

Editorial

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The modern-day phenomenon of Big Data (i.e. the high-speed generation and storage of a great quantity of structured, semi-structured and/or non-structured data sets) is being intensified by the ever more widespread use of social networks and the proliferation of e-commerce, which require sophisticated management of large volumes of information. Big Data thus has different sources. In addition to the internet and, in particular, social networks, there are sources of a different kind from the public and private sectors (businesses and public sector bodies alike compile information on their customers, users, suppliers, operations, etc.). Other contributing factors include mobile devices' omnipresence, GPS and satellite use, the consumption of audio and video material, or the interconnection of computers.

The enormous scale of the vast data sets involved makes it nigh on impossible to process and analyse them with conventional tools. Specific resources are required for the purposes of processing and displaying them, and the ability to distinguish between relevant and irrelevant information is key to decision making. In that context, mention should be made of the emergence of new business models based on Big Data, with companies compiling and analysing information to build up highly detailed profiles of their customers, so as to find out what makes them tick and anticipate their future behaviour. Large enterprises collect and process an ever growing volume of data with a view to gaining a competitive edge in their respective markets.

Using Big Data in such ways raises a number of legal and political issues that ought to be examined, over and above questions related to the real potential and the reliability of the results obtained. Key legal considerations include the privacy and right to be forgotten of users and consumers, data security and storage, the possible use of data for criminal purposes, and freedom of expression. From a political perspective, Big Data offers political actors strategic opportunities and makes it possible to think about new methods for analysing social and political behaviour, with a bearing on matters such as transparency, public access to information and the reuse of public sector data.

This issue of the journal includes three papers presented at the 9th International Conference on the Internet, Law and Politics (IDP 2013), which focused on Big Data. Organized by the Law and Political Science Department of the Universitat Oberta de Catalunya (Open University of Catalonia, UOC), the event in question took place in Barcelona on 25 and 26 June 2013.

"Slaves to big data. Or are we?", an article by the lecturer Mireille Hildebrandt, looks at the monetization of personal data and how we can avoid becoming slaves to the phenomenon in question.

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In an article with the title “Opening up divides: Centralization of decisions and online interaction in CIU, ERC and PSC”, Marc Esteve Del Valle and the lecturer Rosa Borge Bravo analyse the relationship between the centralization of decisions in three of Catalonia’s political parties and the interaction in which they engage via their web pages and Facebook accounts.

This issue also features the second part of the lecturer Lorenzo Picotti’s article “Regulation of computer damage in Italian criminal law”, the first part of which was published in the previous issue. On this occasion, the author deals with the crimes of child pornography and the sexual abuse of minors, offences related to expressing and disseminating ideas online, copyright violations and the criminal liability of social network managers.

In his article entitled “Fundamental rights and compliance with intellectual property rights”, Xavier Seuba Hernández discusses the relationship between human and intellectual property rights from the perspective of international public law’s secondary regulations. The article pays particular attention to the right to an effective remedy, evidence protection measures and the criminal penalties applicable to violations of intellectual property rights.

Lastly, this issue also contains details of new regulatory developments, courtesy of the lecturer Jordi García Albero.

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