Defining Information Policy in the Canadian Context

Martin Dowding,
Faculty of Information Studies,
University of Toronto
dowding@fis.utoronto.ca

Kirsti Nilsen,
Faculty of Information and Media Studies,
University of Western Ontario

Over the last decade or so we have witnessed in Canada, as elsewhere, a growing wave of policy developments and discussions in response to new information and communication technologies. It has been noted that such information policy discourse suffers from a lack of clear consensus on what constitutes its true boundaries. This paper proposes to map the boundaries of Information Policy in the Canadian context in order to develop a prescriptive model which can be used in future policy studies. Our definition of information policy is based on an examination of the literature and of the organizational structures that help to create it. Access is assumed to be a fundamental underlying tenet of information policy. An examination of The Canadian Information Policy Bibliography leads to identification of various previously disparate policy areas which are converging and merging. Research, analysis, and commentary in various policy areas were examined in order to determine the extent to which Canadian policy researchers and practitioners are focusing on technology applications and impacts. The extent to which traditional Canadian values are subsumed in policy work by researchers and practitioners is considered. A historical culture/technology duality in Canada is identified which underlies policy developments in Canada. We identify what should be meant by "information" in the term "information policy." This descriptive analysis provides the basis for a prescriptive typology which we argue will provide a workable definition of Information Policy in the Canadian context. Based on policy studies literature, we propose various approaches that can be used to further Canadian policy development and research in this area.

Introduction

In recent years information policy has become the focus of a good deal of attention from a number of different directions. Governments at various levels have formulated and implemented policies which address information issues, stakeholders have participated in the policy process in order to protect their interests, interest groups have sought to infuse various public concerns into policy formulation, academics have described, analyzed, and theorized about the policy process and policy outcomes, and the media have raised questions. Despite the variety of players, or perhaps because of it, there has been little attempt to define the term "information policy" or to identify its boundaries (Browne 1997). What exactly do we mean when we speak of information policy? What is and what is not included? This paper addresses these questions and proposes a definition which is specific to the Canadian context, though it may apply to other countries as well. We begin with the assumption that information policy is public policy and should ultimately include access to information as a fundamental underlying tenet.

In Canada, as elsewhere, there has been a disparate, inchoate policy process for ensuring and improving access to information, particularly in relation to new information technologies. Establishing policy in the present electronic environment is not dissimilar from the policy processes of the early days of Canadian telephony and broadcasting (Dorland 1996). Today the policy process is simply more complex because technology convergence means that the number of stakeholders is vast, the external international pressures inexorable, and the speed of change allow us little time for reflection. Establishing definitions of information policy and appropriate policy responses will help us understand the implications of technological convergence, and the consequent social effects. Such understanding can inform the policy process.

In Canada, information policy and the way it addresses access is especially problematic because, when we speak of "access," we so often ask about more than the technical means for connecting to information (where's the wire?). But we also ask about what it is we are connected to (or, where's the culture?) (Dorland 1996). That dichotomous problematic has become more troubling in Canada

during the past decade or so, partly because of new federal governance structures that favour, for example, pragmatic technical interests over cultural ones, but also because the threat of economic globalization means that social issues appear to be taking a back seat. A compounding factor is our inability to agree upon a theoretical framework in information policy (Browne 1997; Kajberg and Kristiansson 1996). What we are faced with currently is an uncoordinated, kaleidoscopic response to many aspects in the information transfer continuum.

We hope to help remedy the technological/culture dichotomy in Canada, at least, by identifying useful typologies of information policies, and by looking for policy possibilities that are emerging by virtue of technological convergence and cultural contributions and responses to them. Recent Canadian LIS and Information Technology policy literature shows that technological change is transforming policy. As information transfer is becoming concentrated or centralized on the Information Highway, so too is the focus of the policy being created to analyze and direct it.

In order to determine how information policy in Canada is changing we should: (1) discover who has had what role in influencing policy development; (2) determine who have been the stakeholders; (3) establish the role of the state, the market, and information users in cultural and technology policy; (4) determine how, in the increasingly competitive, technologically driven deregulated market we can be certain that both sides of the Canadian access problematic (the culture/connection duality) are satisfied. To begin do this we have used the typology structure of The Canadian Information Policy Bibliography (CIPB) (1997) (see Figure 1) developed by Kirsti Nilsen for the Information Policy Research Project (IPRP) at the University of Toronto.[1] We have also relied on a number of recent international definitions and theoretical analyses about information and policy derived from the LIS and Policy Studies literatures.

In two recent articles Mairead Browne (1997a; 1997b) provides an overview of the disparate definitions of information, policy, and information policy in the information studies literature. She forcefully points to the normative, legitimizing value of adopting in LIS

the theoretical principles located in the literature of Policy Studies. Browne's (1997) observations on the purpose and current development of information policy make it clear that, like the information highway itself, information policy is at an early stage of development; information policy, as a sub-discipline in Policy Studies, needs to develop fundamental methodologies for creating and analysing policy. According to Browne this will come about through adopting long-standing processes already in use in other areas of policy. The process includes adopting both paradigm and value-critical approaches, as Rowlands (1996) and Browne, (1997b) suggest, or, in other words, using a dualistic analytical procedure based on structural (paradigmatic) and cultural (value critical) analyses, well suited for analysing the Canadian culture/connection duality.

Browne concludes, citing Braman (1989), that there is a hierarchical set of definitions in information policy regarding information itself: (1) information is a resource; (2) information is a commodity; (3) information is a perception; (4) information is a constitutive force in society.

The most obvious force that information constitutes is change, the highest, most complex point in the Browne/Braman hierarchy and the most fitting for the Canadian technological/cultural dichotomy. Consider the telephone as an instrument of cultural change and how it has transformed our social, employment, and technical situation. Consider also the Information Highway which, for its effect on technical and social convergence, is changing the way we value, obtain, interpret, and use information; the Information Highway is, in fact, becoming the spring-board for a compelling new convergence or concentration of themes in information policy-making. Current trends in information transfer are changing the method and the direction of information policy development so much that Browne (1997a) was also compelled to ask "What is Policy?" She concludes that (1) policy is a theory, or model; (2) policy is an expression of general purpose; (3) policy is a field of study; (4) policy is the decisions of government; (5) policy is specific proposals; (6) policy is a process. While those are not profound or ground-breaking observations, and reflect a variety of long-standing reasons for undertaking and analysing public decision-making, they usefully, and naturally

lead to Browne's ultimate concern about policy in LIS. Her question: "What is Information Policy?" Research conducted for the CIPB shows that there have been very different information policy areas in Canada, but that that is also changing. As the convergence of technologies brings together formerly disparate concerns and voices, new merged policy issues are also arising.

Figure 1. Typology of Canadian Information Policy

Access/Universal Access
Broadcasting Policy
Censorship/Intellectual Freedom
Communications Policy
Community Networking
Content/Cultural Policy
Copyright
Education/Training Policy
Government Information Policy
Information Highway Policy
National Information Policy
Organization Level Information Policy
Policy Process
Policy Theory
Privacy Policy
Telecommunications Policy
Workplace Information Policy

A glance at the typology shows that it is composed of formerly disparate policy areas which we contend are interacting and merging because of the imperatives of electronic technology and the impact of the Information Highway paradigm. Thus all of these policy areas can now be identified as "Information Policy." We contend that for policy studies to advance in all of these areas, we need to accept this broader definition of information policy.

Browne would agree that a broader definition is inevitable. If proponents of the various policy areas outlined in the typology disagree, they need but consider the problems associated with a scattered policy model are addressed well by well-established policy scholars such as Lindblom (1990) and Charles Anderson (1978). These scholars note that the most effective public policy requires holistic, socially responsible citizen participation and an "obligatory" (Charles Anderson 1978, 711) combination of political and moral principles. The foundation for such all-inclusive information policy-making and analysis in Canada

already exists, but needs to be more fully developed and adopted. Clement and Shade's (1997, 7-9) "Access Rainbow," for example, potentially addresses both sides of the culture/technology dichotomy and the other complexities in the Nilsen CIPB policy typology; as does James Anderson's (1983) five-part analytical policy model[2]; and narrative analysis (Kaplan 1993; Roe 1994) a less complex, but elegant supplemental method for testing completeness[3].

The fundamental underlying assumption that information policy is (or should incorporate) access policy is the primary rationale for our research into how information is defined, organized, described, and transferred in Canada. Without ensuring the means for unfettered access to and comprehension of information, public policy decisions will be necessarily incomplete and unrepresentative of all interested stakeholders.

We are concerned here with more than simply connecting technologically the "have nots" as well as the "haves." The problems associated with access to information are more pressing than the so-called "technology gap." Technology is merely the latest means whereby inequality might be resolved, if the right technical and social/cultural decisions are made; but inequality will certainly be perpetuated if a socially holistic response is not forthcoming. While there is a need for political will and technical expertise, there is also a need for moral and cultural comprehension and evaluation of the effects of technology through adequate policy responses.

The Typology

The CIPB typology shown in Figure 1 is an initial proposal of the areas that need to be encompassed in any information policy definition. In creating the subject/typology structure we assume three primary stakeholder perspectives: (1) Government; (2) For profit (market); (3) Not-for-profit (organizations and interest groups, including individual interests).

We seek to establish a policy typology based on the "levels" or degrees of integration and holism present in the policies, ranging from technical/econometrically determined policies (e.g., network connection policy — without cultural implications — to policies

that fully recognize the importance of the public interest and the effects of technology on one's ability to realize social, economic, intellectual, and citizenship (or, culturally holistic) aspirations and responsibilities. The CIPB typology helps point to the fact that "access" has not been uniformly defined in Canadian information policy, and that a fundamental dichotomy exists between policies that recognize the significant role of culture in policy-making and those that do not.

Observations on the Typology (Pt. I)

The broadest, most profitable solutions derive from the policies that recognize the dichotomous reality of Canadian society: on the one hand, some policies have recognized a historically traditional, legislatively based cultural universalism for ensuring access to health, education, broadcasting, telecommunications, and communication (Buchwald, 1996); on the other hand, especially more recently as international economic agreements are signed, there has been a belief that there is a much greater role for a less regulated, technologically driven market to perpetuate access to information, especially on the Information Highway.

Despite recommendations for a means for ensuring technical and cultural access from federally supported groups (IHAC 1995 and 1997), in interest group reports (Clement and Shade 1997) and promises from the government itself (Industry Canada 1996, 24), a National Access Strategy is not at present forthcoming.

Observations on the Typology (Pt. II)

A close examination of the entries in the various sections of The Canadian Information Policy Bibliography reveals changing policy directions in every policy area. In can be seen that electronic technologies are increasingly directing policy concerns. The more recent research, analysis, and commentary listed in the CIPB addresses issues raised by the availability of the electronic technologies. Issues which were the focus of attention in previous decades are either no longer discussed or are subsumed within discussions of the possibilities for and effects of access to electronic information and technol-

ogy convergence. The attempt to clearly delineate the "subject headings" of various entries became increasingly problematic with items produced after 1992. This difficulty is evidence of the merging of these areas and supports our contention that Information Policy must be defined to include all of the areas in the proposed typology.

Solutions

What, then, are the missing, and/or un-coordinated elements in the process? What procedures and intentions are not represented in current Canadian information policy development? And how can we develop procedures that will serve to evaluate and create appropriate policy in the future?

Policies designed to address inequality of access to information — like all policy dedicated to resolving inequality — recognize that while there is an "information society" that might be and is, there is also one that ought to be, or could be, given the right conditions and the appropriate adjustments. In order to determine the potential effects of these policies, or what they propose and how their purpose might be realized, it is essential to test them with a broad analytical process such as the one described by policy scholar Charles Anderson (1979, 711) who says that in order to make a policy decision there must be a "standard" of some sort. Anderson also says he hopes to stay "safely within the positivist and pragmatic tradition" (1979, 713) of policy science but concedes that what he calls obligatory socially based criteria of "authority, the public interest, rights, justice, equality, and efficiency" can be addressed in a variety of ways:

> The significant issue is how we should proceed when we are aware that public issues can be perceived and appraised through multiple frameworks of evaluation. (714)

And while he says that such "public issues can be perceived and appraised" in more than one way, we would argue that they must be, and that the culture/technology dichotomy must be considered. Recent policy in Canada inspired by the Information Highway suggests that "multiple frameworks" in the information policy kaleidoscope are being viewed through a more focused lens than previously, when technology was different and required different poli-

cies. Ironically, the technology may allow us — even if unintentionally — to satisfy Anderson's "obligatory" concerns about rights, equity, and justice, as well as our dichotomous problem of culture and technology. Our point, then, is that considering the multiplicity of stakeholders, their points of view, and their varied needs, the policy problems outlined above demand that we satisfy the full range of enquiry, as LIS policy scholars such as Kristiansson (1996) and Browne (1997) suggest.

When adopted alone, some positivist and rationalist policies will lead to no more than a deterministic solution to questions of efficiency. That is not to deny, however, that some form of equity may at least be intended in a policy based on economic efficiency. But if, as Deborah Stone (1988) so forcefully argues, efficiency can easily be challenged by more complex questions of justice, then other policy "standards" will have to be employed.

Alternative Standards

According to Kaplan, alternatives to positivism such as hermeneutics can provide a "device for correcting and perfecting findings over time" (1993, 171). The interpretive device he prefers is Aristotle's three-part narrative structure which, in order to be feasible at all, must have a cohesive plot composed of a beginning, a middle, and an end.[4]

Questions of equity, especially when considered under the rubric of justice (suited to explaining "why" we ought to do something), are more likely to require a process of argued deliberation than a strictly rationalist-efficiency model can provide; beyond relatively immutable solutions to budgetary problems of efficient distribution stands the more complex issue of fairness. Because of ideological reasons, for example when power changes hands, those groups which appear to be (or actually are) treated fairly can change greatly. In fact, the very nature of "fairness" can change.

We have here, then, three potential standards for analysing and making policy: instrumental (possibly positivist, but definitely rational choice, and based on empirical modelling), narrative (completeness of "plot"), and moral-philosophical (principles of distributive jus-

tice). We suggest that all three "tests" are required to determine, first, what kinds of policies are merging or are incorporated into Canadian information policy (a typology of policy) and, second, which principles and potential means of operation underlie their arguments.

It is our purpose to show that in order to benefit fully and equitably from the emerging "information society" it will be necessary for a variety of stakeholders[5] to employ a broad combination of policy methods to identify, define, and attempt to resolve the problems of distributive justice associated with technological change. In keeping with Goodin's view that "to be effective, the practice of policy science requires (intellectually, and ultimately politically as well) the joint practice of the political and moral sciences," (1988, 63) we should consider how or whether current and future policy might promote efficiency in the rationalist or positivist sense, how policies tell their "stories," and how or whether they promote the moral concepts of liberty, equity, and, justice, which are surely more obviously embedded in cultural narratives than technologically oriented ones.

Why Policy Analysis/Development is Needed

We need to prepare viable solutions to problems caused by the interplay among technological, organizational, and social change. It must be done, now that the Canadian federal government has reneged on its promise to create a National Access Strategy by the end of 1997, made in its Information Highway policy document *Building the Information Society* (1996, 24). If a Federal policy initiative were undertaken to develop and sustain a strategy in the same fashion that, say, the IHAC reports were prepared (with viewpoints from all elements of the cultural/technological spectrum)[6] there would be more opportunity to contribute to, interpret, analyze the outcome, and effect change in future policy considerations.

Central Research Problems

We propose that the culture/technology dichotomy and kaleidoscopic (disparate) information policy problems in Canada can be addressed by considering the ideas of those policy scholars cited above.

and also by adapting a research method based on Archer (1996) and Sabatier (1993), who address the relationship between institutions and ideation (culture) by considering the deeper implications of belief systems. Archer's notion of analytical dualism suggests that ideation (culture) and institutions (in this instance the "institution" of technology) and their relationship to change be studied separately then ultimately together in order to acknowledge their symbiotic relationship. Archer's dualism is a productive way to interpret the similarities and differences between the two sides of the Canadian policy dichotomy — the technical (connectivity) and cultural (content).

Belief systems are characterized by how they represent their intentions about varying degrees of justice and values (or, in other words, cultural considerations). These intentions can be evaluated by determining the kind of "justice" (Rawls 1971; Nozick 1974; Anderson 1979; Stone 1988) inherent in the policies and by developing ways to question the cultural absences or lacunae in primarily technologically oriented policy.

We will be able to ask how the Canadian technical and cultural policy discourse about information access has been manifested. We will be able to enquire how the discourse has changed because of technological, cultural, and trade policies. We will have the theoretical means to seek out a unifying or contradictory cultural foundation in any policy.

These central policy problems can be addressed by taking into account the ways the various decision-making agencies and actors in the CIPB have adjusted or created their policy to respond to new economic and cultural opportunities and constraints being imposed by the imperative of technical solutions to access. A particular problem is the Federal government's abrogation of its responsibility to respond to the culture/technology dichotomy.

Increasingly, the social science literature is concerned with "two important elements in the social dynamic," namely the "structural (or institutional) and the ideational (or cultural)" (O'Reilly 1996, 3; Archer 1996). Recognizing that structure and ideation are analyti-

cally distinct will help distinguish technical questions from cultural questions; although "culture" of some nature will become manifest in both instances. As governments reduce their governance responsibilities through divestment and subsidiarity[7] procedures, we will need to develop new and adaptable policy decision-making processes. As technological systems and cultural relationships continue to change, so too will continue the need for vigilant policy analysis and policy-making.

Pursuing the Problem: A Policy Future

We propose conducting a qualitative cross-case study[8] of the relationship between technically based policy (current federal and industry policies) and holistic, culturally based information policy (produced by interest groups, some professional organizations, and possibly Heritage Canada). This will require three levels of enquiry (Sabatier 1993), including the analysis of policies, interviews with the authors of technologically based and culturally based policy-makers, and critical analyses of works on the subject by other scholars. This will illuminate the first potential identification of formal influences in the technologically inspired policy and culturally motivated policy. Organizational analysis will also provide the necessary evidence needed to complete Archer's three-part "morphogenesis" (Archer 1996) process in which separate structural (primarily organizational, rule-bound, and we suggest "technologically bound") and cultural (primarily culturally, ideationally-determined) analyses (Archer's first step) are combined to establish interaction/reciprocity (Archer's second step) and are observed for "structural elaboration," or change (Archer's third step).

The initial organizational relationships, or "patterns" will help lead to inductive phenomenological conclusions about Canadian information policy boundaries and hierarchies and will help determine who is responsible for decision-making and who, outside formal bureaucratic organizational structures, has "coalesced" with whom and to what end. A cultural/technological dialectic offers the most hope for an information policy that is inclusive technologically and culturally. Such a dialectic will also help determine whether, even within current national decision-making processes, a place can be found for a broader, holistic policy-making.

Endnotes

1. Similar typological structures have been developed by Hill (1994); Chartrand (1986); and Milevski (1986).

2. Anderson's model (1983, 19) is as follows: (1) Problem identification and agenda formulation; (2) Policy Formulation; (3) Policy Adoption; (4) Policy Implementation; (5) Policy Evaluation.

3. Based on Aristotle's requirement that a plot have a cohesive "beginning, middle, and end," Kaplan's narrative analysis provides a supplemental (or alternative) method to James Anderson's model.

4. As noted above, models such as James Anderson's 5-part analytical structure can also assist in judging the "completeness" of a policy procedure.

5. For example, the broad spectrum of government, academic, information industry, and interest groups who attended the University of Toronto Faculty of Information Studies Universal Access Workshops (1996-97).

6. Although there are disagreements about whether the IHAC process adequately addressed the cultural spectrum.

7. For the Canadian experience see Doern (1996) and Paquet and Sheperd (1996).

8. The validity, purpose, and advisability of which are described Ragin (1992), Creswell (1994), and Miles and Huberman (1994).

References

Anderson, C.W. 1979. "The place of principle in policy analysis." *American Political Science Review*. 73: 711-23.

Anderson, James. 1983. *Public Policy-Making*, 3rd. ed. New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston.

Archer, Margaret. 1996. *Culture and Agency: The Place of Culture in Social Theory*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Braman, S. 1989. "Defining information: An approach for policymakers." *Telecommunications Policy* 13, (3): 233-242.

Browne, Mairead. 1997a. "The field of information policy: 1. Fundamental concepts." *Journal of Information Studies* 23, (4): 261-275.

Browne, Mairead. 1997b. "The field of information policy: 2. Redefining the boundaries and methodologies." *Journal of Information Studies* 23, (5): 339-351.

Buchwald, C. 1997. "Canadian universality policy and the information infrastructure." *Canadian Journal of Communication* 22: 161-93.

Building the Information Society: Moving Canada into the 21st Century. 1996. Ottawa: Ministry of Supply and Services.

Chartrand, R.L. 1986. "Legislating information policy." In *Bulletin of the American Society for Information Science* 12, (5): 10.

Clement, Andrew, and Leslie Regan Shade. 1997. *What Do We Mean By "Universal Access"?: Social Perspectives in a Canadian Context.* Working Paper no.7, Information Policy Research Program. Toronto: Faculty of Information Studies, University of Toronto.

Creswell, John. 1994. *Research Design: Qualitative and Quantitative Approaches.* Thousand Oaks: Sage.

Doern, G. Bruce. 1997. "Looking for the core: Industry canada and program review." In *How Ottawa Spends 1996-97*: 73-97.

Dorland, Michael, ed. 1996. *The Cultural Industries in Canada: Problems, Policies, and Prospects.* Toronto: Lorimer Press.

Goodin, R.E. 1988. "Political theory as policy analysis — And vice versa." In *Handbook of Political Theory and Policy Science*, Edwin Bryan Portis and Michael B. Levy, eds. New York: Greenwood Press: 17-27.

Hill, Michael. 1994. *National Information Policies and Strategies: An Overview and Bibliographic Survey.* London: Bowker Saur.

Information Highway Advisory Council (IHAC). 1997. *Preparing Canada for a Digital World.* Ottawa: Industry Canada.

Information Highway Advisory Council (IHAC). 1995. *Connection, Community, Content.* Ottawa: Industry Canada.

Kajberg, Leif, and Michael Kristiansson. 1996."An overview of the field of information policy." *International Forum on Information and Documentation* 21, (1) (January): 5-10.

Kaplan, T.J. 1993. "Reading policy narratives: Beginnings, middles, and ends." In *The Argumentative Turn in Policy Analysis and Planning*, Frank Fischer and John Forester, eds. London: Duke University Press/UCL.

Lindblom, C.E. 1990. *Inquiry and Change: The Troubled Attempt to Understand and Shape Society.* New Haven: Yale University Press.

Miles, Matthew, and Michael Huberman. 1994. *Qualitative Data Analysis*, 2nd. ed. Thousand Oaks: Sage.

Milevski, S. 1986. "Information policy through public laws of the 95th-98th Congresses." In *Proceedings of the ASIS Annual Meeting*, 23: 211-19.

Nilsen, Kirsti. 1997. *The Canadian Information Policy Bibliography.* Toronto: Faculty of Information Studies, University of Toronto Information Policy Research Program, Working Paper no. 7.

Nozick, R. 1974. *Anarchy, State, and Utopia.* Boston: Basic Books.

O'Reilly, Patricia. 1996. "'For a word on a page': Ontario's health practitioners." PhD Dissertation, Department of Political Science, University of Toronto.

Paquet, Gilles, and Robert Sheperd. 1997. "The program review process: A deconstruction." In *How Ottawa Spends 1996-97: Life Under the Knife*, Gene Swimmer, ed. Ottawa: Carleton University Press.

Ragin, Charles. 1992. "'Casing' and the process of social inquiry." In *What is a Case?*, Charles Ragin and Howard Becker, eds. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Rawls, John. 1971. *A Theory of Justice.* Cambridge: Belknap Press.

Roe, Emery. 1994. *Narrative Policy Analysis*. London: Duke University Press.

Rowlands, I. 1996. "Understanding information policy: Concepts, frameworks, and research tools." *Journal of Information Science* 22, (1): 13-25.

Sabatier, P. A. and H.C. Jenkins-Smith. 1993. *Policy Change and Learning: Advocacy Coalition Approach*. Boulder: Westview Press.

Stone, Deborah. 1988. *Policy Paradox and Political Reason*. Glenview: Scott Foresman.