School of Computing, Engineering, and the Built Environment
Edinburgh Napier University

PHD STUDENT PROJECT

Funding and application details

Funding status: Fully funded project (worldwide)

Application instructions:
Detailed instructions are available at https://blogs.napier.ac.uk/scebe-research/available-phd-student-projects/

Prospective candidates are encouraged to contact the Director of Studies (see details below) to discuss the project and their suitability for it.

Project details

Supervisory Team:
- DIRECTOR OF STUDY: Peter Cruickshank (Email: P.Cruickshank@napier.ac.uk)
- 2ND SUPERVISOR: Bruce Ryan

Subject Group: Applied informatics

Research Areas: Communication & Media Studies - not clear where information science sits in these categories.

Project Title: A new model for information literacies of community representatives

Project description:
Direct participation has been an important threat in democracy for some decades now. However, the ideals of widespread individual participation are often in reality under threat of hijacking by a minority of self-efficacious individuals. As a result community representatives often take on the role of seeking information from officials/government then sharing it with communities, and vice versa (Hall, Cruickshank & Ryan, 2018; de Souza et al, 2022). Some (such as community councillors) are formally appointed, others are members of local voluntary and religious (e.g. church) groups.

Our past research has established that community representatives occupy a zone between elected representation and citizenship, the workplace and volunteering, and occupy a mix of physical, digital and blended spaces (Acedo et al, 2019; Cruickshank et al, 2020; Marzoukou & Abdi, 2017). They are generally seen as part of civil society – that is, they are different from elected representatives at local authority or government levels. They work in a multi-channel context, mixing in-person and digital communication, so the concept of hyperlocal representation can be a useful definition in this context, defined as: "The actions of representations in the context of the lowest level of democracy: digitally enabled, geographically based, community-oriented and intended to promote civic engagement".

Past research has identified that community representatives face significant informational barriers in (a) learning about their role (b) understanding the information needs of the communities served and (c) gathering and sharing information about local issues with stakeholders. Information literacy (IL) represents one approach to investigating these topics (Cope, 2010; Saunders, 2017). However, although there are IL models that cover citizens, the workplace, and everyday life, there is no obvious model that accounts for the information activities of community representatives.

This PhD project will develop a new model of information practices and literacies for community representation. The Research Questions that this project will therefore address are:

1. What information practices are involved in understanding the role, and (information) needs of the communities served?
2. How do community representatives navigate between sharing information with their communities, campaigning and liaising with government?
3. How do existing models of literacies apply to the information practices of community representatives as they work jointly?

The research will be conducted within the social informatics research group, where the PhD student can will join a lively and support community of researchers. The group was highly rated in the recent REF2021 assessment exercise, with a very strong research environment. We have excellent international links and a good track record of working collaboratively with partners in the UK and around the world.

Perspective applicants are encouraged to contact the Supervisor before submitting their applications. Applications should make it clear the project you are applying for and the name of the supervisors.

References:
[1] Acedo, A., Oliveira, T., Naranjo-Zolotov, M., & Painho, M. (2019). Place and city: toward a geography of engagement. Heliyon, 5(8). https://doi.org/10.1016/j.heliyon.2019.e02261
[2] Cope, J. (2010). Information Literacy and Social Power. In E. Drabinski, A. Kumbier, & M. Accardi (Eds.), Critical Library Instruction: Theories and Methods (pp. 13–28). Library Juice Press.
[3] Cruickshank, P., Hall, H., & Ryan, B. M. (2020). Information literacy as a joint competence shaped by everyday life and workplace roles amongst Scottish community councillors. Proceedings of ISIC: The Information Behaviour Conference Pretoria, South Africa, 28th September to 1st October, 2020, 25(4), 1–16. https://doi.org/10.47989/irisic2008
[4] Cruickshank, P., & Hall, H. (2020). Talking to imagined citizens? Information sharing practices and proxies for e-participation in hyperlocal democratic

settings. Information Research, 25(4), 1–26. https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.47989/irpaper880

[5] de Souza, A. A. C., d'Angelo, M. J., & Lima Filho, R. N. (2022). Effects of Predictors of Citizens' Attitudes and Intention to Use Open Government Data and Government 2.0. Government Information Quarterly, 39(December 2021). https://doi.org/10.1016/j.giq.2021.101663

[6] Hall, H., Cruickshank, P., & Ryan, B. M. (2018). Exploring Information Literacy Through the Lens of Activity Theory. European Conference on Information Literacy, 810, 803–812. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-74334-9_81

[7] Martzoukou, K., & Sayyad Abdi, E. (2017). Towards an everyday life information literacy mind-set: a review of literature. Journal of Documentation, 73(4), 634–665. https://doi.org/10.1108/JD-07-2016-0094

[8] Saunders, L. (2017). Connecting information literacy and social justice: why and how. Communications in Information Literacy, 11(1), 55–75. https://doi.org/10.15760/comminfolit.2017.11.1.47

Candidate characteristics

Education:
A first-class honours degree, or a distinction at master level, or equivalent achievements in Information science or an allied subject, alternatively, a background in studying comunity representation (e.g., through politics or sociology)

Subject knowledge:
Information behaviour, information literacies, participatory democracy, community groups

Essential attributes:
- Experience of fundamental concepts in information science research and/or participatory democracy or community groups
- Competent in mixed research techniques including interviewing, document analysis, focus groups, and surveys
- Knowledge of and interest in community groups and how they operate
- Good written and oral communication skills
- Strong motivation, with evidence of independent research skills relevant to the project
- Good time management

Desirable attributes:
- The ability to work comfortably with people with a range of ages and backgrounds.