Regulating the Global Information Society
edited by Christopher T. Mardsen
reviewed by Bozena I. Mierzejewska

This volume is a “contribution to the debate into the role of governments in the ‘Information Society’, ‘Information Super Highway’ or digital networked economy” (see p. 1). It brings together 17 contributions authored by distinguished scholars and professionals: Jonathan D. Aronson – Professor, University of Southern Carolina; Fod Barnes – Consultant, Oxford Economic Research Associates; Martin Cave – Professor, Brunel University; Richard Collins – Head of Education, British Film Institute; William J. Drake – Senior Associate, Carnegie Endowment for International Peace; A. Michael Froomkin – Professor, University of Miami; Nicolas Garnham – Professor, University of Westminster; Thomas Gibbons – Professor, University of Manchester; Mark Gould – Lecturer at University of Bristol; Perry Keller – Lecturer at King’s College London; Mark Lemley – Professor, University of California at Berkeley; David McGowan – Professor, University of Minnesota, Christopher T. Mardsen – Lecturer, University of Warwick; Paul Nihoul – Professor, Royal University of Groningen and the Université Catholique de Louvain; Monroe E. Price – Professor, Benjamin N. Cordozo School of Law, New York; Pamela Samuelson – Professor, University of California at Berkeley; Ad von Loon – Lawyer, VECAI (the association of cable communication companies in the Netherlands); Stefaan G. Verhulst – University of Oxford and Dmitri Ypsilanti – OECD.

These authors suggest the range and depth of the problems of regulating the “information society”: analyse selected aspects of its dynamics and structures; and provide an interesting contribution from those who have participated in the policy analysis over the last decade.

Problems introduced in this book have been a subject of public debate for few years but have yet to result in one solution how to regulate such new and fast moving phenomena. The technical and economic conditions that form the ground of regulatory policies are shifting, global information and communications equipment and service firms are intensely interested in shaping policy outcomes. In this context talking about the new framework of new relationship between government, the public and the firms is of high relevance. However, there have been changes and new developments since the book was written in March 2000 but most of the issues are still a good background for discussion.

The book’s introduction and concluding chapter serve both as conceptual base and future outlook bookends. The introduction by the editor, surveys recent developments in information and communication technologies, its economic dimension and links it to the next chapters in this volume. The final chapter, by Pamela Samuelson offers discussion of five challenges for regu-
Regulating the Global Information Society: the dilemma of introducing new laws or adapt existing laws and policies, the question of proportionality, flexibility, preserving values and transnational cooperation. She argues that the information cannot be seen only as commodity since it is also “essential input to innovation, knowledge creation, education, and social and political discourse” (p. 325). For scholars of international communication this is not a great discovery per se, but it provides a good framework for making sense of debates about regulating the Internet.

The book includes sections on theoretical perspectives; the limits of telecommunications regulation; international self-regulation and standard setting; standard setting and competition policy; and the limits of government regulation. A recurrent theme is that the “information society” changes the way we look at regulating information flow, in ways that have significant economic and political consequences.

Price and Verhulst, for example, discuss tremendous growth of self-regulatory systems on the Internet. Their analysis links self-regulation with active consumer and citizen consultation. This approach suggests that public members, experts, consumer and industry representatives together with government bodies will negotiate “rules of the game”. Examples presented suggest that self-regulation is more effective than the exclusive excersise of government authority, however the authors end with a list of recommendations on how to improve the still very new tool of self-regulatory power.

Cave’s chapter on deregulation of telecommunications discusses the economic results of “normalising” policy. Taking the UK as an example, he argues that deregulation is a way of solving many problems of competition and consumer protection at the same time. This chapter includes well presented economic comparison of retail price changes and market structure of the UK telecommunication market together with explanations of the underlying processes.

Other chapters sustain this book’s integrity. William J. Drake’s examination of the rise and decline of the international telecommunications regime provides an excellent overview of the ancien régime, its transformation and decay. Aronson’s story of “After Seattle” and Dmitri Ypsilanti’s comment / response demonstrate an interesting exchange of opinions as well as being an informative piece.

Most of the authors deliver a fair amount of underlying theory for their presented examples. McGovan discusses the problem of the ‘third way’ taking Java technology; Gould looks at Internet standard setting processes; Froomkin applies semi-private international rulemaking to the WIPO domain name process.

Regulating the Global Information Society will most certainly help us read through the complexities of the regulatory issues. A major contribution of this book is its homogeneity despite the fact that it is an outcome of a transatlantic workshop held at Warwick University. If research on the regulation of media markets and the nation state is still valid, studies on regulating the information society are even more so. Overall, this book provides a useful and insightful examination of the processes and the significance of regulation. Most chapters are likely to give good directions to future research for established, as well as emerging communication researchers.

### Rating

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Rating Points: excellent: ++++ poor: +

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