Finding the "institutional space" for democratic e-governance: Information and Community Technology (ICT) and Area-based Management (ABM) in Durban, South Africa

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ABSTACT

The notion that Information and Communication Technology (ICT) can assist effective local governance is an exciting one to explore in developing countries. Given that urbanites in developing countries suffer from the indignities of poverty, inequality and resource scarcity, the onus is increasingly on local governments to enable more effective service delivery and economic empowerment. The role of ICT in this regard is underpinned by technological and human resource capacity as well as social and cultural networks. Given the uncertain terrain that is governed by many municipalities in developing cities, a number of questions emerge when examining the interface between local government and ICT within this context. Firstly, how well are local governments placed to harness digital technology towards more effective service delivery? Secondly, how well is it placed to understand the civil society networks that underpin urban life in poor communities? Furthermore, does the institutional make-up of local governments in developing (and developed) countries allow for the use of ICT in a truly empowering manner?

This paper will engage with these questions by investigating the prospects for enhanced democratic governance using ICT in Durban. The eThekwini Metropolitan Council, has recently embarked on a system of Area-Based Management (ABM) to enable decentralised governance within the city. The paper will attempt to understand whether the inclusion of ICT in ABM can promote the community networks and institutional learning necessary to achieve democratic governance. Can it contribute to regeneration and development in Metropolitan Durban? The research will be based on interviews with key community and institutional stakeholders implicated in these initiatives as well as perusal of relevant policy documentation.