



Swiss Internet Governance Forum

Swiss IGF 2018

Messages from Bern

20 November 2018

Plenary 1: Digital democracy – more than just e-Voting!

For better trust in digital democracy, transparency is needed and should be guaranteed all along the line from the technology to the political processes. Trust is really important as once it is broken, it cannot be fixed easily. National authorities should ensure trust and legality in providing the appropriate framework conditions.

Financing & responsibility for the tools and processes is important - there are great needs but the stumbling block is often financing – and whilst some state actors have a major role to play, there was also some feeling that the state should have a hands-off and enabling approach and alternative sources, including crowdfunding, should also be possible to enable these processes.

Digital Democracy is a key vector for improvement of inclusiveness and an enrichment of direct and representative democracy as it enables new, inclusive processes in the shortest time possible, for example through cloud campaigning, and can improve democracy through the use of ICTs. You do not only vote on political packages, but everyone can be involved online, whether they have right to vote or not.

Political and population diversity can be promoted with digital tools so that all people including youth, take part in the new processes for digital democracy. The roadmap to revitalise the political landscape from the grassroots upwards is to start with digital democracy tools at the local level (Municipalities and Cantons can serve as political laboratories) and if successful, this can grow to the Federal level.

At the same time, however, existing processes should not become obsolete and should continue to be usable, for example by older people. Furthermore, new tools like social media should not be overestimated and political participation is not improved by new technologies alone. There is also a need for appropriate political education and greater sensitization and awareness-raising, for example in dealing with personal data.



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Plenum 2: The digital economy – how do we manage the structural change?

Digitalization, which is reinforced by globalization and happens in parallel with the ageing of populations, is another step in the historical process of structural changes, wherein artificial intelligence predictive tools may be helpful.

One aspect of structural change is to involve consumers into the process, which means changing their behaviors at the right pace and setting the right incentives.

Although there was broad agreement that the framework conditions for adapting the employment market to the structural change are generally fit for purpose in Switzerland, it remains to be seen if specific adjustments are needed, inter alia, in the social security laws – something that will become evident from forthcoming court cases, especially regarding employment relations with globally active platforms.

There were diverging opinions on how the Swiss economy is addressing structural change: whether a more conservative or a more open-minded approach is appropriate - and whether Switzerland needs to better prepare for an incoming digitalization “tsunami”.

In addition to a fair social security framework and labor conditions, digital skills and proactive re-schooling of workers were mentioned as key measures needed to ensure that structural change is for the benefit of all and does not lead to social unrest or outright rejection.

Different experiences on new models of learning were shared by participants. While some underscored the richness of the available offers, others highlighted an existing lack of clarity in the currently available education offering and identified the funding and costs of such offering as an access barrier for a number of workers, especially for older employees.



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Plenum 3: The digital human – how do I use, maintain and protect my digital self?

In the age of digitalization, people have multiple digital identities, which are increasingly interconnected. Thus, activities on the web become traceable - consciously or unconsciously. Participants discussed how many digital identities Internet users have, what the benefits and risks of multiple identities are and whether these identities could be consolidated into one.

The session discussed how to strike a balance between transparency, self-determination and security - with trust being the cornerstone of any identity framework. One approach would be to avoid online services that ask for too much personal data, but a total retreat should not be the solution either. In the end it is up to Society as a whole to find suitable solutions and strike the right balance - how to effectively empower users in this debate is a burning pending issue.

One possibility could be that users have several identities in the online world and do not use a single identity across all services. A verified identity could be used for certain services that require a higher level of security. For example, one possible option would be a government issued e-ID for services provided by public authorities or for e-banking. For other services, like social media, users could create a different identity. Users should become aware of which services they would like to use with which identity and which level of security is appropriate.

Various risks of a digital identity were discussed, such as identity theft or the loss of private data. Trust and confidence in the provider of services is therefore core to a digital identity. At best, new services are developed with Privacy by design in mind - whether this answers the fundamental question on Trust is unclear. In this context, it was discussed how states and the private sector can work together and whether the state should provide e-identity solutions itself at least as a default provider or could also delegate the issuance of identities to the private sector. Finally, the possibilities of blockchain in this area of application were mentioned, whereas there was no agreement on whether blockchain would provide an appropriate solution by itself.



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Special Session: Network barring from the technical, legal and social viewpoint – myth, reality and developments

This short session highlighted the limits and the drawbacks of network blocking and filtering, especially due to the fact that by blocking, unlawful or harmful content as such is not deleted, but only its access is hindered. Although blocking and filtering already exists in some cases - as for spam and security- for reasons voluntarily agreed and welcomed by users, the question is different when the blocking or filtering is imposed onto the user.

Blocking and filtering come with side-effects, like overblocking and territorial fragmentation, and are broadly considered having a limited efficacy, as these measures are embedded in a territorially borderless context and circumvention of such measures remains possible.

The need to ensure that the requirements of proportionality and legal consistency in such network blocking are met was underlined, in particular regarding contents whose access is not forbidden by law and is at the same time in principle protected by freedom of information rights, such as works of literature and art protected by copyright.

There were different opinions on what role the precedent created by the new Swiss Online Gaming Law may play in future legislative proposals, with diverging points of view on the question whether the validity of using blocking may depend on the relevance of the goal pursued.

Messages from Bern

The "Messages from Bern" summarise the main points of the sessions at the Swiss IGF 2018 briefly, concisely and neutrally. They will be presented to the Global UN Internet Governance Forum (IGF) and the European Dialogue on Internet Governance (EuroDIG) in order to feed into the discussions in these forums.

The Messages from Bern 2018 were compiled by our reporting team: Jorge Cancio, Olivier MJ Crépin-Leblond and Nicolas Rollier.