

ISOC.PH - An introduction and our contribution to the Internet Governance Forums: Participation and Cultural Plurality

The Purpose of the Philippines Chapter of the Internet Society as stated in its By-Laws make up four streams of advocacy:

First is debate, discussion, dialogue.

Second is intelligent, creative, informed use of Internet technology.

Third is representation, meaningful participation.

And fourth is innovation.

I would now like to present these streams and their convergences within the broader questions of Internet governance in the Philippine context, a context which effectively reflects the reality that those who are not on the Internet are also impacted by its effects, an apparent exclusion that can easily lead us to the issue of the "digital divide" and the all too obvious solution of "digital inclusion."

However, before moving on to two core elements of governance that I'd like to discuss today, I would like to problematize "digital divide" as a relationship issue and not simply an "access issue" pervading the politics of participation among developing and less developed countries and countries of the English-speaking and developed world. At the local level, this same asymmetrical relationship informs the allocation and diversion of resources from food production, housing, basic education and health care to installing, supporting and maintaining ICT structures.

Such ICT structures and projects have likewise become the new cargo cults for disempowered communities via their funding organizations, and certainly the new milking cows for corruption in government and private sectors alike. They have also served as impetus for public policy and legislation on Cybercrime, Data Protection, Anti-Terror, Intellectual Property Rights and Education, which are often framed within technical and economic terms neglecting their un-seen social and cultural effects.

Via the four streams of ISOC.PH's advocacy, and ISOC's key initiatives toward a collaborative Internet, we at ISOC.PH hope to contribute and engage discourse and active participation in the broader questions of Internet governance, questions that will seek to challenge Internet governance advocates to take into very careful consideration the world and the politics that exist outside of the Internet, not by simply trying to bridge or bring that world into the Internet, but by looking at the much bigger picture of governance.

Here, in this bigger picture of governance, I propose that there are two core elements: meaningful participation and cultural plurality.

First, a bit about cultural plurality, which is related to cultural diversity. The difference between diversity and plurality is very well expressed by Rustom Bharucha, a colleague and fellow CopySouth member from Calcutta, India:

"On diversity – this is a sacred cow and one of those words that falls into a “feel

good" category. We live in a country (India) where diversity is a given but all these diversities do not amount to a plurality. Need to distinguish between diversity and plurality. Just because we live in a diverse world it does not mean we are harmonious or tolerant. India is sectarian if not racist and we cannot say that diversity has allowed people to live more harmoniously. If we want to work towards plurality we must work through negotiation and arbitration – diversity comes with inequity."

This is where the element of plurality in governance comes in - that it is not a feel good factor as "cultural diversity" has become. It rather signifies the inequity that comes with diversity, and the demands that it weighs upon the types of participation that we must undertake in local and global forums.

Meaningful participation is rooted in cultural plurality and self-determination.

I should also add that participation is meaningful only if participation is acknowledged and heard.

In his Introduction to the book "Internet Governance: Asia Pacific Perspectives" published in 2005, my friend and colleague, Danny Butt, states the problem of participation then and still at hand:

"In particular, for historical reasons, the various bodies usually associated with Internet governance (ICANN, IETF, ISOC) have been dominated by participation from English-speaking North America and Europe. While these bodies market their inclusivity and openness, they nevertheless fail to reflect the diversity of the users of the Internet within key positions of power. This has significant effects on their decision-making capacity in areas that primarily affect non-English speaking users..."

On this, I should say that ISOC.PH's founding membership may have the potential to represent expertises and needs that - apart from the technical and economic questions often considered in Internet governance - include diverse cultural interests and the rapid socio-cultural challenges that mark Filipino life today. Our membership reflects the physical and virtual diaspora of labor and identity. All of us speak more than one language. Our work and contribution won't simply be on the basis of "a shared culture" or the principles of "openness" and "commonality" or the ideals of "individual participation" or of "local, bottom-up and accessible" Internet development. In a truly diverse and participatory scheme of governance, these principles are and will always be challenged. Hopefully, we can bring to the Internet governance table productive dialogues toward a culturally open approach to diversity, difference and conflict.

Pondering on the recuperation from sins of the past, a friend recently told me, "tra il dire e il fare c'e' di mezzo il mare" - "between saying and doing, half the sea."

So I should add - the founding membership of ISOC.PH is itself going to be a difficult test of actually negotiating and managing a complex multi-stakeholder environment. We will have to provide practical solutions to questions such as: How can we deepen the involvement of the technical community in questions of public

policy? How can we strengthen the technical understanding of development advocates in the effort to transform existing governance regimes? How do we transform both political struggles and development goals into truly meaningful and inclusive problem solving processes for our communities? And how can our communities make a direct input into global Internet governance processes?

Crucial to the investigation of these questions is ISOC.PH's own relationship with the government, private sector, and civil society. After having undergone the international process for recognition of ISOC.PH - with thanks to Rajnesh Singh and Sabrina Wilmot who have seen us through the rejuvenation process and to Rodel Urani for his vision and dedication in establishing the Chapter - this forum marks our local presence for cooperation, coordination and collaboration. At this early point in the Chapter's rejuvenation, I can confidently say that ISOC.PH can work with you on key issues affecting Internet and "not purely Internet" governance questions.

These are:

(1) the impact of Internet governance on cultural diversity, plurality and the status of Asia Pacific languages and cultures; this diversity, plurality and status is particularly important as demands for grassroots deployment of VoIP and wireless increases; this also brings us to the issue of intellectual property, for instance of ISO Unicode standards, that unless these are in the public domain these remain a barrier to localisation;

(2) Intellectual property regimes, and alternative and collective ownership structures; which brings us to policies on Free and Open Source Software and open standards especially in government procurement and public access; this also leads us to the need for a more careful and diverse analysis of regional policy on "intellectual property" and the control of content online which so far have been largely determined by private organizations and such bodies as WIPO and WTO. Cultures produce and circulate a whole range of intangible property in diverse ways and thus harmonization and commitment to international "intellectual property" agendas could be a threat to cultural diversity online (and offline);

(3) IP address management, IPv6 adoption and responsive policies in IPv6 allocation, which leads us to global allocation policies under IPv6, and whether new proposals for allocating remaining IPv4 space provide responsive mechanisms for IPv6; DNS management, the question "when will the .ph domain be opened up?" in the contested .ph domain monopoly; and will there be a need for responsive global forum for resolving what seem to be entirely local or national issues?

(4) Quality of Service by Internet Service Providers, and particularly the costs of access and service arising from lack of diversity in shorter cross-border or intra-regional cables, as well as the status of Asia Pacific ISPs as customers of upstream ISPs;

(5) Internet Governance in the context of human rights and civil liberties; status of the Freedom of Information Act of 2008 and the presidential veto on the right to information clause in the 2009 General Appropriations Act; and the chronic absence

of an enabling legislation for a long-time Constitutional guarantee;

(6) The role of education - formal and non-formal - not only in promoting the Internet but more significantly in understanding and debating the broader questions of governance and the impact of the Internet and ICTs on social and cultural diversity; for example, there is an ever increasing demand for education towards supplying the global informational labor market. But as it becomes easier to transfer jobs to different geographical locations in such a global mobile out-sourcing marketplace, the companies and regions at the top of the ICT value chain take the best advantage in accumulating capital, while it gets harder for dependent groups to retain knowledge and capital. What is the role of ICT education in this "brain drain"?

These are some of the questions and issues that ISOC.PH founding members consider important, and certainly, ISOC.PH members have varying positions on these issues. As a group, our collective contribution is towards a more open and intelligent discussion of issues such as these, and hopefully a contribution towards a more culturally open process in global Internet Governance.

At this point, I would like to take some time to introduce the Founding Members of ISOC.PH.

LCmdr Ferdinand Abad, Philippine Navy
Lisandro Adamos, Global-Link MP
Tina Amper, BC Management
Antonio Balgos, Philippine Veterans Bank
Maureene F. Bello, Ateneo de Zamboanga University
Josie Cacdac, PT Multimacs
Ramon Cerezo, Eastern Telecoms
Krstoff Thomas Chavez, TouchStar
Vera Cruz, Asirius Philippines
Dann Diez, E-Skills and ILIRA
Atty. Michael "Bong" Dizon, law.norms.code
Christian A. Foronda, Department of Science and Technology-Advanced Science and Technology Institute
Joel Galgana, Bayang Pinoy
Aris Ignacio, Saint Francis of Asisi College
Rachel Khan, University of the Philippines, Diliman
Fatima Lasay, Korakora.org
Randall Lozano, 18SeventySix.com
Dr. Alvin Marcelo, TeleHealth, IOSN
Jan Martinez, Technidata
Ian Pamintuan, Zilog Philippines
Michael Perez, FiveNines Enterprise Technologies
Charmaine Reyes-Urani, IBM Philippines
Glenn Michael Tan, US Auto Parts Network Phil
Rodel Urani, Covanta Energy
Winthrop Yu, Philippine Internet Commerce Society

And our incoming active members:

Charity Gamboa, with IGF Remote Participation Working Group and Diplo Foundation IGCBP scholar

Yen Sayson, Infocom

Wheng Romo, Axus Technologies

Trevor Batten, British computer artist from the late 60's and current Philippine resident

This is the new and rejuvenated Internet Society Philippines Chapter. We look forward to the work and the challenge. Maraming salamat.

Fatima Lasay

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