

## Editorial

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Over recent years Internet Governance has been elevated to the centre piece of a complex web of international policy debates and as such the hitherto and relatively arcane world of Internet Governance has come under the spotlight. The view of Internet Governance that rested its arguments on the premise of ‘don’t fix it; it ain’t broken’ – a view that reinforces the status-quo – has been supplanted by an intense, highly charged and extensive policy debate.

This special issue of *Information Polity*, through the contributions of key players in these debates, seeks to explore the Internet Governance debate from a number of different perspectives, from the formal processes enshrined in the World Summit on Information Society (WSIS), through an institutional analysis and a developmental perspective.

Concomitant with the rapid diffusion and growth in the use of the Internet, the number of questions about the existing processes and procedures of Internet Governance has grown. The core question is ‘are the traditional models of governance appropriate for a new world?’. Hence the views held by some of the internet pioneers that this was a community free from the norms of governance have been profoundly challenged. Thus, for example, as the diffusion and growth in the use of the internet has embraced more people, permeating our economic and social lives, so a policy debate has begun to rage over those who do *not* have access. For those countries, communities and people without access there are real issues about the equitable allocation of internet resources, the delivery of a reliable and safe internet, and profound issues about the nature of access as well as specific issues surrounding multi-lingualism, for example.

Thus whilst a well established internet governance community highlights its inclusiveness, its engagement in open process, participation, transparency and outreach – and which in many cases are truly exemplary - there are many, including governments, who argue that these existing internet governance mechanisms reinforce the aspirations of a relatively closed and privileged community.

The papers in this special issue of *Information Polity* review the emergence of Internet Governance as a major international policy debate from three perspectives. The first perspective is that of the formal WSIS process, the two summits, the Working Group on Internet Governance and the creation of the Internet Governance Forum. The second perspective reviews the issues from a institutional viewpoint. The third viewpoint looks at the issues of Internet Governance from a development perspective, drawing on the information and communications for development (ICT4D) literature.

Linking the themes of the papers is not only the common concern for issues of Internet Governance but so too is a detailed knowledge of the process and the debates of the last few years. All the authors have been participants in the WSIS and related processes; all of the authors are well recognised as authorities in their fields and noted for their work on Internet Governance.

Concerns with the WSIS process and the eventual creation of the Internet Governance Forum pervade all the papers, but the work of Kummer, Collins and Souter dwell on the processes, mechanisms and outcomes. Kummer offers a unique reflection on the Internet Governance process written with the advantage of being a ‘participant/observer’ from the very beginning of the debate in the WSIS process. In fact many, including Souter, argue that unusually in a UN process the role of individuals has been important in the Internet Governance process and Kummer is one of those key individuals facilitating

the process. The Kummer paper traces the ever evolving debate that has resulted in the IGF being at the “epicentre” of Internet Governance issues until 2010. He highlights the innovative nature of the WGIG and the IGF, especially the structuring of a inclusive dialogue based on multi-stakeholder participation. He also highlights that the cross cutting theme of the Internet Governance debate is economic and social development; a theme developed throughout the papers in this special edition.

Collins and Souter both reflect on the WSIS process and the WGIG and IGF outcomes. In particular Collins discusses the attempts to embrace trilateralism within the Internet Governance debate. He uses the models of Held and the recommendations of the Cardoso Panel (on the participation of Civil Society) to evaluate the WSIS Internet Governance processes. Collins observes that the new forms of participation through the adoption of trilateralism raises important issues of legitimacy; “Who speaks? Who decides? What doctrines should dominate? Which view of the world has most heuristic power?”. The dynamic created by these questions in part drives the Internet Governance debate and the detail of the agenda. As observed by Collins each of the groups viewed the trilateralism embodied in Internet Governance from their own perspective; the successes and failures defined and understood from the view of the different parties.

In part of his paper Souter addresses the issues of the WSIS process. He comments that the debate over “Internet governance also resonated with the external political agenda” and that, for some “The United States’ apparent dominance of Internet activity and alleged dominance of Internet institutions, particularly ICANN, also led some delegations to treat Internet governance as a proxy for US foreign policy”. But Souter goes on to argue that the Internet Governance debate opened up a ‘new’ digital divide between different development communities and the role attributed to Information and Communications technologies in Development. In his discussion on the WSIS/Internet Governance process Souter highlights the disconnect between the relatively technocratic debate of Internet Governance from the Monterey and MDG processes. The Internet Governance debate then can be seen as another example of the complexities associated with the ‘mainstreaming’ of the ICT4D debate.

In terms of institutional arrangements the papers from Zhao and Satola explore the issues from different perspectives. Zhao, who is now the Deputy General Secretary of the International Telecommunications Union (the host UN institution of the WSIS) highlights the role of the ITU as one of the main institutional players in Internet Governance, arguing that with the rapid diffusion and growth in use it is inevitable that Internet Governance issues will be the focus of multilateral, transparent and democratic processes and the participation of international agencies in these processes is critical.

In his paper Satola makes cogent arguments for the importance of Internet Governance and the adoption of a new and coherent legal framework to develop issues of Internet Governance. He argues that combination of horizontal (sources of law) and vertical issues (areas of law) along with differing jurisdictional arrangements calls for the creation of a new legal framework – a framework that optimize the inter-operability and harmonization of relevant legal structures.

In their paper Dutton and Peltu reflect on the Internet Governance mosaic and offer up a structure within which to categorize many of the issues and to provide linkage to other policy debates. They use this structure to review many of the core themes of the Internet Governance debate, such as the technical layer, standards and protocols as well as within and between nations. They also begin to map out key principles of good Internet Governance such as optimization and adaptation to unpredictable change, the key themes of internet design, internet centric governance and “wider governance aspects”. In their conclusion Dutton and Peltu stress the importance of a coordination process that helps to find appropriate governance homes for different issues given the fragmented nature Internet governance.

In his paper Kenny looks to position the importance of Internet Governance in a development framework and asks how and why it matters when you are poor. His paper, along with discussion in Souter’s paper,

explores the use of information and communications in development and the potential of Internet based services to contribute to the lives of the poor. Ultimately he asks should the poor be worried about Internet Governance when the debate is seemingly focused around highly abstract and technical issues concerned with core internet functionality. He concludes that there are real issues of concern, most notably a whole constellation of issues around access. Kenny not only stresses the need for national policy making reform with regard to ICT as well as the need to address issues such as literacy and multi-lingualism. Souter, reinforces the views articulated by Kenny and underlines the significance of information and communications in the development process and how the mainstreaming of such ideas places new emphasis on the need for a development focus in shaping the debates on Internet Governance.

This Special Issue brings together leading commentators and participants in the debate of Internet Governance; explores the drivers behind the debate and sets out the dynamic that will keep Internet Governance centre stage in the coming years.

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