, it may be a less strenuous way of exploring the world, but exploration it is nevertheless.

Fire had other effects on the lives of our ancestors. Fire brought social groups together, it huddled them around the warmth, it got them talking, connecting, bonding. The internet has the same potential today.

Many have warned about how the web may be pulling people apart, allowing and encouraging them to look for connections beyond the traditional boundaries of family, neighbourhood, workplace or school. And, further, that the new, distant connections people make are not as deep or meaningful as those they replace.

Another perspective is that these new communication tools actually have the ability to strengthen traditional, local relationships. This premise rests on what I believe to be a fundamental truth: that people care about their communities, they feel pride in their home town or village, they want to know the people around them. We may be approaching an era of extra-territoriality, but a community is much more than just a territory.

There is no end to the number of ways that localism and the 'information society' could go hand in hand, and the contributors to this volume will explore some of those ways. Edward Andersson begins by showing how ICT is allowing new forms of community engagement to evolve. Professor Gordon Dabinett discusses the new economic geography coming into being, but rejects the technological determinist approach of saying there is no way to plan the development of the local space in this context.

Helen Goulden progresses the discussion with a focus on those initiatives by local authorities to address the digital divide, arguing how technology can be a great tool for social inclusion. Shaun Fensom then shows us the perspective of a single city, Manchester, to further explore this theme.

There is a political debate inherent in this discussion. For me, the point has to be reinforced: nothing about the new technology reduces the relevance of local authorities or of local participation. Social exclusion, falling public participation, disempowerment: this may be national or global problems but there is very much a local solution to them.

We stay with political debate for the focus section of this publication, about the proposals for new internet top-level domains (TLDs) defined by cities, which my co-editor Dave McLaughlin will introduce in full. At the heart of that debate is the issue of local identity (and local identification), and how much this really matters in an information society. TLDs may not be the answer – they are surely not the only answer – but it is worthwhile to explore the contribution they could make.

The information society: community catalyst or local liability?

Edward Andersson

Twin trends

Two of the most important trends of today are the dramatic increase in the use of information and communication technologies (ICTs) and the shift from centralism and expert led solutions towards local participative decision making.

The rate of change around communication in the past ten years has been astounding. Information previously only available through weeks of painstaking research is now available at the touch of a button. Today many of us take for granted the amazing opportunities to network and collaborate the internet provides, opportunities which were unthinkable ten years ago.

We also live in a time of democratic innovation. 'Localism' and 'community engagement' are terms which find wide support across all political parties and are being implemented in a wide variety of settings. Examples include the idea of 'Community calls for action' raised by the Local Government White Paper¹, the Quirk Review on Asset Transfer to Communities² which recommended that local communities be given more control over local assets, a proposed Duty to Involve for Local Authorities as part of the Local Government and Public Involvement in Health Bill (currently going through Parliament) and the recent focus on participatory budgeting.³ Increasing public participation in local decisions and service delivery has clearly become a key policy objective.

How do these twin trends interact? Whilst in the eDemocracy sector participation processes make full use of the opportunities that ICTs offer many participation practitioners at the local level are wary of embracing ICTs. There is a widespread concern that ICTs are undermining local communities, for example increased email use has been blamed for the demise of many local post offices.⁴ This begs the question; should we abstain from broadband and Facebook for the sake of our neighbourhoods?

This article shows that such a position is misguided. New technologies are often seen as harbingers of doom for local communities. In the past both railways and television have been blamed for community breakdowns and today it is the internet and mobile phones that are the new technologies that we fret about.

¹ Department for Communities and Local Government (2006) *Strong and Prosperous Communities - The Local Government White Paper*, <http://www.communities.gov.uk/publications/localgovernment/strongprosperous>

² Department of Communities and Local Government (2007) *Making assets work: The Quirk Review*, <http://www.communities.gov.uk/publications/communities/makingassetswork>

³ Minister of State for Communities and Local Government Hazel Blears announced that ten pilot projects would give local communities more of a say in local budgets building on past experiments in Bradford, Salford and other areas at the LGA Conference on 5 July 2007. See <http://www.communities.gov.uk/archived/speeches/corporate/conference-2007>

⁴ BBC (2006) '2,500 post offices face closure' 14 December 2006 <http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/uk/6176929.stm>

In the next section I counter three common concerns about the effects of the internet at the local level. Following this the chapter outlines key lessons from recent experience in strengthening the internet's role as a tool for localism.

Social Capital

Some believe that the information society is unravelling social capital (the social 'glue' that holds local communities together). The internet allows more social interactions to be carried out remotely, for example shopping on Amazon.co.uk rather than the local bookstore and interacting with people 'who are like us' on Facebook rather than with our neighbours. It is argued that ICTs might undermine social capital both by reducing the time we spend interacting with people locally and by limiting our connections to people with similar interests and worldviews to our own.⁵

But there is no evidence that the internet decreases the amount social capital in a community *per se*. A study of the deprived Stockholm neighbourhood of Skarpnäck found that the local internet café was in fact a focal point for local community activism, creating relationships between groups who would not otherwise have met.⁶ A physical location (such as an internet café) is not required for the internet to have a positive impact. Residents of a Toronto suburb with access to fast internet connections and a neighbourhood focused email list had far more local social contacts (both online and using phones and face to face meetings) than residents in comparable areas without similar online infrastructure.⁷

Most people use the internet to keep in touch with people they already know.⁸ Online communication is often not a substitute for face to face communication but a catalyst for it.

Inferior communication(?)

A common assumption is that online communication is inferior to face to face communication, and it has been suggested that online methods should be reserved for when it is impossible to meet face to face.⁹ Some argue that the anonymous nature of online communication is adversarial and non-deliberative, allowing participants to simply state their predefined position without engaging in discussion.¹⁰ The tone of debate on many internet forums is aggressive; anonymity seems to encourage people to be more confrontational than they would otherwise be.¹¹

Another criticism revolves around the fact that tone of voice and body language are missing from most online communication. Psychological studies show that for building trust what we say is less important than our tone of voice and body language.¹²

Anonymity online contributes to an adversarial tone but also makes the internet a safe place to discuss. When researchers compared people's behaviour using regular email and video conferencing programmes they found that being able to see each other made strangers far

⁵ Locke, J (1998) *The de-voicing of society: why we don't talk to each other anymore*, Simon & Schuster

⁶ Ferlander, S (2003) *The Internet, Social Capital and Local Community*, University of Stirling

⁷ Hampton, K, Wellman, B (2003) 'Neighboring in Netville: How the Internet Supports Community and Social Capital in a Wired Suburb' in *City and Community* 2(4)

⁸ Cravens, J. (2006) 'Involving International Online Volunteers: Factors for Success, Organizational Benefits, and New Views of Community', in *The International Journal of Volunteer Administration*

⁹ Urry, J (2002) 'Mobility and proximity' in *Sociology* 36(2)

¹⁰ Community Development practitioner quoted in Harris, K. (2003) "'Keep Your Distance": Remote Communication, face-to-face and the nature of community' in *Journal of Community Work and Development*, 1(4)

¹¹ It is interesting to note the hostile reaction that Internet practitioners Jimmy Wales and Tim O'Reilly received when they suggested that bloggers should adopt a voluntary code of conduct online. <http://www.bloggingcode.org/>

¹² Mehrabian, A (1971) *Silent messages*, Wadsworth Publishing Company

less likely to be open and honest.¹³ A key barrier to local involvement is that many people are uncomfortable about attending face to face meetings with people they do not know. Providing space for people to interact online in a safe space can build confidence levels to the point where they are willing to get involved in face to face activities. It is also worth noting that while we have had hundreds of years to develop cultural codes to regulate out behaviour in face to face setting our codes of 'netiquette' online are still under development. Internet users developed 'Smiley's to overcome the limitations of the online environment in conveying emotions and I'm sure that in the coming years similar innovations will make it easier to deal with unwanted aggressive behaviour online as well.

Impact on exclusion

Regular users of the internet sometimes easily forget that not everyone can or wants to take part in the information revolution. This year's Oxford Internet Survey showed that around a quarter of the population have never used the internet¹⁴ so there are clearly many people who do not have the physical access or the interest or skills required to use the internet. This 'digital divide' might exacerbate existing social inequalities, allowing well off neighbourhoods to make full use of the potentials of the internet whilst leaving more disadvantaged neighbourhoods behind. Equality is an important aspect, although some of the inequalities of access are likely to decrease over time. Indeed the Oxford study showed that in the last few years some gaps have narrowed.

The 'digital divide' is not so much an argument against using ICTs and the internet at the local level but an argument for levelling the playing field. There are concrete interventions that can help overcome or reduce these inequalities and such efforts should be stepped up in the future. It is not necessary for everyone to be online for communities and neighbourhoods to benefit. Community leaders can use the internet to gather information and make connections which can be used by wider groups of residents who do not have access to the internet.

Policy lessons

Obviously the Internet has been acknowledged as a key resource for local participation for a long time. In the past ten years a large number of projects have been developed, both in the UK and abroad. Some have been going for a long time such as long running community portals such as UK Villages¹⁵ and the Local Channel.¹⁶ Others are newer such as VOICE, a government sponsored community portal, the BBC Action Network.¹⁷ A positive development has been the recent launch of the International Centre of Excellence in Local eDemocracy (ICELE) aiming to share learning across the sector.¹⁸ Six key lessons from this wealth of experience are outlined below.

1) 'Localist' is not the same as 'local'

Sites do not need to be built or maintained locally to support local community activism. In fact most successful community portals are national or regional platforms which allow local people to tailor pages to fit their circumstances.¹⁹ This allows an economy of scale in building infrastructure which provides access local content and information, puts people in touch with each other and thus assist in local mobilisation.

¹³ Joinson, A (2001) 'Self-disclosure in computer-mediated communication: The role of self-awareness and visual anonymity' in *European Journal of Social Psychology*, 1(2)

¹⁴ Dutton, W. & Helsper, E. (2007) *The Internet in Britain: 2007*, Oxford Internet Institute, <http://www.oii.ac.uk>

¹⁵ <http://www.ukvillages.co.uk/>

¹⁶ <http://www.thelocalchannel.co.uk/>

¹⁷ <http://www.bbc.co.uk/actionnetwork/>

¹⁸ <http://www.icele.org/>

¹⁹ Although there are also successful portals at the local authority level, for example <http://www.digitalfife.com/>

In the past community portals and sites have tended to be funded by the government or the voluntary sector. In recent years however the private sector has taken an interest. Local search engines such as UpMyStreet²⁰ have been around for years and in the last months three new commercial sites have been set up to connect people in their neighbourhoods (My Neighbourhoods²¹, Are You Local?²², Who's Your Neighbour?²³). Even more recently a neighbourhoods application has been developed for the popular social networking site Facebook allowing people to make contact with their neighbours as well as old school friends. This private sector interest shows that not only is localism a good idea it also can make sound business sense.

2) Bridging online and offline participation

Online participation has largely been developed separately from face to face participation in local communities. eDemocracy specialists know a lot about how to engage people online but usually know little of the work of community development workers and face to face meetings and vice versa. This is a problem as both groups are trying to engage the same people, leading to disjointed messages, duplication of effort and avoidable mistakes. When online and offline methods are used in conjunction, drawing on their respective strengths the results are often far better than if these methods are used on their own. Some of the most interesting work of recent years has been in the intersection between online and offline, looking at ways of using new technology in face to face meetings.²⁴

Involve's new practical site peopleandparticipation.net seeks explicitly to provide information on different participative methods regardless of if they are online or offline and will hopefully help to bridge the different 'practice silos' that currently exist.

3) Funding, support and training

If sites and networks are to support community activism and decision making adequate funding is important. Often projects are initiated without proper consideration of long term sustainability.²⁵ Insufficient funds often deliver sites which are not updated often enough to be useful for local activists or residents. The investment does not have to be massive but it does need to be carefully thought out.

It cannot be assumed that community members automatically have the skills or confidence to make full use of the internet. Training and development is central to ensuring that benefits are shared more widely in communities. Government interventions, such as UK Online Centres and 'Wired Up' communities have tried to provide support to communities that lack the infrastructure, knowledge and skills to use the internet.²⁶ These types of interventions are especially important in rural areas where market forces alone are often not enough to provide necessary infrastructure. Government should continue to make these types of interventions a priority in the future.

²⁰ <http://www.upmystreet.com/>

²¹ <http://www.myneighbourhoods.co.uk/>

²² <http://www.areyoulocal.co.uk/>

²³ <http://www.whosyourneighbour.co.uk/>

²⁴ See for example the work of AmericaSpeaks in the United States <http://www.americaspeaks.org/> and the Department of Health's Your Health, Your care, your Say consultation process <http://www.dh.gov.uk/>

²⁵ Andersson, E, Warburton, D, and Wilson, R (2006) 'The True Costs of Public Participation: Why it is better to be roughly right than precisely wrong' in Stoker, G, John, P, and Brannan, T (eds.), *Re-energising Citizenship: Strategies for Civil Renewal*, Palgrave Macmillan

²⁶ <http://www.ukonlinecentres.com/> and <http://www.dfes.gov.uk/wired/>

4) *Local involvement*

Local portals, networks and other projects can gain a lot by a high level of community involvement. Where local people have a voice in decisions around a project it often improves its legitimacy and levels of community support. Local involvement also allows better targeting of scarce resources to meet local needs. No matter how well intentioned the project doing things to people rather than with them tends to lead to reduced interest amongst local people. Even in cases where local ownership or control is not practicable or possible transparency around who makes the decisions and where the money is going can help local residents feel more ownership over the project.

5) *Moving beyond 'business as usual'*

In the past local authorities have tended to approach the internet as a different medium in which carry out the same activities. Local council websites have often been limited to spaces for citizens to find the minutes for council meetings or to pay for and complain about services.

Local council websites are important. They are often the first port of call for citizens looking for information about their local area. The best council sites act as community gateways, linking to community groups, other local public services and relevant information. These sites provide a real service to local residents by making sense of what is often a confusing jungle of acronyms and jargon. However for the great majority of council sites a lot of work is needed before they can fill this important role. A recent study found that many local council sites do not link to community organisations and are far more likely to link to other local authorities than to local service providers such as the police or local Primary Care Trust.²⁷

The development of the International Centre of Excellence in Local eDemocracy (ICELE) provides somewhere for local councils to turn for advice and encouragement. Helen Goulden's chapter in this volume also discusses how councils can reach out to local residents to improve digital inclusion.

6) *Joining up representative and participative democracy*

In the debate around public participation elected representatives are often overlooked. Some elected representatives have come to view community engagement and empowerment as threats to their roles. This is a pity as local elected representatives have much to gain from the policy of decentralisation and engagement. There is a tension between participative and representative democracy, but this is often a creative tension. The Lyons review into local government spending suggested that local councillors should have a new role as 'place shapers', working with rather than just for local communities. This new type of role for local elected representatives, as a networked enabler rather than a distant decision maker, will hopefully make the prospect of standing for office more appealing and can restore public trust in their elected representatives.

Summary

Our fears of the imminent death of local life are wrong. ICTs have contributed to a more mobile and connected population, but most people still feel an affinity to their locality. Online spaces can and should form part of a vibrant local democracy.

Society and technology are constantly changing. In the coming years new developments will allow us the choice to bypass our local area altogether or to make new connections locally.

²⁷ Pratchett, Lawrence, Wingfield, Melvin & Karakaya Polat, Rabia (2005) *Barriers to e-Democracy: Local Government experiences and responses*, Office of the Deputy Prime Minister

The internet will undermine or strengthen local democracy based on choices we make as policy makers, citizens and consumers. A key challenge for us in the coming years will be to create uses of the internet which enable us to be good neighbours as well as good world citizens.

These are exciting times for local democracy. ICTs will increasingly provide us with ways of harnessing the powerful passion that people feel for their local area. As our understanding of participative involvement increases we will be able to facilitate a more direct and meaningful connection between local people and local decisions. In the past decade we have come a long way in developing ways of reinvigorating local communities and local democracy. Ten years on I hope to see local communities flourishing, supported by robust online and offline infrastructure.

Planning and spatial justice in an information society

Professor Gordon Dabinett

The spatial behaviours that underpin present day life are subject to a broad pattern of structural change, a silent revolution often referred to as the information society, portrayed as a new, knowledge-based and borderless world, commonly associated with a collapse of time and space. As a result, spatial planning at a variety of scales is dealing with a new economic geography, electronic-based transactions, increased mobility and accessibility, and fundamental changes in the valorisation of spatial resources and assets. This information society has implications for future patterns of spatial development, creating a need for different and sometimes radical imaginations of spatial futures. We require new discourses of how different places might change and how they themselves might be able to shape their own futures. The purpose of this paper is to reflect on some of the current practices and perspectives in spatial planning and to seek to bring critical commentary to this arena.

The Challenge of an Information Society for Spatial Development

Essentially, the use of digital technology underpins the connectivity revolution that manifests through:

- New electronic transactions; for example, e-commerce.
- New agglomerations; for example, ICT business clusters.
- Increased mobility and flexibility; for example, telework.
- New forms of accessibility; for example, e-retailing and healthcare e-services.
- New uses of labour; for example, call centres.
- New forms of culture and expression; for example, multi-media and virtual spaces.

Early predictions about new technologies showed a marked tendency to both exaggerate and simplify their spatial impacts. In contrast, more recent and well-researched empirical evidence shows that ICTs tend to have a more complex and reflexive role, including their relationship with the physical environment. Thus, at first, the application of ICTs seemingly offered spatial planners new opportunities to bring about their desired outcomes of sustainable and balanced development. However, the current manifestation of the information society exhibits characteristics that contradict an approach to spatial planning constructed on such a benign view of technological benefits.

ICTs are furthering a global hegemony that continually searches for increased productivity. This goal is now quickly extending beyond production activities and private capital, to service functions and public spheres of influence. The increases in productivity come with an expansion of individual choice for products and services, but also more generally, lifestyles. The growth in individual consumerism has been supported through successful challenges to previous regimes of regulation and control that might have been used to protect or advance particular collective or spatially fixed interests. The internet provides the potential and the reality of an open access and a spatially non-fixed market place for traded and un-traded

interactions. These changes have led to the re-valorisation of tacit and soft assets, such as learning and knowledge. These are assets that have always been present, and as now, have been heavily concentrated in particular urban localities, showing that human activity still requires and demands physical proximity, movement and expression. Many spatial activities are also contingent on fixed assets and sunken capital as well as cultural norms. The result is in fact highly differentiated outcomes, often occurring around old but also new spatial inequalities.

Spatial Planning Practices and the Information Society

A growing number of spatial planning initiatives are seeking to influence changes associated with this emergent information society. A predilection towards technological determinism means that many of these suffer from loosely constructed concepts such as the new economy, e-cities and smart-homes, or lack a territorial coherence and an appreciation of spatially differentiated outcomes. Interventions, such as those towards urban congestion (ICTs in traffic management), industrial restructuring (acquisition of ICT skills) or public service provision (internet-based health care), have sought to contribute to spatial development through:

- *E-highways*: the provision of broadband, and the filling of infrastructure gaps in networks to address peripherality and market failure.
- *E-flows*: the capturing of data flows or the management of data and data flows to manage other movements and connectivities, such as the use of teleports and other data nodes, ICT based 'traffic' management and logistics systems.
- *E-places*: promotion of cities and regions as centres of the information and knowledge revolution through urban and place marketing images, and the development of specialist quarters in cities and towns, such as media quarters, e-business parks.
- *E-spaces*: the construction and support of building projects, at the scale of an individual dwelling or office, such as smart homes, or wider areas such as wired neighbourhoods. Many of these largely experimental schemes are either exploring new forms of resource management (e.g. heating control) or simply trying to increase real estate values.
- *E-justice*: projects that seek to address the digital divide, often targeted at specific members or social groups in cities and regions, mainly through the provision of community access and training schemes.

In contrast to this dominant project-based approach, some cities and regions have begun to take a more strategy-based approach to the information society, characterised by quasi-activist interactions with an emphasis on networking and institutional economies that support general innovation. Here no simple panacea for less developed spatial areas is advocated, but rather the active searching to achieve these outcomes is meant to develop the institutional- and cultural-based innovativeness of a region or city that in turn is necessary to trigger the adaptation and flexibility required by the informational society. To date, such strategic responses have promoted the integration and prioritisation of public sector-funded developments in health, transport, tourism, social services, education, GIS and governance, often based on common platforms, gateways and portals. Concern with such wider systemic processes illustrates a desire to effect transformative change and a wider modernisation of the region or city through the creation of new norms and conventions, and offers the opportunity for new territorial-based power relations rather than simple technological fixes. This potential regenerative outcome can be particularly attractive to post-industrial towns and localities.

Prospects for Spatial Planning

The lack of strong regulatory powers over ICTs and the dominance of commercial market forces may suggest severe constraints on the scope of strategic spatial planning. To fully appreciate the significance of ICTs requires both a shift in planners' conventional understanding and politicised debates that extend beyond economic and technologically determined agendas. In particular spatial planners should engage in debate on:

- How the information society gives expression to and further reproduces a particular form of growth, based on the production of highly concentrated *patterns of wealth and power*;
- The suitability of the *high growth outcomes* desired from the information society, in terms of both their scale and rate, to achieving sustainable spatial development objectives;
- The potential of *high value-added growth*, inherent in the information society, to further a digital divide, where general increases in prosperity fail to adequately counter-balance low-waged or cost-based competitive advantage;
- How the outcomes from placing an emphasis on *spatial proximity*, agglomeration effects and the creation and promotion of milieu and clustering can further balance territorial and urban development.

Technology provides choices not predetermined outcomes. The current construction of the information society, both in terms of spatial planning praxis and conceptual arguments, must be continually contested in political debates. Futures are not pre-determined, they are of our imaginations and can be realised in different ways. The information society involves contestable choices over:

- What new forms of territorial management and planning are required to respond to the conditions that result from a re-orientation of spatial and virtual relationships?
- What normative models of spatial development underpin the attempts to realise the benefits of ICTs, and can these be applied to sustainable business and social development?
- What conflict, if any, results from policies supporting the deregulation and liberalisation of ICT markets and attempts by regions to deal with the inevitable uneven spatial development and instances of market failure?
- How the modernisation of cultural and political relationships might occur through the adoption of ICTs?

Strategic spatial planning can make a difference where it legitimately addresses the uncertainty and complexity of change; it takes a new perspective on the scope and scale of territorial management; develops new measurements and expressions for intangibles such as time, information and knowledge; and reinforces the values associated with place that can create just and sustainable futures.

Beyond the digital divide: focusing technology on delivering social inclusion

Helen Goulder²⁸

True or False?

Here are a few statements that are often made about digital exclusion:

1. The digital divide is narrowing and will continue to narrow over time – the pace of technological progress is unrelenting and more and more people are benefiting each year.
2. The mobile phone will help to close the digital divide further – internet via the mobile is now a reality, and mobiles are almost ubiquitous.
3. Those who are not using the internet have mostly made a conscious decision not to and government has no role in persuading them to use it.
4. The socially excluded will be the last to use the internet – they face greater problems than lack of access to technology and government agencies should focus on solving these issues first and foremost.
5. When modernising public services, we should ensure that the digitally excluded can at least access services via traditional channels such as phones or face to face. Technology can help to transform these traditional channels as well – so everyone benefits. Transformation government for the socially excluded is principally about good channel management and back-office improvements for all.

We shall revisit these statements again later.

Technological change and digital exclusion in the UK

The implementation of the 2006 Local Government White Paper ‘Strong and prosperous communities’ marks a time of great change for local government.²⁹ The paper sets a new agenda for local authorities as place shapers, working in partnership with other public bodies and the private and third sectors. Local authorities are increasingly supporting marginalised communities and reaching out to citizens who are disadvantaged. Technology has a major role to play in shaping the future development of places across the UK. The innovative use of technology increases the ability of local partners to identify and address the issues in their area and deliver improved services to disadvantaged groups. But there is a question mark over whether the increased use of technology in service delivery will actually help socially excluded groups and deprived communities or increase exclusion.

It is undoubtedly true that the pace of technological change has been unrelentingly fast over the last few years. Over half of UK households now have broadband as opposed to roughly 15% in 2004, WiFi is now available in many urban centres and there are more mobile phone

²⁸ This paper represents the personal views of the author and not necessarily those of the Department for Communities & Local Government

²⁹ See <http://www.communities.gov.uk/publications/localgovernment/strongprosperous>

subscriptions than people in this country. Furthermore, this technology is being used in new and innovative ways, with millions participating in online social networking, and user generated content, such as personal websites and blogs increasing in popularity.

Against all of this progress we could be forgiven for thinking that the digital divide is no longer significant. But it is. Most of the progress over the last few years has been about the same people either getting faster access, access on the move or benefiting from new applications and services. Meanwhile, many remain excluded from services delivered via various forms of technology – 1 in 10 don't have a mobile phone, 2 in 10 households don't yet have digital TV, and around 3 in 10 households don't have a home computer. Most worrying though is the lack of access and use of the internet – around 4 in 10 UK adults do not use the internet and this has changed little since 2004. Affected by this are around 800,000 school children without home access, many from poorer backgrounds, who are disadvantaged within an education system that increasingly utilises modern technology.

Why does the digital divide still exist?

Common reasons for the non-use of new technology include lack of equipment, skills and confidence. But lack of interest and need is one of the most frequent reasons cited which tends to fuel the perception that most of those who do not use the internet by now, have made an informed choice not to do so. The reality is different. There is clear evidence that many who are the wrong side of the digital divide live in deprived communities or suffer multiple social disadvantages such as unemployment, poor educational attainment and low income. Recent survey evidence shows that

- Around 20% of the population suffer three or more significant social disadvantages and could be classified as being broadly socially excluded. Three in four of these do not use the internet.
- As social exclusion deepens, internet use reduces. Around 3% of the population suffer deep and persistent exclusion, with five or more disadvantages. Nine out of ten of these do not use the internet.
- As community deprivation increases, internet use reduces. Evidence from the Scottish Household survey indicates that households in the least deprived 20% of communities are over twice as likely to have internet access as those in the most deprived communities

This is not to imply that all those who are the wrong side of the digital divide are socially excluded. Far from it, an estimated 24% of the population do not suffer significant social deprivation and do not use the internet. This group represents a market development opportunity for industry to engage with innovative new services that capture the imagination in a way that existing products and services have so far failed to. However, for 15% of the adult population, it is difficult to ignore the links between digital and social exclusion; the fact that lack of meaningful engagement with ICT coincides with other significant social disadvantages.

Innovative use of ICT can lead to better access to education, to employment, to health and to a socially fulfilling life. It can be an additional support tool for people to lift themselves out of their disadvantaged social situations, and also to improve the communities in which they live. Technology can be a tool towards greater social inclusion and neighbourhood renewal. There are many excellent examples which have increased self esteem, helped people into education, volunteering and work or improved access to support services. The use of technology has also been seen to have a beneficial impact on community engagement, optimism, the reporting of antisocial behaviour and fear of crime.

How can local government promote digital inclusion?

So, if ignored, the links between social and digital exclusion represent a missed opportunity all around. The individuals concerned are missing out on social, financial, educational and employment opportunities which could improve their lives and life chances. Whilst government is also missing out on new and innovative ways of tackling social issues, delivering services and reducing the associated costs of social exclusion to society. Digital inclusion is more about simply tackling the digital divide and providing direct access to technology, it is also about grasping these numerous opportunities. There are many excellent examples across all sectors (see Digital Inclusion Landscaping in England³⁰) and they share some common characteristics:

- a focus on those people in greatest socio-economic need,
- a focus on the most deprived communities,
- success is measured less by 'digital outcomes' such as take-up and much more in terms of tangible social-economic outcomes such as engagement, employment, self-esteem, educational attainment and community optimism.

So how do local authorities and local strategy partnerships make the most of the opportunities around digital inclusion? Well there are too many points to mention in a short article like this, but here are a few key activities to consider:

- **Review and exploit the synergies between social and digital policies.**
Those who are socially excluded are most often already the target of government policies and major users of services. For the most disadvantaged there is the opportunity of combined interventions which tackle social and digital exclusion concurrently in a way that is mutually reinforcing. The overall impact of this is greater than the sum of the parts.
- **'Social exclusion proof' ICT intensive policies and programmes.**
Review ICT intensive projects and services to ensure that they a) do not deepen social exclusion and b) where possible directly support social inclusion policies and programmes.
- **Consider technological opportunities and threats at the earliest possible stage of policy and strategy formation.**
Technology can open up intervention options to help to deliver against Public Service Agreement (PSA) and Local Area Agreement (LAA) targets. In practice this could mean, a Local Strategic Partnership systematically considering the opportunities for technology to support the delivery of each element of its sustainable community strategy. This could be enabled through a local champion who draws on the wealth of digital inclusion projects that have been implemented elsewhere.
- **Create space for problem solving and innovation.**
The socially excluded are often failed most of all by public services, having to deal with many different agencies that do not communicate with one another efficiently. Incremental change is unlikely to deliver significant improvement for these groups. Genuine transformational change backed by innovation is essential for supporting the socially excluded. Local innovation processes could:
 - create opportunities for individuals who do not normally come together to interact and develop solutions – front line workers in government and third sector, academics, policy, industry and ICT,
 - start with the problem and the desired outcome, rather than the technology,
 - generate solutions based on sustainable operating models as a key aim from the outset,

³⁰ <http://www.digitalchallenge.gov.uk/links-and-resources/research/The%20Digital%20Inclusion%20Landscape%20In%20England.pdf>

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- concentrate on the most deeply socially excluded and most deprived neighbourhoods where the opportunities for technology to deliver social impact are greatest.

The reality of the situation

Many of these points challenge and contradict the statements we started off with, so let's revisit them:

1. The digital divide is scarcely narrowing – around 40% of the population remain largely excluded from the benefits of the information society and there is little evidence to suggest the market will close this gap.
2. Increasing internet access via mobile phones may help to bridge the digital divide for some services but it is not the panacea that some perceive it to be. internet via mobile phones is expensive and usage is very low. Furthermore, many services are simply not suitable for delivery over small devices such as mobile phones; for example children doing their homework on a mobile phone might well be significantly disadvantaged compared to their peers using a home computer.
3. While it is undoubtedly true that some people that are digitally excluded have made a conscious choice not to engage, it is far from true that this is the case for all. The links between social exclusion and digital exclusion are clear and many people are simply not in the position to make a choice because of their social backgrounds.
4. In the context of bridging the digital divide the socially excluded are perhaps the hardest to reach with interventions; lack of access to the internet would appear to be a much lower priority for them. However, to conclude this risks missing major opportunities. The most disadvantaged are the target of government policies and major users of services. So for the most disadvantaged there is the opportunity of combined interventions which tackle social and digital exclusion concurrently in a way that is mutually reinforcing.
5. It is true that channel strategy and back office transformation can help to deliver service improvements for the socially excluded, and there are some good examples of service innovations based around traditional channels like the phone and high street contact centres. But this approach 'writes-off' the socially excluded to traditional channels, which:
 - unfairly excludes them from the huge investments in web based services, across government, industry and the third sector
 - excludes them from the differential benefit of web based services that designers actively build in to encourage channel shift among mass market users.
 - misses the opportunities around 'design for all' – the principle that improving the services for the few who stress services the most, benefits the many.

In conclusion, the links between social and digital exclusion that are emerging cast new light on the digital divide, challenging common assertions and principles. This represents an opportunity as much as a challenge. Social exclusion is a government priority for the Social Exclusion Task Force, and has been the subject of recent reports and policy documents. For local authorities, businesses and the third sector, who work with the socially excluded it is important to understand that social services, policies and programmes share the same target audience as initiatives to tackle the digital divide. With the co-operation and integration of social and IT policies, we can move beyond a sterile debate around the digital divide and focus the huge opportunities around technology into improving the lives of disadvantaged people and deprived communities.

Worldwide technology, local regeneration: the Manchester Approach

Shaun Fensom

It was back in 1989 that forward-thinking people in Manchester City Council first thought of using on-line services to promote economic and social development. The city was reeling from the loss of many thousands of manufacturing jobs in the 1980's – parts of North and East Manchester had become a wasteland, and many thousands of people had no realistic prospect of ever working again. At the time the fledgling on-line services industry consisted of a small number of independent networks offering mostly corporate and public sector users email and online information sources, and the internet was a specialist computer network confined to academics and the US military.

Working with one of the smaller providers, pioneers at Manchester City Council used urban regeneration money to set up a new online service for the city. This was the Manchester Host³¹, aimed at private, public sector and community users. It offered email, bulletin boards and access both to existing commercially-run database services (such as the Official Airlines Guide), as well as a facility for local organisations and businesses to set up their own on-line databases, and take the first steps to becoming electronic publishers in their own right.

The Manchester Host was probably unique in the way it used a technology that was clearly global (email was hardly known at the time, but was an invaluable tool for international communication), with a local economic strategy. Grant funds were used to set up a network of “Electronic Village Halls” where people – often from disadvantaged communities - learnt how to use the Host – how to connect using a modem, exchange emails and access database information.

The Host was operated by an employee cooperative, Poptel, which was able to sustain the business after the grant funding was used up. But it was almost certainly too far ahead of its time. It seems ironical now that one of the biggest disincentives to new users, newly excited by the technology, was the bald statement that they had “no new messages” when they logged on: email did not reach “critical mass” until several years later.

During the early 1990's the technology was made easier to use, particularly with the invention of the World Wide Web. This was adopted as the base technology for the Manchester Community Information Network (MCIN)³², started in 1994. This was in contrast with a number of municipal information services set up by local authorities using viewdata technology which was seen as a way to distribute information quickly and cheaply. The low-cost modems were “asymmetric” – information was transmitted from the central servers out to the users much more quickly than the other way. The crude low-resolution text and graphics meant that cheap and simple terminal devices could use a television for a display.

³¹ The Manchester Host has been the subject of academic research and is referred to in Gurstein, M (2000), *Community Informatics: Enabling Communities with Information and Communications Technologies*, and Woolgar, S (2002), *Virtual Society?: Technology, Cyberbole, Reality*. See also http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Manchester_host

³² <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Poptel>, and <http://www.andrewbibby.com/socialenterprise/poptel2.html>

MCIN not only correctly guessed which technology would become dominant, it also instinctively rejected the “broadcast” model implicit in the other public information networks.

With the spread of dial-up internet access in the late 90’s, MCIN went on to focus on the development of what it called community portals. Portal services were mushrooming across the net as a way for people to find what they wanted in what was already a bewildering mass of information. MCIN adapted the principle to local information. This was not unique, but the focus on enabling the community to run their own portals and generate content was typical of the Manchester approach.

The same notion – that disadvantaged communities can enthusiastically adopt and benefit from quite advanced technologies ahead of the rest of society – was central to the development of the Eastserve³³ project some years later in 2001. Eastserve was one of a number of government-funded “wired up community” projects. Its aim was to break a cycle of decline in East Manchester - one of the most deprived areas in the UK. Very low cost computers were made available (£200 for a new PC) to residents in cooperation with the local credit union which provided loan finance. And a large scale wireless (“WiFi”) network was built, providing internet access at broadband speeds (at a time when “DSL” broadband services were only available in some parts of the UK and take-up was very low).

Since its launch Eastserve has provided the community with over 5,000 PCs, each one delivered with 3 hours’ training, and over 2,000 households have taken up the broadband service. This is in an area where very large numbers of households have no telephone line and would in any case be unable to buy normal broadband services because of the requirement to have a credit card and to sign up for a year’s contract. Instead Eastserve users can pay cash – from as little as £6 per month – and drop in and out of the service as and when they can afford it.

A vital component of the project has been the focus on involving the community in its delivery. The lively website encourages local people to contribute content, and “community champions” have received some 30 hours training each, enabling them to provide training and support services in turn. Some have even gone on to teach ICT at the local college. The jobs database receives over 2,000 enquiries a month, and the anonymous crime reporting service amassed 650 reports in 9 months. There is – claims Eastserve – emerging evidence of increases in school attendance and achievement (a similar effect has been reported by Cybermoor in Cumbria).

Manchester now has a vibrant digital and creative sector, expected to grow rapidly when the BBC moves in to the new Media City on the banks of the ship canal. The city centre has seen a building boom since the IRA bomb in 1996. But many in the city see the success as a reason to put more effort into tackling social exclusion: Manchester still ranks third in the deprivation stakes behind Liverpool and Knowsley. The next challenge for cities, like Manchester, that see their future in the development of “knowledge industries”, is the introduction of so-called next generation access – ultra high speed broadband services of 100Mbits per second and more. Here again Manchester’s attitude is that the very latest technology is relevant and useful in tackling social exclusion, and that given a chance, deprived communities can make just as much use as the young professionals moving into the city centre apartments.

Acknowledging Manchester’s status as the home of the worldwide cooperative movement (the first modern cooperative was founded in Rochdale 160 years ago, and Manchester is the headquarters of the Co-op), the Manchester Digital Development Agency³⁴ now wants to use

³³ <http://www.eastserve.com/>

³⁴ <http://www.manchesterdda.com/>

the cooperative model, as a way of tackling the failure of the private sector to start building a next generation network, but also as a way to engage communities in the production of content. Cooperatives can help “aggregate demand” to make new network construction viable, while at the same time ensuring that all parts of the community can get the benefit, instead of allowing network operators to “cherry pick” the most lucrative business.

Introduction: the return of the city

Dave McLaughlin

With the exception of a relative minority of executives, very few of us lead truly global lives, and yet the Internet – increasingly our main tool for directing those lives – does not reflect this. The most commonly registered Top Level Domain, with over 70 million sites, is the purposefully dislocated and often misleading ‘.com’.

The constantly increasing number of registered domains being compacted ever-more tightly into the ‘.com’ space highlights a problem facing the internet as serious as the first: the lack of memorable Top Level Domains (TLDs). As many are unwilling to have their identifier lost in myriad third and fourth-level domains, they turn to increasingly inane and unrelated domain names to ensure they remain at the second-level of a ‘.com’.

The second section of this publication is concerned with one currently evolving solution to the above problems, within the issue of localism in the information society: City TLDs. The campaign for this new type of TLD is led by two cities, Berlin (dotBERLIN) and New York (.nyc). It is the purpose of this introduction to outline the reasons for, and against, the proposals of these campaigns.

Firstly, as Tom Lowenhaupt and Michael Gurstein of the .nyc campaign argue in their contribution the internet has developed from being a tool for the American government into a network linking millions of private users. As the numbers of people using the internet increase, it should be made to reflect the real lives of those users – and as this year marks the point where more people, globally speaking, are urban dwellers than not, City TLDs are the perfect vehicle to carry through the next stage of the internet’s development.

This argument is not without its detractors, however. The case for City TLDs is centred on the fact that the drivers of global development are so-called ‘global cities’ – those hubs of inter-cultural interaction with global influence; for example London, Berlin or New York. This would mean that the increased development cited by Lowenhaupt and Gurstein as a positive aspect of City TLDs would primarily affect these ‘global cities’. This would drive increases in the inequality gap with other, potentially more populated urban spaces such as Sao Paulo or Mexico City, which would not be included in the provision of a virtual ‘location’. This division could be equally antagonistic for the so-called North-South global divide as the majority of global cities are in the North.

But the global aspect of the City TLD is not its main purpose. As the .nyc campaign make clear in their paper, at the very same time that more people than ever are living in cities urban spaces are losing their primary place as the main arena for our discussions, decisions and transactions to disparate virtual connections. Therefore the main aim of the City TLD project is to return the city to its place of pre-eminence in our lives. The argument adduced is that by creating virtual ‘locations’ for cities on the web, people’s virtual and real lives can become more integrated. This is made clear in the dotBERLIN campaign’s slogan: ‘the voice for all Berliners on the internet’.

If this is not enough, exclaim advocates of City TLDs, there's more. The geographically embedding of cities in virtual spaces will aid their economies, by making it easier for residents to locate local services and businesses through intuitive searches or the use of directory pages (for example, 'www.restaurants.nyc'). This benefit address the second problem outlined above, for the introduction of a new TLD with limited scope would allow most interests to select relevant, memorable domain names, rather than relying on difficult-to-spot acronyms and the suchlike.

As if to provide further evidence of the importance of localism on the development of the internet, the .nyc and dotBERLIN campaigns have ventured two different conceptions of a City TLD, each informed by the individual situations of their respective environments. New York City's campaign revolves around the idea of 'global cities' and TLDs to represent those communities – reflecting the international aspect of this prominent city. DotBERLIN is heading down a different path, suggesting a 'community TLD' that would represent not only the citizens of Germany's premier city, but also people from other Berlins around the world, as well as those with the surname 'Berlin'; this notion reflecting a greater 'diaspora' element in Berlin's idea of community.

The Senate's argument highlights a further, final consideration for the dotBERLIN and .nyc campaigns – the effect of City TLDs on intellectual property. As Monika Ermert discusses, the Berlin Senate did not greet the dotBERLIN proposal with enthusiasm, as it has interests invested in the berlin.de brand. This raises the question of how far City TLDs would be threatening the intellectual property of public and urban bodies on the internet. Further to this, the introduction of many new sites could infringe on more established sites, or it could go as far as forcing established sites to switch to a City TLD from their original domain.

The two articles that follow allow you to read some of these arguments as expressed by the New York and Berlin campaign teams themselves, with Monika Ermert then picking up the political arguments in a discussion about the prospects for city TLDs.

Towards Global City TLDs in the Public Interest

Thomas Lowenhaupt & Michael Gurstein³⁵

The internet's impact on cities grows daily as it electronically enables the meeting, movement, and exchange of people, ideas, products, and cultures at a range and frequency never before possible, creating what Marshall McLuhan called the "global village".

This paper looks at the effects that the emergence of this *global village* has had on cities and explores ways that one significant element of the internet can be remolded to support the traditional and progressive role of the city: as the ambience for creativity and innovation, the fountainhead of progressive movements, the cauldron for the creation of culture and cultural related employment, and the ultimate stage for self expression and re-invention.

Our look at cities and the internet takes place at an historic moment, for mid-2007 is projected to be the transition point when for the first time a majority of the global population will be city dwellers. Of these, the 50 largest cities include some 10% of the world's population with the 10 largest cities each having a greater population than 113 of the United Nations' 192 member states.

Amidst all this, in an era noted for globalization in populations, trade, and markets, the world's *global cities*, those central enablers of the globalization processes with their diverse populations and international linkages, have no direct and visible presence at the highest level internet space, as Top Level Domains or TLDs.

Yet in the most local or global of interactions there is frequently a need for providing a visible electronic means for specifying identification and location. This is the process of electronic "naming" i.e. the creation and use of internet TLDs as a unique identifier for *global cities* and their resources.

Global City TLD's in the Public Interest

We argue for the creation of a category of TLD's to respond to the needs of Global Cities³⁶ (GC TLDs) following the pattern set for country level TLD's. This being the management and overall goal of these TLD's to operate in and support the broader public good. In this we distinguish GC TLD's from those that are managed to support one or another commercially, institutionally, or their sectional interest. What this would mean in the context of the Global

³⁵ A longer version of this paper will be found on Connecting.nyc Inc.'s wiki at <http://www.connectingnyc.openplans.org>. Comments are invited.

³⁶ We follow the usage introduced by Saskia Sassen in defining "Global Cities" as strategic geographic locales that see processes being created, facilitated, and enacted that have a direct and tangible effect on global affairs through socio-economic, [culture](#), or [political impact](#) - see <http://www.india-seminar.com/2001/503/503%20saskia%20sassen.htm>.

City TLD would be that the management of the TLDs would follow general principles of good governance³⁷:

- **Transparency**: bringing visibility to the management and operation of the service
- **Effectiveness and Efficiency**: enabling optimal use of resources for the delivery of services
- **Participation**: empowering citizens to legally control the service delivery to their advantage
- **Equity**: providing to citizens the service on an equal basis
- **Rule of Law**: ensuring that the laws and regulations governing the service are applied in an impartial way
- **Accountability**: creating standards against which the individuals providing the service and the service delivery can be held accountable
- **Responsiveness**: serving all citizens in a consistent and predictable way
- **Consensus Orientation**: proceeding with the management and operation of the service within overall principles of consensus decision making among stakeholders, and, in the instance of GC-TLDs, collaborating with residents, local government, and other organizations.

The Net Impact

Over the past decade, the internet's impact on cities has been rapid and diverse. While economic and education barriers in the US have recently slowed the pace of internet penetration and use within some demographics and sectors, overall it would appear that its impact on cities, as on other institutional and governance frameworks, has been positive. By speeding up and extending the range and opportunity for exchange of ideas and commerce and by increasing the efficiency and effectiveness with which information is managed, disseminated, and applied; the net has benefited us all.

However, the net's impact on communication and information flow at the local level during this period has been of growing concern to people in major cities such as Berlin, Paris, and New York who are seeing the possibility of long term negative effects arising within their complex metropolitan environments from their current lack of formal electronic recognition.

They observe that most of people's lives are lived locally and in contact with their immediate neighbors. This is particularly the case for local commerce and local governance where there is an immediate impact on people's daily interactions as compared to interactions with more distant regional, national, and global entities.

They also worry about the impact a global communication system might have on the traditional aggregation and networking roles of cities. They speculate about a lack of foresight in planning for this technology similar to that which occurred when the Model T Ford first rolled into early 20th century American urban areas and by mid-century had resulted in the razing of miles of inner cities to make room for highways. Fearing a parallel set of impacts from the internet's globalizing technology, they propose a simple precautionary action in the form of Global City-TLDs operated in the public interest.

Absent specific processes for the high level naming of city TLD's are small signs of negative effects which are beginning to appear. These arise from two directions: from the ways the internet's global reach has substituted global and electronic activities for local (and physically

³⁷ As defined by the United Nations Development Program for example. United Nations Development Programme (UNDP). (1997). Governance for sustainable human development: A UNDP policy document. Retrieved March 25, 2005, from The UNDP Web site: <http://magnet.undp.org/policy/>.

embedded) ones; and from the disappearance (or invisibility) of the city as a primary locale within which a range of social, cultural, commercial, and political activities are enacted³⁸.

Proximity & Networking

If we explore the internet's early impact on the first of these, the substitution element, we can observe the net eroding a number of the traditional roles of cities. While for many, the impacts discussed below might be perceived as benefits, the difficulty arises when these are seen in the aggregate where, through the combination of multiple small dislocations, the overall and positive historical role of cities is eroded. Among the areas where the internet has had an impact on cities are the following:

- A traditional advantage of cities was proximity; it enabled face to face exchanges which fueled the development of new ideas, new relationships, and new products. Pre-internet, the large numbers of city residents and their proximity would result in people and ideas connecting through various in-person social and business contacts. Today's internet globally unites ideas and people around the most arcane subjects eliminating the necessity of traveling to the city to find those with similar interests.
- Pre-internet, when a Catholic had a question about a religious issue, s/he might seek out the advice of a local priest, knowledgeable friend, or colleague. With the internet it is now possible to access the Catechism of the Catholic Church directly through the Vatican's website at vatican.va. There's no need to walk down the street to visit the local church (or synagogue or mosque) as local views and expertise have been replaced by "direct" access to unitary global "authority".
- Today, when someone loses interest in a physical object, s/he can readily sell it on eBay. No need to bother lugging it to the PTA's fundraiser. EBay's global network provides cash in hand and reduces the significance of local markets.
- It used to be that the demands of a city's large population would draw products from around the world into a market. Today's internet is a global marketplace that makes even unique items readily locatable. No need to travel to the city for specialty shopping.
- The opportunities (and occasional risks) which arise from eye to eye neighborly contact are increasingly being replaced by the anonymous exchange of digital profiles and the instantaneous flow of words and images to any place on the globe. No need to travel to the city to meet Mr. Right.

While each of the above clearly provides an "advantage," they can also be seen as detracting from the city's traditional role and thus in some respects "hollowing out" the overall beneficial influences which cities have and continue to offer. Meanwhile for many, particularly those who are physically, technically, economically, or emotionally unable or unwilling to transfer these types of activities into the electronic environment, cities must continue to provide these vital if now challenged and attenuated opportunities.

Global Cities: Needles in the Internet's Haystacks

A second impact arises from the internet's immense size. Let's look for a moment at the problems associated with locating the resources of a global city like New York. For example:

³⁸ In this context recognizing that cities are, in the emerging age of resource, environmental awareness and more specifically energy depletion, are the most energy efficient and environmentally manageable residential form for large scale populations.

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- Think of New York's 400 hotels that service the increasingly important tourist sector. Without its own TLD these 400 hotels are lost in the 37,200,000 results that a Google search for "Hotels in New York City" provided on May 11, 2007. Not only is locating a desirable hotel difficult, but directly accessing its resources can be a challenge. While the forest of intermediaries one encounters sometimes provide valuable assistance, too frequently their privately sponsored directories, with their varying degrees of accuracy, self-interest, and bias, hinder direct access to a hotel's website. And while seeming "free," the cost of these intermediaries is present, if often hidden, in the bill at check out time.
 - Or imagine parents mulling over a job offer in New York City, and doing a Yahoo search for "good schools in New York City." How long might it take to review the 59,400,000 search results?
 - Similarly, "Hospitals in New York City" presents 44,600,000 results. Might there be a better way to support those who are looking to the internet to assist in gaining information in this most basic area?

Some argue that the search engine (e.g., Google) has supplanted the need for TLDs overall. And indeed there are times when accurate search results are presented in a near miraculous manner. But intuitive directory-like pages such as www.hotels.nyc, www.schools.nyc, and www.hospitals.nyc could provide a means for introducing a measure of local expertise and control while presenting a city's resources to the world. One day these needs might be obviated by improved search engines, but even then it seems evident that effective information handling and decision making on contentious issues such as local elections will necessitate an intuitive and searchable geographically embedded naming structure.

In summary, whether it is the "hidden in plain sight" obscurity within a billion websites or having the internet's global reach supplanting the city's traditional proximity role, there are now two identified areas where the net is having unplanned impacts. If history is a guide, others will make themselves known with time.

Digital Housing for Homeless Cities

So where are *global cities* like New York, London, Paris, Mumbai or Tokyo to be found on the internet? With their resources scattered over the .com, .net, .biz, .info, .org, and 250+ other TLDs, and presented through the prism of legions of privately sponsored intermediary directories with varying in-built degrees of self-interest and bias – these most important of contemporary geo-physical structurings are nowhere to be found. Their people, ideas, cultures, and products are scattered everywhere via an electronic diaspora but the cities themselves are electronically invisible. Without an address, cities on the internet are homeless and, like a fog, everywhere present but lacking substance and form.

To make *global cities* "real" again in the electronic age, the first thing that's needed is a piece of electronic "land", with an address, that provides these cities with the same opportunity to occupy and be found in electronic space as they have in physical space. In internet terms this would be through the allocation to these cities of top level domains or TLDs. Think of it this way: once such a city has an address (a TLD) it can print stationary, send out invitations, and invite friends and family over for a festival.nyc. Once people come on over, they will see that it's a nice place to visit and soon they and their friends and neighbors will be settling. If established in an organized and intuitive way, in collaboration with local residents, government, and other organizations, and using web 2.0 features like community page ranking, neighbor will find neighbor and people from outside the region will readily find the city's resources.

While our argument so far might lead one to conclude that there is a significant advantage for global city-TLDs, let's review the experiences of other cities and public interest TLDs before presenting any conclusions.

Current “Cities” on the Internet

There are two locations where “cities” might now be said to officially exist on the internet: the “localities” areas outlined by the RFC 1480 standards document and in the experiences of Hong Kong and Singapore, city-like entities which have used two character country codes for nearly two decades.

The RFC 1480 guidelines were issued in 1993 by the IETF, a developer of the internet's standards, using the .us TLD to explain how other country code operators might provide electronic names/locations for cities. These guidelines suggested two ways cities might list their resources: using 4th and 5th level names under the city (3rd level); state (2nd level) and country (Top Level), e.g. Hilton.hotels.New-York-City.ny.us; or under a CI (city identifier), as in Tilden-High.schools.CI.New-York-City.ny.us. Not surprisingly, these have been rarely used as the invisibility and difficulty of remembering fourth and fifth level names made even barely memorable and pronounceable .com names more inviting.

Demonstrating an instance of 1480's failure and the Internet's fog is New York's city government: the office of the mayor found a home in the .gov TLD and the city council exists partially in .us and partially in .info TLDs. In this context, little use is made of either of the 1480 locations.

In the instance of Hong Kong (.hk) and Singapore (.sg), both have used the two character country codes issued to nation-states and other geographic entities since 1990 and 1988 respectively. Viewed by size, demographic makeup, and role, they closely resemble global cities like New York, Paris, London, and Mumbai. Both TLDs grew piecemeal from their early administrations under university technology departments and initially adopted what might be called the Modified American Model (MAM), using .com, .net, .org, .gov, and .edu as second level domains. So for example, a retail store would have to use www.store-name.com.sg, not www.store-name.sg.

Since Singapore began selling second level names to local individuals and companies in 2005, sales have been brisk (see chart below). However, legacy registrations from earlier distribution policies have resulted in Singapore's older and larger firms, e.g., Singapore Airlines, continuing to use global .com TLDs.

“The Second & Third Level Name Registrations in Singapore” chart presents Singapore's early experience with the MAM and the early results of its opening up the second level domain space. Note the changes that began in January 2005 when second level domains first became available: the total number of TLDs nearly doubled in the 28 months from the inception of the second level .sg registrations, with two thirds of the new registrations being second level names. This experience shows a high level of interest by local residents in the identity, clarity, and simplicity offered by good local domain names.

Benefits of GC-TLD

A Global City-TLD can provide many advantages to a city's residents. But one need only look at the operation of country codes like .TV (Tuvalu) and .LA (Laos) to see that the mere assignment of a TLD does not guarantee benefits to its presumed constituents. In both of these instances the TLDs commercialized home page provides barely a link to the designated countries. Below we examine the benefits that arise with the development of a

TLD planned in private-public collaboration, and controlled, and managed by a city's multiple stakeholders, a public interest GC-TLD.

Public Interest TLD Experiences

The *public interest* is central to policy debates, politics, democracy and the nature of government itself with a traditional meaning of "common well-being" or "general welfare." We examined the experiences of .org, one of the original global TLDs operated as a public interest TLD. Like most of the .orgs under its umbrella, the operator of .org, Public Interest Registry (PIR), is a registered nonprofit organisation working for positive change. PIR "uses its resources to expand Internet access around the world, particularly in developing areas, and to promote growth of the Internet and its capabilities".³⁹

But .org's operation is global and there appears to be little capacity to effectively coordinate its registrants. As a result, the .org TLD is plagued with the same set of problems: spam, phishing, internet fraud, and so on that face other global TLDs such as .com and .net. With a much more limited physical footprint and a significant opportunity for face to face interaction, and by including the (hoped for) cooperation with the city's existing institutions and licensing mechanisms, it is anticipated that these hazards can be moderated for a *public interest* GC-TLD.

Benefits of Public Interest Global City-TLD

While public interest TLDs can be developed to address a variety of issue areas or regional geographic entities, our focus here is on TLDs developed to serve the public interest of Global Cities. We focus on Global Cities, those with very large populations and many international links that have begun to experience the impact of substitution and electronic invisibility. This is not to say that smaller cities might not benefit from the use of TLDs, but for now, without evidence to the contrary, we will presume that, especially in small cities, the smaller the size the less the impact of the globalization effects of the internet identified above.

Properly planned and executed, many benefits will arise with the development of a public interest GC-TLD, for example:

- Good Domain Names - If issued equitably and at affordable rates, a public interest GC-TLD will facilitate the fundamental benefit that derives from a new TLD, that is, good names, those that are short, descriptive, and memorable.
- Equitable Distribution of Domain Names – A public interest GC-TLD can establish allocation policies that avoid pitfalls such as hoarding and typo-squatting. Policy decisions can be made on price and nexus requirements (a legal term indicating a required city connection such as a residency or operating a business), and can reserve domain names for unbiased public interest directories, government, civic, and issue usage.
- Affordable Domain Names – By eliminating the profit requirement, public interest GC-TLDs can keep prices low and set rates that maximize community benefit. It can provide affordable names for the young entering the business world, for the community and civic worlds, for recent immigrants, small businesses, and for use in the public realm. Where appropriate and feasible, a GC-TLD operated in the public interest can provide free names to individuals, organizations, start-ups, etc.
- Name Set-Asides - With an improved community a key part of its mission, a public interest GC-TLD can set aside second level names for neighborhoods or civic benefit activities and issues, e.g., "www.elections.nyc" or "www.sante.paris" Also, it can

³⁹ <http://www.pir.org/AboutPIR/AboutPIR.aspx>

experiment with allocation plans that facilitate shared name usage for civic, community, and issues such as developing a reusable public access name bank that facilitates a time-based allocation of names like “www.save-the-tree.nyc.”

- The New Proximity – While the internet excels by connecting on a global scale, a public interest GC-TLD can establish discussion, issue, geographic, and opportunity name spaces where residents can locate one another. Combining the internet’s global reach and local face-to-face contacts will optimize the exchange of ideas and revivify the traditional role of cities.
- Civic Tools for Collaboration – The New Proximity will be facilitated by making available public access civic tools such as calendars, maps, listserves, polling, and organizers. These may be adapted from those currently providing web widgets such as Google or custom developed if needed.
- More Secure Experience – With a focus on a limited and fixed geographic area, a nexus requirement for acquiring a city domain name (a demonstrated residency or business interest in the city), and working in close cooperation with the extant institutions, public interest GC-TLD operators can approximate the expectation and experience found with TLDs such as .gov and .edu.
- Unbiased Directories – A public interest TLD can create directories of selected second level domain names like www.hotels.nyc and www.schools.nyc, making city resources far more accessible. For example, a carefully designed and managed www.hotels.nyc directory would provide global access to a small directory page presenting the city’s hotels using alpha and geographic links to sites of the hotel’s choice. Or a directory might make a city’s schools accessible by organizing them by public vs. private, and primary, secondary, and university.
- Intuitive Design – A well planned and organized TLD will be intuitive and provide confidence that “guesses” will be effective. For example, today one might imagine success by directly entering www.ibm.com or www.coke.com into a browser’s address space. With a fresh GC-TLD name space residents might presume that the entry www.jacquescafe.paris would reach its target. Intuitive design will also play a role in encouraging directory searches of the likes of www.bookstores.london or www.restaurants.nyc.
- Search Engine Transparency – Whether one is searching for a hotel or issues surrounding a local election, the trustworthiness of the responses is vital. Developers of GC-TLDs will find advantage by presenting search engines with transparent heuristics.
- Identity – While any city-TLD will say for example, Made in Berlin or From Mumbai, a GC-TLD operated in the public interest will assure the long term preservation of the TLD as a symbol of a city’s character. And with public participation in its design and development, it will provide that point of civic pride around which a population will rally to protect its brand.
- Shrink Digital Divide – A public interest GC-TLD could (and should be expected to) commit a portion of funds received from name sales and other sources to facilitate the provision of civic collaboration tools, education, training and eradicating digital divides.

Additionally, the growing awareness and acceptance of global warming and the sustainability of cities vs. the suburban or rural lifestyles provides a further justification for arming cities with the most modern of technologies.

Finally, with the foundation of an effective public interest GC-TLD based in transparency, accountability, and public participation one might hope, and indeed expect, that an engaged public will transform the internet’s capabilities into city resources of types yet unimagined.

Conclusion

While the serendipitous and rapid development of the internet precluded most *global cities* from enjoying the first fruits of this technological wonder, no technical, legal, or other restraint precludes the current issuance of TLDs to these cities. Indeed, the ICANN, the Californian not-for-profit charged by the U.S. Department of Commerce with issuing additional TLDs, gained valuable experience through recently issued geo-TLDs - .eu and .asia – and is preparing a Request for Proposals for additional TLDs for expected release in late 2007. Parties from Berlin, New York, and Paris have stepped forward to indicate their intention of applying for city specific TLDs.

If global cities like Berlin, London, New York, Paris, Mumbai, or Tokyo are to create a space for civic organization and conversation, they require a TLD and a governance structure that encourages and enables public engagement in their deliberations and decision making.

Through using open and transparent governance processes that engage all stakeholders the equitable allocation of names can be achieved within the scope of meeting basic name space needs, resource organization, and presentation. Beyond the melioration of the global village impacts, a TLD can help global cities optimize local resources for coordinating global markets and in turn help cities to meet the needs of efficient and effective resource distribution and the needs of their populations in the coming years.

GeoTLDs: top level domains for cities and regions

Dirk Krischenowski & Johannes-Lenz Hawliczek

Domains provide permanent identity and identification on the Internet. Businesses, citizens, and administrations look for domain names that are easy to communicate as well as intuitively and semantically comprehensible because the Internet has become an essential communications channel for all of them.

Demand for domains grows with the number of users and the pervasiveness of the Internet, currently by more than 30 percent each year. The name space for the German community under the Top Level Domain (TLD) .DE reached a total of 11 million domains in 2007 and thus has become rather tight as each domain name can be assigned only once. The name space under .COM, by far the most crowded TLD with nearly 70 million registrations, offers global identity for hundreds of different languages and cultures.

At the same time, the increasing regionalisation, localisation and individualisation of the Internet has emerged as a global mega trend, creating a natural counterbalance to the global fantasies of the Internet's early days. Regional self-confidence and regional self-administration become increasingly important in developing countries and industrial nations alike. These trends are mirrored in economic, cultural and sociopolitical aspects and comprise many business models and value chains. Local search and location based services are good examples of the hyperlocal development.

These trends create a demand for local addresses in turn, i.e. local domains and name spaces. The extension of the name space and Domain Name System (DNS) is accordingly one of the great challenges that the responsible organisation, ICANN (Internet Corporation for Assigned Names and Numbers), is faced with.

Communities are the foundation of human identity

“Everybody wants to belong to a tribe” is one of the essential human paradigms. That tribe is a community, and it always indicates a group of people who develop joint will and knowledge, share experiences and have or create an individual identity. Communities thrive on the principle that participants contribute to their success by getting involved for a common cause.

At the same time, each person is, voluntarily or not, a member of many different communities. He or she is for instance a Londoner, English, European, party member, in a cricket club, dog owner, Audi driver or has a profile at Xing or MySpace. In many communities, people have to act with their real names, but humans also enjoy to disguise themselves and to obtain new identities. The Internet space offers many opportunities for that, and Internet users use them to be LonelyStar15 on YouTube or to communicate with mail@starlet.com, while being maria.doe@york.gov.uk in their job and having a family website at www.the-does.co.uk.

TLDs as attributes that generate identity contribute to the creation and development of a community and its members. When TLDs are brought to them in an intelligent way and are considered useful by them, they will integrate them in their daily lives. This may lead to an enhanced identity, self-esteem and corporate feeling, as it is the case with the Catalan TLD .CAT which was introduced in 2005.

Potential for communication and brand building

By being marketed globally TLDs can create a product with a clear brand. Slogans like New York's „Big Apple“, „I love NY“, and maybe soon „NYC“ demonstrate how brands help build a city's identity. The values attributed to a city from the outside world may include modern and traditional aspects at the same time: Sustainability, diversity, self-realisation, openness, potential and opportunities.

In the Information Age, the city is home to the so called creative class, whose creativity and innovative power are essential for economic prosperity. Planners, engineers, marketers, artists, in general people with ideas form this social class. For a city like Berlin which lost great parts of its former industrial base through the Second World War, the division during the Cold War and globalisation, they are critical for its survival. The norms of the creative class change society as a whole – with individuality and openness for diversity at the core instead of conformity and homogeneity.

Competition for the creative class is global. One old rule is obsolete: People used to come to the cities because the found work here. The creative class comes to cities because here they find cultural offerings, restaurants, clubs, a tolerant climate or bicycle paths. Studies have shown that cities with a well developed brand such as New York and Paris grow because of their diversity. Yet, such success is not planned but has grown organically. Successful cities have an interesting history that allowed change, progress and diversity. A good relationship between the citizens and their respective administration is also characteristic for successful city brands. This is helpful, considering the fact that each citizen is a walking advertisement for his or her city. The active presentation of its positive attributes strengthens a city brand. A TLD that is being used by a city's citizens and institutions in their everyday communication can aid significantly to this process.

GeoTLDs – The Next Big Thing?

A domain has an important role in the on- and offline communication of one's identity within a community. The choice for 6.5 billion people, more than 6.000 languages and cultures and numerous other communities on the Top-Level today is limited to about 250 country codes like .de and about 20 generic endings like .com, .info or .biz. Many communities don't find themselves represented adequately in the available Internet addresses and look for workarounds. In Germany, the word „berlin“ is being used in more than 100,000 Domains such as www.zoo-berlin.de to communicate the local association to the Berlin community; the city synonym „nyc“ can be found in almost 300,000 domains.

For instance, this demand for local addressing has led the German county of Rosenheim to an agreement with the country code TLD for Romania (.ro) in order to use this TLD for the Internet services of the public administration (www.stadt.ro – City of Rosenheim, population of 60,000). A similar usage can be seen for the endings .la (Lao People's Democratic Republic, used for Los Angeles, California), .by (Belarus, used as www.bayern.by by the Bavarian tourism agency) or .sh (Saint Helena, used for the German federal state Schleswig-Holstein).

Statistical data of the Internet Systems Consortium (ISC) shows that a city like Berlin accounts for more domain registrations than more than 150 countries that have their own

TLD. At the same time, neither Berlin nor any other metropolis or comparably sized regions and cultural communities (with the single exception of Catalonia) do have an own TLD as of today.

These numbers reveal why metropolises like Tokyo, New York or Berlin, but also urban agglomerations such as the German Ruhr region or the San Francisco Bay area, whose populations and economic power outperform many nation states, do have a need for their own Internet name space. With so called GeoTLDs, top level domains with a geographic or geopolitical string like .BERLIN, .BAVARIA or .GALICIA, the respective cities and regions can develop their own identity on the Internet, thus offering citizens, businesses and institutions new ways for evolvement.

ICANN is aware of these developments and expects community TLDs in general and those for cities, regions and cultural communities in particular, to play an important role among future applications for new TLDs. Today, there are already a number of initiatives for GeoTLDs: .BERLIN, .NYC, .PARIS, .SCO (Scotland), .CYM (Wales), .BZH (Bretagne), .GAL (Galicia), .EUS (Basque region), .LLI (León), .VLX (Flanders) or .LAC (Latin America).

The .berlin Initiative

.berlin is a bottom-up initiative of Berliners for their own TLD on the Internet, taking account of the interests of Berliners worldwide. The basis of the .berlin community is the people who identify themselves with the name Berlin. The community includes citizens, companies and organisations from Germany's capital city Berlin, other cities and villages with the name Berlin, people who were born in a Berlin or who work in a Berlin or its immediate vicinity. It also includes people with personal, social, cultural, economic or other relationships to a Berlin, as well as people with the surname Berlin. dotBERLIN GmbH & Co. KG (a Limited Liability Limited Partnership) has initiated this project and will apply for .berlin at ICANN in the name of this entire community.

dotBERLIN was founded in July 2005. Currently (Summer 2007) about 60 organisations and persons that represent the community of Berliners, e.g. chambers, guilds, city organisations, ICANN accredited Internet providers, tourism organisations, hotels associations, SMEs and citizens, are partners of dotBERLIN. dotBERLIN's advisory board has a consultative and supporting position for the approval activities and for the subsequent operation of the TLD .berlin. The advisory board also helps to anchor, in a socially responsible way, the TLD .berlin in the Berlin community made up of political, commercial, cultural, social and individual interests. It also advises dotBERLIN on the issuing of domains, taking account of the various interests fairly and transparently. The heterogeneous composition of the advisory board can make use of a variety of experience, knowledge and contacts.

The local addresses available with .berlin are concise and create an identity for citizens, companies and institutions. Those providing and looking for information, goods and services can thus intuitively come together. The .berlin domains strengthen the feeling of community amongst Berliners, improve communication and make interaction easier, thus providing a stimulus for innovation and development. Both for Berliners and for non-Berliners, places called Berlin become more attractive as a place to visit, as a commercial location and as a place to live.

Summary

The age of Web 2.0., Wikinomics and the Long Tail, with much internet content aimed at tiny, specific audiences, may have come, but basic values of society will prevail and may even gain new importance. The quest for individual namespaces is a good example of how the strength of communities might evolve in the Internet, For communities, TLDs are precious

instruments for the branding into the community itself as well as for external marketing and communication.

From 2008 onwards, there will be new TLDs continuously. We will have to learn to get used to this in our communication, as well as we got used to web sites, car brands or new yogurts, with the small difference that TLDs are basically conceived for eternity.

There is little doubt that this trend towards individual namespaces for communities will take hold. Opportunities outweigh potential risks and concerns. CityTLDs are being seen as a sensible extension of the Internet name space by ICANN itself. Whether and to what extent there will be a sustainable added value by the new TLDs for the communities themselves and for Internet users worldwide is up to the first candidates going online to proof.

TLDs or not TLDs for cities?

*Monika Ermert*⁴⁰

The campaign to win dedicated top-level domains (TLDs) for individual cities has been taken up across the globe. It is not without resistance: for instance, a fight has begun over the virtual existence of Germany's capital. Does a .berlin address space have a right to exist beside the old standby berlin.de? Johannes Lenz-Hawliczek argues in the following chapter that it does, but not everyone in the city agrees. The outcome of the fight could have a broader effect on the future of city names on the Internet.

Michael Donnermeyer, speaker of the Berlin Senate, has said that the right to the name Berlin belonged to the city and has to be protected. For the young company dotBerlin GmbH that is applying for a new city top level domain (TLD) with the Internet Corporation for Assigned Names and Numbers (ICANN), the Senate's blockade could kill a long-nurtured project and could set a bad example for other initiatives like .london, .paris or .nyc.

The core question to be answered is whether name and trademark rights block geographic TLDs. This had been a concern of experts discussing proposals for ICANN's planned procedure to introduce new.⁴¹

In summer 2005, dotBerlin took the stage to ask ICANN for a quick opening of a new round of TLD applications or a regular process for assigning new zones beside the classical .com, .net, .org, .info, .biz or the so-called country code TLDs like .de for Germany. With some of the attractive zones already heavily populated – .com has nearly 70 million domains, .de over 10 million – there was a perceived need to farm new virtual grounds. "Geo" TLDs are seen by many as a natural way to create spaces for large communities, especially with an average metropolis having a larger population than most countries.

Krischenowski's idea and his standing up at every single ICANN meeting since has finally got some traction. Thomas Lowenhaupt, interactive marketing consultant and long-time member of one of New York City's community boards agrees with Krischenowski on how indispensable a virtual home is for the modern city dwellers, with his arguments presented in the final chapter of this report.

Besides .berlin and .nyc, a project for .paris has been presented to ICANN, and an idea for a .baires (Buenos Aires) TLD also discussed. For the next round of TLD introductions starting in 2008, applications are expected from at least half a dozen city and regional TLDs, like .cym for Wales, .gal for Galicia and perhaps some language-based TLDs from tribal nations in Latin America could be expected, said Werner Staub, secretary of the Council of Registrars, a Geneva-based international association that expects to provide back-end registry services for the regional TLDs.

⁴⁰ An earlier version of this article appeared in Intellectual Property Watch at <http://www.ip-watch.org/weblog/index.php?p=672&res=1280>

⁴¹ 'Rights and Content Issues May Complicate Domain Name Extensions, Monika Ermert, Intellectual Property Watch, <http://www.ip-watch.org/weblog/index.php?p=575&res=1280>

Lowenhaupt has hoped for a .nyc domain years before after the Community Board of Queens passed a decision asking for .nyc in spring 2001. But after the September 11 attacks there were other things to deal with, and when ICANN started a new round to assign TLD space in 2003 the city was too busy with its application to host the Olympics to answer Lowenhaupt's recommendations, he said.

Lowenhaupt said it was always clear that city support was crucial for a potential manager for a .nyc zone. And according to him, there is some precedent in the United States in the cities' licensing of cablecasters and the latter's obligation to provide for community channels. As is done for community channels, there should be an agency or a non-for-profit entity that works in the interest of citizens, managing the public resource, Lowenhaupt argued.

Lowenhaupt, meanwhile, set up a non-profit corporation and said he is focussing on the best possible governance structure. The holding of elections by New York Citizens for the Board for the .nyc managing corporation is one of the possibilities being explored, said Lowenhaupt.

If he believes city support is vital, the Berlin campaigners may have to revise that view. Senate speaker Donnermeyer has given three reasons for the opposition. First, that they do not want to intervene in the market. A position on the board of dotBerlin offered "as a compensation to use the name" for the city government would mean they had not only to share responsibility for names like porno.berlin, but would participate in the selection of names like hotel.berlin or taxi.berlin.

Donnermeyer argues the state is obliged to neutrality. (The argument is reminiscent for those familiar with the just closed ICANN application round for sponsored TLDs where the controversial .xxx got voted down by the ICANN board partly for the reason that it was expected that ICANN would be dragged into responsibility for breach of content rules on the adult industry TLD.)

The second reason to deny support for .berlin is that the Senate did not expect the concept of city TLDs to have as much of a future as expected. There may be many cities where the concept does not work, they have argued, because of diverse spellings, like Roma, Rome or Rom or Munich's dilemma between international or national spelling, including: Munich, Muenchen or München. Thomas Lowenhaupt has dismissed this argument, saying it was for the people of Munich to simply choose a spelling for themselves.

Confusingly similar domain names?

The last reason given by Donnermeyer is about existing contracts and money and perhaps it is the most important reason for the Senate. Their berlin.de trademark has 27 million visitors every month. The city could be competing with our own portal if they supported .berlin. After years of work marketing berlin.de that also gave home to citizens and industry it would not make sense to change now, Donnermeyer has said.

In fact, it is not possible for business or citizens to get their own .berlin.de domain. So far they can only get basic services such as an email address for example. The 27 million number quoted by Donnermeyer were page impressions according to official statistics and while the site was much in use for e-government services of the city, .berlin might allow second-level domains for citizens and industry.

Campaigners have not given in, and dotBerlin now looks forward to a proposal, tabled at the city parliament, to support it after all. Germany's national parliament already passed a resolution that welcomes a possible .berlin TLD.

In the end it is ICANN that might receive an application and be left to decide if it will consider a letter by local administrations, national parliaments or a “community.” Whatever the benefits may be – and according to the following two contributions they could be substantial – ICANN may not want to proceed without official approval.

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