

time had come for India to have a voice in technology study, polity and discourse, as we quickly find ourselves becoming an Information Society". He, along with Alternative Law Forum's legal theorist Lawrence Liang, Shah and Sunil Abraham, brought CIS into being, pooling in the finest minds from the field of arts, academia, law and technology. CIS, since, has set out to produce local and contextual histories of the Internet to make voices "emerging out of Asia more visible in international dialogues around technology".

Their approach: research, awareness and advocacy. Their goal: to make sense of how the Internet is changing the world around us, with India at the heart.

CIS looks at, among other



wards software as not only a strategic but also socially and ethically a bad decision, and is looking at policy change in the area. Explains Sunil Abraham, director-policy, in his paper: "If I were to store data, information or knowledge in .doc, .xls or .ppt format, my ability to read my own files expires the moment the licence for my copy of Microsoft Office expires." He adds that governments have a responsibility to use open standards, especially for interactions with the public and where the data handled has a direct impact on democratic values. "In developing countries, governments have greater responsibility because most often they account for over 50% of the revenues of proprietary software vendors," he writes.

They are also exploring bridging digital divides without ignoring the "complex interplay, in the case of India for instance, of

caste, language, affordability, education, literacy, and in some cases, even religion" and how the Internet is changing the landscape of higher education in India. As Shah puts it: "Internet technologies are now becoming tools that we think with. We cannot write without the cursor blinking on an empty screen, we cannot talk in public without the aid of a digital presentation..." It's about time, then, that we thought about the one thing that's becoming one of the bigger movers in our lives and build a discourse around it.

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## BONFIRE WITHOUT SMOKE

All you outdoors enthusiasts are going to love this gadget. Designed by Yu-ri Lee, it has a bunch of fire-producing sticks with an attachment for gas to ensure the fire keeps burning. It might take the fun out of hunting for dry wood in the wild and the search for the perfect spot for your bonfire. But this is fun too, being fully foldable and compact enough to fit in your backpack for a trip to the mountains. ([www.tuvie.com](http://www.tuvie.com))



# Wield the joystick, make a change



A lab at the Centre for Study of Science, Technology and Policy is creating gaming models that'll facilitate better policymaking. **Malvika Tegta reports**

It's time "serious" policymakers looked at innovative approaches to policymaking, rather than dwelling heavily on theory, jargon and elaborate economic models. A quiet work lab at the Centre for Study of Science, Technology and Policy (CSTEP) recognises this need and has programmers, researchers and animation experts geared to make governance a little less boring, in due time.

In 2002, the Serious Games Movement started with the US Army video game, America's Arm, a free online download that gave you a sense of what it's like in the US Army. That was probably a step removed



Left: Dr Robin King, research scholar at CSTEP; Top: Work in progress

from console gaming with all its thrills and trappings. But what that did was make the world look at gaming as an alternative tool, predominantly in education.

Now, at CSTEP, gaming is set to tackle an unfamiliar domain — policymaking. In the months to come, the non-profit think tank, located on Infantry Road, will create games that will facilitate public policy design using games developed here, on issues like energy, national security, infrastructure, new materials, and information communication technology for development.

"Very few games exist for the Indian context yet. So our plan is to actually build on the work tools and concepts that have been developed in Europe and the US, and apply some of these

games in India, using local data," says Dr Robin King, distinguished research scholar at CSTEP. "These will offer a reality-based, empirical approach to policy, unlike that which is based on theory or 'your tribe versus my tribe'. This is a viable method to consider different policy options."

Research is currently on for their energy game that will look at the composition of different kinds of renewable energy for sustainability. For that, first a generic model of a Karnataka village will be simulated, then researched information on the costs and benefits will be fed into the model and then the actual visuals will be superimposed. By doing a cost-benefit analysis, the most efficient solution can be chosen and rules formed accordingly.



The final goal for CSTEP is to use some of these games for public education

"Some of the games being developed look at things like how different energy policies affect the market," says King. "So here people can make choices and see the results of their choices there and then."

She then shows us a work, a disaster management tool, in its preliminary stage. With the looks of a 3D Google map, this game is designed to determine how ground help can be mobilised using the minimum amount of time to reach the point of calamity. So rather than trial and error, the simulated scenario can help predict the path of least resistance to the site.

"We are also looking at agriculture supply chain management, which is a huge challenge in India in that a large amount of produce does not make it from the countryside to the cities. The

idea with the games is to allow policymakers to play them and to think how they can design policies, and provide infrastructure that resolves problems," she says.

The industrial cluster/SEZ at Chennai is another area where CSTEP is trying to create a model to determine how much of a cluster it really is. "We're trying to see if firms are getting inputs from other firms there, if they are reusing waste products from other companies, to determine whether they are a sustainable industrial ecology," says King. These games will then help figure out what kind of rules make sense to create an economically and socially sustainable cluster. "All models are based on the underlying assumptions of how things work and how things should work. These games will help in incorporating equity and ecological sustainability into a basic model of economic efficiency, so policies aren't just made by the big guys," says King. The games are clearly designed to help change the rules. The process is still in the early stages, but CSTEP plans to have an exhibition by June.

The final goal for CSTEP is to use some of these games for public education, for spreading awareness on energy and public health, "to make people aware of simple things like if you pay attention to the rules and wash your hands, other people don't get sick. Some of these will be put up on our work-in-progress website and later introduced into school curricula. Their main target is the guys at the top layer. "The real challenge," says King, "is to open the eyes of the policymakers to the possibilities that exist in simulation for policymaking" — that's achievable by wielding the joystick.

