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*National and Regional Internet
Governance Forum Initiatives (NRIs)*



ASSOCIATION FOR PROGRESSIVE COMMUNICATIONS (APC)

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National and Regional Internet Governance Forum Initiatives (NRIs)

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A special edition of GISWatch, "Internet governance from the edges: NRIs in their own words", is being published as a companion edition to the 2017 GISWatch annual report. It looks at the history, challenges and achievements of NRIs, as recounted by their organisers. It is available at <https://www.giswatch.org>



Eurovisioni

Giacomo Mazzone, Arturo Di Corinto, Roberto Masotti and Lea Melandri¹
www.eurovisioni.eu

Introduction

Italy was one of the first countries to launch a national Internet Governance Forum (IGF), organising its first in 2008, two years after the first global IGF in Athens; but since then, its initial enthusiasm has lost momentum.

Historically Italy has been a forerunner in the development of the internet in Europe, and recently celebrated its 30th anniversary of the internet in the country. On 30 April 1986, an institute of the National Research Centre, the National University Computing Centre (CNUCE), connected to the ARPANET² network for the first time. Italy then became the fourth European country, after Norway, the United Kingdom and West Germany, to be connected.

But despite its early involvement in the internet, Italy has not been able to establish a sustainable, robust and structured national multistakeholder process to contribute to internet governance in the country. Competencies are still fragmented among various governmental bodies, and civil society, academia and the business sector have not been able to hold constructive and mutually beneficial dialogue on internet governance issues.

For these reasons, learning more about the Italian experience, its mistakes and its current problems, could be very useful for other countries that want to elaborate on a comprehensive and truly multistakeholder approach to internet governance.

Policy and political background

Since the beginning of the internet governance process at the World Summit on the Information Society (WSIS) in Geneva in 2003, Italy has changed government eight times (it has had four short-lived left-wing governments, three right-wing governments led by Silvio Berlusconi, and one interim government). Since the first global IGF in Athens in

2006, it has had six governments. This fast-changing political situation that rapidly brought opposite political views into power impacted on internet governance matters – it was not the best environment to build consensus on internet policy issues, or a constructive multistakeholder space for internet governance deliberations.³ If we add to that the fact that Berlusconi's government has always been hostile to the proliferation of internet access in Italian society,⁴ it is easy to see how internet governance issues have become completely irrelevant *vis-à-vis* domestic issues.

One key exception was during the debate over the Charter of Internet Rights promoted by the speaker of the Lower Chamber of the Parliament, Laura Boldrini. The debate lasted two years (2014-2016) under the leadership of Stefano Rodotà⁵ and concluded with the approval of the charter.⁶ Other exceptions have been legal actions following attempts by the government to censor the internet in one way or another.⁷ Apart from this, the debate on internet governance issues has never gone very deep and the question of the role of stakeholders has never really been the subject of public debate (with the only exception being the public consultation in 2015 on the draft text of the above-mentioned Charter of Internet Rights before its submission to a vote in the Parliament). Instead, internet governance has remained mainly confined in the hands of the technical community and a few other actors.

Regulations against online copyright infringement, child pornography, cyberbullying and unauthorised gambling have all included some form

1 The authors thank Andrea Cairola for his support in their work.

2 <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/ARPANET>

3 The polarisation of the positions between successive governments has also affected the business sector and civil society. Only academia and the internet community have remained (relatively) immune from the phenomenon; but they have not been able to change the behaviours of the other stakeholders.

4 See previous GISWatch Italy reports at www.giswatch.org

5 Stefano Rodotà (30 May 1933 – 23 June 2017) was one of the most renowned Italian jurists and an expert on privacy and other internet rights. A member of the Italian parliament for decades, he was a candidate to be president of Italy in 2013.

6 www.camera.it/application/xmanager/projects/leg17/commissione_internet/testo_definitivo_inglese.pdf

7 One case involved wire-tapping (see: https://it.wikipedia.org/wiki/DDL_Intercettazioni) and the other cyberbullying (see: www.ilsole24ore.com/art/SoleOnline4/Tecnologia%20%20Business/2010/02/sentenza-google-privacy-giro-mondo.shtml?refresh_ce=1).

of control placed on the internet and of cooperation among diverse stakeholders, but have not resulted in public debate on the importance of internet governance. There was no public debate even when the government's cybersecurity strategy was approved. Updated with the prime ministerial decree of 17 February 2017,⁸ the strategy aims at improving coordination among public cybersecurity organisations, at better involving the private sector, and at centralising the liaisons with international bodies such as the European Union (EU), NATO and the United Nations. The Ministry of Interior and the Ministry for Economic Development both have cybersecurity bodies sharing information with the private sector (limited to the very largest companies). Most businesses have no access to these cybersecurity bodies, and the main force driving their information security efforts are regulations such as the EU's General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR).

Unstructured engagement

By its nature, the internet is a transversal and disruptive technology. It is something that is very difficult to fit into a governmental structure, especially when highly specialised agencies tend to work in separate clusters. Initially, the various Italian governments tackled the internet governance issue by creating new structures within existing ones, but this has not worked. In 2012 – following the model suggested by the EU – an agency dealing with the country's digital agenda called Agenzia per l'Italia Digitale (AGID) was created under the Prime Minister's Office.⁹ It partially replaced various former bodies existing since 1993 that have changed their mission over the years – such as Agenzia Per L'informatica Nella Pubblica Amministrazione (AIPA), Centro Nazionale per l'Informatica nella Pubblica Amministrazione (CNIPA), and DigitPA. But the coordinating muscle granted to AGID has never been flexed, and so internet governance today still remains within the mandates of the Foreign Affairs Ministry, the Ministry of Economic Development, the Ministry of Education and Research, and a few other agencies and authorities.

Given this fragmentation of duties and responsibilities on the governmental side, the internet governance debate has remained confined mainly in the hands of the internet technical community: the Italian domain registry, Registro.it,¹⁰ and the Italian chapter of the Internet Society (ISOC).¹¹ However,

contrary to what happened in other countries, the representation within the Governmental Advisory Committee of the Internet Corporation for Assigned Names and Numbers (ICANN) has been taken over by the Prime Minister's Office and by the Ministry of Economic Development (MISE), and Registro.it is now totally excluded.¹²

The participation of public bodies in internet governance processes stops here: few in government systematically follow the IGF or WSIS processes, except the Italian diplomatic representation in Geneva (part of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs). But this has no connection with civil society and business stakeholders and very thin ties with the other ministerial bodies. The Italian government has also never applied for a seat in the Multistakeholder Advisory Group (MAG) of the global IGF. The only two Italians elected to the MAG since its inception have been representatives of business and media.

Individuals from Italian civil society and the business community participate in these two global processes, but because of the lack of a national coordination, they represent their constituencies, not the country.

The absence of debate on internet governance issues in the country reflects the isolation of the sectors from each other generally. The only existing tool to address internet governance in a multistakeholder environment is the national internet governance event, which kick-started in 2008. But the Italy IGF is an annual gathering, nothing more: a two-day event, with random preparation processes and with no follow-up.

The absence of ongoing structured platforms for dialogue – or of a democratic and transparent process within the Italy IGF itself – penalises the groups that are not in direct contact with the various fragmented centres of power that govern the Italian internet, including the national registry and AGID. In this kind of situation, there is a disconnect between high-level models imported from the global internet governance structures – which emphasise a bottom-up, multistakeholder approach – and the daily reality of the national internet governance debate in Italy.

Even the national business community is not active in this debate. Italian industry associations are dominated by traditional industries (automotive, construction, the banking sector, etc.) and have no interest in the internet governance debate at all. Furthermore, the Italian telecom sector is largely controlled by foreign capital: all the five largest operators are owned by foreign companies, potentially

8 www.gazzettaufficiale.it/eli/id/2017/04/18/17A02714/sg

9 www.agid.gov.it

10 www.nic.it/en

11 www.isoc.it

12 www.sviluppoeconomico.gov.it/index.php/en

limiting their willingness to work on the topic. The very active small and medium enterprise (SME) sector¹³ and the few innovative internet companies do not have enough resources (human or funding) to support or even to follow a costly, lengthy and expensive process that the internet governance debate is today.

The unstructured and sometimes hazardous approach to internet governance in Italy is exemplified by the national IGF. In the last nine years, the country has organised eight national IGFs: three in the capital, and five elsewhere across the country (Cagliari, Pisa, Trento, Torino and Venice).

The lack of resources (public or private) for the process makes it impossible to source grants to allow for the participation of the poorest organisations, to provide translation for international guests, to publish the proceedings and the documents of the IGF event, or even sometimes to build and maintain a proper and rich website for the national IGF.¹⁴

The financing and organisational model has changed practically every year since its foundation. Initially the responsibility of Registro.it and ISOC Italia, local administrations and the academic community then took over its organisation, with the last two events organised and funded by universities in the north of the country. (In 2014 and 2015 costs were covered by parliament).

The following cities have hosted the Italy IGF:

- 2016 – Venice (VIII)¹⁵
- 2015 – Rome (VII)¹⁶
- 2014 – Rome (VI)¹⁷
- 2012 – Torino (V)¹⁸
- 2011 – Trento (IV)¹⁹
- 2010 – Rome (III)²⁰
- 2009 – Pisa (II)²¹
- 2008 – Cagliari (I).²²

With the exception of the 2014 and 2015 events – which were held in the Italian parliament, focused on the Charter of Internet Rights debate mentioned above, and were organised by a group of parliamentary experts working on the charter – all the Italian IGFs have had no follow-up in the national political debate, and even less with regard to forming a national position for international forums where internet governance is discussed. Even the link between the Italy IGF and the European Dialogue on Internet Governance (EuroDIG)²³ is left to the good-will of a few individuals who participate in both processes; there is no structured reporting process or mechanism for planning or following the interaction between the Italy IGF and EuroDIG.

Processes in the Italy IGF also do not meet most of the criteria established by the IGF for National and Regional Initiatives (NRIs).²⁴ There are at least three criteria it does not meet. It lacks openness, primarily because the organising committee changes every year, which makes it very difficult for those who are not connected with the fragmented power centres of the Italian internet to become part of the game. It lacks transparency, including the absence of a website where information on each year's events can be accessed (this information is hosted on various organisations' websites instead). It is not "bottom up", because the programme, the speakers, the dates and the venue are decided by a small group of decision makers that change practically every year.

While it does meet two criteria, neither is due to any structured attempt to meet these criteria. It is multistakeholder: there are companies involved, and professors from universities – even if these are not "representative" of their communities in any formal sense, but participating through good will, and there remains a range of barriers that make it difficult to participate. Last but not least, the Italian IGF is not "commercial", because in this unstructured state it is impossible to find sponsors that will invest in it in the long run.

Regional reflection

The Italy IGF has always kept informal relations with EuroDIG as well as with the NRI Coordinators. In the absence of any official mandate, these informal relations are mainly the initiative of individuals. This means that the Italy IGF has no direct impact on the selection of EuroDIG topics put up for discussion. Nevertheless, topics raised at EuroDIG and the

13 The sector has recently been the focus of a law called "Start-up Italy" to incentivise new innovative companies.

14 The website for the Italy IGF 2011 does not exist anymore because it has been taken down by the public agency that hosted it.

15 www.isoc.it/archivio-igf-italia/igf-italia-2016

16 www.isoc.it/node/1066

17 www.isoc.it/node/1051

18 Held with the support of the Piedmont Region. www.isoc.it/Archivio/IGF%20Italia/IGF%20Italia%202012 and 2012.igf-italia.it

19 Held with the support of the Province of Trento. www.isoc.it/node/1048

20 www.isoc.it/node/1047

21 www.isoc.it/Archivio/IGF%20Italia/IGF%20Italia%202009#

22 www.isoc.it/node/1045

23 <https://www.eurodig.org>

24 www.intgovforum.org/multilingual/index.php?q=filedepot_download/3568/480

global IGF do impact on the thematic concerns of the national IGF.

All stakeholders participating in the Italy IGF agreed in principle in Venice in 2016 on the idea of strengthening the integration and interaction between the national, European and global forums when it comes to thematic topics. This goodwill has not yet been put into practice because of the organisational inconsistency at the national level. On top of this, the lack of resources often makes it impossible for Italy IGF organisers to attend the regional and global IGFs, unless they are funded by third parties or they pay for their participation themselves. This means that civil society, academia and small business representatives cannot attend EuroDIG or the global IGF, where, very often, the only Italians attending are those representing international or foreign organisations.

Conclusions

The preparatory work for the Italy IGF 2017 has started on a very promising note, with the academic community in charge – this year the host will be University of Bologna, which took over the organisation. A dedicated channel for collaboration has been created using Slack²⁵ and around 50 participants are already registered and participating in a collective effort to prepare the IGF, scheduled for 20 and 21 November. A dedicated website was launched one month before the event to ask participants to contribute to the programme.²⁶

Government and business representatives remain under-represented at the moment, but some of the criteria for an NRI are finally being met: transparency, openness and an equal footing for all constituencies. The only problem is that the imminent elections in Italy (in spring 2018) will probably distract the attention of politicians and institutions.

It is more than likely that we will have to wait until the next government is in place before we can put together a truly multistakeholder experience. Until then, the current fragmented situation will be perpetuated.

This fragmentation and the absence of structured dialogue among stakeholders is not only a problem for Italy, but is the case in many countries where there is little cooperation among the various stakeholders. As a result, the global internet governance debate is weakened through an absence of shared views and common goals.

Action steps

There is a strong movement in Italy, driven mainly by academia and civil society, trying to bring all stakeholders around the same table. The imminent elections make it very unlikely that this will be achieved immediately. Nevertheless, the proximity of the global IGF in Geneva this year could provide a boost to these efforts, and favour cooperation and dialogue. This is the primary interest of civil society, because in the absence of structured dialogue, government institutions will decide for the country at international forums on their own; and businesses will do the same in their international associations and initiatives.

Now the most urgent thing to be done is to create a positive movement, using the next Italy IGF and the Italian presence at the global IGF as catalysers for a national debate. The recent death of Stefano Rodotà, who has for many years been the most vocal and respected activist for human rights and the internet in Italy, could also be the pretext to gather all stakeholders around the same table, in a dialogue that could result in concrete engagement and a multistakeholder future for internet governance in the country.

²⁵ <https://igfitalia2017.slack.com>

²⁶ igfitalia2017.cirsfid.unibo.it/index.php/partecipa/consultazione-pubblica

National and Regional Internet Governance Forum Initiatives (NRIs)

National and Regional Internet Governance Forum Initiatives (NRIs) are now widely recognised as a vital element of the Internet Governance Forum (IGF) process. In fact, they are seen to be the key to the sustainability and ongoing evolution of collaborative, inclusive and multistakeholder approaches to internet policy development and implementation.

A total of 54 reports on NRIs are gathered in this year's Global Information Society Watch (GISWatch). These include 40 country reports from contexts as diverse as the United States, the Democratic Republic of Congo, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Italy, Pakistan, the Republic of Korea and Colombia.

The country reports are rich in approach and style and highlight several challenges faced by activists organising and participating in national IGFs, including broadening stakeholder participation, capacity building, the unsettled role of governments, and impact.

Seven regional reports analyse the impact of regional IGFs, their evolution and challenges, and the risks they still need to take to shift governance to the next level, while seven thematic reports offer critical perspectives on NRIs as well as mapping initiatives globally.

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