

Editorial for the Special Section on Indigenous Use of Information and Communication Technologies:

Information Systems and the Practice of Indigenous Self-determination

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Self-determination is a social, political and cultural right that belongs equally to all peoples. The three articles in this special section show how Information Systems' practice may limit this right on the one hand, or make significant contributions to its development, on the other. The ways in which information is collected and curated to diminish the stories that people wish to tell about themselves, or to create opportunities, is the articles' common theme. They consider self-determination beyond its more usual study as a body of legal and political rights to show its deep cultural significance and to draw out Information Systems' research and practice as inevitably cultural activities.

A people's capacity to tell its own stories, for its own purposes, and to choose how these stories are presented beyond its own citizenry is an expression of the right to self-determination. It has methodological and ethical implications for how research is done, by whom, for whom and for whose purposes. The special section addresses each of these questions in specific context while, *inter alia*, contributing to the broader scholarship of self-determination.

In the first article of the special section Thorpe, Christen, Booker, and Galassi argue that museum, library and archival collections have contributed to the colonial narrative through practices that demean Indigenous people and cultures in the telling of their stories, in the ways that their sacred artefacts are stored and displayed, and in the ways that they address the repatriation of these artefacts. In many cases questions of repatriation concern human body parts collected, in contravention of Indigenous cultural norms, and as objects of scientific curiosity. Thorpe et al.'s underlying question is, then, how do colonial archives repay the colonial debt?

They argue for the 'reshaping' and 'rebuilding' of archival management systems, data governance and preservation so that Indigenous priorities are central to their work. They show that collection management is not a culturally neutral process and argue that concepts of sovereignty (which may be understood as similar to the rights and capacities of self-determination) are underdiscussed in the context of library and archive management. They make a case for alternative collection management practices.

The article draws on and develops papers that each of the authors presented to the International Conference on Archives in 2019. They discuss a collaboration between the Waramungu nation in northern Australia and the Centre for Digital Scholarship and Curation at Washington State University as an example of a project that supports the Indigenous nation's expectations of why items should be collected and how and for which purposes they should be curated.

While Thorpe et al.'s article is the only one of the three to make an explicit connection between their arguments and the United Nations' Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, their discussion illuminates self-determination as a common theme. This thematic commonality shows how the articles may be located within a broader Indigenous data sovereignty scholarship (discussed below), to show that they have a theoretical and empirical relevance beyond their immediate subjects.

The Declaration (UN, 2007) provides that: 'Indigenous peoples have the right to practice and revitalize their cultural traditions and customs. This includes the right to maintain, protect and develop the past, present and future manifestations of their cultures, such as archaeological and historical sites, artefacts, designs, ceremonies, technologies and visual and performing arts and literature' (article 11 (1)). It also affirms that 'Indigenous peoples have... the right to the use and control of their ceremonial objects; and the right to the repatriation of their human remains' (article 12 (1)).

In the second article of the special section, Kutay considers the recording and transmission of histories and other stories of significance. The cultural aspects of indigenous relationships with technology must, therefore, be considered. She proposes knowledge sharing as a community narrative and that the employment of new technologies should consider target audiences and their worldviews. She describes and analyses projects that use digital technologies to record and present culturally significant knowledge. These include recording stories of the stolen generations and the development of an information sharing system for the Sydney Koori Inter-agency Network. Her discussion of a project involving the distribution of broadcast materials for remote radio and television is a further example of Information Systems research and practice supporting self-determination by helping people to tell their stories for their own purposes, to audiences that they have chosen and through technological means consistent with these purposes.

Kutay explains that in each of the cases describe resources developed for the expression of culture. She argues that using 'technology and knowledge transfer' for 'cultural maintenance' is multifaceted and 'may start with the interface design, the ontology of the knowledge system; and then extend to developing the components'. She argues that as an expression of self-determination this means that 'eventually communities can be in control of the systems and provide ongoing innovations in this area'.

In the third article of the special section Clapham, Hassan, Fredericks, Bessarab, Kelly, Harwood, Senior, Longbottom, and Dale note the importance of Indigenous led research, arguing that research conducted by 'outsiders' may be problematic for its perpetuation of a 'colonial mindset of non-Indigenous Australians leading to failed solutions to Aboriginal problems'. In contrast, they propose a methodological focus on potential rather than problems which may include Information Systems providing 'an accessible platform for Aboriginal voices'. Their purpose is to show how the application of 'digital tools' to existing Indigenous research methodologies 'can support authentic data collection', analysis and dissemination. They develop these arguments from a case study of Aboriginal led community research involving an Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisation and the Illawara Koori Men's Support Group in New South Wales. The study showed the benefits of community knowledge and involvement in decision-making to improved health outcomes. They argue that the study

also demonstrated digital tools' broader applicability to Indigenous research methodologies and that 'digital tools can (i) support many activities in the conduct of research in Aboriginal communities; (ii) enable authentic outcomes to projects which address Aboriginal issues and concerns; (iii) help in the management of Aboriginal knowledge; and (iv) provide a platform for Aboriginal voices'.

Hasan et al. locate their work alongside Indigenous scholarship in other disciplines with a similar focus on contextualising and giving substantive effect to the right to self-determination. They cite education, health policy, social work and media studies as particular examples.

More widely still, all three articles may also be understood as contributions to Indigenous data sovereignty as an emerging field of inquiry. Data sovereignty is both a precursor to self-determination and an expression of an indigenous capacity to know and interpret their own stories and to collect, record, store and curate information for their own purposes.

Data sovereignty responds to the idea that relying on others to frame how a people should understand itself, and be understood by the wider world, contributes to colonial stereotypes and to the setting of research and public policy agendas by other people. Creating negative images of people to justify colonialism's hierarchy of human worth is a phenomenon that data sovereignty challenges. The articles in this special section show self-determination's alternative potential and its significance for Information Systems' research and practice.

Each of the articles is important beyond its own context, because each shows why the information that Information Systems researchers and practitioners collect, curate and use may reflect people's relative positioning in a social and political order that they may not have chosen or helped to construct. The articles provide insights into Information Systems' potential to contribute to the perpetuation of a social order in which self-determination is not equally available to all peoples or, on the other hand, to contribute to the reclamation of Indigenous people's authority over information about themselves and its use. Collectively, the articles show the diversity of data sovereignty's concerns and the scope of the right and capacities of self-determination.

Access to knowledge is a measure of social and political inclusion and a measure of cultural independence. The articles show how and why and provide useful case studies for the consideration of Indigenous data sovereignty scholarship.

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Reference

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