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Government-initiated community website schemes: what can we learn from the implementation of an Australian model?

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**Government-initiated Community Website Schemes:
What can we learn from the implementation of an Australian model?**

A thesis submitted in fulfilment of the
requirements for the award of the degree

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

from

THE UNIVERSITY OF WOLLONGONG

by

ALISON ELIZABETH NORRIS

Bachelor of Information & Communication Technology (Honours Class I) (UOW)

Graduate Diploma in Education (UNE)

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Abstract

As the Internet has become integral to our daily lives, many community websites have been developed in an attempt to create ‘community’ online and to support traditional communities. These community websites were typically developed on an ad-hoc basis. In 2002, the Australian Domain Name Administrators responded to the lack of government-initiated, structured community website schemes by establishing the Community Geographic Domain Name (CGDN) Scheme. This Scheme created new domain names, solely for the use of community groups with the purpose of building community websites. Before gaining access to a CGDN, a community group must demonstrate their links to the community and meet numerous conditions.

To date, there has been limited research into the issues that affect government-initiated, structured community website schemes, and no studies have compared the experiences of multiple community websites developed under such schemes to identify factors that affect the viability of these websites and the schemes as a whole. This thesis aims to develop a deeper understanding of the issues associated with government-initiated, structured community website schemes, using an instance of such schemes: the CGDN Scheme. Using a case study approach, an analysis of the CGDN Scheme, and its viability, is completed. Through case studies of the three communities participating in the trial of the CGDN Scheme (Wollongong, New South Wales; Bathurst, New South Wales; and Ballarat, Victoria), rich qualitative data is collected from a variety of data sources about the experiences of the case study participants. Qualitative data is also collected from and about the CGDN management bodies and the CGDN Policy. Based on this data, issues faced by these case studies and by the CGDN Scheme management bodies are identified and their implications discussed.

To consolidate the findings of the case studies in a format that is easy for communities to manage and apply, the relationships between these issues are modelled, and the issues are grouped into eight categories: auDA and auCD, Policy, CGDN Project leadership, Publicity and advertising, Community involvement, Finance, Community Website Group and Infrastructure. These issues and factors are mapped using four models. A comparison of approaches chosen by the three test cases allows the implications of such decisions to be considered, and recommendations to improve the viability of the CGDN

Scheme are provided. Finally, recommendations for the establishment of government-initiated, structured community website schemes are presented. These recommendations provide a summary of the contribution that this thesis makes to a deeper understanding of government-initiated, structured community website schemes.

Thesis Certification

I, Alison Elizabeth Norris, declare that this thesis, submitted in fulfilment of the requirements for the award of Doctor of Philosophy, in the School of Information Systems and Technology, University of Wollongong, is wholly my own work unless otherwise referenced or acknowledged. The document has not been submitted for qualifications at any other academic institution.

Alison Norris

13th November 2007.

Table of Contents

Acknowledgements.....	i
Abstract.....	ii
Thesis Certification	iv
Table of Contents	v
List of Tables	xv
List of Figures.....	xvi
List of Publications.....	xvii
List of key terms, abbreviations and definitions.....	xix
Chapter 1: Introduction	1
1.1 Introduction.....	1
1.2 Background.....	4
1.3 Research Purpose & Goals.....	7
1.4 Research Methodology	9
1.5 Significance.....	11
1.6 Organisation of this Thesis	13
Chapter 2: Literature Review.....	16
2.1 Introduction.....	16
2.2 Traditional Definitions of Community	16
2.2.1 <i>Sense of Community</i>	18
2.3 Community Informatics	18
2.3.1 <i>Measuring the Value of Community Informatics</i>	21
2.4 Community Websites.....	21
2.4.1 <i>Defining the Concept</i>	22
2.4.2 <i>Background to Community Websites</i>	23
2.4.3 <i>Previous Schemes and Models</i>	24
2.4.4 <i>Issues affecting the Viability of Community Informatics Projects</i>	28
2.4.4.1 Aims	28

2.4.4.2	Planning.....	29
2.4.4.3	Facilitation and Management	30
2.4.4.4	Financial	31
2.4.4.5	Website Technology.....	33
2.4.4.6	Website Design and Content	33
2.4.4.7	Community Awareness and Participation	35
2.4.4.8	Community Context	37
2.4.4.9	Competition	40
2.4.4.10	Perceived Value.....	41
2.4.5	<i>Modelling the Issues</i>	42
2.4.6	<i>The Process of Developing a Community Website</i>	44
2.4.7	<i>Conclusion</i>	45
2.5	Conclusion	46
Chapter 3: Research Methodology.....		48
3.1	Introduction.....	48
3.2	Research Goals.....	49
3.3	Addressing the Research Goals	50
3.4	Overview of Qualitative Research.....	51
3.4.1	<i>Multi-methodological Research</i>	52
3.4.2	<i>Qualitative Research Methods</i>	53
3.5	Shared Evaluation Approach and Techniques	54
3.5.1	<i>Case Study Approach</i>	55
3.5.2	<i>Grounded Theory Methods</i>	57
3.5.2.1	Grounded Theory Use in Information Systems & Community Informatics	58
3.5.2.2	Case Study Research and Grounded Theory	60
3.5.2.3	Use of Emerging Issues Analysis to Identify Issues.....	63
3.5.2.4	Applying grounded theory and emerging issues analysis.....	64
3.5.3	<i>Data Sources and Collection</i>	65
3.5.3.1	Interviews	66
3.5.3.2	Teleconferences.....	68
3.5.3.3	Observation.....	68
3.5.3.4	Surveys	69
3.5.3.5	Online Discussion Group	69
3.5.3.6	Informal Communication	70

3.5.3.7	Documentation	70
3.5.3.8	Reflections.....	74
3.5.3.9	Summary of Data Collection and Analysis	74
3.6	Evaluating the CGDN Scheme	75
3.6.1	<i>Purpose</i>	75
3.6.2	<i>Data Collection and Analysis</i>	75
3.7	Evaluating the CGDN Projects	75
3.7.1	<i>Purpose</i>	75
3.7.2	<i>Data Collection and Analysis</i>	76
3.8	Conclusion	77
Chapter 4: Monitoring the CGDN Scheme and Policy		78
4.1	Introduction.....	78
4.2	Proposal for CGDNs	79
4.3	Approval for CGDN Trial.....	79
4.4	CGDN Policy Features	80
4.4.1	<i>Community Group</i>	80
4.4.2	<i>Geographic Domain Names Available for Registration</i>	81
4.4.3	<i>Legally-registered, Not-for profit Entity</i>	82
4.4.4	<i>Representative of the Local Community</i>	82
4.4.5	<i>Licensing Period</i>	83
4.4.6	<i>Community Website Operation</i>	83
4.4.7	<i>Number of CGDNs to be Licensed</i>	83
4.5	Selection of CGDN Trial Test Cases	84
4.6	Test Case Requirements.....	85
4.7	Changes to the Scheme	85
4.8	CGDN Management and Licensing.....	86
4.8.1	<i>Proposed</i>	86
4.8.2	<i>Implemented</i>	86
4.9	Website Management Groups.....	88
4.9.1	<i>Proposed</i>	88
4.9.2	<i>Implemented</i>	88
4.10	Fourth-Level Domains	89

4.10.1	<i>Proposed</i>	89
4.10.2	<i>Implemented</i>	89
4.11	State and National Websites	90
4.11.1	<i>Proposed</i>	90
4.11.2	<i>Implemented</i>	91
4.12	Sale of Geographic com.au and net.au Domains	92
4.12.1	<i>Proposed</i>	92
4.12.2	<i>Implemented</i>	92
4.13	National Promotion	94
4.13.1	<i>Proposed</i>	94
4.13.2	<i>Implemented</i>	94
4.14	Sponsorship	95
4.14.1	<i>Proposed</i>	95
4.14.2	<i>Implemented</i>	95
4.15	Licensing Costs	96
4.15.1	<i>Proposed</i>	96
4.15.2	<i>Implemented</i>	96
4.16	Launch Delays	96
4.16.1	<i>Proposed</i>	96
4.16.2	<i>Implemented</i>	96
4.17	Reporting	97
4.18	State and National Websites	97
4.19	Value of Evaluating the CGDN Scheme	98
4.20	Reflection	98
4.21	Conclusion	101
Chapter 5: CGDN Project 1 – Wollongong		102
5.1	Introduction	102
5.2	Facilitation	102
5.3	Introducing wollongong.nsw.au to the Community	103
5.3.1	<i>Informing & engaging the Community</i>	103
5.3.2	<i>Holding the Initial Meetings</i>	106
5.4	Committing to the Project	108

5.4.1	<i>Community Representation</i>	108
5.4.2	<i>Internal Communication</i>	110
5.4.3	<i>OCOS Reporting</i>	111
5.4.4	<i>Meetings</i>	111
5.4.5	<i>Resources</i>	111
5.5	Community Website Group	113
5.5.1	<i>Management Committee</i>	113
5.5.2	<i>General Members</i>	115
5.5.3	<i>Geographical Scope of Membership</i>	116
5.6	Formation of Legal Entity	117
5.7	Membership	120
5.7.1	<i>Business Membership</i>	120
5.7.2	<i>Community-wide Membership</i>	121
5.8	Moving Forward	122
5.9	Domain Name Application	123
5.10	Website Vision	125
5.11	Website Development	125
5.11.1	<i>Community Involvement</i>	125
5.11.2	<i>Initial Website Design and Development</i>	126
5.11.3	<i>Website Structure</i>	127
5.11.4	<i>Professional Website Development</i>	129
5.11.5	<i>Images</i>	129
5.11.6	<i>Database Development</i>	129
5.11.7	<i>Usability Testing</i>	130
5.11.8	<i>Development Software</i>	130
5.11.9	<i>Hosting</i>	131
5.11.10	<i>Funding</i>	132
5.12	Content and Functions	133
5.12.1	<i>Possible Liabilities</i>	134
5.12.2	<i>Events Calendar</i>	134
5.12.3	<i>Directories</i>	135
5.12.4	<i>Local Information</i>	136
5.12.5	<i>WCW and CGDN Information</i>	136

5.12.6	<i>Feedback</i>	136
5.12.7	<i>Fourth-level Domains</i>	136
5.12.8	<i>Community Inclusion / Exclusion</i>	138
5.13	Managing and Launch	139
5.13.1	<i>Problems and Delays caused by auCD</i>	140
5.13.2	<i>Local Launch</i>	140
5.13.3	<i>National Launch</i>	141
5.14	Medium-term Vision for the Community Website Group	141
5.14.1	<i>Funding</i>	141
5.14.2	<i>Membership</i>	143
5.14.3	<i>Community Involvement</i>	144
5.14.4	<i>Content and Functionality</i>	145
5.15	Post-Launch Experiences	146
5.16	Reflection	146
5.17	Conclusion	148
Chapter 6: CGDN Project 2 – Bathurst		150
6.1	Introduction	150
6.2	Facilitation	150
6.3	Introducing Bathurst.nsw.au to the Community	152
6.3.1	<i>Informing & engaging the Community</i>	152
6.3.2	<i>Holding the Public Meeting</i>	153
6.4	Committing to the Project	154
6.4.1	<i>Community Representation</i>	154
6.4.2	<i>Internal Communication</i>	155
6.4.3	<i>OCOS Reporting</i>	156
6.4.4	<i>Meetings</i>	156
6.4.5	<i>Resources</i>	156
6.5	Community Website Group	157
6.5.1	<i>Management Committee</i>	157
6.5.2	<i>General Members</i>	158
6.5.3	<i>Geographical Scope and Boundaries</i>	159
6.6	Formation of Legal Entity	160

6.7	Membership	162
6.7.1	<i>Business Membership</i>	162
6.7.2	<i>Community-wide Membership</i>	162
6.7.3	<i>Partnerships</i>	163
6.8	Moving Forward	164
6.8.1	<i>Financial Planning</i>	166
6.8.2	<i>Banking, Legal and Insurance</i>	168
6.8.3	<i>Website Planning</i>	169
6.8.4	<i>Policy Development</i>	170
6.8.4.1	Marketing Plan	170
6.8.4.2	Business Plan.....	172
6.8.5	<i>Supporting BCW Members</i>	172
6.8.6	<i>Using Local Skills</i>	172
6.9	Domain Name Application	172
6.10	Website Vision.....	174
6.11	Website Development.....	174
6.11.1	<i>Community Website Design and Development</i>	175
6.11.2	<i>Website Structure</i>	176
6.11.3	<i>Development Software</i>	177
6.12	Content and Functions	177
6.12.1	<i>Legal Considerations</i>	179
6.12.2	<i>Community Representation</i>	180
6.12.3	<i>Community Exclusion</i>	180
6.12.4	<i>Fourth-level Domains</i>	181
6.13	Managing and Launch.....	182
6.13.1	<i>Problems and Delays caused by auCD</i>	182
6.13.2	<i>Local Launch</i>	184
6.13.3	<i>National Launch</i>	184
6.14	Medium-term Vision.....	185
6.14.1	<i>Functionality</i>	185
6.14.2	<i>Membership</i>	186
6.14.3	<i>Funding</i>	186
6.14.4	<i>Partnerships</i>	187

6.15	Post-Launch Experiences	187
6.16	Reflection	188
6.17	Conclusion	190
Chapter 7: CGDN Project 3 – Ballarat.....		191
7.1	Introduction.....	191
7.2	Facilitation	191
7.2.1	<i>Facilitation Problems</i>	192
7.3	Introducing ballarat.vic.au to the Community	195
7.3.1	<i>Informing the Community</i>	195
7.3.2	<i>Holding the Public Meeting</i>	195
7.4	Committing to the Project.....	196
7.4.1	<i>Community Representation</i>	196
7.4.2	<i>Internal Communication</i>	197
7.4.3	<i>OCOS Reporting</i>	197
7.4.4	<i>Meetings</i>	197
7.4.5	<i>Resources</i>	198
7.5	Community Website Group	198
7.5.1	<i>Steering Committee Skills</i>	198
7.5.2	<i>Geographical Scope and Boundaries</i>	199
7.6	Formation of Legal Entity.....	200
7.7	Membership	202
7.7.1	<i>Business Membership</i>	202
7.7.2	<i>Community-wide Membership</i>	203
7.8	Moving Forward	203
7.8.1	<i>Problems Encountered</i>	203
7.8.2	<i>On-going Recruitment</i>	204
7.9	Domain Name Application	205
7.10	Website Vision.....	206
7.11	Website Development.....	206
7.11.1	<i>Community Website Design and Development</i>	206
7.11.2	<i>Website Structure</i>	208
7.11.3	<i>Development Software</i>	209

7.12	Cost	209
7.13	Functions	210
7.14	Managing and Launch.....	211
7.15	Medium-term Vision for the Community Website Group.....	213
7.16	Post-Launch Experiences.....	214
7.17	Reflection	214
7.18	Conclusion	216
Chapter 8: Discussion & Lessons Learned.....		218
8.1	Introduction.....	218
8.2	Summary of Issues Identified	218
8.3	Categorising the Issues in the CGDN Scheme	220
8.4	Validating the Identified Categories by Comparison to the Literature.....	221
8.5	Modelling Issues and their Relationships	221
8.6	Comparison of Test Cases in the CGDN Scheme Trial.....	225
8.7	Relationship between test case experiences & the literature	232
8.8	Findings relating to the CGDN Scheme	238
8.8.1	<i>Recommendations for the CGDN Scheme.....</i>	<i>238</i>
8.8.2	<i>Lessons learned about the CGDN Scheme</i>	<i>243</i>
8.9	Findings relating to the design of government-initiated schemes for community websites.....	244
8.9.1	<i>Recommendations for government-initiated schemes for community websites</i> 244	
8.9.2	<i>Lessons learned about government-initiated schemes for community websites</i> 246	
8.10	Findings relating to the design of all community website schemes	248
8.11	Conclusion	249
Chapter 9: Conclusion.....		251
9.1	Introduction.....	251
9.2	Summary of Key Issues	251
9.3	Significance of this Research.....	258
9.4	Limitations	259

9.5	Future Research Directions.....	260
9.6	Conclusions.....	261
Bibliography		263
Appendix A.	Test Case Member Questions – June-August 2004..	281
Appendix B.	auDA Questions – August 17, 2004.....	282
Appendix C.	OCOS Test Case Reports.....	283
Appendix D.	Weekly Report Template	293
Appendix E.	Domain Name Application.....	295
Appendix F.	Wollongong website.....	301
Appendix G.	Bathurst website	304
Appendix H.	Ballarat website.....	307
Appendix I.	Bathurst Community Website Legal Documentation .	309
Appendix J.	Categorisation of Issues.....	311

List of Tables

<i>Table 2.1: Adapted version of the Five D's of portal strategy</i>	45
<i>Table 3.1: Grounded Theory Method for Case Studies: Detailed steps (Lehmann and Fernandez, 2007)</i>	62
<i>Table 3.2: Data sources for CGDN Scheme evaluation</i>	75
<i>Table 3.3: Data sources for CGDN Projects evaluation</i>	76
<i>Table 4.1: Test case community characteristics</i>	84
<i>Table 8.1: Summary of case study issues</i>	219
<i>Table 8.2: CGDN Scheme Trial Implementation – Approaches to Facilitation</i>	226
<i>Table 8.3: CGDN Scheme Trial Implementation – Comparison of CGDN Scheme Principles Across Three Test Cases</i>	228
<i>Table 8.4: Current Implementation Details and Recommendations Relating to CGDN Scheme Features</i>	240
<i>Table 8.5: Recommendations for Government-initiated, Structured Schemes for Community Website Development</i>	245

List of Figures

<i>Figure 2.1: Romm and Taylor's Autonomy/Harmony Model</i>	40
<i>Figure 2.2: S3 Model (Vrazalic et al., 2003)</i>	43
<i>Figure 3.1: Life cycle of a trend (Thinking Futures, n.d.)</i>	64
<i>Figure 4.1: auCD Website</i>	91
<i>Figure 5.1: Wollongong CGDN website, June 19 2006</i>	141
<i>Figure 6.1: Bathurst CGDN website, April 18 2006</i>	184
<i>Figure 7.1: Management Structure of Ballarat CGDN Project</i>	193
<i>Figure 7.2: Ballarat CGDN displaying cBallarat test website, April 18 2006</i>	212
<i>Figure 7.3: Ballarat CGDN website, June 21 2006</i>	213
<i>Figure 8.1: Model of CGDN Project Issues</i>	223

List of Publications

Note: Publications relevant to this thesis are marked with an asterisk ()*

* **Norris, A.** and M. Freeman 2007, 'Community Domain Name Policy Development', *18th Australasian Conference on Information Systems (ACIS): the 3 Rs: Research, Relevance and Rigour - Coming of Age*, Toowoomba, Queensland, December 5-7 [forthcoming].

* **Norris, A.** 2007, 'Community Geographic Domain Names' in A. Tatnall (ed.), *Encyclopedia of Portal Technologies and Applications*, Information Science Reference (IGI Global), Hershey, Pennsylvania. pp.157-161.

* **Norris, A.** 2007, 'Community Website Sustainability: An Australian Perspective' in *Proceedings of the 2007 International Conference on Internet Computing (ICOMP'07)*, Las Vegas, USA, June 25-28.

* **Norris, A.** and M. Freeman 2006, 'Community websites and what makes them sustainable: Evidence from Australia' in *Proceedings of the 10th Pacific Asia Conference on Information Systems (PACIS)*, Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia, July 6-9.

Freeman, M., **A. Norris** and P. Hyland 2006, 'Usability of Online Grocery Systems: A focus on errors' in *Proceedings of the OZCHI 2006 Conference. Design: Activities, Artefacts and Environments*, Sydney, New South Wales, November 20-24.

Norris, A. 2005, 'Information-based websites: A usability assessment of a library website', *Internet Research Annual*, vol.3, pp.159-169.

Norris, A. and M. Freeman 2005, 'Improving Library Website Usability: A User Focus' in *Proceedings of the neXt 2005: ALIA National Library and Information Technicians Conference*, Sydney, New South Wales, September 6-9.

* **Norris, A.** 2004, 'A framework to support community portal financial sustainability' in *Proceedings of the Community Informatics Research Network Conference 2004*, Prato, Italy, Monash University & Community Informatics Research Network, September 29-October 1.

Norris, A. 2004, 'Information-based websites: A usability assessment of a library website' in *Proceedings of the 5th Annual Conference of the Association of Internet Researchers (AoIR) 2004*, Brighton, UK, September 19-22.

List of key terms, abbreviations and definitions

(presented in alphabetical order)

Term	Abbreviation	Definition
.au Community Domains	auCD	The body responsible for the allocation and management of CGDNs.
Australian (.au) Domain Name Administrator	auDA	The policy authority and industry self-regulatory body for the .au domain space
Community Geographic Domain Name	CGDN	An Australian scheme that created a new second level domain name space of Australian geographic locations for the exclusive use of Australian local geographic communities.
Community Geographic Domain Name Policy	CGDN Policy	The legal document that specifies the rules of use for CGDNs.
Community Geographic Domain Name Project	CGDN Project	A practical, community-based application of the CGDN Scheme with the goal of producing a community website.
Community Geographic Domain Name Scheme	CGDN Scheme	Encompasses the CGDN Policy and the related processes and activities that are related to the implementation and use of CGDNs.
Community Informatics	CI	A field of research and practice concerned with technology projects that are designed to enhance community experiences.
Office of Information and Communications Technology	OICT	The state government department under which the OCOS Project was implemented.
One City One Site Project	OCOS Project	The Australian state government project that organised and managed the trial of the CGDNs.