The Future of the IGF (*)

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Since the IGF process began, based on the Internet governance conceptualization established in the 2005 UN Working Group on Internet Governance and sacralized in the Tunis edition of WSIS, a growing, diverse set of Internet governance-related initiatives has sprouted.

On the one hand, actions by specific sectors or multistakeholder and multilateral initiatives launched international events in which sets of commitments or recommendations have been established, frequently with no meaningful or explicit relation to each other. Reinventing the wheel has been part of the outcomes of some of these events and processes – and the wheels reinvented so far do not run as smoothly as expected.

On the other hand, the welcome proliferation of national and regional Internet governance dialogue spaces, not directly related to the IGF (in many cases their timing does not sync with the IGF, do not take into account the themes defined by the MAG for their own dialogue program, and might not even be considered part of the IGF intersessional efforts), but somehow converging to the main event – the dozens of events baptized more or less informally as national or regional IGFs.

This is a non-exhaustive list of initiatives (not necessarily coordinated or interacting with the IGF), which keeps growing:

- Internet & Jurisdiction Policy Network (2012-ongoing)
- Alliance for Affordable Internet (A4AI, 2013-ongoing)
- Smart Africa (2013-ongoing)
- Global Commission on Internet Governance (GCIG, 2014-2016)
- NetMundial Conference (2014)
- Global Cyberalliance (2015-ongoing)
- IEEE Global Initiative on Ethics of Autonomous and Intelligent Systems (2016-ongoing)
- Global Commission on Stability of Cyberspace (GCSC, 2017-ongoing)
- Entrepreneurial Charter of Trust (2018-ongoing)
- Entrepreneurial Cybersecurity Tech Accord (2018-ongoing)
- Web Foundation's Contract for the Web (2018-ongoing)
- High Level Panel on Digital Cooperation (HLPDC, 2018-2019)
- Paris Call for Trust and Security in Cyberspace (2018)
- International Panel on Artificial Intelligence (2019)

These initiatives generate many recommendations (with several overlaps), basically under the general goal of proposing actions to ensure a single, open and secure Internet for everyone. The list is testimony to the intense interest in finding ways to tackle several global challenges of Internet governance, but they lack a much needed

coordination or integration of efforts in order to be more effective – something the HLPDC report recognizes as one of the six main gaps in these processes as a whole.

I trust several other commentators have covered the relevant aspects of the HLPDC proposals. I wish to make just a few observations. The IGF Plus proposal contemplates a MAG with additional functions. On the basis of my experience in earlier and current MAGs, I need to remind proponents that nearly all MAG members are volunteers who have their other time-consuming jobs. To cope with the current challenges is already hard enough, and the HLPDC proposal for the MAG seems to overlook this aspect. One of the proposed additional functions would be identifying "moments when emerging discussions in other forums need to be connected". Here is another reason for including the above non-exhaustive list of "other forums" – this task would be an impossible challenge for a voluntary group. In addition, this would be a function better carried out by the proposed Observatory/Help Desk, if these were to be implemented.

While recognizing the need of efforts to monitor and consolidate so many processes, this would ought to be the job of a specialized staff on a full-time basis. Should this be done as part of a UN-led forum? Some critics of the report think the whole idea of the Observatory/Help Desk, or even the Cooperation Accelerator, does not belong to the IGF at all, and should be thought of in other formats and fora. I agree with this view.

As to the Policy Incubator, I have to say that the intersessional activities (the many Dynamic Coalitions, the Best Practice Forums and so on) try to do just that, with the difficulties inherent to a voluntary effort, practically since the beginning of the IGF. There is a need here for qualified help in gathering and consolidating their ongoing work and recommendations.

(*) W.Kleinwächter, M.C.Kettemann, M.Senges, K.Mosene (eds.), *Towards a Framework for Cyberpeace and Digital Cooperation: An Agenda for the 2020s*, Verlag Hans-Bredow-Institut, Hamburg: 2019, pp.113-114.