

Government, Internet governance, and the evolution of the Internet

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The importance of the Internet has led the world's governments to establish policies regarding Internet governance and the growth and management of the domain name system. The World Summit on the Internet Society (WSIS) established the UN Working Group on Internet Governance (WGIG) to define Internet governance principles, norms, procedures, and programmes; to preserve open access to the Internet; and to guarantee the security and reliability of the Internet as well as user privacy, the protection of children online and the successful transition to IPv6.



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The Internet is very different now than it was twenty years ago. The role and importance of the Internet has evolved massively during these years. The effects that the Internet have on our society force governments of all nations to establish policies for how to relate to the Internet. This raises questions regarding how governments should be involved in the future growth of the Internet, how governments should be involved in the management and control of the domain name system, and how the Internet should be governed. These questions lead us to what is known as *Internet governance*.

In the beginning of this century the UN organised the World Summit on the Internet Society. This summit took place in two phases in Geneva 2003 and Tunis 2005 respectively. The UN Working Group on Internet Governance (WGIG) was established in order to agree on the future of Internet governance.

In this context WGIG developed a working definition of Internet governance:

"Internet governance is the development and application by governments, the

private sector and civil society, in their respective roles, of shared principles, norms, rules, decision-making procedures, and programs that shape the evolution and use of the Internet."

In the wake of the WSIS process five Internet Governance Forum (IGF) meetings have taken place. At these meetings, Internet governance and public policy issues relevant to Internet governance are discussed in many International organizations and forums.

In 2005 the Internet had one billion users

and thus the challenge of connecting the next billion Internet users was one of the main issues on the agenda at the time. Today the Internet has almost two billion users and we face new possibilities as well as new challenges. The continuing development of network technology, of new ways and types of communications like 'The Internet of Things' and use of smartphones has increased traffic, problems and network complexity. As more and more automated devices and objects are connected to the Internet, the complexity and policy issues also increase. This fact highlights the need to establish proper Internet governance structures.

Internet policy issues

Four key public policy areas relevant to Internet governance were identified by WGIG, in 2005, as:

- 1) issues related to infrastructure and the management of critical Internet resources;
- 2) issues relating to the use of the Internet;
- 3) issues relevant to the Internet, but that also have an impact much wider than the Internet and for which existing organizations are responsible;
- 4) issues relating to the developmental aspects of Internet governance, in particular capacity-building in developing countries.

These key public policy areas are still of importance today. However, I believe we now see some new challenges for the future of the Internet.

Firstly I would like to draw attention to the importance of an open and accessible global Internet platform. This must be preserved in order to stimulate global participation and economic growth and to enhance the freedom of expression and human rights. Norwegian policy states that it is imperative to ensure and preserve the Internet as an open and non-discriminatory platform for all types of legal and not harmful communication and content distribution. Therefore, Norway participates actively in the Body of European Regulators for Electronic Communications (*BEREC*)'s work on shaping the European policy on Network Neutrality.

Secondly the security and resiliency of the global Internet must continue to be a high priority in all relevant organisations and among all stakeholders. On this issue the Norwegian policy is very much in line with the European Commission's policy, maintaining a strong emphasis on the need for security and stability in the global Internet.

Furthermore we need to enhance privacy for all Internet users. The Internet and new communications platforms will be important in the future development of our societies, so it is important to make the Internet safer, especially for our children. We must ensure the protection of children online; if we fail in this task, we could jeopardize the trust in the Internet as a vital communications platform for years to come.

Finally, I believe that a successful transition to IPv6 Internet addresses and continued professional address space management is important. The IPv4 addresses we have depended upon since the beginning have almost all run out; the conversion to IPv6 will provide the new addresses needed to allow the entrance of new users, especially from the developing countries. This conversion is also important to ensure that innovative Internet applications can emerge. That is why governments must engage actively in the policy development processes for address space management.

Government participation

The fast evolution and growth of the Internet challenge us to not only keep our policies up to date, but also to manage future development. The Internet has become an important factor for the development of our society and it is too vital to be left without governmental involvement. Governments must safeguard the privacy of Internet users and maintain a certain level of security for both private users and enterprises so that the Internet will remain an attractive arena for content and service providers.

The Internet will, of course, continue to evolve with or without Internet governance mechanisms. However, I believe that good and effective governance mechanisms are needed to shape the future evolution of the Internet. We need to ensure that the Internet continues to play a role in improving the quality of life for the citizens of the world and to be a catalyst for the development of commerce, education, social services and everyday life in all the countries in the world. The Internet also has an important role in ensuring freedom of speech, democracy and the protection of human rights for citizens all over the world.

In the past, the development of the Internet encompassed mainly technological and administrative decisions. The success of the Internet has created a new role for the Internet. This implies a more active role

for governments in defining models for governance. The agenda from the WSIS meeting in Tunis 2005 focused on the roles of the different stakeholders. Improvements have indeed been made; however we still have to find the right balance between the various stakeholders. In Norway, the private sector takes a lead in operational parts of the Internet; however the government has a responsibility to safeguard its overall functional framework.

Safeguarding public interests

Governments represent their citizens and have a mandate to safeguard the public interest. Therefore governments must participate in and take the lead in defining the public policy issues and in ensuring the public interests.

As stated by WGIG, one of the main public policy issues of Internet governance is to manage critical Internet resources. The Internet Cooperation for Assigned Names and Numbers (*ICANN*) is responsible for the efficient management of the Domain Name System and IP-addresses and Autonomous System numbers. In order to enhance future growth of the Internet, to facilitate economic growth, world participation and development and to ensure that critical Internet resources are managed in accordance with public policy, Norway takes an active part in the Governmental Advisory Committee (*GAC*) of *ICANN*.

Norway works with Brazil and the Netherlands to establish a hybrid model for a new Secretariat for *GAC* and aim at a more independent *GAC* not biased by other stakeholders, but influenced only by the governments participating in the *GAC*. This will enhance the ability of governments to address the public policy issues and safeguard the public interest in their territories in accordance with the Tunis Agenda.

The way ahead

In my view, we have not yet reached stable global structures of Internet governance, but a better understanding among all the relevant stakeholders for roles and responsibilities has been established. Governments must actively continue to build the foundations of a global Internet governance structure and address the public policy issues. Together with all stakeholders we should aim at establishing the best environment for the Internet and its applications to flourish. ●