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Community informatics

Harris, Roger; Davison, Robert; de Vreede, Gert-Jan; Vogel, Doug; Gurstein, Michael

Published in:

Proceedings of the 34th Annual Hawaii International Conference on System Sciences

Published: 01/01/2001

Document Version:

Post-print, also known as Accepted Author Manuscript, Peer-reviewed or Author Final version

Publication record in CityU Scholars:

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Published version (DOI):

[10.1109/HICSS.2001.927114](https://doi.org/10.1109/HICSS.2001.927114)

Publication details:

Harris, R., Davison, R., de Vreede, G-J., Vogel, D., & Gurstein, M. (2001). Community informatics. In *Proceedings of the 34th Annual Hawaii International Conference on System Sciences* (Annual Hawaii International Conference on System Sciences (HICSS)). IEEE. <https://doi.org/10.1109/HICSS.2001.927114>

Citing this paper

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Community Informatics

Roger Harris
Faculty of Information Technology
Universiti Malaysia Sarawak
roger@fit.unimas.my

Gert-Jan de Vreede
Faculty of Technology, Policy and
Management
Delft University of Technology
gertjanv@sepa.tudelft.nl

Michael Gurstein
Technical University of British Columbia
gurstein@techbc.ca

Robert Davison
Dept of Information Systems
City University of Hong Kong
isrobert@cityu.edu.hk

Doug Vogel
Department of Information Systems
City University of Hong Kong
isdoug@cityu.edu.hk

"Community Informatics" (CI) is the study of the application of Information and Communications Technologies (ICT) to the social, economic, political or cultural goals of communities. Much of the research and development work in the area of Information Systems and Technology has been concerned with pushing the frontiers of hardware or software - to make it faster, smaller, cheaper and more functional. There remain a wide variety of applications and application areas that are not accommodated within this schema. Indeed, there are also many people for whom "access" to such applications may be unavailable for any of a variety of reasons, such as cost, infrastructure, literacy, and attitudes, among others. CI takes into account the design of the social system within which the technology resides, as well as the technology system with which the social system interacts.

Community Informatics (CI) as an approach begins with the perspective ICT can provide a set of resources and tools that individuals and communities can use, initially to provide "access" to information management and processing and thus with "access", to pursue their goals in such areas as local economic development, cultural affairs, civic activism, and community based health and environmental initiatives. Thus, a CI approach is concerned with both the technology and the "user" (and the "uses"); and with community processes, user access and technology usability as well as systems analysis and hardware or software design. In many respects CI is an extension of the "socio-technical" approach to systems design but shifting attention from the "organization" to the "community", and thus reflecting the increasingly widespread distribution of ICT access (PC's and

Internet) and their use from organizations to individual end users and communities.

The papers in this mini-track examine various aspects of Community Informatics as can be seen from the titles and authors:

Virtual Community Knowledge Evolution by Michael Bieber, Douglas Engelbart, Richard Furuta, Starr Roxanne Hiltz, John Noll, Jennifer Preece, Edward Stohr, Murray Turoff, and Bartel Van De Walle

A 'Community Informatics' Approach to Health Care for Rural Africa by Michael Gurstein

Community Informatics: Hope or Hype? by Bill Pitkin

The Role Of Local Government In Community Informatics Success Prospects: The Autonomy/Harmony Model by Celia T. Romm and Wal Taylor

We are pleased to see the variety of focus and encourage your thoughtful consideration.