Editorial

Agency and Informatics

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This, the latest issue of the *Journal of Community Informatics*, brings a variety of research on underserved communities around the world. While this is not unusual, as the mandate of CI is precisely to work towards a better understanding of and greater opportunities for such communities, it is interesting that the particular assemblage of papers collected in this issue reflects the realities of our changing, unstable, shared community, i.e. our planet.

The importance of talking, as means and also as an end, is presented in [Wollersheim, Koh, Walker, and Liamputtong's](#) paper on unlimited phone service for refugee women in Melbourne, Australia. The simple act of talking with loved ones or friends, and the freedom that communication on one's own terms provide, serves to increase individual agency, critical

for people suffering dis-empowerment who have little if any support or trust available networks. Here, technology enhances life, but it is the action of providing technology that actually produces change, showing that democratizing access remains an issue requiring work. The same issue of agency but in a different context brings [Rose, Racadio, Martin, Girard, and Kolko](#)'s work on the usage of mass public transportation in Seattle, USA. Their analysis suggests that systems design can be strengthened by considering the needs arising from the lived experiences of the users, who constitute in many countries a group with lower incomes and lesser means than those not using public transportation. The categories of agency are not just positive ones, for example resourcefulness and reciprocity, but powerlessness is also considered. In many countries the Telecenter strategy has less relevance than some years ago, or even has been discontinued completely as technology became more readily accesible in many regions.

However there are still lessons to be learnt from the practice and experience of this specific development associated with CI from the earliest implementations. Under the title of Community Technology / Multimedia Centers, these common facilities are the focus of both [Jayakar and Grzeslo's](#) article and [Cumbula, Sabiescu and Cantoni's](#) case study. While the latter reports on a specific and successful south-north collaboration, the former is an assessment of income levels as a function of CTC usage. This connects easily with [Teeters'](#) case study on the application of ICTD tenets in the USA. Her work provides a model based on community health workers, or *promotoras*, that identifies the main aspects to take into account when designing such projects under the ICTD guise. Design is also the concern of [Thinyane's](#) paper on MobiSAM, a tool for participation in local governments in South Africa, with consideration of not only common factors like education and awareness-raising interventions but also external conditions sometimes left out of the equation such as political stability and communication capacity.

Three papers confront three very different issues important to those working in the field or doing research with communities, from quite different angles. [Johnson and Sieber](#) approach mapping, a process that has become common thanks to the mass availability of commercial applications on both computers and smartphones, recognizing at the same time how mapping is often under the control of the corporations running the show with these technologies. The GeoWeb, as a specific implementation of geospatial data tools with the potential to allow development of local applications of many kinds, is presented through two projects in Quebec, Canada, that showcase its potential and the best practices for using such tools successfully.

One promise of technology, of informatics, is to allow people to express themselves. Digital storytelling is a significant field of inquiry in the digital media curriculum, and [Lorini, Sabiescu and Memarovic's](#) paper offers an approach for how to use it to enhance participation in co-design initiatives, with local underserved communities.

An issue present since the earliest implementations of digital systems is how written text is represented differently from traditional standards as taught in schools, and as considered "proper" writing. Non-Standard typography demands learning but it is also a new resource, as contended by [Zelenkauskaite and Gonzales](#), signaling "the knowledge of discourse norms ascribed to texting in a community."

Last but not least: thematically an outlier, the final article of this issue offers a view of the Journal itself: a bibliometrics and altimetric study of 12 years of dissemination of knowledge on communities and informatics. [Naudea and van Biljon's](#) contribution allows us, as the editorial team of JoCI, to ponder our performance. For the reader at large, it offers an approach to understanding the impact of JoCI that may not replace some of the popular indexes that academia is demanding more often and more forcefully all over the world, but that at least provides a picture of the way the Journal is being read and used by the CI community. I do expect it to be illustrative and suggestive.

The articles in this issue all reflect on the issue of agency, both individual and collective, which is also a question still in need of debate not only for CI purposes but

also for the larger discussion on "development." Who is the subject of development? If individuals, who benefits from investing in social resources? If discussing the collective, where does the individual belong, if not under the bulk of generalizations brought by sophisticated but reductive indicators and indexes? A matter not to be ignored, and a challenge for further discussion in this Journal.

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This new volume of the Journal completes a transition started about a year ago. A new editorial team, together with a single editorial board, share the mission of continuing the work started by Michael Gurstein now our Editor Emeritus. While Michael will continue to be involved in the field sharing his ideas through this medium, the managing of the Journal is now in the combined hands of the new editorial team.

We expect to continue strengthening the end-product, at all levels, while making the processes of submission and review as efficient as possible. One of our goals is to guarantee regularity and increase response time for reviewing, something that may be more complicated than it sounds. JoCI, of course, will continue to be an open, free journal, something achieved through your participation and commitment to share and disseminate the work of our contributors.

We will also continue to combine regular issues, like this one, with special issues dedicated to emerging or critical themes related to the Community Informatics field, from the widest possible interpretation of the concept. This means that we will continue seeking partnerships with interested parties to define new special issues. If you, as a reader, think that this Journal is potentially an interesting partner for your subject, please contact us.