Cities, Citizens, and Internet Governance

- Area: ROADMAP FOR THE FURTHER EVOLUTION OF THE INTERNET GOVERNANCE ECOSYSTEM
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Abstract

Our lives are increasingly affected by digital developments enabled by the Internet. Yet Internet users have meager access to the governance structures that establish the policies, standards, and practices that guide the Net?s operation. This submission suggests ways cities and their residents can better participate in Internet governance at the local and global levels.

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Background

When ICANN earnestly activated its new TLD issuance responsibilities in 2005, its initial inclination was to view cities as outside the scope of entities eligible for Top Level Domains. After a persuasive campaign by representatives from Berlin, Barcelona, New York, Paris, Tokyo and other global cities, that viewpoint changed and cities were included within ICANN’s 2008 resolution authorizing a new TLD program.

As the ICANN community struggled through the long process of developing an Applicant Guidebook, many in the city-TLD community noted that the needs of cities and their probable use of TLDs differed in significant ways from those of generic and business TLDs. And they urged that a different set of requisites for city-TLDs be established.

Additionally, these proponents urged that cities be forewarned about the implications of a TLD, enabling cities to better prepare for the responsibilities entailed in their planning and operation.

However, the challenges surrounding the completion of an Applicant Guidebook and pressure from eager applicants did not allow for applicant categories. And the only significant interventions were those proffered by ICANN's Government Advisory Committee (GAC) on behalf of the integrity of geographic names.

As of March 2014 it seems likely that approximately 35 cities will receive TLDs in the coming year.

This submission advances two topics for consideration by NETmundial. The first involves changes to the city-TLD issuance and development process and advocates for the inclusion of cities in Internet governance processes. The second suggests a means for cities and individual Internet users to better participate in Internet governance processes.

Cities and Top Level Domains

Cities are amongst the oldest and most complex entities we encounter in our daily lives. They house more than half our planet's population, with U.N. estimates projecting that will rise to 75% by mid-century. Cities are the places from which a preponderance of ideas and economic development emerge. And there's growing acceptance that a sustainable planet is likely to arise from the efficiencies of urban areas.

To date, the digital needs of cities have been given short shrift by Internet technologists and the Net's governance ecology. As remedy, we offer the following suggestions.

- The Roadmap should recommend a more robust process for issuing city-TLDs. This should include a recommendation that the TLD issuing entity

provide an informative and enlightening application process for cities considering TLD acquisition. While the “letter of non-objection’” required of the 2012 city-TLD applicants held the spirit of informed consent, the inclusion of a detailed scoping of a city-TLDs utility to residents, local businesses, quality of life, government operation, and global identity would better contribute to their efficacious development.

- Cities do not have a formal place in the Internet governance ecology. While a City-TLD Governance and Best Practices workshop was held at the 2010 IGF in Vilnius, follow-up has been scant. At ICANN, there’s a move to include city-TLDs within the Registry Constituency of the GNSO, but only as part of a broader geographic representation. Considering their size, their unique needs, and their importance to the global economy and a sustainable planet, we believe cities should be considered as a stakeholder within any multistakeholder regime.

A Message From The Bottom

Our lives are increasingly affected by digital activities enabled by the Internet. Yet Internet users have modest access to the “bottom-up” governance structures that establish the policies, standards, and practices that guide the Net’s operation.

Here in New York City we’ve experienced a small inkling of bottom-up participation in Internet oversight and management through two At-Large Structures. One is operated by the New York Internet Society, a chapter of the global Internet Society, and another by Connecting.nyc Inc., an advocacy and education organization focused on the development of the .nyc TLD.

For those not familiar with the At-Large Structures, here’s a brief history.

In its early days ICANN provided for strong representation of individual Internet users in its decision making processes. It did so by allocating 5 seats on its board of directors to

be filled by Internet users, with each of ICANN's regions selecting one member via a direct election. One such election was held and, for a time, 5 Internet user-selected board members helped govern ICANN.

The corporation found fault with the selection process and replaced the user-selected members with an appointed At-Large Advisory Committee and a Nominating Committee charged with selecting several board members.

In recent years the At-Large was reconstituted and now participates in selecting one (1) voting member to ICANN's board of directors.

By any measure, under today's governance formation, the world's 2+ billion individual Internet users and the At-Large Structure's impact on ICANN's governance decisions remain tenuous.

As mentioned earlier, Connecting.nyc Inc. is an At-Large Structure and can attest to a significant improvement of the At-Large's operation over the past several years, with significant contributions made on dozens of policy considerations this past year alone. But far more can be achieved by enhancing user engagement through the following actions.

- The number of seats selected by individual Internet users on ICANN's board of directors should be increased. Reverting to the original 5 seats seems a reasonable short term target.
- The new seats should be allocated as of old, one per ICANN region.
- The new seats should be selected by each region's At-Large Structures. (There are currently 180 At-Large Structures in the 5 regions.)
- The number of At-Large Structures should to be increased with additional resources provided to facilitate their operation.
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Special care should be taken to assure that participation by the poor and the marginalized is facilitated.

- Concomitant with this resource allocation there needs to be improved transparency and accountability measures for the At-Large.

NOTE: At the June meeting of the ICANN in London the second At-Large Summit is to be held, with a representatives of all At-Structures in attendance.

We remain eager to add clarity and depth to this sumisssion.