Introduction:

What is Internet Governance and why is it important?

To provide a form of response to this important question, IFLA has summarized the available literature to introduce this important topic for librarians and information specialists alike. The guide is not comprehensive as the field is broad and in constant evolution, but it certainly presents Internet Governance in its multifaceted nature and highlights its major policy implications. At the end of the guide, there will be a list of online resource to investigate further this topic.

Part I – What is Internet Governance?

Internet governance is a complex field that involves many issues, actors, mechanisms, procedures and instruments. As the Internet has grown over time and continues to develop its governance is in constant flux and rejects a consistent, linear approach and definition. It reflects the different approaches, methodologies and policies that make the Internet, and a policy analyst, a librarian, a technologist, or a politician will approach the challenges and possibilities from different angles and perspectives, adding rather than detracting to the variety and diversity of the net.

So, what is Internet Governance to them and to us all?

The history of internet governance starts on a technical level with the creation of ARPA Net, the grandfather of the Internet, in the late 1960s. At first, this USA government project aimed to connect a limited number of computers in the country for scientific purposes. In the mid 1970's it evolved into today's network with the invention of TCP/IP (Transmission Control/Internet Protocol). Because this technology allowed bits of information to be transferred over the wires virtually everywhere, it also highlighted some of the most interesting and challenging features of the Internet: its decentralized nature, the lack of traditional barriers and its almost inexistent control mechanisms.

At this time the first questions arose regarding who should manage, or govern, this global network that offered possibilities to government and business sectors alike. In 1994 when the US National Science Foundation who managed the key infrastructure of the Internet tried to subcontract the Doman Name System (DNS) to a private US company the first internet governance war broke.

The Internet community reacted to this arbitrary and unilateral decision and a truce was reached in 1998, after four years of discussions and negotiations within the Internet community. At the time, the ICANN (The Internet Corporation for Assigned Names and Numbers) was created with the purpose of assigning and managing the DNS.

Since then, a flurry of summits, conferences and forums have aimed to lay the foundations for the shared Internet governance principles that shape the evolution and use of the net. Players such as international organizations and nation states started to take sides and argue about the meaning of Internet governance, and, especially, their respective roles in shaping the Internet.

In 2003 and 2005, the World Summit on the Information Society (WSIS), a two-phase United Nations-sponsored summit on information, communication and the information society, placed the existence and management of the internet on the diplomatic agenda.

A list of internet governance issues was defined, and both the Working Group on Internet Governance (WGIG) and the Internet Governance Forum (IGF) were created. WSIS also formulated the following working definition of internet governance which is now widely accepted: *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 programme that shape the evolution and use of the Internet.*

In 2006, after the International Telecommunications Union (ITU) Plenipotentiary conference in Ankara, cybersecurity and development were listed as additional Internet governance issues. In 2008, web 2.0 tools and net neutrality were also added.

In 2011, the Egyptian government cut the internet to disrupt revolts in the country, highlighting the he relation between freedom of expression and Internet governance, bringing a human rights dimension to the way we think about Internet Governance. Principles for this were also devised by additional organizations and countries such as the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), the Council of Europe, the European Union (EU), and Brazil.

Technical issues at the core of the internet infrastructure continue to have a central role in the evolution of the internet governance debate. Currently, however, the governance of the Internet reflects its decentralized and distributed approach and the role of many actors, including governments, civil society, academia and businesses, each with different interests and preoccupations, who are shaping the Internet daily. Certainly, no one person, company or organization runs the Internet as it operates without a central governing body.

Online Resources: Part I

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