Policy | brief

Building better multistakeholderism: GIPO's role in promoting debates on internet governance

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Lack of information sharing between different actors in internet governance (IG) debates means that voices are often uncoordinated and unheard. One of the initiatives recognised as contributing to multistakeholder processes in internet governance is the Global Internet Policy Observatory (GIPO). *GIPO monitors and categorises internet governance related information online*, aiming to help stakeholders, in particular those with limited resources, understand and engage in decision making related to internet policy and governance. GIPO is a practical contribution of the European Commission to capacity building for the global community, and part of their wider approach to global internet governance.

GIPO provides us with an opportunity to examine whether multistakeholderism can actually live up to the opportunities it provides for improving global governance mechanisms in many different policy spheres. GIPO's observatory attempts to provide a space for informing new and engaged stakeholders on IG debates. As such, it tries to fine-tune one small but necessary aspect of multistakeholderism: promoting more well-informed debates between a wider range of stakeholders. As one of GIPO's main objectives is to advance discussions on internet policy, we provide this Policy Brief to address the opportunities in this area. This strategy should build on the added value and unique characteristics of the tool, namely its capacity to aggregate, index and categorise various sources that it crawls. GIPO can provide the 'background' trawling of specialised resources to help provide timely, focused and relevant information to different types of stakeholders. It is hoped that this will encourage the engagement of all stakeholders in IG debates.

The Global Internet Policy Observatory (GIPO), an initiative of the European Commission, is an online tool to help monitor developments on Internet governance and policy around the world and provide better understanding and access to the largest number of potential stakeholders. Governments, NGOs and others interested in Internet Governance, including Internet users, are often daunted by the complexity of this fast-paced policy area.

Thanks to the use of advanced IT technologies, GIPO provides a practical tool to navigate this field, increasing expertise and understanding among many more interested actors. The tool helps all those interested in Internet Governance to navigate the labyrinth of global Internet governance and policy. This policy brief outlines the results of a meeting held on the fringes of EuroDIG in Brussels in 2016, and presents some of the challenges and opportunities for such an experiment in 'machine-driven information monitoring' on a given topic of global importance. It provides recommendations for the future development of the tool, and continues the debate launched by the GIPO project's Federation Roadmap, to help the tool maximize its impact in this complex policy environment.

Multistakeholder approaches to governance of complex issues are present in several fields: environmental governance, labour standards, and internet governance. Given the novelty of the

concept, it is understandable that there is a lack of consensus on how to best approach these flexible and far more diverse decision-making structures and processes. Although there is no specific 'model' of this approach (most appear to be organised in pragmatic terms), the various fora where this is used share at least three characteristics:

1. open engagement, involving interaction between various 'stakeholder types';
2. loose engagement mechanisms; and
3. seeking solutions through consensus.

Despite processes being 'open', we note that the role of different stakeholders, the definition of the rules of engagement, and the explanation of the decision making processes are often opaque (at least to the non-engaged observer). Additionally, selective (self-)participation of the stakeholders provides a barrier to broad engagement. The outcomes that emerge from multistakeholder processes are also difficult to manage, as they require buy-in from a wide range of actors.

In spite of these challenges, multistakeholder processes are upheld by many actors as central to decision-making processes at the global level. This is one of the core ambitions of GIPO. Particularly in this case, however, civil society and academia are puzzled with finding out who the communities are GIPO wants to reach out to, why these communities should engage with the tool and how we can effectively promote the tool? The following pages outline three key areas where GIPO needs to take steps towards achieving its goal of sharing information and coordination amongst all stakeholders affected by IG processes.

GIPO is one of a whole range of initiatives that attempts to improve participation in global policy debates. These initiatives are becoming increasingly important in debates on global governance and we need to continue to follow their development. This policy brief goes some way to highlighting the challenges and opportunities for such an experiment in 'machine-driven information monitoring' on a given topic of global importance, and proposes suggestions that will hopefully help the initiative to develop further in the years to come.

Advancing IG discussions: GIPO's content and technical capabilities

The richness of GIPO flows from two key areas. Combined, these help fulfil the aim of increasing information sharing with a diverse range of stakeholders. First, the tool makes use of its curated list of sources to provide a large amount of focused search results to a visitor to the observatory. Second, as a result of the crawling of its sources, GIPO has amassed a huge database of metadata (such as location, date and tags) concerning items examined by the tool. This makes the number and quality of sources, and the way in which they are harvested of crucial importance to the success of GIPO.

One of GIPO's current challenges resides in the obstacles associated in contributing sources to the tool. Users who wish to add a source have to contact the technical team of GIPO, via an online form. Moreover, much relevant information is missing or cannot be added to the tool due to technical reasons, mainly driven by lack of standardisation of representation of content online. GIPO is designed to automatically crawl dynamic sources, but requires standardised formats for doing so. Currently, these are limited to RSS feeds, Twitter links, Google+ feeds, and webpages with changing content. As a result, policy, legal and academic content is either absent or difficult to add (for example, journal articles or policy codexes). These additional types of sources need to be added to GIPO for it to have any pertinence to IG specialists.

We contend that collating input into GIPO from a wide range of contributors, sources and source types should be prioritised. In order for this to happen, efforts are necessary to increase the 'social' elements of the tool. We discuss two sets of solutions in the paragraphs below.

On the one hand, different communities and stakeholders, each in their respective roles, should be able to **contribute sources to the GIPO tool easily**. Users need to receive guidelines not only on how to use, but importantly also on how and why to add sources to the tool.[1] To ensure future growth and use of the tool, we believe facilitating the contribution of sources and items (including policy and academic content) by diverse stakeholders in many languages is paramount. The im-

portance of contributing new sources to the tool, couched in terms of specific benefits that will bring for increasing and developing knowledge and awareness amongst different stakeholders, should be clearly stated.

On the other hand, increasing the 'social' elements of the tool implies *a proactive and user-centred communication approach*. Now that the tool is available in beta version, systematic updates of the tool shared through social media, and awareness raising at relevant trainings and programmes on internet governance should be continued and even increased. Recent conversations with users have also revealed that the newly developed GIPO plug-in for websites (API) is much appreciated. One suggestion for improvement of the technical capabilities of GIPO could be a presentation of trending searches or popular topics in the tool. Similarly, a feedback option (as simple as 'did this answer your question?') may be also envisaged in the future, should resources be available to deal with the emergent feedback.

The more user friendly GIPO becomes, the more value it will receive and the more stakeholders it will attract. If we want GIPO to advance IG policy discussions, we believe this requires facilitating contributions to and promotion of the tool.

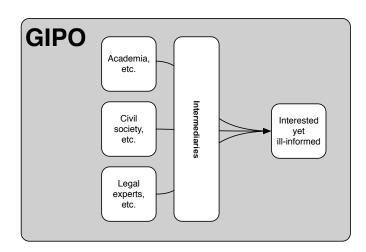**Stimulating use: GIPO's audience and networks**

GIPO desires to stimulate multiple stakeholder participation in IG debates around the world. Hence, the 'audience' needs to be specifically addressed in subsequent presentations of the tool. When initially developed, the idea was to create a platform to help include the 'interested yet ill-informed' in internet governance, notably those with fewer resources or access to adequate information. GIPO as an information sharing tool goes some way to achieving this, but this is only part of the story of increasing the level of participation in multistakeholder discussions on internet governance issues. We now understand that for the tool to gain traction in the communities concerned with IG in its broadest sense, the engagement of specialists who are active in IG topics is a must. Thus, the core audience can be split into two, or even three categories:

1. specialists in IG (who can be academics, technical

community members, legal experts, civil society members, business interests, diplomats, policymakers and Internet Governance schools), involved in either the broader policy discussion, or just in one of the IG policy issues on a daily basis;

2. 'interested yet ill-informed', looking for information and news on how IG policies influence their lives (who can be individual citizens, media, diplomats or policymakers); and

3. intermediaries, who bridge the gap between specialists and the interested yet ill-informed (such as IG policy observatories, mapping initiatives and international governance forums (eg. IGF)).

For GIPO to have an impact, the growth of networks of IG (internet governance) specialists and regional intermediaries engaged in the tool is crucial. These experts help build knowledge, which intermediary organisations then share with their established communities. Seen in this light, it is beneficial to address the diverse audiences simultaneously. This ensures a 'virtuous circle' grows between content 'providers' and platform 'users', and avoids the need to focus solely on the 'fragile stakeholders'.

Indeed, it is improbable that reaching out to 'fragile' communities or new stakeholders can be done without the participation and contribution of already 'established' or existing stakeholders, such as existing observatories, researchers, legal experts, technical communities and civil society groups. The importance of reaching out, support and education of newly established observatory initiatives and IG school, in particular in the developing world should not be underestimated. It is *the inclu-*

sion of the usual suspects in combination with the attempt to go beyond them that can maximise GIPO´s impact. In terms of IG specialists, researchers for example, can play a decisive role in conducting case study research that maps the 'fragile' communities GIPO wants to reach, their location, their particular needs, etc. The expertise and the network of existing stakeholders should not to be overlooked in the process of outreach. Further, in terms of intermediaries, it has proven fruitful to engage in a proactive manner at the regional IG meetings, where links to local IG communities across the world can be fostered. By providing the possibility of an incorporation of the Observatory Tool into the websites of the regional and local intermediaries, GIPO facilitates the process of creation of new observatories as well as the process of education of the new generation of experts.

Shared ownership of GIPO: institutional issues

The European Commission is kickstarting the GIPO initiative.[2] At the end of 2017, the fully operational tool will be provided to the internet governance community. The future governance arrangements need to be resolved before the handover is complete, in order to ensure sustainability of the tool.

This future institutional governance model requires full awareness of the intended user base, their needs and how GIPO contributes to improving their position in these multistakeholder debates. GIPO will be ready to use in 2017. This does not mean, however, that it will be a 'finished product' once it is released to the IG community. *Continued investment is necessary both now and in the future to add the ever-increasing number of IG-related sources to the platform* and to help it achieve its aim of broadening debate. This investment is obviously a cost that needs to be taken into consideration when 'handing over the tool', and yet cannot be determined during the development phase.

As mentioned above, local content will increase the relevance of the GIPO tool for 'fragile stakeholders'. Key to providing relevant content at a local level are regional partnerships. Recently GIPO has started collaborating with the African Civil Society for the Information Society, ACSIS. By being an intermediary rather than simply an end user of the platform, ACSIS helps ensure that relevant local content is included in the tool and plays an

important role in enabling GIPO to reach more stakeholders who are interested yet ill-informed in Internet governance. Developing these partnerships at a regional level seems a productive way forward. GIPO's existing advisory group could also be expanded to include regional working groups.

The GIPO initiative has already reached out to other internet governance observatories. This has been a fruitful exercise, ensuring that GIPO complements rather than competes with current efforts. A next step could be to join the initiatives in an IGF network of platforms, similar to a dynamic coalition, in order to facilitate discussions on support and interoperability between the observatories. Structured dialogue among the initiatives would also create more visibility and transparency towards stakeholders.

Various models for ownership of GIPO after this initial phase are possible. However, depending on the host organisation, the tool will receive a particular political 'flavour'. For this reason, we believe the future host should be as neutral and uncontroversial as possible. Taking into account its success in gathering stakeholders around the table, the Secretariat of the IGF has been put forward as a potential option. It is equally conceivable that an academic institution, a civil society organisation or a combination of these actors, committed to the multistakeholder process, could take up this role. Indeed, engagement with as broad a representation from the IG community as possible is necessary to sustain the tool in the longer term.

Regardless of the type of future host, *continued maintenance but also outreach of the tool are paramount.* The future of GIPO is not cost-free. Moreover, it should be recognised that the more investment is made, the more sophisticated and useful the tool will become. Perhaps the future host of GIPO is able to allocate funds. More probable, however, is that crowd funding will be necessary to cover (at least part of) the tool's running costs. In this regard, the efforts of Friends of the IGF or the IGF Supporters Association to raise voluntary individual contributions to financially support the Forum should be recognised and recommended.

Recommendations

The discussion above leads us to formulate the following set of recommendations. Although specific to the GIPO Observatory, the recommendations are based upon our analysis of the role and form of multistakeholderism in the field of internet governance. They reflect our understanding of what multistakeholder processes should entail (broadest possible input from the largest number of informed stakeholders) and how these can be encouraged through a specific form of interaction: namely a platform for information collection (such as GIPO).

GIPO joins a whole range of observatories that map out the complexities of IG and engage different individuals in the process. These include the Geneva Internet Platform, NETmundial Initiative, Internet and Jurisdiction Observatory, and many more. Each of these initiatives provides a particular niche in the IG ecosystem. Rather than overlapping and competing with these, GIPO should continue to develop a framework for collaboration with them. We propose three areas for recommendations for the GIPO initiative and its sponsor, the European Commission, stemming from debates and discussions that have been taking place amongst the project team and GIPO's Advisory Group since the project officially launched in 2015, and particularly at an event held on Day 0 of EuroDIG in Brussels in 2016. These focus on content and technical capability, expanding the audience and networks for the tool, and looking towards future institutional organisation after the European Commission's seed funding comes to an end.

Content and technical capability

1. GIPO will only achieve its aims if it is recognised within the internet governance (IG) community as a useful tool. Buy-in from the expert community is essential. It is important that the Advisory Group fully engage in facilitating links between GIPO and the wider IG community.

2. GIPO is only as good as its sources. It has to be easy to add relevant content to the tool. We recommend efforts are made to facilitate integration of GIPO into the daily practices of experts to ensure that sources are constantly updated and filters validated.

3. New content types, such as academic articles and legal texts, need to be introduced to GIPO's database for it to have pertinence to the IG community. This can either be done by encouraging use of standards by repositories (see the DCAT-AP standard) or by prioritising specific journal/legal repositories and developing 'connectors' to GIPO.

4. GIPO's support for multiple languages, as intended in the tool's roadmap for 2016 and 2017, will greatly benefit the IG community. We recommend this is given a key position in communication activities as it clearly shows how GIPO tries to move towards broadening the stakeholder base. It may be advisable to provide guidelines on how the IG community can add additional languages to the tool once it is handed over at the end of 2017.

Audience and networks

5. Establishing regional participation will help the GIPO tool grow in breadth and depth. GIPO's governance structure should incorporate regional advisory groups to help develop awareness and use of the tool by regional and local intermediaries.

6. GIPO should continue to develop extensive and structured collaboration with other observatories, and in particular with regional IGF structures. We recommend that GIPO become part of a network of platforms similar to a dynamic coalition. This could help institutionalize discussions on the contribution and complementarity of these tools.

Future institutional organisation

7. Considering its commitment to the multistakeholder process, the IGF Secretariat forms a good candidate to host the GIPO tool in the future. As this would likely necessitate (at least in part) independent funding, fundraising activities through Friends of the IGF or the IGFSA should be considered.

8. This institutional ownership does not preclude, and in fact encourages, potential opportunities for shared host-

ing options. We recommend that any future institutional governance mechanism present in GIPO's Observatory take different stakeholder types (academic, civil society, business, etc.) into consideration when developing Advisory and Management Groups, as well as the regional actors mentioned in Recommendation 5 above.

Footnotes

[1] For instance, the multilingual capacity of the GIPO tool is perceived as one of its main assets. In 2016 and 2017 the interface of the tool (including metadata) will be translated into the six UN official languages (Arabic, Chinese, English, French, Russian and Spanish). The collected content itself, however, will not be translated.

[2] European Commission (2014). Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions. Internet Policy and Governance Europe's role in shaping the future of Internet Governance. COM/2014/072 final. Brussels: European Commission. Available at http://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/ALL/?uri=CELEX:52014DC0072

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