



Swiss Internet Governance Forum

Swiss IGF 2020

Messages from Bern

28 September 2020

Plenary 1: Environment & Climate 4.0

The Climate system is a very chaotic and difficult to understand system. Today it is monitored and modelled using computers at an accuracy of up to 1km. The “Climate” is the range of temperatures that the country experiences during a season. When these temperatures change, this is called climate change. The climate can be modelled using the multiple parameters including temperatures of the oceans and ground temperatures, which include past temperatures. One such model compares CO2 levels with forecast rises in temperatures due to Greenhouse Gases.

There are three levels of effects of Digitization on the Environment

1. Direct Impact on the use of existing or new devices
2. Improved Ecological efficiency thanks to the use of ICTs
3. Feedback of first and second order effects with social behaviour

So far, digitization has had a negative impact. There are opportunities and risks relating to energy consumption. Maximising opportunities is important, through energy efficiency, the circular economy, sufficiency and data governance.

This is therefore not just a technical question but also a societal challenge.

The question “Measures” vs. “Incentives” should be discussed at a political level. Measures might give concern as it would be like “Regulation”. If there are incentives to reduce consumption this gives rise to an impact on the economy. As regards to growth or the way economy functions with a growth driven dynamic, it will destroy energy saving measures, especially if this increases consumption of digital devices. Even Electro-mobility will reduce carbon emissions, but will use Cobalt Resources, therefore some solutions might have a different impact on the planet’s resources.

Efficiency increases alone won’t be sufficient. We need action to reduce environmentally unfriendly practices. Staged responsibility could be triggered where the authorities should initiate a new movement that leads to a new trend of more environmentally friendly behaviour.

- It might well be that all types of energy are too cheap – thus raising the price might be a way forward. Switzerland is introducing a new CO2 tax on airline tickets – perhaps should it think of a tax on ICT? The question on whether energy intensive products should be taxed should be a matter of further study.



Swiss Internet Governance Forum

- Sharing of resources & instruments could lead to better efficiency of use of resources. Or there might be a push for Carbon Neutral ecosystems, for example, Carbon Neutral Data Centres that are both energy efficient but also utilise green, renewable energy sources, linked to an incentive.
- Carbon footprint could be assessed depending on the source of energy to power the cloud.
- Volumes of data will continue increasing. One possibility would be to have a curb on this growth.
- There could be an assessment on mobile phone energy classes and also the environmental footprint in manufacturing a phone, or indeed any device.
- The circular economy alone will not be sufficient. There needs to be a reduction of consumption.

These are amongst the many avenues that should be explored further, along with their political and societal impact.

Plenary 2: How are you doing in the digital age? Awareness, skills and ideas in politics and administration

Digitalisation has brought us an enormous number of benefits, but it has dark sides as well as positive aspects. This ambivalence is also reflected in the positions adopted by politicians and parties. Digitalisation remains a topic that is not subjected to close scrutiny and which barely featured in the 2019 election campaign, for example. The question we therefore need to ask is: what is the situation with regard to digital literacy in politics?

A study on the digital affinity of candidates in the 2019 parliamentary elections revealed that only a quarter of the candidates participated. Candidates from the Greens and the Green Liberals were the most active in engaging with the topic (30% participation each).

Another interesting fact is that the parties seem to have no clear positions – they are only set out selectively and by individual exponents. Acquiring the necessary expertise to position themselves is, however, a necessity for the parties – digitalisation must become a political culture.

A fundamental problem is the lack of expertise in the field of digitalisation. The technical know-how is highly complex and it is not possible for everyone to become an expert in such matters, but something needs to be done in the form of providing Parliament with training in this subject. In addition, it is also necessary to explain terms and principles and ensure that the language used is made accessible to non-experts.

Digitalisation should promote the common good. It is therefore necessary to engage in a discussion with the grassroots to understand what society needs and what our society of the future should look like. The input of civil society organisations also plays a vital role in this process.



Swiss Internet Governance Forum

We need an administration that is courageous and open to experimentation. An increase in activity and willingness to take risks is needed – at both the cantonal and the national level. While there are lighthouse projects at the cantonal level, we must acknowledge that French-speaking Switzerland is generally taking the lead in this area. Ultimately, digitalisation in public administration should take place in as “bottom-up” a manner as possible, but as “top-down” as is necessary. To some extent, this could mean that the ideas could come from the bottom up, while the necessary funding comes from the top down, e.g. in the form of a “digital fund” via the cantons and municipalities to finance projects.

The UK, Estonia, Denmark and also the Netherlands are international role models in the field of digitalisation but we also need to take into account the realities of Switzerland – we need solutions that are compatible with our culture and political structure. Switzerland’s direct democracy is a great strength that we should further improve with the use of digital decision-making.

Plenary 3: Self-determination in the digital space

The increasing concentration of data and technical progress increasingly challenge basic values and individual self-determination. How much self-determination do citizens have in the digital space or are they losing ever more control over their data? Should there even be digital self-determination and what could a self-determined data space look like?

A presentation was given about the project on digital self-determination and trusted data spaces, which seeks to demonstrate a way out of the current trade-off between the protection of individual basic rights (e.g. data protection) and the innovative use of data.

The concept of “self-determination with regard to the use of personal information” is closely linked to digital self-determination. Self-determination with regard to the use of personal information gives individuals the fundamental right to choose how their personal data is used. The question came up as to the extent to which such a concept is globally scalable and is thus capable of being implemented in reality, or whether the focus should instead be on the concrete disadvantages of data processing (e.g. discrimination).

There was a discussion on the question of whether and to what extent the basic right of self-determination over information can and should be effective not only with regard to the relationship between state and citizens but also in the relationships between private individuals.

The element of trust and the conflict between the increasing mistrust of profiling and tracking among the public and the lack of awareness among some people of how much data they actually disclose about themselves was emphasised. Different options were discussed: strengthening local and regional data spaces, and the question of quality labels.



Swiss Internet Governance Forum

Workshop 1: The challenge of digital markets and Internet platforms

It is clear that Internet platforms have acquired a great practical importance in certain sectors and have enormously transformed some markets from an economic perspective. There was ambivalence on the question of whether and how these Internet platforms should or can be regulated. Fears that regulation could slow down innovation and market dynamics must be taken into account, as must calls to take due heed of the findings of international research and politics for Switzerland and its strategies.

Workshop 2: Libraries 4.0 – Innovation to boost knowledge transfers

The speakers at this workshop presented concrete projects from libraries across Switzerland (National Library, public and university libraries) on how to meet the challenges of the digital transformation with regard to access to information: Access to e-books (Library of the University of Geneva), centralised access to scientific literature (central service platform of the Swiss Library Service Platform, SLSP), long-term archiving of Swiss websites (Web Archive Switzerland), teaching information literacy to young people (GGG Stadtbibliothek Basel).

Workshop 3: Cybersecurity & cybercrime: global challenges – local solutions?

Encryption is essential for security and every attempt to weaken encryption or build in backdoors is creating more risks than benefits. Reporting cybercrime needs to be easier (where, how, what evidence is needed) and victims wish to be informed about what happens with the investigation. Fighting cybercrime is a global task and requires broad cooperation of all entities in all countries. Cybercrime is very underreported. Cybersecurity companies can help bring light to the real extent of especially the numerous smaller cases. Education is key for prevention of cybercrime and for personal and overall cybersecurity. This needs to be considered, also in regard of the next 3.5 billion new users that will connect to the internet in the coming years.

Messages from Bern

The "Messages from Bern" summarise the main points of the sessions at the Swiss IGF 2020 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 2020 were compiled by our reporting team: Olivier MJ Crépin Leblond, Andrin Eichin and Dominique Keller.